



PASTOR JOHN KLESS

A LIFETIME IN THE WORD

VOLUME 2 - NEW TESTAMENT

Dedication:

To my wonderful wife: LuAnn

Without your commitment to share together in ministry with me these 48 years I could not have had a “lifetime in the Word”! Your countless hours of caring for me, our children, our home and the church body gave me the ability to pursue the deep study of God’s Word each week so this book is as much a product of your life as it is mine. I am thankful for you and I love you.

To our five wonderful children: Andrea, Benjamin, Amy, Jennifer and Dan

You have sat under my teaching and preaching literally your entire lives. The greatest fruit of my ministry has been to see each one of you grow up to be mature believers who deeply love Jesus, understand and value His Word and are committed to serving Him, even alongside me. I am blessed to be your father and I love you.

To my church: Glenside Bible Church

You have loved and cared for me as your pastor for 42 years. It has been my great honor and privilege to preach to you and instruct you in the Word of God. Almost all of the sermons in this book were carefully prepared for you and graciously received by you as truth from God. Thank you for being patient with me and giving me the opportunity to serve God among you in this way. I love you all.

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How To Use This Book

From June of 1974 at the age of 19 to the present at age 67 it has been my greatest privilege to preach and teach the Word of God nearly every Sunday. Originally, I made handwritten notes on paper, most of which have been lost, but around 1985 God blessed me with a personal computer (an Apple IIc with 128K of RAM and 5 ¼ floppies if you can imagine that!) and I began to type out messages and save them as digital files. Over the years I have preached hundreds of times and because they have been stored digitally, I now have the ability to edit and format them and share them with you. This book is my collected work from a life of ministry. It literally represents *A Lifetime In The Word*, a lifetime of studying the Word of God for hours each week, endeavoring to understand it as God intended and faithfully communicate it to the people of God.

So, this is obviously a book of sermons, not the kind of book that you sit down and read from beginning to end. It is more like a Bible commentary, a book in which you turn to the portion you wish to know more about at the moment. To keep its size reasonable, I have divided it into three separate volumes:

Volume 1 - Old Testament in which you'll find studies covering *most* of the books of the Old Testament.

Volume 2 - New Testament in which you'll find a study of *every* New Testament book.

Volume 3 - Thematic Studies in which you'll find studies on biographical, doctrinal, missiological and prophetic themes and more.

1. Use it like a Bible commentary - If you are studying a particular passage of Scripture, find the message that covers that text and it will probably help you understand the meaning of the passage. The messages are based on a lot of thorough research including commentaries by many others, as well insights from the original language. It has always been my goal not to teach or say anything that wasn't true and accurate to the best of my knowledge, so you can benefit from the research I've put in by simply reading my explanation of the passage and its context.

2. Use it as an aid in teaching and preaching - These are expositional sermons which means that the points of the message are derived from the text as much as possible. The messages are in outline form rather than paragraph form so that the points of the outline are in **BOLD** type, followed by further explanation and devotional comments. Thus, here you have an outline for many of the books and chapters of the Bible and also for many of its important themes that you can use as they are or reword to suit yourself as you present them to others.

3. Use it for devotional purposes - Because the point of sermons is to motivate people rather than simply giving them information, there is much devotional material and there are many touching illustrations in this work. So, you can read through all or part of a message as part of your regular devotional life, perhaps as you read through the section of Scripture it points to.

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You have my permission to copy, share, edit and use any of the material in this book, with or without giving any credit to me, as long as you are using it to sincerely help yourself or other people grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Freely I have received from God insight into the Word and freely I give it to you. However, it MAY NOT be sold or used to make a profit.

To the glory of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

Rev. John M. Kless, Jr.

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The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Arrival Of The King - Mt. 1-2

The Credentials Of The King - 1:1-17

We have four inspired records of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, four Gospels. You may have wondered why. Well, you must understand that a Gospel is more than simply a historical narrative of Jesus' life. It is a document which a writer put together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit using various sources of information to present a message about Jesus Christ to a particular audience. A Gospel is much like a tract that we might produce today. The author decides who he's going to target and then chooses material from the wealth of Bible verses, illustrations, and testimonies that are available and puts together a document that will present the particular aspect of the message of Christ that his target audience will best understand. The Gospel writers did the same thing, only under the absolute control of the Holy Spirit. Not all of the material in this or the other Gospels is arranged in exact chronological order, which explains why the order of events sometimes differs between the Gospels. Rather, each author was writing to get across a message and sometimes grouped events together in a way to better convey that message. Matthew (or Levi as he is also called) was a Jew, formerly a tax collector for the Romans, but still very much a Jew. And he wrote his Gospel around 55-60 AD as a document to proclaim to his people, the Jews, that the Jesus they had rejected was indeed their King, their Promised Messiah, the one they had been waiting for. That is why, of the four Gospels, Matthew's is the one overflowing with Old Testament quotes and references, some 125 of them! The message Matthew is trying to convey as he tells the story of Jesus in these 28 chapters could be summarized very simply like this: "Your King Has Come and He is Coming Again!"

In the first two chapters, Matthew records for us The Arrival Of The King, the story of Christ's birth. And smack at the beginning, before all the familiar birth stories that we love, Matthew places, of all things, a genealogy. Now, contrary to what you may feel, genealogies are not put in the Bible simply to bore those who read it! Nor are they put there to simply record historical facts, the way the state of Pennsylvania might mechanically keep a record of all babies born in it. To the Jewish mind, and it is the Jews who are Matthew's primary audience, genealogies are a person's credentials. They are the way of validating who a person is and therefore what a person is entitled to. Even in the United States, you must produce your birth certificate to prove that you are entitled to the benefits that come to you through citizenship, for example, Social Security benefits. Your birth record proves who you are and that you have a right to what you are claiming. And that is:

I. The Real Purpose Of This Genealogy You can see it right in verse (1). First of all, Matthew intended:

1. to show that Jesus was the Son of Abraham That's why he started with Abraham. Luke went all the way back to Adam, but Matthew didn't need to; He simply wanted to prove that Jesus was the son of Abraham. Why? Well, that made him the **heir to the Covenant** that God made with Abraham. You remember that covenant, don't you? Certainly, no Jew would ever forget it. God reiterated it to Abraham several times, but never more clearly than right after he had been willing to sacrifice Isaac to God on Mt. Moriah. Look with me at **Gen. 22:15-18**. The word *offspring* or *descendants* is literally *seed*. And notice in the ESV the phrase *the gate of HIS enemies*. That hints at something that Paul explains for us in **Gal. 3:16**, *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," [plural] referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," [singular] who is Christ*. God chose His words carefully and used the singular, not the plural, meaning that ultimately this promise belonged to One who would come as the Seed of Abraham who would rightfully inherit the land eternally and would bless all the nations of earth. So, anyone claiming Messiahship or Kingship would have to be of Abraham's line. Matthew is saying, "Jesus is the promised Seed of Abraham, the One in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed!" Then secondly, in verse 1, he intended:

2. to show that Jesus was the Son of David Why? Well, that made Him **heir to the Throne**. Look with me at **2 Sam. 7:12-13, 16**. God promised that David's throne, His authority as King over Israel, would be established forever and that throne would be occupied by one of His descendants. You see, Judah had only one dynasty of kings, the line of David. The right to rule was passed from father to son, generation to generation. God never interrupted that flow and started afresh with a new family line, even though some kings were very wicked. Therefore, anyone claiming Messiahship or Kingship would first have to prove himself a descendant of David and then of the rightful line through which the Kingship was passed. Son of David became a title for the Messiah; remember how the crowds shouted it as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? They're calling Him the Messiah, God's promised King. And that's exactly what Matthew is showing us here: Jesus stood in the line of the kings and has the right to the Throne of David. And He had no son, so the line ends right there; it is passed no farther because He is alive and seated on that Throne right now and will return to display that Throne to the world one day! Interpreting Ps. 45, the writer of Hebrews says, *But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom."* - **Heb. 1:8**. The promise to David of an eternal throne is really about Jesus!

Jesus has the credentials; He is Abraham's Greater Son, David's Greater Son, the One about whom all the promises of God were made! Hallelujah! Now let me share with you:

II. Some Important Facts About This Genealogy First, please realize that:

1. it is a summary arranged for easy memorization (17) Matthew did not need to record every name in the line to establish his point because detailed genealogy and historical records were available in the Old Testament, in the books of Chronicles and elsewhere, so he skipped some generations here and there to shorten the list and even it out into three easily memorizable groups of 14 names that end at three major historical landmarks. There were 14 generations from Abraham to The Kingdom under David, 14 more to The Captivity in Babylon, and fourteen more to The Messiah. Memorize that and you know Christ's pedigree, but since you're not Jewish, somehow, I doubt you will. It doesn't matter to you, but it did to them! For some reason, he seems to count Jeconiah twice, in both the second and third group, but remember the point is to make a memorable list. Likewise, don't worry that he skips three names between Jehoram and Uzziah, because the word *father of* literally means *ancestor of* and easily accommodates more than one actual physical generation. As I said, it's a summary. Second, notice that:

2. it is the genealogy of Joseph (16) We might find that strange. Why Joseph, not Mary? Well, Jewish society was patriarchal; the right to authority and property was always passed through the male line. So even though Joseph was not Jesus' physical father, He was, in the eyes of his people, Jesus' legal father. The people of his home town, Nazareth, said, *Is not this the carpenter's son?*... It was whose SON you were that mattered. So the fact that Joseph descended from the line of the Davidic Kings **placed Jesus in the line of kings**. God gave Jesus the right to rule through Joseph. Now there is something none of us would notice about this genealogy:

3. it both contains and solves a hidden problem Notice in verse (12) the name of Jeconiah. In the Old Testament his name is Jehoiachin or in other places, Coniah, and he was the second last earthly king of Judah before the exile. The very last was Zedekiah, Jeconiah's uncle, Josiah's son, who was installed by the Babylonians. So Jeconiah was the last generation to actually rule Judah. Now look with me at **Jer. 22:24, 30**. God said, "That's it. I pronounce a curse on this man. Even though his children would have the right to rule, not one physical descendant of his will ever be recorded as sitting on the throne. They will not prosper to this level." So, it now seems as if God has painted Himself into a corner. The right to the throne must be passed through Jeconiah to get to Jesus, but none of his descendants can ever make use of it. In essence it seems there can be no more kings, right? And there weren't. But God had a plan nobody would have dreamed of, the Virgin Birth! Jesus was not a physical descendant of Jeconiah and therefore God did not contradict His own Word. Yet through Joseph he did inherit the right to the Kingship from Jeconiah, but without the curse! And I believe that Luke's Gospel really gives us Mary's genealogy, which shows that through her Jesus physically descended from David, however, through an entirely different line. What a marvelous God we have! Not one letter of His Word goes unfulfilled! And speaking of the Virgin Birth, notice how:

4. its careful conclusion reinforces and leads into the Virgin Birth (16) Matthew specifically says, *Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born*, instead of saying *the father of*... as he did through the whole list! The fact that Jesus was born as a man in an identifiable lineage does not negate the fact that He was Virgin Born; God was His real Father. Matthew carefully makes that clear and then goes on to tell the story of how it actually happened in verse 18 and following. But we'll save the story for next time because we're not done yet. We have to consider:

III. The Spiritual Lesson From This Genealogy As you read it (and I hope you don't skip genealogies in your Bible reading; they have some neat gems in them), you can't help but see that:

1. it displays the variety of people God used to bring His Son into the world 41 people are mentioned here; 41 lives, all of whom God placed in the line as direct ancestors of Jesus Christ. But just look at the sheer variety of the kinds of people God chose to include. Obviously:

a. He used some outstanding, noteworthy people Right in verse 2 we find *Abraham*, the great man of faith who trusted God, the father of the Jewish people, along with his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, to whose lives so much of Genesis is given. In verse 6 we come to *David*, the man after God's own heart, the sweet Psalmist of Israel and the greatest King she ever had. In verse 9 we see *Hezekiah*, the godly king of Judah who prayed and trusted God and saw the Lord deliver Judah from the Assyrians when 185,000 of their soldiers were dead the next morning! And there are more great men in the list, but one would expect to find these. One would expect that from a line of spiritual giants would come other spiritual giants and eventually the Messiah. However, the list also shows us that:

b. He used many ordinary, unnoticed people Like *Boaz* in verse 5, who was just a well-to-do farmer with a loving heart that he opened to marry Ruth. There was *Jesse* in verse 6, a father trying to support his family of 7 sons by raising sheep in a day when the land was at war and some of his sons had to go. There was *Joseph* himself in verse 16, the man chosen to be Jesus' earthly father and to raise Him, a man who was just a simple carpenter, working all day in his shop and dying young. And there are lots of others in the list, people who just lived ordinary lives and loved God where they were, and yet their names are here. Yes, God uses the spiritual giants, the John

Wesleys and the Billy Grahams, but for the most part He uses just plain ordinary people who love Him, people like you and I! Then notice that:

c. He used several people who were foreigners By the way, did you see that Matthew mentions a few mothers here along with the fathers? Five of them to be exact. Ladies, you are not left out; God uses men and women alike to bring about His purpose. But two of them were not even Jews! *Rahab* in verse 5 was a Canaanite woman who lived in Jericho and protected the spies Joshua sent. God rewarded her faith by sparing her family and she ended up married to an Israelite named Salmon (probably one of those spies) and became the great grandmother of King David! In the same verse, *Ruth* was from Moab across the Jordan and from a pagan family who worshipped idols there. But through her first husband who died young and her mother-in-law Naomi, she came to believe in the God of Israel like Rahab did. And God opened the door for her to marry Boaz and become David's grandmother. God is just showing here briefly what you see all through the Old Testament, that He loves all the peoples of the earth and wants all of them to seek Him, and when they do, He uses them to accomplish His purpose! In fact, Matthew's gospel ends with the command to make disciples of every people; from the very beginning, Matthew was showing that you don't have to be a Jew to be used of God! Good thing or we'd all be left out! Now here's something incredible. In the list:

d. He used several people who were fallen Here in verse 3 you find *Judah*, who deserted the rest of his family, married a Canaanite woman, and whose sons were born by union with his own daughter-in-law, who forced him to honor the cultural law of the land and give her children by disguising herself as a harlot. We already mentioned *Rahab* from verse 5, who, at the time the spies showed up in her pagan life in Jericho, was an actual harlot, before becoming a godly wife and mother. In verse 6 we have *Bathsheba* who committed adultery against her husband with King David. Yet it is HER son God chooses out of David's many to become the wisest King Israel ever had. God is reminding us that He's a forgiving God! If you think God can't use you because of your past, because of some sin back there that haunts you to this day, think again! God uses fallen people! And it's a good thing because we're all fallen people! Why, God works so out-of-the-box that:

e. He even used several people who were wicked In verse 10 you have Manasseh and Amon, father and son kings who filled the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood and led the people fully into idolatry, even sacrificing children in the fire to idols. And in verse 11 *Jeconiah* was evil and God's curse rested upon him. Yet God used even them to advance the line of His Son's coming, which reminds us that God uses even the wicked to serve His purposes and the wrath of man to praise Him!

So be encouraged dear friends! Just as each of these played their small role in preparing the way for God's son, you are also a part of God's plan, God has a plan that He is working out in human history and He wants to use you! He wants to use you to prepare the way for the King, not for His coming as a baby like He did the first time, but rather for His coming again in glory.

2. God wants to use us in the line of people who bring His Son BACK to the world Look with me at **2 Pet. 3:9-12**. God made a promise to send His Son the first time and it took 1800 years from Abraham for His purpose to be worked out and His promise kept. We'd say that was slow, but to Him it was *the fullness of time*, the exact perfect right time, the time when everything was finally laid in place. Well, God has now made the promise all over again that He will send His Son from heaven and He will reign on the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And 2000 years have gone by, but God is not being slow about it; He is waiting for US to accomplish His purpose, which is that every person in every people group on the planet would hear the Good News of what Christ did and have the opportunity to come to repentance. God is patiently waiting for all of us in each generation to play out our part in that long chain of sending forward the Good News until that Day comes, the day when the King finally arrives. We are all in the line of folks that will bring back the King!

a. our only necessary qualification is relationship with Jesus Christ We just learned that it doesn't matter who you are, great or small, well-known or unknown, male or female, Jew or Gentile, faultless or fallen. If you know Jesus Christ, you are in the line of people that He is using to accomplish His purpose *that gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all [peoples], and then the end will come* - Mat. 24:14. But:

b. His coming hinges upon our faithful performance Verse 12 says we can do more than wait for that day; we can hasten it's coming; we can speed it along. We can bring Christ back sooner! How? By focusing our lives completely on His goal and purpose instead of our own! By doing all that we can to share the Good News right where we live and by devoting our time, our energy and our resources to the one third of the human race that has not yet had their first opportunity to hear it. We all play a role, a small role, nevertheless a necessary role, in the process. If we do our part, it speeds the whole process along. If we don't, God has to use someone else to get it done, but it WILL get done! Just as the day arrived when Jesus came into the world, so the day WILL arrive when He comes back.

As you know, our Jewish friends who do not believe Jesus was the Messiah are still waiting for their Messiah, their King, to come. *There is a video on YouTube dated Nov. 18, 1990, when Benjamin Netanyahu, later Prime Minister of Israel, was a member of the Israeli Knesset or Parliament. It is a clip where Mr. Netanyahu meets with a group of Hasidim, a sect of orthodox Jews dressed in black garments and black hats, evidently seeking their support. The lead speaker, an elderly man, greets him by name in the Hebrew language saying, "I haven't seen you in a long time. Blessing and success. A double portion of benediction." And Netanyahu says, "I came to ask your blessing and help." To which the Hasid replied, "In everything?" and Netanyahu responded, "In all areas both personal and political." The Hasid then took the lead, saying, "Since we have last met many things have progressed." And Netanyahu agreed, "Many things HAVE progressed." But then came the old man's punchline: "What hasn't changed, however, is that Messiah still hasn't come, so do something to hasten His coming!" Netanyahu tried to brush it off by saying, "We're doing. We're doing.", to which the wise old man replied, "Apparently, it's not enough, since many hours have already passed today and He's still not here. But there are still a few hours left in the day. So, try still for today."* [\[http://youtu.be/pRmk4egn_dg\]](http://youtu.be/pRmk4egn_dg) Dear friends, many things HAVE progressed, but apparently it is not enough! What hasn't changed is that Jesus still hasn't come! So do something to hasten His coming! Many hours have passed and He is still not here, yet there are still a few hours left in the day. So, give all you have to advance His Kingdom from this moment on. Try still for today!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Arrival Of The King - Mt. 1-2

The Birth Of The King - 1:18-25

So much about Jesus' birth that we celebrate in story and song and decoration at Christmas time, the angel appearing to Mary, the journey to Bethlehem, the stable and the manger, the angels and the shepherds, all these things come to us from Luke. He is interested in conveying those kinds of personal details, the human-interest side of the story, if you will. Matthew leaves them all out! His desire is to demonstrate that Jesus is the King, God's promised Messiah. So, after giving us His credentials in the genealogy in verses 1-17, Matthew proceeds to spell out and explain to us what he meant in verse 16 when he specifically said that Joseph was *the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ*. In the next verses he tells us:

I. The Circumstances Concerning Jesus' Birth (18-19) which were not all rosy and beautiful and wonderful. We love to romanticize things. So, we try to paint this picture of a young couple madly in love who can't wait to get married and their love is nearly interrupted and ruined by God asking Mary to bear His Son, but then He straightens Joseph out and there's a happy ending. In actuality, almost nothing is known about Joseph and Mary personally. Tradition has assumed from earliest times that Joseph was significantly older than Mary. This probably comes from the fact that he is never mentioned after Jesus is 12 and appears to have died before He was 30 and began his ministry. Yet Mary lived on to see the Cross and Resurrection and the growth of the early church and, since Christ placed her under John's care, is said to have much later gone with him to Ephesus in Asia Minor and died there. The Orthodox churches even hold that Joseph was already a widower when he married Mary, though there is no evidence for that. Here are the facts we do know:

1. Mary was betrothed to Joseph but had not yet brought her to his home Joseph had gone to Mary's parents and a marriage contract had been arranged between them, including payment, but Mary still lived at home with her parents. In their culture, they were considered legally married, absolutely bound to one another, but there would be a period of one year before the marriage would be consummated in a celebration where Joseph would take Mary to his home and they would live together as husband and wife. This one year period served as evidence of the purity and faithfulness of both the bride and the groom, since in the absence of birth control, sexual activity would likely result in pregnancy. It guaranteed that any pre-betrothal impurity either from the union of the two or unfaithfulness with an outsider would show up before marriage. So, Joseph and Mary were following this custom when:

2. Joseph discovered she was pregnant Luke fills in the missing details here. Look with me **Luke 1:39-40**. Right after the angel appeared to tell her that she would conceive and have a child who would be God's son, she left Nazareth. As confirmation, the angel had told her that her aged relative Elizabeth, who had been childless all her life, was already 6 months pregnant. So, without telling Joseph, she practically ran down to the town in the hill country of Judah where Elizabeth lived to see for herself. She found it was true and stayed, probably to be with people who believed her own news, according to verse 56. She stayed until the baby was born 3 months later. So, by the time she came home to Nazareth, her parents and Joseph and the whole community could visibly see that she was pregnant. Joseph must have been absolutely crushed. I'm sure she told him the whole story but:

3. Joseph could only assume she had been unfaithful, that while away and out of her parents' home and care, she had become involved with some guy there in Judea. Would YOU believe her story? Never in history has there been a case of spontaneous pregnancy without a man involved! He could not conceive what Matthew asserts in verse 18, that the child was from the Holy Spirit. Who could blame him? And so:

4. Joseph planned to divorce her quietly, that is, **privately**. Matthew comments that Joseph was a just man, a righteous man. He was concerned about obeying God and keeping the law. In his estimation Mary was no longer pure; she was defiled, not to mention being untrustworthy. Besides, if he were to go ahead and marry her anyway, to the whole community it would seem an admission that the two of them had been unchaste and violated their betrothal. So, to divorce her:

a. this would assert and maintain his own innocence It would say that SHE was the unfaithful one, not him, and would keep him pure in every way. But he had two options of how to go about it. He could publicly take her to the town elders, expose her sin to the world, proclaim his own innocence and divorce her. In an earlier era, she would probably have been stoned, because that's what the Law required. The scene would have been much like that of the woman taken in adultery that the Pharisees later brought to Jesus and made her stand humiliated before the whole group. But Joseph was not natured like that. He was also a kind man; he did not want to hurt Mary by exposing her to such a thing, just to make himself look good. So, he chose the second option; he planned to go to Mary's parents privately and sever the betrothal arrangement.

b. this would be merciful to Mary and spare her public disgrace It would keep her "sin" and shame a family matter and leave her own parents to deal with their "errant" daughter.

He pondered and thought about what to do and his mind was made up. He was resolved to pursue this quiet divorce when he went to bed. The situation looked hopeless to him. But when he woke up, his mind was completely changed because of:

II. The Truth God Delivered To Joseph Through A Dream (20-23) You know how it is when something serious is troubling you and you're trying to go to sleep. You lay there and ponder the situation over and over as Joseph did, and as he dozed off, he began to dream. And in that dream, when his thoughts were no longer under his control, an angel of God appeared to him. No details are reported, but in Scripture whenever people realize they are in the presence of angels they are struck with awe and fall to their knees. They are deeply impacted. And this angel had a direct message from God for Joseph. Look at the truths that God delivered to Joseph in this dream, truths that we hold deeply to this day. First:

1. God deliberately chose Joseph to be the father and guardian of His son The angel's first words were, "Marry Mary! Take her home as your wife! You are to be her husband and the father to this child!" God was calling Joseph. And notice the call, *Joseph, SON OF DAVID....* "Joseph, I need you. This child in Mary's womb is the Messiah, the promised King of the line of David, the very One you've been waiting and longing for. And I need you, Joseph! I need you to let go of your own fears and take Him as your own, to give Him your lineage, to make Him THE SON OF DAVID, the promised King of Israel! I need you to care for Him and protect Him and raise Him with the same godly principles and heart that you have toward Me. Just as Mary is blessed above all women to have the privilege of carrying and birthing the King, so you are chosen and blessed in My plan to marry her and become His earthly father, even though He is not your physical child." Second, the angel explained that:

2. Mary conceived through the agency of the Holy Spirit She had NOT been unfaithful. She was telling the truth. Jesus had no human father; he was not the result of sexual union. His birth was a supernatural miracle arranged by the power of the Holy Spirit, a virgin conception. It is popular to doubt this today; it is probably harder for this culture to accept than that one. The Jews, at least, believed that miracles did happen, that God was able to intervene in the world, to part the Red Sea and dry up the Jordan River. To modern culture all such things are ancient myths believed by people who didn't know any better. But here we have it from God's lips straight to our ears: Jesus' conception was a divine miracle done by the Holy Spirit. The eternal Son of God entered a human embryo planted in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit and joined Himself to it permanently to become what no other being is or ever will be, the God-man, fully God and fully man, God come to earth in human flesh through the womb of a virgin. Then the angel declared that:

3. her child would be a son, not a daughter, and she would not miscarry. She would bear him to term and give successful birth to him. That was by no means a sure thing in the world of that day. Many a woman died in childbirth and many a child did not survive. But this one would and:

4. Joseph was to name him Jesus On the eighth day, a son born to a Jewish household would be circumcised as God commanded, making him a participant in the covenant that God gave to Abraham. And on that day his father would name him; he would officially declare what he would be called. But in Joseph's case the choice was not up to him. The angel said, "You are to name Him Jesus". In Aramaic, *Yeshua*; in Hebrew, a variant of *Joshua*, which means "**Jehovah saves**" or "**Jehovah is salvation**". God chose the name that this child, His Son, would bear and He tells us the reason for it.

5. Jesus would save his people from their sins There is His life-mission. He is the King! He is the Messiah, the promised One, but He is being birthed into the world, not to save Israel from the power of Rome as they so fervently hoped, but to accomplish something far beyond that, to save all those who truly wish to be His people, His subjects, from their own sins which separate them from God! Even before His birth, God declares that the culmination of His earthly life will be a cross, not a crown! He is born to die, born to be the sacrificial lamb of God who would take away

the sins of the world! And then the angel goes on to point out to Joseph that God had already promised and predicted that He would do this very supernatural thing 700 years earlier!

6. Mary's virgin conception fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy You know **Is. 7:14**, but it's quoted there in verse 23, *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son...* Even though that prophecy was originally given as a sign to King Ahaz seven centuries earlier and probably had an immediate fulfillment through some young unmarried woman he knew who then married and later bore a son, God explains to us here that ultimately, He meant those words to have a deeper fulfillment in the birth of His Son. The real sign to the world would be that a complete virgin would conceive, that is, she would be a virgin at the very moment of conception and conceive a child anyway, without knowing a man! God promised that when He sent His Son, Messiah the King, into the world, He would do it by means of a humanly impossible miracle. And He told Joseph, "700 years ago, I promised to do this very thing and you are the witness to it; this is it; Mary is THE Virgin and this is the promised Son." And because of this miracle:

7. Jesus Himself would be Immanuel. *Immanuel* in Hebrew is not a proper name like Joshua or David; rather it is a title, like King or Savior. It describes what the person is, one who rules or one who saves. *Immanuel* literally means "**God with us**". The point is that Jesus IS Immanuel, that He is "God with us!" Through this wonderful creative act of the Holy Spirit, God will now walk around in human flesh as one of us! John puts it like this: *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...* - **Jn. 1:14**. God became man, a human being in a human body of flesh and blood so that He, Jesus, could save us from our sins!

Well, that's a boat-load of truth to get all at one time, especially while you're asleep! But, unlike many dreams, Joseph remembered every word. He woke up a changed man, his whole demeanor transformed by the fact that Mary was telling the truth! This was a miracle and God had chosen him and commanded him to be part of it! See:

III. The Response Of Joseph To God's Command For Him (24-25) First, it says that:

1. he obeyed God and took Mary to his home as his wife Instead of breaking the betrothal as he had planned, he went to her parents and moved the time of the marriage up. He said, "I will take her to my home as my wife TODAY!" Notice that:

a. in doing so, he surrendered to God and reacted immediately He perceived this dream as a command of God. God told him exactly what to do and he did not hesitate. He did not pause to say, "Well, Lord, let me think about that; let me weigh the consequences and figure out the most judicious time." He did what he knew he was supposed to do as quickly as humanly possible. But please don't think that it was easy for him. Knowing Mary was still a virgin may have given relief to his own sense of purity, but marrying her:

b. it meant taking Mary's assumed "guilt" upon himself In the same way that he just could not believe her, now nobody in Nazareth would be willing to believe him! They would see him as the offender, the one who couldn't wait and honor the betrothal. His own reputation as a righteous man would go down the tubes. But he was willing for that to happen, if that's what obeying God meant. He was willing to let his "good be evil spoken of" for God's sake and what's more:

2. he honored God by having no sexual union with her until after Jesus' birth The angel never commanded him to do that. To take Mary home now as his wife would normally mean having sexual union with her. But, on his own, he refused. What does that tell us? I think that:

a. doing so indicates that he believed God and did not wish to sully the miracle He now believed God had done this great miracle and saw His purpose in it. This child to be born was a "holy being" and he didn't want to take ANY chance that someone could later protest that he was the physical father of this child. From the beginning of the betrothal to the birth of the baby, Joseph treated Mary in an absolutely holy and pure fashion, reverently counting her body as being set apart for God's holy purpose during those months. What an honorable man! But again, don't think it was necessarily easy for him:

b. it meant completely denying his own desires and rights as a husband He could not touch his own wife; he could not satisfy his own dreams and desires of being with her, which were at the very heart of why he had arranged to marry her and had waited so patiently in the first place. When he saw God's plan, he died to self, he put himself aside completely, his plans, his reputation, his desires. Only God mattered! And because of that, Joseph:

3. he was used by God in a wonderful way. It became his privilege to obey God and **to name Jesus**. *Luke 2:21* says, *...at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.* Joseph did that. Joseph gave Him that wonderful name we worship and adore. When we enter Chapter 2 next time, we'll see how God used that same willingness to listen and obey God to **protect** Jesus from certain death at the hand of Herod's soldiers. God also used Joseph's righteousness and reverence to **raise** Jesus as a godly father and his patient instruction to teach him his trade as a carpenter.

You know, in the beginning Joseph didn't sign up for any of this. It was not at all what he had in mind. And he didn't have to do it. He could have said "No" and gone his own way and no one would have blamed him. Yet when God called him to something really difficult that he didn't have to do, he obeyed and stepped up. Country singer Brad Paisley has a music video titled "He Didn't Have To Be". You can watch it on YouTube [<http://youtu.be/BjO1F6oCab8>] and cry if you want, like I did. The singer pictures himself as a little boy who was the only son of a single mom. And every time any man asks his mom on a date, they always look inside the house and see that she has a little boy sitting on the steps and they always walk away. One man after the other doesn't want him. Yet one day when he's five, a man comes to call and sees him sitting there and smiles at him and invites him along on their date. That man becomes his stepfather and now, singing as an adult, he celebrates growing up with the love and acceptance of a stepfather who made their house a home and their two-some into a family. And finally, standing there beside him at the nursery window in the hospital watching the nurse bring out his own newborn son, he sings these words, *Lookin' back all I can say, About all the things he did for me, Is I hope I'm at least half the dad, That he didn't have to be...you know, he didn't have to be...* That thought rings so true about Joseph. Joseph signed up for something he didn't have to sign up for, to be a husband to a pregnant virgin, to be a stepfather to the Son of God, to be a protector to the infant King. He chose to be "a dad he didn't have to be". God calls all of us to hard things in our lives, to do things that will be misunderstood, to do things we don't really want to do, even things that are dangerous. And He gives us the choice to answer His call or not. We don't have to; neither did Joseph, but I'm sure glad he did. What will you choose?

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Arrival Of The King - Mt. 1-2

The Acknowledgement Of The King - Ch. 2

Matthew does not actually record any of the details of Jesus' birth. He passes over it in one statement in 1:25. He passes over the journey to Bethlehem, the stable and the manger, the shepherds and the angels. He does not mention Jesus' dedication at the Temple 30 days later and the joy of Simeon and Anna. Instead, Matthew skips six months forward to a public event that stirred the city of Jerusalem, the arrival of a caravan of wise men from the east, and to them, strangely enough, he gives an entire chapter. Matthew has a purpose in mind. He has chosen his material carefully to make a point. So first, let's look closely at:

I. The Story That Matthew Shares With Us Few scripture stories have been so added to and become so fraught with imported traditions as this one has. The wise men have been numbered, promoted into kings, seated upon camels, given personal names, immortalized in song and made to stand around the stable with the shepherds in every nativity scene we display. However, this is the only record there is of this amazing visit, and we want to know what it actually says. In verses (1-2) we see:

1. the arrival of wise men seeking a King Notice that they were not kings but wise men, *Magi* in Greek, part of an eastern caste who studied, not merely the stars, but many different disciplines and were regarded as having special wisdom. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon called his *magi* to find out the meaning of the dream he had in Daniel 2. How many there were, Matthew does not say. But these men had seen something in the sky, a new appearance which they called a star. And to that star they somehow attached the meaning that the King of the Jews was born and that the Star was the sign which betokened his birth. Obviously, wherever they were, they must have had some connection with a community of Jews to know that the Jews were awaiting a Messiah. We cannot be sure where they came from, whether from Babylon or Persia (modern Iran) or Arabia. We do know that the Kings of Yemen at the tip of the Saudi peninsula professed the Jewish faith from 120 BC down through the 6th century AD. Among the ancient Jewish writings which had multiplied profusely by the time of Christ are some statements which show that at least a few of the rabbis taught that a star would shine forth from the east, the Star of Messiah, two years before His birth. Of course, these are not Christian writings, but merely Jewish traditions which had grown up somehow over the centuries. It seems to me that these wise men had some contact with this tradition and when the star appeared they identified it as His star. Consequently, they gathered a caravan (note there are no camels in the text either, but they probably had a few) and set out for the capital city of the Jews, Jerusalem, where they fully expected that everyone would know that the King of the Jews had been born! So, upon their arrival they began asking about Him, which soon led to:

2. their meeting with Herod (3-8) News of their arrival and of the birth of a King reached Herod's ears immediately. Now Herod has got to be a prime candidate for the "World's Greatest Butcher" award. Toward the end of his life, he was absolutely paranoid about anyone contending for his throne. He killed his own wife, two of his own sons, and anyone else whom he felt in any way threatened by. As he was dying, he had the entire leadership of Judea, dozens of people, held captive with orders to slaughter them upon his own expiration, so that all of Judea would mourn when he died whether they wanted to or not! The Emperor Augustus said it was better to be Herod's sow than his son! No wonder that when he heard of the wise men he was disturbed. And so was the entire populace, worrying about how many Herod would kill this time! Herod was not a Jew but an Edomite; he was obviously not of the rightful line to Judah's throne; the Jews saw him as a usurper. Anyone "born King" would be a great threat. So, he hatched a plot. He called together all the Jewish leaders to ask where the Messiah was "supposed" to be born, then he asked the wise men

carefully when the star had appeared and sent them to Bethlehem with a smile saying, "Let me know when you find him so that I may worship him too!" His answer is what guided them on their way. Next, we read of:

3. their worship of Jesus at Bethlehem (9-12) As the magi were on their way, the "star" which they had not seen for more than a year, maybe even two, suddenly reappeared in the night sky. And it filled their hearts with joy because it was the Divine confirmation of their quest. Various attempts have been made to identify this "star" as being a lining up of several planets which occurred in that year, a comet, or some other heavenly phenomenon. However, this "star" must have been much lower than outer space because it appeared both to travel in front of them (and they were traveling from north to south which is not the normal direction of star movement) and to stop over a particular house. In reality, it was probably the glory of God shining forth for this occasion as it did in the Old Testament for Israel in the pillar of fire, and on other occasions. By dated events that we'll leave to serious scholars, the time of their arrival was probably something like six months after Jesus' birth, so Mary and Joseph had stayed in Bethlehem. They needed to take Jesus to the Temple for His dedication at a month old, so why would they travel back to Nazareth and return? Joseph found work and they found a house to rent. The star led the Magi to that very house and when arrived they came in and fell down and worshipped the infant Jesus and gave him royal gifts, the kind of gifts one would present to a King. What a night these unlikely companions must have spent together! Perhaps they stayed a day, but Bethlehem was only 5 miles from Jerusalem and Herod would not long be patient. It could be that very same night that God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod and they departed for home by a different route where they would not encounter him. And, probably that same night, we read of:

4. the family's flight into Egypt (13-15b) Now Joseph once again had a dream and an angel appeared to him with instructions to leave immediately, explaining that the child was in danger from Herod. So, that night Joseph packed up Mary and the baby and the expensive gifts and headed out. By morning, no one knew that they were already far along the 75 mile road to Egypt. But don't think of Egypt as it was back in the days of Moses; by this time Egypt, too, was a Roman province, well-controlled, but out of Herod's jurisdiction. One ancient historian says there were about a million Jews living in Egypt in that era, so Mary and Joseph could find friends among their own people and begin to fit into a new life there. But they left none too soon because now comes:

5. Herod's slaughter of the infants (16-17) Within a day or two, it became obvious to Herod that the wise men had seen through him and were not coming back, and he was furious. So, instead of trying to find one particular child and destroy him, he did the most logical thing to his sick mind and decided to kill all the children in Bethlehem who had been born from the time the wise men had first seen the star to the present, no doubt allowing a large margin for error! In that day, Bethlehem was only a small village with possibly 300-1,000 people at most, maybe 60 to 100 families. The slaughter of a few dozen infants in a rural town hardly made the "evening news" in Jerusalem that day in light of Herod's long list of atrocities. Yet in Bethlehem there was a deep and loud mourning and wailing, a sadness which God chose to memorialize in Scripture to this day. But soon the tables were turned. We read last of:

6. the family's return to Nazareth (19-23) Mary and Joseph stayed at most only a few months in Egypt. Herod was stricken with a horrible disease and died an excruciating death, shortly after his awful deed, in March of 4 BC. Immediately, God informed Joseph in a dream that it was time to go back to Israel and the family set out, no doubt to go back to Bethlehem, but once back in Judea, he heard that Herod's son Archelaus, who was as crazy as his father, was ruling Judea, and was afraid. God confirmed his fears yet once more in another dream, and he headed north to Galilee which was ruled by Antipas, another son of Herod, who was much more level-headed. There he settled his family back into his home town of Nazareth.

Now that's the story, but what is:

II. The Message Matthew Is Conveying To Us If you put it in a nutshell, it is in the words of the wise men in verse 2:

1. Jesus was "born King of the Jews" And notice that is different from the phrase, "he who is born to *BECOME* King of the Jews". His office is not something that He will attain one day. He already IS King; He was BORN that way. It is His birthright! That's Matthew's message: Jesus is the King! First, Matthew proves it through giving us His pedigree, His genealogy. He is born King. Then He proves it through showing us that:

2. His birth fulfilled Old Testament promises Last week we read that He was born of a virgin as Is. 7:14 promised. In chapter 2, Matthew points out four separate promises that God made centuries before that were directly fulfilled around Jesus' birth. First, verse (6) tells us that:

a. he was born in Bethlehem, just as **Micah 5:2** predicted. He was born where God had said Messiah was to be born and He lived there for several months, so that it could truly be said that He came out of Bethlehem. Had He been born back in Nazareth or anywhere else He would not have qualified as King of the Jews, for the Word of God would not have been fulfilled. The next three Old Testament texts were not quite as clear predictions as Micah 5:2. For example, verse (15) says:

b. he was called out of Egypt in fulfillment of **Hos. 11:1** which says, *Out of Egypt have I called My Son*. No one was sitting around saying that when Messiah comes, He must be called out of Egypt. In Hosea, the first half of the verse says, *When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt have I called My son*. This promise was fulfilled first in His "son", the nation of Israel, but here, the Spirit says God intended ultimately to make this text have a second fulfillment in the life of Jesus, so that He not only called His son Israel out of Egypt but also His literal Son Jesus in His great love. Further, in verses **(17-18)** there was a great weeping when:

c. the children of Bethlehem were destroyed as **Jer. 31:15** predicted. Originally this prediction referred to the weeping of the Jewish mothers at the time of the Babylonian captivity, mourning over the death and carrying away of their children from Ramah. Ramah is slightly north of Jerusalem, Bethlehem is a bit south of it, but you have Rachel mentioned here whose tomb was close to Bethlehem and who was considered figuratively to be the mother of the nation. Again, though no one was expecting it, God showed how this was fulfilled a second time through the life of His Son, in the weeping of the mothers of Bethlehem over their children. And finally in verse **(23)** Matthew shows us that:

d. he was called a Nazarene There is no specific statement anywhere in the Old Testament like that. But **Is. 11:1** says, *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit*. Isaiah predicted there would be a Branch from the stump of Jesse (King David's father) who would be the Messiah. The Hebrew for *branch* is *netzer*, which is the root of the name Nazareth. Because Jesus grew up in Nazareth, the designation "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus the Nazarene" was attached to Him through His life. That is literally saying, "Jesus the Branch". So, while calling Him by His common designation all his life, people were really calling Him the Messiah, even though they did not see the significance of it! But Matthew did, and so once again, he points out that the Scriptures were fulfilled! Jesus is the King, because in Him the Scriptures find fulfillment.

Then finally, look back at the story of chapter 2 and see how:

3. His Kingship was acknowledged It was acknowledged:

a. by supernatural phenomena, by a supernatural "star" that God placed in the heavens to honor His birth, which not only fulfilled the traditions concerning Messiah's birth, but even fulfilled the expectation of Moses in **Num. 24:17**, when he said, *I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel...* The star in the sky was God's sign to the world that the True Star was here! Then His kingship was acknowledged:

b. by leaders of other nations Though His own people missed it and were clueless, wise men from the east, leaders of their peoples, came and bowed themselves before Him because they knew He was King. It was just as **Ps. 72:11** says, *May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!* And one day they will! He was even acknowledged as king:

c. by the very tyrant who tried to kill Him Why else did Herod send the soldiers to Bethlehem? He didn't dismiss this as some hoax or the errand of fools. He believed the wise men. He questioned them carefully about the time they saw the star. He believed the Scriptures; that's why he killed the children of Bethlehem! He was not trying to squash a rumor; he was trying to kill the King, and probably thought he had done so. And last, Jesus was acknowledged as King:

d. by repeated Divine intervention and protection Three times God sent an angel to warn Joseph to protect his Son. And notice the order in verses 14 and 21, *the CHILD and his mother...* That's the inverse of normal order. It is the child that is the focus of God's protection. Why?

Dear friends, Jesus is the King! No other person could ever lay claim to that. No other could ever fulfill "to a T" every prediction and even every intimation of the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is the rightful King of all, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! And what do you do in the presence of a King? You do what the wise men did. You bow down! You give Him your all your gifts and you promise Him all your loyalty. Make this song your response to the King.

"We All Bow Down" by Lenny LeBlanc |

*Princes and paupers, Sons and daughters, Kneel at the throne of grace
Losers and winners, Saints and sinners, One day will see His face
And we all bow down, Kings will surrender their crowns, And worship Jesus
For He is the love, Unfailing love, He is the love of God
Summer and winter, The mountains and rivers, Whisper our Savior's name
Awesome and holy, A friend to the lonely, Forever His love will reign
He's the light of the world, And Lord of the cross
And we all bow down, Kings will surrender their crowns, And worship Jesus
For He is the love, Unfailing love, He is the love of God*

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The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Ministry Of The King - Mt. 3-4

The Preparation For The King - 3:1-12

In Chapters 3-4 Matthew essentially records for us the launching of The Ministry of the King through His baptism and temptation when Jesus was about 30 years old. But he begins by telling us about the preparation that God planned for Jesus' ministry as the King through John the Baptist in 3:1-12. John's father was a priest from the tribe of Levi named Zachariah; his mother Elisabeth was also from that tribe, yet somehow distantly related to Jesus' mother Mary. The King James translation of Luke 1 has resulted in the false impression that John and Jesus were second-cousins, but although the events surrounding their miraculous births were connected and six months apart, it is doubtful that they really interacted with or knew each other until their ministries began. So let's look at that first phrase in verse (1) and talk about:

I. The Circumstances Of John the Baptist's Ministry

1. John's ministry began at a crucial time Luke tells us exactly when *In those days...* was. He says, *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...the Word of God came to John.* - **Lk. 3:1-2.** We call that year **29 AD** and it was a time when Israel was at its lowest ebb in every way. Under Caesar Augustus the Jews were tolerated and treated mildly, but Tiberias hated the Jews, persecuted those Jews who lived in Rome and dealt extremely harshly with Judea, which was now directly under Roman rule. He had three years earlier appointed Pontius Pilate governor, who repeatedly antagonized and offended the Jews, murdering many over the course of several incidents. The common people lived in fear of their oppressors; they understood that they were living in the iron grip of the fourth beast of Daniel's vision in chapter 2 and their only hope was that the God of Heaven would soon set up HIS Kingdom on earth and smash it to pieces! Yet at the same time, religiously, Israel had fallen to an all-time low. Most of her priests were Sadducees, who denied life after death and operated largely as political pawns of the Romans. The majority of Pharisees, considered the most pious of Jews, made a grand show of outward religiosity, but in reality, were vain, power-hungry, greedy, and equally capable of throwing poor widows out onto the street or plotting murder when it suited their purpose. Israel had not known a prophet in 400 years; they had not heard the voice of God thundering from one who proclaimed with authority, "Thus says the Lord!" I am not above suggesting that, in some senses, the day in which we live here is somewhat like it. We legitimize immorality in every form. We take human life for the sake of convenience. The pride of power and the raw greed of materialism rule the day. There's religion everywhere, but a large portion of the church has thrown out the truth of Scripture and doesn't proclaim it anymore. Like Babylon, if our society were weighed in the balances today, we are growing dangerously close to being found wanting, not worthy of continuing, and deserving of wrath and judgment. It is a crucial time in our history too; like Israel in that day, we need a massive turning back to God! Well, it was exactly at this crucial time that John the Baptist came on the scene preaching, but not where you would expect him:

2. John's life and ministry were centered in the desert of Judea. **Lk. 1:80** says *[John] was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.* Now, if your translation says *wilderness*, don't think forests and trees. The Judean desert is a region roughly 10 miles wide and 60 miles long, stretching along the shore of the lower Jordan River and the Dead Sea to the east of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and on to the south. Dozens of deep wadis cut across it. It is a dry, rocky, barren, uninhabited region with few oases or villages. John grew up probably on the edge of this region and lived his whole life there in the desert until he was 30 years old. But what an unlikely place to start a ministry! You would think God would have you go to Jerusalem and preach to the multitudes gathered for the annual feasts or at least send you into the towns and villages where you could go into the synagogues and teach as Jesus did or even the marketplaces. But out here? People had to come out to him from their towns and cities. They had to walk miles to find and listen to him. You wouldn't think they would do it, but come they did, first in a trickle, and then by the dozens and soon by the hundreds, as word of his preaching spread. One has to ask why? Well, one answer probably is that:

3. John's dress and demeanor identified him with the Old Testament prophets (4-5) Instead of dressing like normal people, he wore a rough felt garment made of camel's hair and a leather belt. And instead of adopting a trade or planting a crop, he lived on what was available to him in the wild, eating locusts and searching for wild honey for a sweet. Need I tell you that that was really weird, even in that day? So why did he do it? **Zech. 13:4** seems to indicate that the garment of hair was the mark of a prophet of God. It was exactly what Elijah wore in **2 Kings 1:8** and everybody knew this was how Elijah dressed. Plus, Elijah spent much of his time in the wilderness also. Luke tells us that an angel prophesied of John before his birth (**Lk. 1:17**) that He would go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elijah. John wanted all the people to know that he was a prophet of God, that God had sent a prophet to His people at long last. But more than that, it said that he was the new Elijah, the Elijah whom God said through Malachi that He would send before the Day of the Lord to turn the hearts of His people back again. And come they did, from all over, crowds of people of all kinds to hear him. There were Pharisees from Jerusalem and fishermen from Galilee, soldiers, tax collectors, you name it. All came to hear his message. Now what was:

II. The Purpose Of John's Ministry Matthew explains it to us in verse (3). Matthew quotes **Is. 40:3** and claims that:

1. his ministry fulfilled prophecy He says that this promise was a direct prediction of John's ministry. In fact, John even quoted this verse to identify himself when the Pharisees asked him whether he was the Christ (1:23). He said, "This is what I am! The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord!'" So, both Matthew and John himself are saying that:

2. his ministry prepared the nation for Jesus' public ministry The context of Is. 40:3 is a prediction of comfort for Israel after the exile that Isaiah said was going to come upon them. If you read the chapter, you'll see that it's a promise that the glory of the Lord is again going to come to Jerusalem and that all flesh will see it. It's a call for the people to go out and fix the roads and make the crooked places straight and fill up the ditches and level the humps, to make the rough places smooth so the King can arrive. It's a metaphor for repentance, calling on the people to turn from their sins and correct their crooked ways so that the glory of the Lord will return and the Kingdom will come. John says "I am that voice". He was purposely out in the wilderness doing that very thing preparing the nation of Israel, calling upon the people to repent and change their hearts, so that they might receive their King, Jesus, who was soon to arrive on the scene!

Ancient Kings always had the road prepared before them when they traveled. Even today, whenever the President of the United States visits a community, local officials cooperate with advance teams in an immense amount of preparation for his coming. His motorcade route is carefully laid out. Streets are repaired and litter is picked up. The people who will meet with him are carefully coached and put on their finest clothes. The offices, auditoriums, and businesses he will visit are cleaned and decorated. Everything possible is done to give him the kind of reception that his position deserves. Listen, if our President merits such thorough preparation, certainly the King and Lord of the universe deserves far more! John was the advance man for Christ, urging the people to get ready for their King. Now let's look at:

III. The Message Which John Preached We are given a brief general summary of it. First of all:

1. it was a message about the Kingdom (2) Using the term *heaven* was a Jewish way to reverently avoid taking God's name upon your lips, but everybody knew that when you said *heaven*, you really meant God Himself. Where the other Gospels say *Kingdom of God*, Matthew says, *Kingdom of Heaven*, because he's a Jewish guy writing to Jews. He's saying, "The rule or reign of God is coming; it's drawing close." By that I don't think he was as focused on the setting up of the final kingdom on earth that we look for; rather I think his message meant that the King had arrived and was soon to reveal Himself to Israel. I say that because the focus of it was personal. It was **a call for personal submission to the rule of God in life**. It was saying, "The King is about to arrive right here; make your life ready! Clean the streets, smooth the rough places, straighten the crooked places! Get ready to receive Him, bow before Him and truly acknowledge His rule over your life!" Therefore:

2. it was a message calling people to repentance (7-10) Wow, we don't preach like that much today! But maybe we should. You see, in John's day:

a. people counted on physical descent from Abraham for God's favor They believed that because they were Jews, God was obligated to receive them favorably and treat them with blessing because God had made a promise to Abraham that the land would belong to his descendants who would outnumber the stars in the sky, regardless of what they did or how they acted personally. They figured that as long as they were not idolaters, as long as they called Yahweh their God and were circumcised, that they were IN with Him because Abraham was their father. It did not equate to following Him or obeying Him in their personal lives. Now that shouldn't surprise us too much. We have lots of people just like them. For instance, you have plenty of neighbors who count on the fact that they are Catholic or Presbyterian or Lutheran or something else. Their minds believe, "I was baptized in the church as a baby; I was married there; I count myself part of it, give assent to what it believes and I even go there, at least on important occasions. So, God must regard me favorably." Yet the reign of Jesus doesn't mean very much in their personal lives. They live together without being married or are unfaithful to their spouses or look at pornography on the internet. With their lips they take God's Name in vain or they dishonor him with cursing. They cheat on their taxes or do what they have to to get ahead; maybe they drink too much and become abusive to their families. Their lives focus on themselves and what they want; whatever they give to God is a little bit out of the leftovers, yet they would call themselves children of God. Listen, John said, "God can make children of Abraham out of these stones, if He wants to! He doesn't need you; you need HIM!"

b. he called them to change their minds and see their own sin That's what repentance is, literally a changing of the mind. It's an opening of our eyes to see what our lives truly look like in the sight of God, a changing of our presumptive thinking that we're OK and God doesn't really care about how we live. It's a recognition that I'm a sinful human being who must stand before a holy God and feeling genuine sorrow over it! It is being overwhelmed like Isaiah in the presence of God when he cried out, *Woe [is] me! for I am undone; because I [am] a man of unclean lips...and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!*

c. he called them to change and bear the fruit of holy lives He said, "If your hearts are changed, your lives will bear the fruit that proves it!" Look ahead to what Jesus Himself taught in **7:20-21**. It is not what a person's lips say, but what their life says, that is really true. He is not Lord if our lives aren't ruled by His will. He is not King if our lives don't fulfill His command. That's as true today as it was then. And then John called people to a point of decision:

d. he called them to a public commitment of baptism as a sign of change (6) Baptism was not a new thing to the Jews. Many of the ceremonial laws about cleansing say that a person had to bathe in water before he was cleansed from defilement. It symbolized the removal of sin. For centuries proselytes converting to Judaism had been first circumcised, but then immersed in water, baptized, as a symbol of cleansing from their former sinful lives. John took this familiar symbol and said, "This is not something for the 'sinners of the Gentiles'; it is for YOU! You need to repent of your sins and then come out here into the river with me and make your intent to change your lives publicly known. Do it in front of everybody!" And they took him seriously. As the Spirit broke their hearts, they began to come for repentance and baptism first a few and then by the dozens, then hundreds. It became a movement in Israel. Now John was always found at the Jordan and, daily, crowds came to him; that's how he became known as "the Baptizer". My, but he was straight with them:

e. he warned them of destruction if they refused "The axe is already laying against the root of the tree and when the King gets here, if that tree is not bearing the fruit of a holy life, He's going to swing that axe and cut it down and burn it! Your eternal soul is in danger, Jew or not, church member or not, professing to believe or not! *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God [Heb. 10:31]!*" Whoa! Obviously the "seeker-friendly" service hadn't been invented yet, or at least, John hadn't read the literature! His message was straight but it was true and it's the same one we preach: there is a hell and your sin is going to send you there unless you repent and place your life under the rule of the King! Ultimately, John's message:

3. it was a message pointing people to the King, Jesus (11-12) John said: "Jesus is coming and:

a. He is the One who matters, not us I only baptize with water; it has no power to save you. In fact, I can't save you; I am nothing, nobody, the lowest of servants. I'm just a mouthpiece, a voice crying out a message. HE is everything. It's about Him, not about me. And when He comes:

b. He will baptize those who are genuinely His with His Spirit, just like the prophet Joel said, *I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, young and old, male and female, servants and handmaids [2:28-29]*, upon all who will call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. He will put His own Spirit inside of them, writing His very laws on their hearts and giving them power to live pure and obedient lives. I can't do that, but that's what He will do! Yet at the same time:

c. He will bring refining fire like Malachi and burn up all that is impure among His gold. **[3:2-5]**. He'll pick up his winnowing fork, throw the harvested grain up into the air and let the strong wind of the Spirit blow the **chaff** into the fire and gather those who are truly his wheat safely into His barn. He knows who is real and who is not. Say what you want to people, cry 'Lord, Lord' all you want, but you can't fool Him; He can see your life and right into your heart! Either He's your Lord and King or He's not."

John's ministry was short, maybe a year, not more than two, but the impact of his message was extremely powerful. Twenty five years later and a thousand miles away by land in Ephesus, Paul met a group of men who had heard John's message, repented and were baptized and were still waiting for the King he promised to come. *In the autumn of 1912, Teddy Roosevelt was in Milwaukee to deliver an important campaign speech seeking a third term as President. He was greeting well-wishers in front of the Gilpatrick Hotel, when a deranged saloonkeeper named John Schrank stepped forward, aimed a pistol at Roosevelt and fired a single bullet into Roosevelt's chest. The bullet failed to mortally wound the president because its force was slowed by a glasses case and a bundle of manuscript in the breast pocket of his heavy coat--a manuscript containing Roosevelt's evening speech. The blast knocked him across the car and into a crumpled heap. Police gang-tackled the gunman. But even as his aides begged him to go to the hospital, he said, "You get me to that speech. It may be the last one I ever deliver, and I'm not going to miss it." Minutes after the shooting, Teddy Roosevelt stood before his audience and said, "Friends, I shall ask you to be as quiet as possible. I have just been shot, and even now the bullet is in me. So I cannot speak for long, but I will do my best." With that he pulled the torn and blood-stained manuscript from his breast pocket and declared, "You see, it takes more than one bullet to kill a Bull Moose." He spoke for nearly an hour. That night his speech was more candid than scripted, more urgent than routine. It was driven by passion, not politics. It contained no campaign rhetoric, no jockeying for votes, no idle promises. Instead, he spoke with deep resolve to cure the nation's problems, even while risking his own. He was compelled to tell the truth. Declaring his deepest beliefs was the only thing that mattered that night. Even his greatest critics sat silenced and declared their respect for him.* That desperate passion to do nothing save declare the truth is the way John preached every single one of his short days. It softened the hard ground of thousands of hearts and prepared a nation to meet their King. I hope, on the one hand, that you'll hear John's message and apply it to your own life in whatever way God shows you, but on the other, I hope all of us will be like John in passionately declaring the unpopular truth of God to a decadent society, that we will all be voices crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord!"

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Ministry Of The King - Mt. 3-4

The Baptism Of The King - 3:13-17

Last time we looked at the ministry of John the Baptist which prepared Israel for Jesus' ministry in the first 12 verses of chapter 3. Today we look at the extraordinary event with which Jesus launched His own ministry. After about six months of preaching, John's work had grown into a true religious movement with crowds coming out to him from their towns and villages every day to repent of their sins and be baptized in the Jordan River. At that point, when He was about 30 years of age, Jesus left home, left the village carpenter's life that He had known in Nazareth, to embark upon a public life of ministry for the next 3 ½ years. And as His first step:

I. Jesus Deliberately Came To Be Baptized By John (13-15) Now first let's try to visualize:

1. the physical journey involved Jesus left His home in Nazareth of Galilee and traveled 65 or 70 miles down the Jordan Valley to find John. **Jn. 1:28** says that the place where John was baptizing at that time was on the east or far side of Jordan, at a place called Bethany or in the KJV Bethabara. The traditional site is just above the ford at Jericho, about 6 miles north of the entrance to the Dead Sea. Interestingly, it was about here that Israel had crossed Jordan to attack Jericho and it dried up before them. It was also here that Elijah divided the Jordan with his mantle and crossed on dry ground; he then went on up a hill to the east, today known as Mar Elias and was taken up to heaven. Today in that section, the growth along the river is lush, but the river itself has been reduced to a muddy creek because Israel and Jordan both siphon off so much of its water upstream for irrigation. Because the river has shrunk so much, the traditional baptism spot is now well inland from the river bank. It is marked by the foundation ruins of two chapels that were built next to it in later centuries (shaded now by porches to preserve them) and the alleged spot itself has been carved out into a cross-shaped pool that is now often completely dry. Naturally, through the centuries people have wanted to come here to be baptized themselves, thus there are steps, and the Orthodox Church has recently completed a new chapel close to the site. Of course, there is nothing holy about the place itself; it simply serves as a reminder that this was an event that actually happened in a real place that believers have always known about and that you can still go to today. It is not some ancient myth or story that the Church made up. My point is that when you think about Jesus deliberately traveling all that way in order to go to John and be baptized by him, it's clear that:

2. He had a definite purpose in doing this The question of why Jesus chose to be baptized by John is worth asking, because it is obvious that Jesus was not doing it for the same reason as everyone else that came. He had nothing to repent of; He was absolutely without sin; His life did not require a change to bear fruit like the rest. So then, why? Well, of all the answers that have been suggested, a few are clear. First:

a. He was personally obeying His Father's will God told Him to do it! That's what He meant when He told John *...it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*. In other words, *God wants both you and I to do this thing so we must do it; that obedience is required both of us. We must fulfill His will*. It made no sense to John and Jesus didn't offer a real explanation; He just said, "God says to do this" and that's enough. You know, sometimes God tells you WHAT to do without telling you WHY. Sometimes obedience makes absolutely no sense; it seems the very opposite of what logic would tell us we should do, but our obligation is to do it anyway, isn't it? Then the most obvious reason we can think of is that:

b. He was publicly revealing Himself as the coming One John preached John became the chief witness to Jesus in those early days of His ministry. The Gospel of John does not record the baptism itself, only what John said on several days in the weeks that followed. When Jesus showed up, he would preach to the crowd, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! There's the one whose shoes I'm not worthy to untie! There's the One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and will burn you up as chaff if you don't repent! Follow Him!" Jesus' first followers, Andrew and Peter among them, started out as John's followers. And Jesus' baptism was the link that bound their two ministries together into one, John's as preparation and Jesus' as the fulfillment. Now, from our own viewpoint living after the cross, we can see that Jesus:

c. He was graciously identifying Himself with US Luke introduces his record of the event by saying, *When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too*. - **Lk. 3:21**. Jesus stood in the line with the people. In essence, He stood with us in our place, the place of humble repentant sinners counting on the grace of God for forgiveness we don't deserve. And He became for us a living visual illustration of what would happen to each one of us at our salvation. As He came out of the water, two significant things happened to Him. The Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the visible form of a dove and then the voice of the Father came from heaven saying, *"This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."* This was a visual demonstration of what happens to us. When we take the place of a repentant sinner counting on the grace of God and identify ourselves with Christ, as Jesus did with John, each of us is instantly and permanently accepted before God as His beloved son or daughter and given the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell us. At His baptism, Jesus was identifying Himself with us to show us what He

will do for us! At our baptism as believers, we identify ourselves with Him; we follow His example of declaring a spiritual message by that physical act. But that's another sermon. Before we move on, let me point out that:

d. John humbly recognized his own sinfulness and unworthiness "Me, baptize the Son of God? YOU should baptize ME! I follow YOU!" And Jesus responded, "I understand your hesitation and I appreciate your humble attitude but we have to do this thing because that's what the Father says to do!" You know, sometimes God gives us the awesome privilege of doing things that we in no way deserve to do. Not that it compares to this, but in India we got to give new Christian names to the new believers who were being baptized, names they would carry the rest of their lives. It was so humbling that we who had literally done nothing, who had no right, should be asked to do that. And that sense of humbleness, that recognition of our unworthiness, is something we never want to lose. Jesus later commented, *...among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist (11:11)*, but John's attitude was always, "Who am I?" It was the attitude of Moses, of David, of Solomon early in his life, of Mary, of Elizabeth (John's mother). It has always been the attitude of the most mature, of those whom God has chosen to use in the greatest ways. Be careful never to lose it!

So Jesus waded into the water and was immersed by John, but immediately after, a second thing happened:

II. The Father Powerfully Revealed Himself At Jesus' Baptism (16-17) The Father:

1. He directly confirmed Jesus as His Chosen One; He declared to the world that Jesus was the Messiah, the King, His chosen Servant. He did it:

a. with a vision of heaven visible to human eyes He pulled back the veil, just like He did for Stephen as he was being stoned. Their human eyes were able to see right into heaven, right into the very throne room of God. And He did it:

b. with a voice speaking audibly to human ears, a voice speaking out loud from heaven! The last time God did that in Israel was at Mount Sinai 1400 years earlier and all the people heard it and were terrified! God truly intended to make this a landmark event!

Now we are not told whether everyone standing there saw the vision and heard the Voice or not, but the text says Jesus did and the fourth Gospel says John did. In fact, he later testified that this moment verified for him with absolute certainty that Jesus was the Christ. I rather think that everybody saw and heard it, as John did, because that was the point! Every Jew knew **Is. 42:1**, *Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations*. The whole point of this scene is that God the Father was openly, visibly, even audibly declaring to the world just who Jesus is! Now in that process:

2. He visually displayed Jesus' endowment with the Holy Spirit The Holy Spirit appeared in a visible form, something like a dove, descending from the sky and alighting upon Him. Of course, the symbolism of the dove is all over the place today, but in that day, there was no common symbolic meaning to connect it with. The dove is not the point. God had told John privately, *...He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit - Jn. 1:33*. The Father is saying, "This is the ONE who has My Spirit!" And please don't give any credence to the heresy that this is when Jesus received the Spirit, as though He did not have the Spirit before this. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. His whole life was lived in communion with the Spirit; in fact, He was one with the Spirit from all eternity. This scene is in reality a visible demonstration for the sake of giving the audience a message: "This is the Man who HAS the Holy Spirit of God and He can bestow His Spirit on you!". Also note that:

a. the Spirit descended and remained upon Him. I don't take that to mean that Jesus walked around with a dove perched on His shoulder thereafter. I take it that the "dove form" kind of alighted upon Him and "merged" into His body. The Spirit remained there permanently. The Jews also knew **Is. 11:2**, *...the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD*. A similar thing happened on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came down in the appearance of flames of fire and lighted upon each of the believers in the room and "rested" on them. I don't think they walked around with little flames of fire on top of their heads; the appearance "merged" into their beings. God was saying, "My Spirit is now in you and He isn't leaving!" By the way, if you're saved today, what happened to Jesus and to those guys is a visible picture of what happened to you! The Father sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in your very body and join Himself to your spirit and He's not going anywhere! But what the Spirit's permanent abiding really said about Jesus is that:

b. His every move was made under the guidance of the Spirit Look at **4:1**. He didn't choose to go the places He went and say the things He said on his own initiative. Every move He made, every Word He spoke, was at the bidding of the Spirit of God who made them known to Him. Moreover:

c. His every deed was done through the power of the Spirit When the Temptation was finished, **Lk. 4:14** says, *Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee*. All His deeds, all His miracles, everything He ever did, was done, not on His own, but through the power of the Holy Spirit!

And isn't that the very way that we're supposed to live? Paul said, *Be filled with the Spirit!* "Let the Holy Spirit who lives in you control everything you do and say! Draw upon His power for every deed; don't rely upon your own strength!" The Father was saying, "Jesus will be the prime example of what it means to live life, *not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit! Follow Him! Live like Him!*" Now at the same time the Father sent the Spirit upon Jesus visually:

3. He clearly declared Jesus' identity as His Son verbally. His voice spoke from heaven. Can you imagine what that was like? Now on the one hand, for Jesus:

a. it was intensely personal Both Mk. 1:11 and Lk. 3:21 record the Father as saying directly to Jesus, "*YOU are My beloved Son*". Not that Jesus didn't know that or wasn't sure of it somehow, but the Father affirmed it to Him again, out loud, in front of the whole world. It's like me saying to LuAnn, "Sweetheart, you are the love of my life!" right up here in front of all these people! And meaning it, of course! It was a powerful affirmation to Jesus Himself and we'll see next week just how these very words prepared Jesus for the very attacks of the Devil He was about to face! However, Matthew gives us the "sense" of what the Father said by writing "*THIS is My beloved Son.*" That shows that it was not merely personal; at the same time:

b. it was intended for the public He was making that declaration before the whole world. Read with me **Jn. 1:32-34**. John says, "When I saw the Spirit and I heard that Voice speak, I KNEW Jesus was God's Son. I saw and heard it and I am bearing witness; I'm telling everybody!" The Father was saying, "HEY WORLD! PAY ATTENTION! JESUS IS MY SON!" But He said even more than that, "MY BELOVED SON!"

4. He freely confessed the nature of His relationship with His Son He actually said two things. He said:

a. I deeply love My Son How it must have warmed Jesus' heart to hear His Father say, "I love you, Son, with all My being!" and to hear Him declare it before the whole world! Have you ever been at a Phillies game and seen them put up on the Phanavision screen in front of 50,000 fans, "I love you, Susan! Will you marry me?" and then the camera shows the surprised face of the girl and she is just absolutely overwhelmed with the fact that her boyfriend loved her enough to put it up in lights before the whole world! Well, magnify that feeling about a million times and you still won't begin to touch the affirmation that this was to Jesus and the warning that it was to the world! But the Father didn't stop there. He said:

b. I am completely pleased in My Son That's our word "well-pleased" from 2 Cor. 12:10. "I am completely satisfied; there is nothing that My Son needs to do for Me to be pleased with Him. I am absolutely satisfied in Him right now, today, without the cross, without all that He will accomplish. I am satisfied with HIS PERSON, with HIM!"

Dear one, have you not yet realized that God says these very things about YOU if you have trusted in Christ! ... *You received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory.* - Rom. 8:15-17! In His Word, God says about YOU, "YOU are My child, My son, My daughter. And I love you deeply. I love you with all My being. And I am completely satisfied in you! Not in your performance, not in all the things you do for Me, not in your carrying out of all the things I have for you to do, but simply IN YOU! There is not one thing you have to do to gain My favor. I am well-pleased that I made you and that I have you as My child, that you are Mine!" How does that make you feel? That's how it made Jesus feel and He went on and lived life out of it, knowing He had complete freedom and acceptance. Years ago, an unknown author wrote this: *I was watching some little kids play soccer. These kids were only five or six years old, but they were playing a real game -- a serious game -- two teams, complete with coaches, uniforms, and parents. I didn't know any of them, so I was able to enjoy the game without the distraction of being anxious about winning or losing. The teams were pretty evenly matched. Nobody scored in the first period. The kids were hilarious. They were clumsy and terribly inefficient, as only children can be. They fell over their own feet, they stumbled over the ball, they kicked at the ball and missed it, but they didn't seem to care; they were having fun! In the second period, the Team One coach, pulled out what must have been his first team players and put in the scrubs; with the exception of his best player, who he left at goalie. The game took a dramatic turn. The Team Two coach left his best players in and the Team One scrubs were just no match for them. Team Two swarmed around the little guy at goalie. He was an outstanding athlete for five, but he was no match for three or four who were equally as good. Team Two began to score. The lone goalie gave it his all. Recklessly throwing his body in front of incoming balls, trying valiantly to stop them. Team Two scored two quick points in succession. It infuriated the young boy. He was shouting, running, and diving. With all the stamina he could muster, he finally was able to cover one of the boys as he approached the goal. But that boy kicked the ball to another boy twenty feet away, and by the time the young goalie repositioned himself, it was too late -- they scored a third goal. The goalie's parents were nice, decent-looking people. I could tell that his dad had just come from the office, tie and all. They yelled encouragement to their son. I became totally absorbed, watching the boy on the field, and his parents on the sideline. After the third goal, the little kid changed. He could see it was no use; he couldn't stop them. He didn't quit, but he became quietly desperate -- futility was written all over his face. His father changed too. He had been urging his son to try harder -- yelling advice and encouragement. But then he changed; he became anxious. He tried to say that it was okay ... to hang in there. He grieved for the pain his son was feeling. After the fourth goal, I knew what was going to happen. The little boy needed help so badly, and there was no help to be had. He retrieved the*

ball from the net and handed it to the referee -- and then he cried. He just stood there while huge tears rolled down both cheeks. He went to his knees; I saw his father start onto the field. His wife clutched his wrist and said, "Jim, don't. You'll embarrass him." But he tore loose from her and ran onto the field. He wasn't supposed to; the game was still in progress. Suit, tie, dress shoes, and all -- he charged onto the field and he picked up his son so everybody would know that this was his boy. And he hugged him and kissed him ...and cried with him. I have never been so proud of any man in my life. He carried him off the field, and when they got close to the sidelines, I heard him say, "Scotty, I'm so proud of you. You were great out there. I want everybody to know that you are my son." "Daddy," the boy sobbed, "I couldn't stop them. I tried, Daddy, I tried and tried and they scored on me." "Scotty, it doesn't matter how many times they score on you. You're my son, and I'm proud of you. I want you to go back out there and finish the game. I know you want to quit, but you can't. And son, you're going to get scored on again, but it doesn't matter. Go on, now." The little guy ran back on to the field, and they scored two more times; but it was okay. I get scored on every day. I try so hard. I throw my body in every direction. I fume and rage. I struggle in life with every ounce of my being -- and Satan laughs. And he scores again, and the tears come, and I go to my knees; sinful, convicted, helpless. But my Father rushes right out on the field -- right in front of the whole crowd -- the whole jeering laughing world, and He picks me up. And He hugs me, and He says, "I am so proud of you. You were great out there. I want everybody to know that you are My child. I love you!"

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Ministry Of The King - Mt. 3-4

The Temptation Of The King - 4:1-11

In our continuing study through the Gospel of Matthew we arrive today in Chapter 4 at the second major event that began Jesus' ministry. The first foundational event was His baptism by John, followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit like a dove and the glorious announcement of the Father from heaven, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*. Now, immediately on its heels, comes the powerful account of His victorious encounter with Satan that we call His temptation. Before we study it, however, I'd like to take a moment to talk about:

I. How Jesus' Temptation Relates To Us Turn with me to **Heb. 4:15-16**. Now right there are three important facts and three reasons for studying Jesus' temptation pretty closely. First of all:

1. He was tempted exactly like we are Of course He wasn't tempted to look at pornography on the internet; He didn't face every specific tempting circumstance we face. Rather He was tempted in every WAY that we are tempted, in every area in which we face temptation. And He experienced it exactly like we do; He felt the same exact human feelings that we feel. In other words, His temptation was real; it was genuine. The desires that Satan tried to stir in Him were actually there. He truly felt hunger and desired food. If what Satan tried to tempt Him with had no appeal to Him, it wouldn't be temptation, would it? In the scene we're about to look at, Jesus may APPEAR nonchalant as we read, but He is engaged in an intense struggle, similar to the one He later endured in Gethsemane. And because of that:

2. He understands the struggle temptation is for us and stands ready to help He knows how hard it is! He has been here; He has struggled through it just like we do. So, He sympathizes with us in our personal struggles; He literally suffers through it with us, alongside us. And He stands ready, not to condemn us for struggling, but to supply us with His mighty power and strength to help us whenever we need it! And notice those little words, *yet without sin*. He went through a stronger, deeper struggle with temptation than we will ever know and won! So, in that process:

3. He demonstrates for us the way of victory over temptation He shows us how it's done, how to make it through! We can look at the temptation of Jesus and see in it our own selves, in our own struggles, and learn how to emerge victorious! That's why our study today is important! So, let's begin with:

II. The Circumstances Of Temptation (1-2a) Don't skip this introduction or take it lightly. Notice this temptation happened in:

1. the desert: In our first study I shared that the wilderness or the Desert of Judea is a barren, rocky, mountainous region along the shore of the Dead Sea where John the Baptist grew up and began his ministry. It was largely uninhabited because there's no vegetation and little water. To go there is to be alone. Mark says in 1:12-13, *He was with the wild animals*; snakes, scorpions, vultures, they were the only living creatures he saw. And He was alone for 40 solid days without interacting with another human being. Imagine that. **Temptation is often the strongest when we ARE alone or at least when we FEEL alone.** Ask any wildebeest; the wild dogs always separate their target animal from the herd to devour it because there's safety in numbers. That's one reason God warns us not to neglect meeting together. God birthed us into a herd, the Church, and we help protect one another from falling into the jaws of the enemy. Now notice why Jesus went into the desert. He was, quite literally, led up there from the Jordan by:

2. the Spirit: Mark says He was *driven* there by the Spirit. He was compelled by God to go to the desert, the very place where He was tempted. To say it another way, He arrived at the place of temptation by the path of obedience. And often, so do we. We are quick to talk about not putting ourselves in situations where we know we'll be tempted to

sin, but the point here is the exact opposite. As we obey God and follow Him, at time He leads us directly into tempting circumstances and it is no mistake! He does it on purpose and He does it for two reasons: **God uses temptation to PROVE us**. Now by that, I don't mean He's trying to see whether He can get us to sin. **Jas. 1:13** says ...*God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one*. God was not trying to see whether His Son would sin; He was proving to the whole world that His Son WOULD NOT sin! When He leads us into temptation, God is proving to us and to the world who we really are, that we really are His followers who have transformed hearts that love Him more than anything in the world and choose not to sin! And in our case, He also uses going through temptation to **IMPROVE us**, to strengthen us through the experience for the more stringent attacks that will lie ahead. Now notice the actual tempting is done by:

3. the Tempter, as he is called in verse 3. **Satan is the one who attacks us with temptation**. It comes from him; he is the author of temptation, the one trying to drag us into sin. But why? Why bother? The bottom line is that **it hurts God!** He told God, "Let me take away everything Job has and he'll curse you right to your face!" (1:11). He put it right out there; that's what he wants. He wants the whole race to turn against God and hate Him and break His heart of love, especially those who claim to love Him! If he can get Jesus to sin, to rebel against His own Father he destroys the most fundamental relationship in the universe and he breaks the very heart of God. The Father says, "Have at it, Satan; it's a vain hope! Let Me show you what My beloved Son will do!" That's the bottom line every time we face temptation. Satan is trying to cause God pain, to get us to grieve, to deeply sadden and wound His Spirit who lives in us! God is wanting to show His glory through His own beloved son or daughter! Now note in verse 2:

4. the duration: Luke 4:1-2 says Jesus *was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil*. That seems to imply that Jesus was tempted through that whole period out there alone and the three temptations we read about are the final three, the pinnacle, the climax of all that had gone before. Here's another fact: **Temptation intensifies by continuation**. Potiphar's wife spoke to Joseph day after day, trying to seduce him to sleep with her. I'm sure she changed her approach daily, changed her outfit, softened her request to "Well, just sit here by me...", and finally opted for the aggressive approach, grabbing him by the garment to pull him into her arms. The longer temptation goes on, the stronger it gets. So, flee sooner if you can! For 40 days Satan changed his approach, used different tactics, maybe softened his appeals, and finally in the end, went all out and laid it on the line in:

III. The Three Ultimate Temptations Now in **1 Jn. 2:16** John basically says that everything the world has to offer us (and tempt us with) falls into three categories: *the desires of the flesh*, which is an appeal to our bodily drives, *the desires of the eyes* to have the things we see which is basically an appeal to our greed, or *the boastful pride of life*, which is an appeal to our pride in what we think about ourselves. **Gen. 3:6** tells us that Eve struggled with all three in that very first temptation of all. She saw *the tree was good for food* (it appealed to her physical desire), *that it was a delight to the eyes* (it appealed to her desire to possess things) and *that it would make one wise* (it appealed to her pride). That's what tempted her to disobey God; Satan threw the whole ball of wax at her in the simple form of one act of eating a piece of fruit that hung on a forbidden tree. Here he throws the whole ball of wax at Jesus in three separate and most extreme forms. The first of these was the suggestion to turn:

1. Stones Into Bread (2b-4)

a. the apparent enticement was obvious. After 40 days with no food, He was hungry. No, He was way beyond hungry. 40 days without food would make you emaciated, literally starving. Like the little kids you see in the videos of Africa, you'd be ready to eat mud just have something in your stomach. This was the strong appeal **to satisfy His physical desire** for food, one of the most powerful and basic **Desires Of The Flesh**. And He could do it simply enough. "You're the Son of God. You could have instant relief. You could take a stone and turn it into a loaf of bread with a word!" It was a simple act that, by itself, would have been perfectly fine, except that it had a subtle:

b. the hidden snare The Father had led Him into this desert and was keeping Him there all this time. Matthew deliberately says Jesus *fasted* 40 days and that word almost always means to choose not to eat as a means of devoting oneself to God. To break the fast at Satan's suggestion and simply to satisfy His own hunger was to disregard the Father in order to meet His physical need on His own. God knows we have physical needs, a whole bunch of them! These frail bodies of ours are high maintenance models! But Satan tempts us **to disobey God by meeting needs our own way**, instead of trusting Him to meet them in the way and the time that He has ordained. Eve ate the "apple" because she was hungry that moment, rather than obey God and go eat of another tree. David went after Bathsheba to satisfy his lust, rather than obeying God and going inside to his own wives. But Jesus declared:

c. the truth: Bread is not what gives you life, starving or not; God does! His quote comes from **Deut. 8:1-3**. God let Israel be hungry and then every morning fed her by an obvious miracle, manna from heaven. It was a 40 year long object lesson that our lives depend on God and not simply on the food we eat! If He says we live, we live, food or not! Therefore, **we must never act independent of God!** We must never act to satisfy our desires as though our life depends on us and what we do and disregard what He has commanded!

Now don't think that was easy for Jesus to say; this was no religious platitude. These were the words of a near-starving Son declaring, "I AM the Son of God and My Father is more important to Me than my food, than even my own physical survival, my most basic human drive!" So, Satan moved on to a second suggestion:

2. The Temple Leap (5-7) In a moment of time the two are transported to Jerusalem. It is early morning. On the highest parapet of the Temple complex is a platform where the priest on duty watches each morning for the sun's first rays to break the horizon so the morning sacrifice can be offered. Edersheim paints the picture: *In the Priests' Court below Him the morning sacrifice has been offered. The massive Temple gates are slowly opening, and the blasts of the priests' silver trumpets is summoning Israel to begin a new day by appearing before their Lord. Now then let Him descend, Heaven-borne, into the midst of priests and people. What shouts of acclamation would greet His appearance! What homage of worship would be His!*

a. the apparent enticement is to prove His identity to the world. "You're the Son of God; PROVE IT! Descend! The very angels will bear you up! The Scriptures say so! Claim the worship and loyalty of your people that is rightfully yours!" This was an appeal to **the Pride of Life**, to that human desire for ultimate significance, for the world to recognize me, to be the one in charge. For 30 long years the very Son of God had been merely "the carpenter's son," planing wooden tables in an obscure village in Galilee. The One through Whom and for Whom all things were created lived in a simple house cutting firewood and cleaning up after animals each day. Why? Because it was the will of His father that He should be born in a manger and live as the humblest of us and have nowhere to lay His head throughout His years of ministry. And there's:

b. the hidden snare. He could cut all that short right now and set it straight. Israel would fall at His angel-protected feet and crown Him King on the spot. But that would be to refuse what the Father wanted. So often Satan uses our pride to entice us **to disobey by making demands of God**, putting ourselves above Him and demanding that He must do things our way as though we are in charge, instead of us doing things His way. But Jesus refused to jump and declared:

c. the truth: "That is putting God to the test, demanding that He prove Himself to me." He quotes **Deut. 6:16**, *You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah*. At Massah in the wilderness the Israelites were thirsty and complaining that God was not giving them water. **Ex. 17:7** says, *they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"* They set themselves up as the judges and wanted to make God prove Himself to them by doing what they wanted right now! Listen, **we must never test God** by demanding that we get what we want right now, whether it's provision or healing or recognition or anything else. Whenever we come to Him saying, "MY will be done!", we picture ourselves as King and Him as our servant; we seek to "be like God" the way Eve did, to take His place and relegate Him to ours.

Jesus refused. "I AM the Son of God and I will NOT test My Father!" So, at last Satan pulled out all the stops and offered Him:

3. The Kingdoms Of The World (8-10) They stand now upon a high mountain and in a moment of time, Luke says, Satan brings a vision before Jesus' eyes. I picture it much like the video clips we're used to watching today where an unending collage of images scrolls on and off the screen, hundreds of them, each appearing only long enough to appeal to our senses. All the good things of the world, all the glory of the nations of the earth, all their splendor, all their riches, all their beauty, the whole world on the silver platter of a newsreel vision, that's what Satan offered Jesus. He said, "It's mine; I rule it all. Adam gave it to me way back in the garden and I'll give it to You!"

a. the apparent enticement is no less than **to possess all the world offers**. Satan appeals to **the Desire Of The Eyes**, that drive to possess what I see before me as my own. The kicker is that it WAS! The end game plan has always been that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth, that the kingdoms of this world will at last become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ! Satan says, "You're the Son of God! All that you are waiting for and planning on, I'll give it to you right now! No cross, no suffering, no waiting for centuries, all you have to do is one simple act! Bow down to me right here and it's Yours!" And there's:

b. the hidden snare: when we reach out to selfishly take what we want and take it in our own way instead of His, we **disobey by giving homage to Satan**. We trade our relationship with God Himself for slavery to an evil angel who is His sworn enemy. Instead of worshipping God by obeying His every word, we give our loyalty to the prince of darkness by obeying his. That's why all sin is against God. Jesus was quick to declare:

c. the truth: He quotes from **Deut. 6:12-15 - We must never forsake God!** He is the only God, the true God; He will not give His glory to another. To place anything above Him, to value anything in this world more than Him, is to forsake Him and worship a false idol.

Jesus says, "I AM the Son of God and I will worship ONLY My Father!" And to it He adds a command in verse 10, "GO! LEAVE! Now!" He knows who He is! He knows who is REALLY in charge! He knows that in all of this, Satan is simply a pawn that God is using to demonstrate to the world the flawless character of His Son. Look at:

V. The Defeat Of Satan (11a) Look at:

1. the flight of the enemy He leaves! He flees when Jesus takes a stand in His authority as the Son of God and orders him out. That's exactly what **James 4:7** says will happen for us! *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Prove who you are! Choose your Father! Take a stand! Tell Satan to go. Tell him you're a son or daughter of God and you're not bowing down to him, you're not doing his will, you're not doing things his way; he has to flee when YOU tell him! And he will! But, remember, as **Luke 4:13** mentions, it will only be for a season, until his next opportunity. You can kick him out of the room today, but you can't put him in the lake of fire forever, so be alert, he'll be back. But in the meantime notice:

2. the ministry of angels (11b) The very angels of God showed up. They brought Jesus food to satisfy His burning hunger and water to quench his awful thirst. They broke His loneliness and spoke of heaven with Him right there in the desert. God has not forgotten our needs! And if we will do things His way, He has angels, both the supernatural kind and the human kind that He will send to us right there in the midst of the greatest ordeal of our lives.

So, what can we conclude from this whole ordeal of Christ's temptation? *Dr. I. M. Haldeman tells of a scene in New York State among the mountains. A bridge had been constructed across a great chasm hundreds of feet deep. One day he heard the first train on the railroad approaching, and looking out saw two huge locomotives drawn up on the bridge. There was a sharp challenging whistle, then the brakes crashed down, and the two great machines came to a standstill. There they stood and waited for fully half a day, right in the center of the bridge, with their great tons of iron quivering and beating and the bridge beneath like a great spider's web supporting them. What did it mean? They were there to demonstrate the strength of the bridge, to show there was no weakness in it, to prove that it was able to bear up under the greatest test put on it, and so was worthy of the fullest trust on the part of man. He writes, "All the weight of temptation was crowded on our Lord Jesus Christ in that hour when the Devil met him on the mount. He was 'tempted in all points as we are,' from animal appetites and desires, to the highest reaches of ambition for self-gratification and power. He was tempted and tried and tested at every point to prove and demonstrate to angels and to men that he could not say, "Yes" to the temptation... That we might see Him as the majestic, unbreakable bridge across the deep chasm of sin and death; and so, seeing fling ourselves without reserve, and in unhesitating confidence upon Him as the One and all supreme object of our unfaltering faith and profound adoration."* [From pamphlet by Haldeman, *Could Our Lord Have Sinned?*] O fling yourself upon Him for salvation; He is without sin! And fling yourself upon Him for help when you are tempted; He KNOWS your struggle and He stands ready with mercy and grace to help you!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Ministry Of The King - Mt. 3-4

The Methods Of The King - 4:12-25

Having had His arrival announced by John to Israel for over 6 months, then having been affirmed by the Father at His baptism and, finally, having been proven against the enemy through His temptation, Jesus was now ready to embark upon His public ministry. So, in the second half of chapter 4, Matthew gives us an initial brief summary of that ministry. That summary is in two parts. First, Matthew tells us:

I. Where Jesus Went About His Ministry (12-13) There are some details here that you need to know about:

1. the geographical pattern of Jesus' ministry First, there is a huge chronological gap between verses 11 and 12. Matthew does not record:

a. His early ministry in Judea which lasted about 1 year That period is recorded for us only by John in Chapters 1-3 of his Gospel, because he was there with Jesus from the time that John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God. So, John records for us the first part of Jesus' ministry, most of which took place in Judea and is often called His early Judean ministry. During the course of that year Jesus made some early disciples, traveled to Cana in Galilee to a wedding and also came to Jerusalem and cleansed the Temple for the first time. Then John says, *After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.* - 3:22. For some months He preached and baptized his followers in a ministry very similar to what John the Baptist was doing and not very far from him. However, when John was arrested and imprisoned by Herod, we read in verse 12 of:

b. His return to Galilee for the majority of His ministry On the way He passed through Samaria, stopped at the well and met the woman of John 4. But from this time on for about two full years, the region of Galilee would be the center of His ministry. In Matthew's record, the Galilean ministry lasts from 4:12 all the way to the end of chapter 18. It is here, away from Jerusalem, the religious center of Israel, that most of His mighty works would be done. Jesus is FROM Galilee, of course; He lived His first 30 years in the town of Nazareth. Naturally, He went home! But now, Matthew adds in verse 13, simply that He left Nazareth without telling us why. Luke 4 tells the story of:

c. His rejection in his home town of Nazareth He went into the synagogue there to teach in His home town and the people were expecting Him to do miracles like they had heard of Him doing elsewhere. But when He refused, they became indignant at His claim to be the Messiah and tried to throw Him off a cliff. However, He passed through their midst and now left His boyhood home, never to return, and so Matthew records:

d. His relocation to Capernaum as a base He actually lived there, in this little fishing village on the shores of Galilee. Whether His whole family relocated there, we don't know. But it became the center for His ministry over the next two years. From Capernaum He went on and taught in many other villages in Galilee, but He always came back. Many of His miracles were done in Capernaum and Matthew himself met Jesus and was called there. But the question we have to ask is, "Why not Jerusalem? Why Galilee?" Look at **(14-16)**. Notice that phrase, *Galilee of the Gentiles*. What are Gentiles? *Gentile* is simply the English form of the Latin word *gentilis*, the same as the Greek word *ethnos*, which means *nation* or *people*. To a Jew, a Gentile is anybody who is NOT a Jew! What I'm trying to show you is that:

2. the ethnic target of so much of Jesus' ministry was non-Jewish peoples, or as He later put it in the Great Commission, ***all nations***.

a. He deliberately chose to focus His ministry in Galilee for three reasons. First:

(1) because it fulfilled the Scripture Matthew quotes **Is. 9:1-2**. You remember that chapter! It goes on in verse 6 to say, *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon His shoulders....* God had said 750 years beforehand that when Messiah the King comes, it will not be to Jerusalem of the Jews. It will be to Galilee of the NATIONS, the non-Jews! The fact that Jesus was raised in Galilee, that He lived in Galilee, that He spent His ministry in Galilee was no accident; God had said He would do it this way. Why? Specifically:

(2) because it had a large non-Jewish population From the time of the conquest the Israelites did not drive out all the Canaanites who lived in this region, but instead lived alongside them. Later on, much of the Jewish population of Galilee and Samaria was carried away into exile in Assyria in 722 BC and their king sent people from Assyria there to colonize and repopulate the region. Besides all that, this region bordered on and traded with Phoenicia, Syria, and the nations to the east of Jordan and people moved back and forth. So, for centuries Galilee had a much smaller population of Jews living alongside people from other nations, as well as ties to other nations. And Jesus not only itinerated throughout Galilee, but repeatedly made trips into all the surrounding nations. God is making a point: He sent His Son to be a Messiah for ALL PEOPLES, not just for the Jews! The Jews had come to despise and look down on all other nations; they had missed God's purpose for them that they should be a light for the whole world to know their God. So, God chose Galilee purely:

(3) because the spiritual darkness was deepest there The people in that region were dwelling in darkness. Spiritual truth was hard to find; people amalgamated and syncretized things from the many religious notions represented by all the peoples. Of all the regions of Israel, they were living in the shadow of death; their very souls were in danger because the Word of God was so scarce. So, it was there that God chose to send the light of dawn first!

Beloved, that is the heart of God! Do you know how many peoples of the earth today still dwell in darkness? In the north of India near Nepal live 7.5 million Pasi people who believe that their ancestors came into existence because a Hindu god named Parashurama needed help to protect sacred cows one day and made five men out of tufts of grass, bringing them to life by letting drops of his perspiration fall upon them. Literally, they are the "Pasi", the "sweat" people! India alone has more than 2,000 peoples like this who live every day in darkness, controlled by superstitions and demonically invented ideas of how to appease false gods and nobody is trying to reach them with the light! If you can get the impression I'm trying to convey, Galilee was something like that and Jesus focused His life and ministry there to bring the dawning of God's light into the darkness. And it worked:

b. His strategy impacted many peoples Look down with me at **(24-25)** *His fame spread through all Syria... Great crowds followed Him from Galilee, Decapolis, and... from beyond the Jordan, the area known as Perea, as well as Jews from Judea!* The great crowds that followed Jesus, the multitudes He fed, were from many peoples. Jesus modeled in His personal ministry what He would later command His church, to go and make disciples of ALL peoples. Now Matthew moves on to tell us:

II. How Jesus Went About His Ministry Jesus was continually involved in two key things at the same time. First of all:

1. He had a private ministry of making disciples (18-22) Jesus knew that His ultimate mission was to go to the cross and die and rise again and then leave the world. But unless somebody was prepared to understand what was happening, the whole effect of it would be worthless. And unless somebody was ready to spread the message of what He did, it would be of little value. So, Jesus had these three years of ministry in which to prepare a group of people who could survive the shock of His death and understand and carry His message. Of course, He had a large number

of followers, but He needed some who could become apostles, literally, missionaries. So, we have here the record of His calling the first disciples. Notice that:

a. He chose them specifically Of all the fishermen along the lake, Jesus chose to call Peter and Andrew, James and John. Now John's Gospel tells us at least three and probably all of these had met and had believed on Jesus a year earlier, and they had been with Him from time to time both in Judea and in Galilee. However, they were still fishing for a living; they still returned to their livelihoods and kept up normal family life for the most part. But, having observed their hearts and their characters, Jesus now:

b. He called them to follow Him He called to travel about with Him full-time, all over Galilee, to watch and listen to Him and then to participate in going out and preaching and healing. So they lived with Him. They learned to imitate Him, to say the things He said, to do the things He did, and even on occasion to wield the powers He had. And through impressing His life upon theirs:

c. He trained them to become missionary evangelists, or as He put it, *fishers of men*. Luke 5 tells us the whole story of this morning. The brothers had fished all night and caught nothing, but Jesus told them to launch out into the deep and let down their nets. They "knew better" but did it anyway, and took in such a haul of fish that the nets were breaking and the boats began to sink! THAT'S when Jesus said, "Follow Me and I'll teach you to gather in PEOPLE like that!" It became the purpose of their lives to gather people to Jesus, to "catch" them by bringing them to believe in Him as their Savior and King. Everywhere they went the rest of their lives, regardless of what they did to support themselves, their true business was hauling people into the Kingdom. And notice that when He called them:

d. they responded to His call without hesitation or reservation They left their boats and nets and the father who was in one of the boats; they left everything and they did it immediately, without a second thought.

Do you realize that the making of disciples is still our business? There will always be the mass of people who will believe and who will worship but that's about as far as it will go. But Paul said, *what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*. God has those waiting who have heard and stand willing to really be used of God to serve His purpose in the world. And we need to find those men and women and then train them for their higher purpose, to use their lives to be fishers of men. Whether they are in full-time Christian work or hold a secular job, we need to be preparing them for the higher calling of winning people to faith in Christ. And we do it just like Jesus did, by hooking them up life on life with someone who is already a fisher of men and having them spend time together learning and watching and listening and fishing. This private kind of discipling ministry is just as important, and probably more so, than any public ministry we have. Public ministry may produce the crowds, but private ministry produces leaders so the church will continue. Who are you investing our life in? Or maybe you're on the other end of the equation, maybe you've been living life as any ordinary earthly person and now you hear that Jesus is calling you to have a higher purpose, that God wants to use you, wherever you are, to gather people into His Kingdom. But you know you need help; you know you need to grow into a true disciple. Don't wait for someone to seek you out and ask you; tell somebody, "I want to become a fisher of men and I need somebody to invest their time and life in me to show me how!" Now secondly, we read here that Jesus:

2. He had a public ministry traveling throughout Galilee (17, 23-25) He began traveling all over Galilee, going from village to village. Now Galilee was small enough, about 70 miles by 40 miles, but one generation later Josephus records that Galilee had 204 cities and villages, each with no fewer than 15,000 people. [*Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 8, p. 120-121*] If he was right, that's 3 million people Jesus set out to touch and visiting one village every day would take 7 months; it would be a draining pace. Everywhere He went He did the same three things in verse 23; in fact, we read it again in **9:35**. Wherever He went, He was:

a. teaching Teaching is **instruction to those who are responsive**. This happened most often in the synagogues where Jesus would exercise the privilege of a visiting teacher to teach a new understanding of the Scriptures as He did at Nazareth. But He also taught whole crowds who were eager to learn at various places. Just look at **5:1-2** and there we have the Sermon on the Mount, three whole chapters of His teaching. "You've heard it said, but I say to you...." Over and over, He explained the true meaning of the Law and the Father heart of God to those who showed interest in spiritual things so they would be drawn to believe. Then, on other occasions, we find Him:

b. preaching Preaching is the **proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom** to those who need to hear it. He preached the same message that John did before Him, that the Kingdom is near and that repentance is needed. Look at **11:1, 7**. Here we have a sermon He preached to the crowds about John and about their own unrepentant hearts, which ended with an invitation to come to Him to find rest for their souls. He often did this; we'd call it street preaching, more or less. But everywhere He was also:

c. healing every disease and every affliction among the people. That's what drew the crowds, the hope of being set free from a disease, from a demon, from seizures or paralysis, of having one's life changed in a day when there was no remedy for almost anything. Why did He do that? Of course, He wanted to help suffering people, but the

impact this had on the crowds went far beyond that. To them He **authenticated His message by miraculous signs**. He proved to them that He could do what only God could do, in order to prove that the words He was saying were also from God. Look at **9:6** where He heals the paralyzed man. He proved His own authority and veracity by signs that were undeniable. The sad thing is that the crowds flocked after the benefit of the miracles but often missed their point; they failed to bow and give their lives to the King who had just proved Himself!

Now there is the pattern of public ministry we pursue even today. For the unconverted we preach the Gospel, however we choose to do it, whether from a pulpit, by radio, by film or on the internet, by one-on-one witness, in a missionary setting or in our own neighborhood. We proclaim to people their need to repent and surrender their lives to the King. Then for the genuine seekers and for the saved alike there is teaching, gentle instruction that leads them along either to conversion itself or on to full growth and maturity in Christ. And then there are, dare we say it, the miracles that prove God is at work and authenticate our message. Where are those, by the way? The way I figure it, God does those when and where He needs to do them to plant His church where the darkness is deepest. Almost every testimony we heard when we were in India involved being healed or freed from demon possession by the Name of Jesus as the thing that caused them to turn from the worship of idols. We must never be afraid to ask God to show Himself real to people. But here, as there, the greatest miracles I see are sitting before me, the living proof of lives changed forever by the power of God. *On Thursday Nov. 17, a short term team of 14 men and women from Oakbrook Church in Kokomo IN, volunteers like you and I, went to bed in a compound outside Port Au Prince, Haiti after a grueling day of ministry. About midnight six armed gunmen attacked their compound. They grabbed Bruce, a team member who was sleeping outside, fired a shot and held his face to a window demanding to be let in. Jason, the first man to the door, opened it and with God given strength yanked him inside out of their hands. Three of the guys barricaded the door with their bodies but not before the gunmen had gotten a brick and a crowbar in between. They stuck their guns in the crack and began to shoot. They shot out all of the windows above and kept shooting indiscriminately. Four team members were wounded by bullets, none critically. The 5 women hunkered down in the back room and cried out to God through the whole thing. Meanwhile Jason hurled himself from the back window to run for help. Even though it was 25 ft. above the ground he was not hurt, but then proceeded to scale two 10 ft. tall gates, cross a creek-like moat and sprint a quarter mile to the missionaries' home. They returned with two pistols and began firing shots into the dark at the intruders who gave up and ran off. Does God do miracles when we cry out to Him? Just ask these guys! You can count them one after the other in this story, which happened only two weeks ago. An impossible fight was won by the power of prayer and intercession. God has no less power today than He did then and He is no less willing to use it. What He needs is those who will answer when He calls, without hesitation and without reservation, "Lord, I will follow you! My life is now yours to do with as YOU please!"*

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The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Message Of The King - Mt. 5-7

Part 1: True Happiness - 5:1-16

Having covered the Birth of the King in chapters 1-2 and the Ministry of the King in chapters 3-4, we now come in chapters 5-7 to the Message of the King. We arrive in chapter 5 at what has come to be known as the "Sermon on the Mount", though Luke has a shorter version of it and records it as being given on a plain or a level place, probably a level area on one of the mountains of Galilee. I think the reason Matthew places it here and gives so much space to it is that, having summarized in 4:23-25 Jesus' ministry of traveling through Galilee teaching and preaching, he now wants to share with us His message, the content of what He taught. Now keep in mind that Jesus probably repeated a great deal of what He taught over and over again in place after place, since He always had a fresh congregation to listen and wanted to spread the same basic message of the Kingdom everywhere. He also probably taught for hours on any given occasion, which means He taught a whole lot more than we have recorded. Matthew is sharing with us some of the key things Jesus taught both on this occasion and throughout His ministry. So, in that context let's begin to consider together:

I. The Sermon On The Mount (1-2) Notice right away that:

1. it is teaching intended primarily for Jesus' followers, not the great crowds, though some of them surely listened in also. You see, Jesus was faced with a difficult task in the making of disciples. All of them were Jews who had grown up and were steeped in the Jewish teaching and tradition of that day. The trouble is that it had become a very corrupted system. It taught wrong values and it had wrong motives; it taught external behavior over internal righteousness. These things were built into the disciples and Jesus had to change their thinking, or rather, cleanse and restore it to a proper perspective. So, to understand Jesus' message, you have to set it against the Jewish thought of the day, which Jesus made very clear by saying *"You have heard it said...but I say to you..."* repeatedly. Second, I'd like to point out that there has been a ton of debate as to how to interpret the meaning of this sermon. Some of it seems to point to a future day and how things will be when the Kingdom has come to earth and yet other portions are clearly commands for our present life. So, I submit that:

2. the teaching has a dual application First of all:

a. it urges us to live in hope with eyes fixed on the future Kingdom We must live in the certain knowledge that this life is not all there is! There will be a Day when everything is set straight and this crooked world functions under the direct authority of the King of Kings and we'll be there to see it! We shall *inherit the earth*, as verse 5 says, and we must focus our eyes on that day and live for that day. But doing so:

b. it gives us principles to live by in the present Kingdom To live under the rule of King Jesus right now is to strive to live in meekness, not self-assertion, because that is what is valuable to Him and what He will ultimately reward. Now verses 3-12 have become known as:

II. The Beatitudes (3-12), from the Latin word for *blessed* with which each of the eight sayings begins. English doesn't really have a good equivalent to translate the Greek word *makarios* which means *happy*, but not the giggling, laughing kind of happiness. It carries with it a sense of God's favor and well-being. For lack of a better word, we might use *True Happiness* to define *Blessedness*. To put it in the form of a beatitude, *the person who is like this is the one who is truly happy and here's why...* Let's start with verse **(3)**. Now who are:

1. the poor in spirit... The word literally means to cower or crouch down in fear as a beggar would, to be helpless and at the mercy of someone else to meet your needs. To be poor of spirit, I think, means to be helpless and weak, afraid, bereft of any sense of being in charge or having authority or the ability to change your situation. And, of course, the vast majority of people who are poor in spirit are those who live in physical poverty. From day one, the overwhelming response to the Gospel has come from those who are poor and struggling, with little hope of improving their lot in this world. Comparatively few believers in the world are like most of us, middle class, with a house, a car or two, and money in the bank. To them we're unbelievably rich (we just don't know it). Ever since our missionary Yallah went back to the capital city of Liberia two months ago, he's been living in a place without electricity, let alone phone or internet, without running water, going to the bathroom outside and walking or riding a bus everywhere he goes. Prices have been manipulated by a crooked economic system to put these basic things out of reach of most. I have met and worshipped with hundreds of believers who live just that way in India, in Kyrgyzstan, and so have many of you. I am always amazed at how they manage to survive, but what amazes me more is the zeal and the pure joy with which they worship. Tears coming down their cheeks, hands in the air, they sing and testify with absolute abandon. Why? Because they really know the truth of this verse that we often miss: they know that ***theirs is the Kingdom of heaven***. They GET what James said, *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?* - 2:5. They get that they have been elevated from being the poor of this world to being heirs of God Himself and that all that is His, is theirs! They know they are blessed, that they are the truly happy ones and so they devote their lives, not to trying to become rich and powerful, but to serving Jesus with every fiber of their being! Their joy, their true happiness is apparent! Now on to verse **(4)**:

2. those who mourn... Just as followers of Jesus are not exempt from poverty, neither are they exempt from sadness and loss. People that we deeply love die, sometimes prematurely, sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes even intentionally. Things that we truly hold dear are taken from us and we mourn like the captive Israelites who sat weeping beside the rivers of Babylon, unable to sing the Lord's song in their mourning for their nation. *Horatio Spafford was a well-known lawyer and businessman in Chicago in the 1860's. He was also a prominent supporter and close friend of D.L. Moody, the evangelist. In 1870, the Spaffords' only son was killed by scarlet fever at the age of four. A year later, every one of his numerous real estate holdings was wiped out by the great Chicago Fire. Horatio decided to take his wife and four daughters on a holiday to England, but just before they set sail on the French steamer 'Ville de Havre' from New York, a last-minute business development forced Horatio to delay while the family went on ahead. On November 2, 1873, their ship collided with 'The Lochearn', an English vessel. It sank in only 12 minutes, claiming the lives of 226 people. Anna Spafford stood bravely on the deck, with her daughters, Annie, Maggie, Bessie and Tanetta clinging desperately to her. Her last memory was of her baby being torn violently from her arms by the force of the waters. She was only saved by a plank which floated beneath her unconscious body and propped her up. Arriving in Wales she sent her husband a telegram that read: "Saved alone." Horatio Spafford boarded the next ship out of New York to join her but during that voyage, the captain of the ship called him to the bridge to say, "I believe we are now passing the place where the de Havre was wrecked. The water is three miles deep." Horatio returned to his cabin and wrote these familiar words: "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, It is well, it is well, with my soul....* Those who mourn **will be comforted**, not merely right here and now, by the One who is the God of all comfort who comforts us in ALL our affliction, but also permanently in a glorious eternal kingdom where we shall see our loved ones again and there will be no more tears nor mourning nor crying nor pain for the former things will have passed away! True happiness is the comfort of that blest assurance of knowing it is well with our souls! Now verse **(5)**:

3. the meek... are the gentle, those who respond by turning the other cheek, not by avenging themselves, but rather by forgiving the wrongs of others. The meek are those who do not push themselves forward and assert themselves over others, who do not seek their own gain but rather defer it to others. Meekness is a characteristic Christ wants to develop in our character but often it's rather painful. It often means suffering in silence rather than taking justice into

your own hands and retaliating. Yet we can be truly happy because we know His promise: **we will inherit the earth!** It is not the strong, the powerful, the violent who will rule the world, though it may seem that way today. But there is coming a Kingdom where wolves will live with lambs and leopards will lie down with goats and calves feed with lions and a little child shall lead them (Is. 11:6); there is coming a day under King Jesus when meekness will rule the whole earth! So being meek now is being in the right mode ahead of time and we are truly blessed to be so. In verse (6) we have:

4. those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... Now hungering and thirsting are not positive things but painful things. To hunger or thirst is to long for what we lack! And what we lack in this world is righteousness. My friend Almaz typed me a note from Bishkek one day, "Pickpockets stole my cell phone when I was on the crowded bus. I am so upset; it was expensive." We live in a world where people brazenly steal things, even in Glenside, where judges and officials take bribes, where some wallow in wealth while others don't have basic necessities or even starve to death, where strong men abuse little children and husbands beat their wives. Injustice is so blatant in so much of the world. I remember how a missionary was lamenting that about the country where he worked some years ago, "When you get cheated in every transaction and you can't trust anyone because everyone is out to use you, it just grinds on you. It hardens you afterwhile." I know what he means; I can remember at times feeling just how wrong everything is in the world, how evil triumphs and the innocent suffer and longing to be free of this world and in a world where everything is right! But that hungering, that thirsting, is a good thing; it is how God wants us to be and Jesus makes us the wonderful promise that **we will be satisfied!** Those who lust for power and money by any means will end up suffering forever, but we will have what we long for eternally! There will be a day when Jesus reigns and justice WILL roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24)! The knowledge that our longing will be fulfilled makes us blessed, truly happy in our souls! On to verse (7):

5. the merciful... Being merciful is not easy either. It means to be compassionate toward the needs of others and do something about it! It means to see your neighbor lying by the road and stop and bind his wounds and take him to the inn and pay his bill! It means to see your enemy lash out in his hurt and have pity on him and forgive him because he has no idea what he's really doing. Sometimes mercy is pretty difficult; sometimes it's a struggle and it's costly and, worse, it may go unappreciated or even be rejected! But Christ had compassion on us and went all the way to the cross and gave His all for us so **we shall receive mercy.** We already have! And going forward, we will! Our whole eternity is a result of the mercy of God poured out upon us! So, it is fitting and right that those who have received mercy should be willing to pay the price to be merciful to others now. Those who show mercy are simply revealing the true happiness in their hearts at the mercy they have received! Verse (8):

6. the pure in heart... The word for *pure* means *clean* or *washed*. To keep a clean heart is no easy thing; it is much more difficult than simply maintaining good outward behavior or keeping a list of rules. It is truly a struggle. It means constantly dealing with our motives and our emotions and our feelings about people. It means keeping any root of bitterness from growing in us, keeping ourselves from unjust anger, dealing with our wicked thoughts. To desire purity in our inmost parts is a never-ending battle against our flesh. But just think, one day we **shall see God!** Who can do that? Who can enter His presence? He who has clean hands and a pure heart! We will walk in His presence and enjoy fellowship with Him forever. This life is merely a preparation for that, so that desire to be genuinely, sincerely pure at the deepest level is a blessed thing and the knowledge that it leads to seeing Him forever gives us true happiness. Now verse (9):

7. the peacemakers... Being a peacemaker is no easy thing either. We usually think of this word as a synonym for an arbitrator, one who tries to settle the squabbles of others, and that's dangerous and difficult enough in itself. But I would suggest that being a peacemaker often means making peace between us and someone else. It means having the courage to face up to our wrongs and ask forgiveness. It means approaching those who have something against us; it means going first, swallowing our pride and forgiving hurtful things. But listen, God was a peacemaker! He was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, making peace for us through the blood of the cross. He has made peace with us, so when we make peace with others, **we will be called sons of God.** That is, we will be acknowledged both by God and other people as being just like our Father, peacemakers bearing His character! It is a tough task but in it we find true happiness for our souls. And last comes verse (10):

8. those persecuted for righteousness... They are chastised and punished and hated for doing what is right in the eyes of God, for telling the truth and being honest and rescuing those who are enslaved by the powerful. They're already living out right now the way the whole world will live one day; **theirs is the Kingdom of heaven!** But to this beatitude Jesus added a **Personal Application** which explains what He means in (11-12). To be persecuted for righteousness is to be reviled and persecuted and falsely accused for the sake of Christ Himself, for doing what HE told us to do. And to those who do that, He gives this personal assurance. First:

a. you have a great reward waiting in heaven When you get there, you'll see the tremendous weight of glory that this has produced for His Name and it will be worth it all! But what's more, when you are truly happy to suffer for His sake:

b. you stand in the very company of the prophets, of Moses and Elijah and Isaiah and Jeremiah and so many other great men and women of God who obeyed Him and suffered for it. You stand in the ranks with them; you're counted among them! What a privilege!

If I were to sum up the message of the beatitudes, it might boil down to what 2 Cor. 4:16-18 says, that if we keep our eyes fixed on the Kingdom, on what we don't see with our eyes yet, and realize the tremendous purpose and the glory that our endurance of all of the difficulties of this present world is producing, that we will indeed know true happiness; it will be well with our souls! Now as we close this first section, Jesus goes on to give us what we call:

III. The Similitudes (13-16), two big-picture statements of what we disciples are "similar" to, using common household objects. First, He says we are:

1. the salt of the earth (13) To us here, salt is largely a seasoning anymore; it is primarily used for taste. But in the ancient world salt had one primary purpose; it was rubbed thoroughly into meat to preserve it from spoiling and becoming rotten. Likewise, that is:

a. our purpose: preservation We followers of Christ are spread throughout the world to preserve it, to save it; our presence and influence keeps it from becoming thoroughly evil and wicked as it was before the flood. God is using us to impact the whole world but Jesus adds:

b. our caution: Salt in those days was not refined and pure like what we have. It was taken in chunks from salt mines, the shores of salt lakes like the Dead Sea, and salt marshes. So, what people had as salt was actually a mixture of compounds containing some salt. But, because salt is very soluble, if it got wet, the actual salt would leach out, leaving only dirt and other inert materials that were useless and good for nothing more than throwing out onto the street to harden the dirt as people pack it underfoot. Jesus is cautioning us against **losing what we truly are**. It is these very qualities of meekness and hunger for righteousness and mercy and purity and the rest that stem from our faith that God uses to impact the world and preserve it. If we give in and allow ourselves to become like everyone around us, we are lost to our mission on earth!

Then second, He adds that we are:

2. the light of the world (14-16) In darkness, we can't see; we grope about trying to get things done and imagine what is about us. But light is a revealer. When the sun comes up, when the lamp is lit, the light reveals the true nature of things. Jesus is saying that's:

a. our purpose as it relates to the whole world: **revelation** We reveal the truth of God to the world. They live in darkness; they can't grope about and find Him on their own. But when they see Him at work through us, in our righteousness and mercy and so on, they turn to Him and find the True Light of the world. And thence comes:

b. our caution: hiding the light If you build a city on top of a hill, you can't hide it! It will gleam in the sunlight of the day and will glow in the darkness of the night. You build it there so everybody sees it. If you light a lamp, you don't take a basket and hide it underneath to create darkness; you put it up on a stand so that its light is shed to the whole house. Yet so often we followers of Christ have tried to hide our light in order to save ourselves from trouble, from embarrassment, even from persecution. Jesus says, "Let it shine. That's what you're here for! They can't see Me unless you show them, unless you tell them. You are not here to be focused on yourselves. Shine your light; hold it up as high as you can with a life that reveals ME; light the world!"

It is often said that Benjamin Franklin invented street lights right here in Philadelphia, but that's not actually true. Several other cities had them first, as did cities in Europe. However, *the street lamps in Franklin's day were not very efficient and the glass globes tended to become dark with soot from the oil burned inside, requiring almost daily cleaning. Franklin determined that the problem had to do with a lack of airflow within the globe. In his Autobiography, Franklin describes an improvement he made to street lights: "I therefore suggested composing them of four flat panes, with a long funnel above to draw up the smoke, and crevices admitting air below, to facilitate the ascent of the smoke; by this means they were kept clean, and did not grow dark in a few hours, as the London lamps do, but continued bright till morning."*

[\[http://www.pbs.org/benfranklin/13_inquiring_little.html\]](http://www.pbs.org/benfranklin/13_inquiring_little.html) Jesus is saying, "Don't let your light grow dim with soot; maintain that godly character that results in deeds of love and humility and mercy and, by so doing, let your light shine brightly in this dark world! That is the path of true happiness, as well as your true purpose."

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Message Of The King - Mt. 5-7

Part 2: True Righteousness - 5:17-26

In chapters 5-7 we are studying through the Sermon on the Mount where Matthew has recorded for us a large sample block of Jesus' teaching, the message that He taught His followers. As I mentioned last time, one of the biggest problems Jesus faced in training His disciples was re-orienting their thinking which had been skewed by their Jewish culture in that day. Jesus taught them to focus on future heavenly blessing to find true happiness in verses 1-16, rather than seeking an

earthly version of happiness. Their culture was also intensely absorbed with the concept of righteousness which they believed came from keeping "THE LAW"; in fact, the leaders of their society were those who taught the law, the Pharisees and scribes. The problem is that these leaders had taught everyone a wrong attitude about and understanding of the Law. Christ had to correct that and, in the second half of chapter 5, He teaches them about what true righteousness really is. Verses 17-20 are key verses for all that follows because they explain:

I. Our Relationship To The Old Testament Scriptures (17) *The Law and The Prophets* is a summary phrase which, to a Jew, means the whole of the Old Testament. You may have wondered about this yourself. Do I, as a Christian, have to keep the Old Testament? Does not the New Testament say I am no longer under the Law? How should I look at these 39 books which make up two thirds of the Bible I'm holding? Well, look at what we just read:

1. Christ came to fulfill the Old Testament And, lest there be any confusion, He declared plainly that:

a. He did not abolish it to start something new He did not want His followers to think that He was throwing out the Old Testament and starting a brand new movement or new religion. He didn't want to appear to be saying, "OK, now forget that; God has a brand new set of rules for you from here on." Rather He wanted us to connect Him with all that God had done before in the history of Israel. He *fulfilled* it. And that means far more than simply that He obeyed the Law perfectly. It means that

b. He Himself is the consummation of all that is written in it. Or to put another way, **all of it was written about HIM!** One day the Jewish leaders objected to Jesus healing a lame man on the Sabbath and his closing statement to them was **Jn. 5:46**, *...if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.* Moses wrote down the Law, the first five books of our Bible, but Moses was writing about Christ! He wasn't simply writing about lambs and altars and feasts and sacrifices; he was writing about Christ, the Lamb of God whose blood would prevent the angel of death from taking our souls. The Tabernacle and the entire sacrificial system, all the annual feasts, all the cleansing, all of it was merely a picture that pointed to what Christ would one day do in reality on the cross for us. *Michael Horton put it like this: Once we truly grasp the message of the New Testament, it is impossible to read the Old Testament again without seeing Christ on every page, in every story, foreshadowed or anticipated in every event and narrative.* Look carefully with me at **Gal. 3:19**. The law of Moses was an addition, a supplemental body of revelation that came after the covenant of faith that God gave to Abraham, and it was given to the nation of Israel as a rudimentary, outward means of controlling sin and keeping it in check. However, in reality its whole goal was that one day the Promised One would come who would accomplish what the law could not do because it was merely the keeping of external rules. Skip to verse **24**. The task of the Law was like that of a child-trainer or a guardian; it was to point to and lead people to Christ, that they might believe in Him and be justified by faith, *not* by the keeping of the rules of the Law. He IS its fulfillment! But there's more:

2. He assured us that everything it declares will be accomplished (18) The things it says will happen, will happen! Many of them already have! We've seen how Jesus was born of a Virgin, born in Bethlehem, how He was Immanuel, God with us in flesh, all things that Isaiah predicted 700 years earlier. But Isaiah also said there will be a day when the wolf will feed with the lamb. Habakkuk said, *...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.* - **2:14**. Zechariah said, *...the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.* - **14:19**. And those things will happen too! Not one *iota*, not the smallest letter, the Hebrew Y, nor the smallest stroke of a pen, something like the right leg on a capital R, will be left to go without fulfillment; Jesus said absolutely everything the Old Testament declares will come to pass, so:

3. He demanded the utmost respect for it (19) He told us not to dismiss it lightly, not to disregard the smallest and the least of the commandments it contains. And do notice that this is not a matter of salvation; evidently you can disregard the commandment and even teach others to do the same and still be a subject of the Kingdom of heaven, even if you are the least one. That's because salvation is through faith in Christ, not keeping the law. But Christ wants us to consider carefully the meaning of every part of the Book, even the Old Testament. Of course, some of the things there were given for Israel to do and not for us to do, but that's a discussion for another occasion. Here:

4. He warned us to discern and obey the true intent of it rather than hypocritically adhering to the letter of it (20) The Pharisees and scribes were the teachers and interpreters of the Law in that day. They were strong literalists and had great respect for the exact commands of the Old Testament. In fact, they were so afraid of breaking them that over the years they had developed a whole set of traditions and commands to sort of wrap around the commands to make sure they wouldn't break them. For instance, God had said to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. So they had developed a whole set of new laws which specified exactly how far you could travel on that day and which things were work and which were not, so they could keep the literal command. However, they never went deeper than the external command. They never thought about why it was given and what God really meant or was trying to accomplish. They started with the exact words and went downhill from there, believing that anything that did not explicitly violate what God had spoken was OK. Your neighbor could be lying in a ditch at death's door, but lifting him up and carrying him home on the Sabbath was work! Better to pass by on the other side! Jesus started at the text and went uphill. He extrapolated it to its true point and meaning. In both the way He lived and also by the way that He taught His fol-

lowers, Jesus revealed the true meaning of the Law. So, we can truly say that we are no longer under the old simple external set of commands but are bound instead by their deeper intent that is set forth in the teachings of Christ and the rest of the New Testament. Jesus is saying that the kind of righteousness that He expects of us as His followers is far greater than that of the Pharisees, the "Righteous Ones" of that day! They wouldn't even get *INTO* the Kingdom, much less be great in it! What He demonstrated and what He wants to produce in us is something far greater than adherence to a set of rules. So now Jesus goes on for the remainder of chapter 5 to illustrate that in one area after another. For the sake of brevity, today we'll look only at:

II. His First Illustration Of True Righteousness (21-26) We have:

1. the ancient commandment, the sixth of the 10:

a. do not murder - Ex. 20:13. We've all heard that. And, by the way, it does NOT mean "Do not KILL!" To kill another human being in battle or in defending your own life or in executing proper justice for a crime, or even by accident, is not what God was talking about; in fact, He either allows or even commands those very things in other places. Here He forbids deliberate pre-meditated murder. That's about as straightforward as you can get and every civil government in history has enacted the same law. An easy one to keep, right? Now to that, their teachers had appended the thought from **Num. 35:12, 24-25** that:

b. murderers are subject to condemnation by the court The judgment referred to here is the decision of the actual ruling group of elders or judges in any given town, the town council if you will, whose responsibility was to administer, to protect the innocent and deliver the murderer to punishment. So if you commit murder, you place yourself in the position of deserving to be tried by the council, found guilty and summarily executed. That is the way the Pharisees interpreted that command and it is very natural and certainly could be memorized and forgotten about. They gave that command no further thought and neither do most of us! But Jesus did! He taught us:

2. the truth God intended to convey through that command (22) It is what's in the heart underneath the murder that God is trying to point at and you can have that without the actual deed! Jesus must have shocked everyone when He said that:

a. flaring in anger without cause deserves condemnation by the court A number of manuscripts add that phrase *without a cause* and that's what Jesus really means. He's not prohibiting anger at injustice. He's saying that to be angry with a brother, to flip out and lose your temper for no valid reason, to scream out the window at the guy who cuts you off in traffic, to yell at your wife for burning dinner or your child for spilling punch on the rug, is just as serious as murder. It has the same root. And although it's obvious that an actual court can't try emotions and feelings and attitudes, hot anger deserves as serious a trial as murder does before God! Then Jesus kicked it up a notch and said:

b. expressing prideful disdain deserves condemnation by the Sanhedrin Literally, *anyone who says to his brother, Raca. Raca* means empty. It is a term of disdain for a person, much as we might call someone worthless or good-for-nothing. We might look down our noses at them and feel that they aren't even worthy of notice. Jesus said that attitude is worthy of being taken to Jerusalem and tried before the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the whole nation, their Supreme Court! And what's more:

c. expressing hatred deserves the condemnation of hell The Greek word for *fool* is *moros* from which we get *moron* but *moros* didn't mean stupid. It was a cursing term, a term of utter hatred. It was as though we would call someone utterly wicked. In Rwanda, the Hutu slogan during the ethnic cleansing was, *We must kill the Tutsi cockroaches!* The particular word you use is not the point; the Ku Klux Klan has lots of them. Jesus is saying that the kind of deep-seated hatred from which that sort of language comes doesn't even deserve a trial; it deserves the fire of hell, whether you physically commit the act of murder or not!

He's saying: "Look, God's point is not simply to keep you from murdering each other! Your teachers missed **Lev.**

19:17, *You shall not hate your brother in your heart...* That command is to keep you from being angry and disdainful and hating each other inside. In fact, the real point of the command is for you to do the very opposite, to LOVE one another!" How many times did Jesus teach that? Then He went on to illustrate:

3. the action God truly wants us to take, which is **restoring relationships (23-24)** That word *so* or *therefore*, is important; what He said now is the application of what He just taught. It's not enough to NOT do the negative toward your brother. The positive application of *Do not murder* is actually "Restore the relationship with your brother!" You see:

a. reconciliation with a brother is high priority to Christ The thing that was heaviest on His heart the night before He died was to pray that His followers would all be brought to complete unity! It is a number one priority to Him, right up there with reaching the whole world! It is so important that even if you are in the middle of offering an animal for sacrifice at the Temple, as sacred as that was to a Jew, you drop what you're doing and go find your brother and do whatever you can to change and restore the broken relationship first. Of course, that is no guarantee that it will work or that the other person will want to reconcile; you can only do what Paul said, *If possible, so far as it de-*

depends on you, live peaceably with all. - Rom. 12:18. But Christ wants us to make every effort from our side to achieve that restoration. And notice that:

b. it should be initiated by whoever who realizes it first The other person may be totally at fault in our view of the situation and still Jesus says, "When you remember it, when God brings it to mind, don't hesitate...GO. Don't wait for the other person to come to you!" Later in chapter 18 He will say, "if your brother is at fault, GO..." It doesn't matter which party you are, offended or offender, when God reminds you of the problem, obeying God's intent in the commandment means going and working to restore the relationship. And then Jesus goes on to say that this principle even applies to those who are NOT "brothers", to those who are adversaries. He says you should:

c. even work hard to settle with an adversary taking you to court rather than letting it become a legal matter (25-26). It might be helpful to look at **Lk. 12:58-59** where Jesus taught the same thing again on another occasion. *Make an effort*, work hard to try to settle this on your own, to make an agreement together, to make peace before it gets into the court and out of your hands. Even with an adversary, an enemy who is trying to do you harm, do your best to restore the relationship as soon as you can. And the reason is that:

d. it will quickly compound into a situation you are unable to remedy You see, the penalty for nonpayment of a debt for centuries was to be thrown into prison until the debt was paid. The problem with that was obvious: in prison you can't earn any money to pay the debt, so you could be stuck there a very long time! However, I don't think Jesus was teaching, "Reconcile quickly to save your own neck!" I think the point is that unresolved situations compound and get worse, sometimes pretty rapidly and if you don't make the effort to restore relationships while you can, they may blossom and mushroom into bigger things that it is too late to fix in a simple and personal way, things that will cost you far more than simply humbling yourself and going to your brother or your adversary.

Commenting on the unwillingness of the older brother to be reconciled to his prodigal younger sibling, Max Lucado writes: Standing before ten thousand eyes is Abraham Lincoln. An uncomfortable Abraham Lincoln. His discomfort comes not from the thought of delivering his first inaugural address but from the ambitious efforts of well-meaning tailors. He's unaccustomed to such attire—formal black dress coat, silk vest, black trousers, and a glossy top hat. He holds a huge ebony cane with a golden head the size of an egg. He approaches the platform with hat in one hand and cane in the other. He doesn't know what to do with either one. In the nervous silence that comes after the applause and before the speech, he searches for a spot to place them. He finally leans the cane in a corner of the railing, but he still doesn't know what to do with the hat. He could lay it on the podium, but it would take up too much room. Perhaps the floor. . . no, too dirty. Just then, and not a moment too soon, a man steps forward and takes the hat, returns to his seat, and listens intently to Lincoln's speech. Who is he? Lincoln's dearest friend. The President said of him, "He and I are about the best friends in the world." He was one of the strongest supporters of the early stages of Lincoln's presidency. He was given the honor of escorting Mrs. Lincoln in the inaugural grand ball. As the storm of the Civil War began to boil, many of Lincoln's friends left, but not this one. He amplified his loyalty by touring the South as Lincoln's peace ambassador. He begged Southerners not to secede and Northerners to rally behind the president. His efforts were great, but the wave of anger was greater. The country did divide, and civil war bloodied the nation. Lincoln's friend never lived to see it. He died three months after Lincoln's inauguration. Worn out by his travels, he succumbed to a fever, and Lincoln was left to face the war alone.

Upon hearing the news of his friend's death, Lincoln wept openly and ordered the White House flag to be flown at half-staff. Some feel Lincoln's friend would have been chosen as his running mate in 1864 and would thus have become president following the assassination of the Great Emancipator. No one will ever know about that. But we do know that Lincoln had one true friend. And we can only imagine the number of times the memory of him brought warmth to a cold Oval Office. He was a model of friendship.

He was also a model of forgiveness. This friend could just as easily have been an enemy. Long before he and Lincoln were allies, they were competitors, politicians pursuing the same office. And unfortunately, their debates are better known than their friendship. The debates between Abraham Lincoln and his dear friend, Stephen A. Douglas. But on Lincoln's finest day, Douglas set aside their differences and held the hat of the president. Unlike the older brother, Douglas heard a higher call. And unlike the older brother, he was present at the party. Wise are we if we do the same. Wise are we if we rise above our hurts. For if we do, we'll be present at the Father's final celebration. A party to end all parties. A party where no pouters will be permitted. Why don't you come and join the fun? [Max Lucado, "He Still Moves Stones"]

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Message Of The King - Mt. 5-7

Part 3: Righteousness In Relationships - 5:27-48

We are continuing to study through the Sermon on the Mount where Matthew laid out a summary of Jesus' teaching for us. Last time we looked at Jesus' relationship to the Law in 5:17-20 where He said that He came to *fulfill* it, to be the personal embodiment of everything the Law was pointing to. And we mentioned the problem that He had in getting his disciples to raise themselves above the mindset of their culture which merely looked at the literality of the commandments

without considering their intent. In verses 21-26 we looked at Jesus' treatment of the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not murder", and saw that God's intent was not simply to forbid actual murder, but ultimately for us to restore broken relationships. Now Jesus goes on in the rest of the chapter to deal with five other frequently-quoted passages from the Law and declare God's actual intent behind them and what God really wants of us. I think there are two important things that can happen for us this morning. First, we can learn God's viewpoint on some very key issues in our lives. But beyond that, we can learn a process for dealing with all the commandments we find in the Bible, the process of learning to focus on God's intent, rather than simply carrying out the letter of what the words say. The next issue Jesus addresses is:

I. Faithfulness In Marriage (27-30) There's the seventh commandment:

1. the original command: *Do not commit adultery* - Ex. 20:14 In Jewish culture it was basically assumed that if you were an adult, you were married and obeying this command seemed relatively simple. Don't sleep with someone else's wife (or husband, for you ladies). But Jesus said that simply keeping the surface meaning of those words does not fulfill:

2. the intent of the command: which really is, ***Do not desire another woman in your heart*** How many times have you heard it said even by Christians "Just 'cause you're married doesn't mean you can't look." What a superficial view of marriage and of sexuality! The whole act of adultery is rooted in the mind and emotions; it is borne out of imagination and desire. To look at a woman and foster sexual desire to blossom inside is adultery already and God sees the heart! He intended that those kinds of sexual desires should be reserved completely for one's spouse. So that means looking at pornographic materials on the internet or sexually explicit movies or TV is just as unfaithful to your spouse as the act itself. It means that suggestive flirting, risqué joking and longingly staring at the beach or the TV screen indicates the desire to violate your marriage vows! And while the physical attraction tends to be more of a male problem, as Jesus rightly stated it, ladies can easily develop an emotional bond with a man who is not their husband. What God was commanding here is absolute faithfulness in marriage. So how do you cultivate that?

3. the positive application: Jesus says, "The final step is to figure out what causes this wrong desire in you and get rid of it!" ***Eliminate whatever creates lust in you***. Even if it's your right eye or your right hand! Now Jesus is not being literal here, though around 300 AD some of the early clergy must have taken passages like this literally and even went so far as to castrate themselves to combat lust. The Council of Nicaea had to specifically forbid it! But Jesus is speaking figuratively here. The right hand is the master hand, the one 70-90% of us use most, the most precious part we could lose. The right eye, for 2/3 of us, is the dominant eye through which we get visual input quickest and most accurately. He's saying, "Look if it gouging out your right eye would stop lust, if cutting off your right hand could stop lust, it would be worth doing! So, whatever is causing it in you, whatever is fanning that lust in your heart, cast it far away from you. If it's a relationship, break it. If it's a habit, kill it, no matter what it takes. Stop holding lust as a cherished inner secret that you enjoy and ask God to make your heart absolutely faithful to your spouse as well as to Him! Then from there Jesus goes on to bring up:

II. The Permanence Of Marriage (31-32) Now:

1. the original command here, ***Give a certificate of divorce***, comes from **Deut. 24:1-4** and, if you look there, it is not a command to divorce at all, but rather a prohibition that says that you can't divorce your wife, have her or you marry someone else and then later swap back and marry again. You could have three different women as long as you publicly said "I divorce you" and "I marry you" each time, and never break the letter of the law against adultery because you were technically married to each woman at the time. The certificate was an official document that actually protected a woman from being simply traded back and forth with such ease, much as divorce laws today are supposed to ensure fairness and protect marriage from being lightly dissolved. Anyway, in Jesus' day, the Pharisees had long debates about this divorce issue and many had drawn the conclusion that because Moses mentioned divorce and did not expressly forbid it, divorce is permissible, as long as you give a certificate to make it legal. Do you realize how little has changed in 2000 years? We do exactly the same thing; the U.S. divorce rate over the last 10 years is that 50% of all new marriages end in divorce, with 65% of second marriages failing and even a higher percentage beyond that. One source said, *...it is not a huge conjecture to say that 100% of the American population is meaningfully affected by divorce!* Jesus said that:

2. the intent of the command goes far beyond paperwork and legality. God was trying to tell us, ***Do not lightly break the marriage bond!*** Marriage was intended to be permanent, for life. To divorce and remarry is still committing adultery against your partner. Of course, there are exceptions where one party is an innocent victim, but we'll save that exception clause for later when we study this more deeply in chapter 19; right now, don't let it cloud His main point which is, "Don't break the marriage bond!" Yet if you look still deeper, here's what He's really after:

3. the positive application: *Respect the sanctity of your marriage* Peek ahead with me at **Mt. 19:6**. That's what's in Jesus' thinking. Man should not separate two people whom God has made one! To be married to your spouse is a holy thing; when you make that sacred vow before Him a divine miracle happens. You are no longer two individuals; you are ONE! You are bound together in the depths of your being and that is symbolized in the oneness of the sexual

union that you alone enjoy together. Respect that! Cultivate that! Grow that so that both in your thoughts and your behavior you mirror the truth of who you are! F. W. Boreham wrote: *"I once said to a Jewish rabbi, 'I have heard that at a Jewish wedding a glass is broken as part of the symbolism of the ceremony. Is that a fact?' 'It certainly is,' he replied. 'We hold aloft a glass, let it fall and be shattered to atoms, and then, pointing to its fragments, we exhort the young people to guard jealously the sacred relationship into which they have entered since, once it is fractured, it can never be restored.'"* [The Heavenly Octave, F. W. Boreham]. Maybe we should adopt that tradition! That's what God is trying to tell us! Next, Jesus moves on to talk about:

III. Truthfulness In Speech (33-37) The Pharisees were notorious oath-makers. They would swear by the temple or by the gold in the temple or Mt. Zion or Jerusalem. For example, "By heaven, I will do thus and so..." You see, they wanted to be quite careful to keep:

1. the original command: They taught, ***Keep the oaths you make to the Lord*** which is based on the **Ex. 20:7**, the third commandment about not taking the Lord's name in vain. And many other texts such as **Lev. 19:12**, **Num. 30:2**, and **Deut. 23:21-23** declare that if you make a vow to the Lord, you better well keep it because God will punish you! However, underlying their thinking was that the farther the oath was removed from the name of the Lord itself, the less binding it was, and they had a whole hierarchy of the seriousness of oaths. Look with me at **23:16, 18**. There is a whole tract in the *Mishna*, the Jewish written traditions, about this. But it was kind of an ingenious way to keep promises tentative, because as long as they didn't involve the Lord too closely, they hadn't broken the Law by breaking the oath. It's kind of like the old kid's trick of crossing your fingers behind your back to keep from having to do what you said if you don't want to. And we even pledge ourselves by saying, "I *promise!*" or wiggle out of something with, "But I didn't *promise* to do it...", as though using the word *promise* validates the truth of our word. We use the word *promise* like an oath. But Jesus focused on:

2. the intent of the command: It doesn't matter what you swear by, heaven, earth, Jerusalem, even your own head! God owns it all; it's all His. The truth is that whether you use an oath or not, ***Speaking any words obligates you before God***. He hears you and holds you accountable for your words. If you say, "I will do this..." and choose not to do it, it becomes a lie. This whole idea of saying some things that you mean and others that you mean less or don't mean at all, comes from Satan; it's evil. So:

3. the positive application is: ***Always mean what you say and keep your word***. If you say yes, mean yes. If you say no, mean no. If you say *I will*, do it. If you refuse to do something, don't! You should not have to validate your promises by an oath; your life and character should be enough in themselves to guarantee that your words are true. Then Jesus addresses another popular subject of the day:

IV. Repaying Good For Evil (38-42)

1. the original command: ***An eye for an eye...*** is found three times in the Old Testament, in **Ex. 21:23-24**, **Lev. 24:19-20**, and **Deut. 19:21**. It is was never a command addressed to individuals; it is part of the judicial code given to Israel for its judges to determine how to punish offenders and it teaches that punishment must fit the crime.

2. the intent of the command: was to define justice and the point of it was that ***Justice means punishment must fit the crime***. You can't kill somebody for stealing a cow, nor can you impose the payment of a fine for murder. Punishment should be commensurate with the crime committed. But this phrase became a favorite teaching of the Pharisees to apply to personal behavior, just as it has for many people who don't know the Bible today. Do unto others as they do unto you. Retaliate in kind. If they hit you, hit back. If they rip you off, get even. You can do it and be fulfilling the letter of the law! But it was never intended to mean that. Jesus turned it around instead with a:

3. the positive application Do *good* to the people who do something bad to you! If someone insults you with a slap in the face, rather than slapping him back or returning the insult, offer him the other cheek. If they sue you, offer more than they want. If a Roman soldier comes along and forces you to carry his baggage for a mile like they forced Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross (that was the law), instead of being angry and spiteful, carry it two miles. In other words, ***Overcome evil with good***, not by retaliating in kind. Look with me at **Rom. 12:19-21**. Justice is the business of the courts and ultimately of God Himself, not yours! Repay evil with good; that's the heart of God! And to take that even further, so is:

V. Loving Enemies (43-47)

1. the original command is one Jesus often quoted Himself, ***Love your neighbor as yourself - Lev. 19:18***. But the Pharisees had come up with a more extensive popular rendition of it: ***Love your neighbors and hate your enemies!*** They got all hung up on the word *neighbor*. You remember when Jesus told them the story of the Good Samaritan, their first question was, "Who is my neighbor?" To keep the letter of the law, I only have to love neighbors; I am perfectly free to hate enemies, after all I am one of God's people and the enemies of God's people are enemies of God. So, hating the Romans or even the Samaritans is not only normal; it's good! Talk about twisting the meaning of something! Jesus pointed out:

2. the intent of the command: *Love is to extend to all*, not just your relatives and friends or even literal neighbors. Love even your enemies! Loving those who love you is easy; even the very people you despise, the heathen idol-worshippers and the tax collectors do that! But God loves even people who don't love Him at all. He sends His rain and sunshine on both the righteous and the evil. You see:

3. the positive application: *Loving your enemies is a reflection of God* When you warmly greet those who despise you, when you pray for the very people who persecute you, you're acting like God. You are expressing His nature in your actions; you are showing yourselves to be His children! And that is really:

VI. The Point: God Wants Us To Become Perfectly Like Him! (48) The goal of all of God's word is not to set down rules for us to keep, but to get us to be like God, to think like He thinks, to love like He loves, and to act like He acts! God is always faithful to us; He never divorces us, never leaves us nor forsakes us! He always speaks the truth and means every word of what He says. And He so often does good things for evil people who don't deserve it; He loves His enemies and showers them with blessing, desperately wanting them to repent and be restored to Him. And that's what He's after in you and I, not the outward keeping of some rule in order to keep ourselves out of trouble, but a life that reflects His heart toward the world! And it's important to use this principle of understanding even in reading the New Testament. There are still many commands that Paul and Peter give there that you can keep in letter and still miss the spirit in which they were intended. You can prefer others over yourself outwardly but do it begrudgingly in your heart. You can let them go ahead of you in the grocery line to be polite, while inside resenting that they're holding you up. You can pray without ceasing and yet not love to talk to God. You can be absolutely honest and moral and have a good reputation with others and have all kinds of grudges and wrong desires in your heart. The point of God's Word is for you to be moved toward the true goal, to become more and more like Jesus.

During the Thirty Years' War in Europe (1618-1648), the King of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, who was known as "Gustave the Great, the Lion of the North" and regarded as one of the greatest military commanders of all time, was slain in battle while his troops were winning the Battle of Lützen, in what is now Germany. Sweden was thrown into mourning, and government officials met to determine how to replace the King. While some suggested forming a republic, others thought the crown should go to Adolphus' cousin, the King of Poland. But the Chancellor of Sweden arose and said, "Let there be no talk of a republic or of Polish kings, for we have in our midst the heir of the great Gustavus, his little daughter, who is 6 years of age." Some protested that they had never seen her. The chancellor said, "Wait here and I will show you." He brought in Christina, the daughter of the king, and placed her on the throne. One of the representatives who was especially suspicious of the move pressed forward and gazed intently into her face. Then turning to the assembly, he exclaimed, "Look at her nose, her eyes, her chin! I see in the countenance of this child the features of the great Gustavus. She is the child of our king!" And immediately from all quarters of the room rang the proclamation, "Hail Christina, Queen of Sweden!" Beloved, we are the children of the Great King of Kings! The point of every command He ever gave us is simply that we might mirror His features in our actions and character, that we might be like Him, so that we might display Him to the world, so that the world might see HIM in us. Don't just keep rules; be like your Father!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Message Of The King - Mt. 5-7

Part 4: Our Motives - 6:1-18

The more you look at the Sermon on the Mount, the more clearly you see that the majority of it is a direct attack against the Pharisees. I'm sure the reason for that is that they were the religious leaders of their day, the ones who were shaping the beliefs and practices of the mass of common people. His own disciples had been to a large extent shaped in their mold, to believe that a person who really loved God would be just like they were. In chapter 5 Jesus attacked their teachings, showing that on issue after issue they taught obedience to the letter of outward rules, with no regard for or understanding of God's real intent. Now in chapter 6 He attacks their practices, showing that all of the seemingly righteous things they did, they did out of wrong motives. In chapter 5 He taught that it is not the rule that is important but the intent behind it. In chapter 6 He teaches that it is not the deed that is important but the motive behind it! So, it is a call for us to examine our motives, to examine what moves us to do the things we do regularly as believers. Verse 1 sets the stage for this teaching; in it:

I. Jesus Warned Against Doing Good Things To Get Recognition (1) Jesus had a special word for this concept: **1. He termed this *hypocrisy*** Notice the phrase He uses three times in verses **2, 5, 16**, ...*as the hypocrites do*. By that term, He was obviously referring to the Pharisees. Our word *hypocrite* is actually carried over into English from the Greek and it literally means a stage-actor. So, picture the Greek or Roman theater with no microphones, no lights, and no binoculars. The actors usually wore large masks in order to be seen by the audience, masks intended to portray feelings. So, a hypocrite is somebody with a mask on, somebody who has an appearance that doesn't reflect the reality of who he truly is underneath. Now of course, there are charlatans, frauds who pretend to do good while they are

secretly doing evil and they know it; their hypocrisy is an intentional deception of others. But that's not exactly what Jesus is accusing the Pharisees of. They actually *were* doing good things, righteous acts, and they were truly convinced that they were doing what God wanted, but underneath that appearance, in the depths of their hearts, they were, in fact, doing these out of a self-centered motive that they couldn't even see. They loved the praise and recognition it brought them from other people. To borrow Jesus' words from John 12:43, *...they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God*. Their hypocrisy was a blindness to the truth about themselves, a self-deception. Or, to again borrow His words from Luke 18:9, they *...trusted in themselves that they were righteous*, when in their hearts they were actually serving themselves through their serving God. And the bad news is that none of us is immune from following in their footsteps. You can sing to God, but in your heart do it so that people will clap and cheer for you to make you feel good. You can preach so that inwardly you are gratified by all the people who respond to "your" message. You can give all your possessions to the poor, Paul said in 1 Cor. 13, and not really care about them, but do it for show. You can even die as a martyr and not do it out of love for God but only to be remembered! And the tough thing is that we can slip into this without realizing it has happened to us, just as the Pharisees did! That's why Jesus warned us about:

2. the consequence of doing righteous acts for the wrong motive On the one hand, we might just get what we really want:

a. we may gain an earthly reward of recognition Three times, in verses (2, 5, 16), Jesus said, "It will work. You will receive your reward, the very one you were seeking. People will see you. They will clap for you. They will say 'Wow' and ask for your autograph. They will give you respect and honor and hold dinners in your behalf. But when they do, you must understand, that's it. Payment in full!" If that's what we want, we can get it! But:

b. we will lose any reward from our Father If we do our acts of righteousness, genuinely from the heart, to please God, three times, in verses (4, 6, 18), Jesus says, *...Your Father who sees in secret will reward you!* It doesn't matter whether anyone else sees or notices or not; if we do it for "the Audience of One", as a friend of mine likes to put it, He will graciously reward it. But NOT if we're really doing it for the recognition, out of a truly selfish motive.

So, Jesus is warning us not to trade away our true eternal reward for a cheap earthly imitation. Now there are:

II. Three Common Religious Acts Where We Must Exercise This Caution The three chief acts of Jewish piety were giving alms to the poor, prayer, and fasting. You can see them in the story of the Pharisee and the publican in Lk. 18:11-12. The Pharisee was praying at the Temple, as was his habit, and he told God, *I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get*. It's curious that Mohammed adopted these as three of the five pillars of Islam. Good Muslims pray five times a day, give alms to the poor and fast a whole month of every year. Every good Jew did these three things on a regular basis; in fact, we evangelicals still teach that every good Christian should pray and read the Bible, give to God, and go to church. These things are how we practice our faith, and they are the very place where this hypocrisy can creep in! First of all, Jesus warns us that:

1. we must be careful to give for the right motive (2-4) He says that:

a. we give hypocritically when we seek praise for our "generosity" We are not sure what actual custom Jesus is referring to in mentioning the blowing of trumpets. We do know that public fasts were proclaimed by the sounding of trumpets and these were occasions when prayers would be offered in the streets (as verse 5 mentions) and when alms would be given to the poor. The Pharisees would certainly be the first to stand up and pray and to give their alms on those occasions. What we know for sure is that the Pharisees loved for people to see them give and deliberately drew attention to themselves as they gave, whether it was in the trumpet-shaped offering boxes in the Temple treasury, in the synagogue or even to needy beggars on the streets! They wanted people to note how generous they were and praise them for it! But that is not true generosity, is it? That is using giving to get something! Jesus says:

b. we give genuinely when we give privately out of true compassion That word *secret* could be slightly misleading. It does not mean that we must all devise ways to give anonymously so that the recipient will never know where it came from or so that no one will ever see us put an envelope in the offering plate or never use a check with our name on it. The Greek word *cruptos* means *hidden*. Jesus is saying, "Do the opposite of the Pharisees. Give in such a way that others will not notice and pay attention. Give quietly, give privately, and give because your heart is moved with compassion for the need, not for the 'Thank you' you might get!" I read a story about *two women walking down a city street who came to a corner where a representative from a worthy charity was soliciting donations to help feed needy children. One woman stopped and placed a large contribution in the collection box. Her companion, remembering that this woman had recently promised to make such a gift, said with a chuckle, "I'm glad you did that. Now your conscience is clear." Her friend quietly responded, "I wasn't thinking about my conscience; I was thinking about those starving children."* What are you thinking about when you give? What's your heart's motive? That's the true test for hypocrisy! Then Jesus moves on to warn us that:

2. we must be careful to pray for the right motive in verses (5-15). Jesus said:

a. we pray hypocritically when:

(1) we pray to show others how “pious” we are (5) Look with me at that story of the Pharisee in **Lk. 18:10-12**. That’s what Jesus was talking about. The man prayed publicly about himself, reminding God how good he was and loud enough to be sure the publican next to him heard it. Does that sound far-fetched? Tell me you’ve never heard someone in a church meeting make a long-winded prayer using huge theological words and a dramatic tone of voice! Even among us there is a great temptation to pray artfully with carefully chosen words for the “Amen” we’ll hear! That’s hypocrisy. It’s also hypocrisy when:

(2) we pray to manipulate God to do our will (7) People who don’t know God, who worship false gods, pray like that. They keep on chanting phrases over and over; they go for volume, thinking that the more they talk, the more they can move God to do what they want. Buddhists have prayer wheels where they write a prayer on paper, attach it to the wheel and spin it, thinking that the prayer is repeated with each revolution! But sometimes in Christian liturgy we have stooped to the same level, repeating the same phrases over and over until they’re meaningless, thinking that God will be pleased with the fact that we’re saying the words, rather than actually talking to Him! Even we who really believe that prayer is genuine conversation with God, sometimes fall into the trap of unthinkingly reading God our list over and over, hoping He’ll listen. That’s hypocrisy. And it’s also hypocrisy when:

(3) we pray for forgiveness without forgiving others (14-15) I don’t know whether the Pharisees ever prayed for forgiveness in public but at least in private they must have, at least sometimes. Yet they saw no need to forgive other people who had offended them. They loved their neighbors and hated their enemies, remember! They taught *an eye for an eye*! So here they are, asking God to forgive them but totally blind to the fact that there is no forgiveness in their own hearts. Surely, WE would never pray like that! It would be hypocrisy to ask God to grant us what we won’t grant to someone else! On the other hand, Jesus tells us that:

b. we pray genuinely when:

(1) we pray privately seeking only to be heard by God (6) If we genuinely want to pursue prayer, intimate communion with God, we need to be alone; we need to get somewhere where it’s quiet, without anyone to disturb us so that our heart can hear the soft voice of the Spirit as we commune together. That’s how most of our praying should be, but Jesus is not intending to forbid praying in public altogether or even praying as a group; the early church did both and so do we. The intent of what He’s saying is that, even in the midst of a whole praying crowd, our speaking should be consumed with the Audience of One, not those around us. They may listen and agree with us and even voice that, but we only pray genuinely when we are talking directly to God. Secondly, Jesus told us we pray genuinely when:

(2) we pray out of relationship with our Father (8) God doesn’t need us to tell Him what we need; He knows it already. We have a Father in heaven and that should be the basis of our praying. Then in 9-13 Jesus says, “Pray like this...” and gives us what we call “The Lord’s Prayer”. We’ve already done an entire series of studies on this prayer, so rather than go into details this morning, let’s look at the bigger context. To start off with, after what Jesus just said about empty repetition, can you imagine that He simply meant for us to pray these exact words themselves over and over? I doubt it! They’re a model, an example of the type of praying that is genuine.

(9a) We don’t pray, *In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful ...* as Muslims recite several times each day, or recite a list of His 99 Names; we come to Him as Our Father! We pray as a child speaking with his Father in heaven, heart to heart out of our relationship. **(9b-10)** We pray, not to get whatever we want as though He is some genie that grants wishes, but **desiring His glorification in our lives and the world**, asking that His Name would be revered by everyone, that His Rule as King would extend to the whole world and His Will would be done in our lives and on the earth. We pray genuinely when we pray first about the things that are on HIS heart! **(11)** We pray **asking His provision for our needs**, confessing how dependent we are on His daily supply to sustain us the way a father feeds His children! **(12)** We pray **asking His forgiveness when we sin**, not because we’re afraid He’ll send us to hell, but because we know we’ve offended our Father’s heart and desperately want things to be right between us. And finally, **(13)** We pray **seeking His protection from the enemy**, realizing that we’re in a battle against a powerful adversary and we need our Father’s strength to resist the temptations we face and to stand firm against the pressure the Evil One brings against us.

That’s what genuine praying looks like! What’s your motive when you pray? Why do you do it? Is it truly because you need your Father in your life? Slipping into praying for any other reason is hypocrisy. Then lastly, Jesus warns us that:

3. we must be careful to fast for the right motive (16-18) We hardly fast at all anymore, but our brothers and sisters around the world do. The Pharisee in Lk. 18:12 claimed to fast twice a week; actually, the Pharisees fasted Mondays and Thursdays. The Didache, a manual of Christian instruction written about 100 AD says basically, “Don’t join yourselves to the hypocrites, fast Wednesday and Friday instead!” But I think that misses Jesus’ point. He says:

a. we fast hypocritically when we seek praise for our “sincerity” When we look haggard and mention how hungry we are because we haven't eaten anything, we're really looking for people to say, “Wow, that guy is something; he really takes his religion seriously! I wouldn't give up eating!” Jesus said, “Look, if you really want to fast, take a bath and put on your normal clothes and wipe your face with oil like you always do. Don't change anything outwardly to draw attention to yourself; that's hypocrisy!”

b. we fast genuinely when we privately deny our desires in order to seek Him When we are so desperate to meet with God and see Him work in our situation that communing with Him and praying takes precedence even over eating, that's genuine fasting! Jonathan Edwards fasted and prayed for three days and nights, neither eating nor sleeping, before he stepped into the pulpit to preach his now well-known sermon, *Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God*; it shook not only his congregation but the whole region and sparked The Great Awakening. That's genuine fasting; simply giving up food to impress God or others is the stuff of hypocrisy. And hypocrisy can be boiled down to this one thought, *being self-centered, having a selfish motive* in the good you do.

Now before you go home thinking, “I'm glad somebody else was there to hear that!”, PLEASE remember this: every single one of us, without exception, is not only susceptible, but falls victim to this brand of hypocrisy! *Dr. Larry Crabb has been a well-known Christian psychologist and author for longer than a quarter century. He wrote: “None of us is immune to putting self first. I don't think I've learned anything about myself that has more surprised and appalled me than how reflexively I put my own needs first. Within days of my brother's death, I spoke at his memorial service. As I prepared my few comments on behalf of our family, I prayed that God would use my stumbling tongue in this difficult situation to encourage others.... I [truly] wanted to give. [But] at one point during my talk, I noticed that a phrase I had just used was especially rich. As any experienced public speaker might do, I paused to let that phrase sink in. During that three-second pause, I heard these words run through my mind, 'I'm doing a pretty good job. That was a good pause.' Immediately, I felt slapped in the face by the realization that at that moment I cared more about how I was performing than about how meaningfully I was ministering. That night I wept bitterly. I grieved that even at my brother's funeral, I couldn't escape the wretched power of pride. I had come to an audience filled with friends wanting to share our grief, and I wanted them to applaud my speaking ability.” [Finding God by Larry Crabb. Zondervan, 1993. Pages 112-113.] Don't think yourself immune. Guard your heart carefully. Examine your motives. I leave you with the first lines of an anonymous poem I read on the internet: One day I found within my heart someone who'd been there from the start. A prudish person—self-appointed, self-sufficient—self-anointed. Though I, a true disciple be, I've met the Pharisee in me! Have you?*

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The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Message Of The King - Mt. 5-7

Part 5: Material Things - 6:19-34

As we continue our study through the Sermon on the Mount, let me remind you that the whole of the sixth chapter is concerned with our motives, with why we do what we do. The Pharisees did what they did for two underlying reasons. The first was recognition, to be praised by other people; that was why they gave alms and prayed and fasted and Jesus warned us in 6:1-18 not to be like them, but to do all our righteous acts sincerely from the heart. Now in the rest of chapter 6, Jesus warns us against their second disguised motivation, reward; they used their position as recognized religious leaders for material gain. In Mk. 12:40 Jesus warned the crowd to beware of the scribes *...who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers*. They took advantage of the generosity of the poor to benefit themselves materially. They preyed on widows and other vulnerable people, offering to manage their material affairs according to the Law, but in the process, defrauding them of their money for personal gain. Or else they played on their religious zeal and convinced them to make sacrificial donations which they kept for themselves, all the while making extensive prayers, sometimes hours long. Materialism, the love of money, has always had an uncanny way of creeping quietly into the lives of religious people, even of genuine believers, and staging a gradual takeover. Whether you look at Johann Tetzel traveling all over Europe in 1517, raising money to construct Saint Peter's basilica by selling indulgences guaranteed to spring people's dead relatives out of purgatory, or televangelist Jim Bakker in 1987, preaching a prosperity gospel and selling non-existent timeshares for his luxury hotel, pocketing \$3.4 million before going to jail, the sad chronicle of church history is replete with examples of people who appeared to sincerely love God but allowed the love of money to take root in their lives until it wound up controlling them. Jesus saw that in the Pharisees in His day and so was careful to warn us as His followers that:

I. We Must Not Be Captivated By Material Things (19-20) The Pharisees believed that God blessed materially all those He loved. No doubt, this belief was motivated at first by the promises God attached to His covenant with Israel. Look with me at **Deut. 28:1-8, 11**. God did promise time and again that he would prosper Israel materially, no question about it. The Pharisees also noted the condition which would bring the blessing, obedience to God's commands. So, of all people, they expected to be blessed! But what happened is a very subtle thing; instead of obeying God because they loved Him and

then rejoicing in His material blessings as a gracious gift, they wound up obeying God in order to get the material blessings. As Paul described it in 1 Tim. 6:5, they ...*think that godliness is a means to financial gain*. That is:

1. the nature of materialism Jesus put it like this:

a. it is storing up treasure In Greek, it is the word *thesauros*, a treasury, a place of deposit for safekeeping, used twice, first as a verb and then as a noun. Literally it says, "Do not treasure up your treasures" on earth. Do not make your goal in life to accumulate material treasures here in this world. Do not make gathering material things your ultimate value. Now, that is not say that having or gaining wealth is evil in itself. It is not wrong for a Christian to have a lot of money or houses or lands. It is not a sin to be rich nor to make a lot of money.

b. it is doing so for yourself Materialism is treasuring up treasures for me, for my benefit, for my enjoyment, for my use, for my security in life. Look at **Acts 4:32**. That's the attitude of believers who are full of the Holy Spirit. None of our possessions are our own! They are God's! Yes, He has given them to us to enjoy, but ultimately, they are for His use and He has given them to me to use to serve Him and to benefit others. When I begin to view them as being for solely for me, then materialism has crept in. I begin to value things above God. Paul calls it *greed*, which, he told Timothy, *IS idolatry*. John Wesley preached a well-known sermon on *The Use Of Money*; His three points were 1) *Gain all you can [work hard, be industrious]*, 2) *Save all you can [be frugal in your spending; don't waste it]*, and 3) *GIVE all you can!* That's the point; you make it and you save it, not so you can accumulate it for yourself, but so you can give it to God for His use! Now in His warning Jesus points out:

2. the drawbacks of materialism First of all:

a. material things deteriorate Moths eat holes in the beautiful clothes you store in the attic. Rust eats holes in your beautiful new car after you scratch it, which you inevitably will! Store up your grain in huge barns and rats will eat it. A house suffers wear and tear; you can never get it quite like you want it because there is always something else that is aging and needs fixed. Material things are a losing battle; it takes a great deal of energy just to maintain them as they are and many of them deteriorate and wear out, no matter how hard we try to prevent it. But worse:

b. material things can be lost Thieves can break in and steal them or vandalize them and there's not a thing we can do about it. My car may be gone tomorrow morning, my house burglarized. My money can be stolen, now even by electronic means, or lost in the stock market. And if those are the things I've set my heart on, if those are my treasures, then I must expect heartbreak! But on the other hand, if the things that really matter to me are heavenly things, if what I really care about is loving Jesus Christ, bringing people to believe in Jesus Christ, helping people to grow in Jesus Christ and doing acts of love and kindness in the Name of Jesus Christ which He has promised to reward, then I am rich indeed! There is no deterioration of heavenly treasures; there is no losing them. The true treasures I will enjoy in heaven last forever. Now here's:

3. the real danger of materialism

a. it affects our heart (21) The things that I ultimately value are the things my heart is set on, the things I desire. In effect loving material things changes the character of one's heart. You remember Dickens' classic tale of Ebenezer Scrooge and how the love of money hardened his heart so that he no longer cared about people. That's what it does. When I begin to love money, all other things begin to take second place, whether I intend that or not; the love of material things bends my heart toward the material; the love of heavenly things bends my heart toward the spiritual. Placing ultimate value on material things naturally leads to the drive to accumulate more of them and that:

b. it will affect our life (22-23) This is a short parable about your eyes. Your eyes are the lamp of your entire body; they are the light-gate. Without them, the body does not see and react to the things around it; it is in great darkness. But with them it sees clearly. The point is that the eyes affect the whole, either for good or bad, and the heart is like that. What my eyes look at all the time is what my heart desires and what my heart desires, affects the whole of my life. If my heart craves material things, it affects my whole life and floods it with darkness. It ruins my marriage, my relationship with my children, my business dealings. You know **1 Tim. 6:10**, *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils*. And the saddest thing is that ultimately:

c. it will destroy our service to God (24) All of a sudden, there are two masters in my life, God and money, God and gold! And these two masters each demand to own me and have my service, but I cannot serve both; it is impossible. If I truly serve God, I will have to deny the selfish desire to accumulate money; conversely, if I begin to serve money, I will soon end up denying God, just as the Pharisees did!

This warning of Jesus is especially relevant in our day, because over the last 60 years this same kind of money-loving thinking the Pharisees displayed has grown like a cancer in the church and spread everywhere all over the world; we have labeled it *prosperity theology* or *the prosperity Gospel*. Turn on the TV or the radio and you will soon hear it: "God wants you to have all your dreams, just believe it! Plant a seed of faith! Healing, financial blessing, these things are your right as a child of God!" Worldwide, thousands of poor people have flocked to the idea of a God who wants them to live in prosperity and complete health and then end up disillusioned because He doesn't produce or else blame themselves for not having enough faith. Please understand that the promises we read earlier were made to Israel as a nation; they were never

given to us as followers of Christ! If you actually read the New Testament, you'll find that Jesus taught the exact opposite, that His followers should expect suffering, persecution, the loss of all things and even death! After seven years in prison Jim Bakker wrote another book titled, *I Was Wrong*, in 1996. *He admitted that the first time he actually read the Bible all the way through was in prison, and that it made him realize he had taken certain passages out of context. He wrote: The more I studied the Bible, however, I had to admit that the prosperity message did not line up with the tenor of Scripture. My heart was crushed to think that I led so many people astray. I was appalled that I could have been so wrong, and I was deeply grateful that God had not struck me dead as a false prophet!* Listen friends, *our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.* - Phil. 3:20-21. That's where our treasure is; that's the hope we have fixed our lives on; that's what we're waiting for and what the whole of our lives is driven toward! *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* - 2 Cor. 4:18. But even if we avoid the love of material things, there is a second way they can hinder our spiritual lives. Jesus went on to warn us that:

II. We Must Not Be Distracted By Material Things Five times in verses (25-34) you'll see the word *worry* or *be anxious* [ESV]. The Greek root means to be drawn in different directions, to be distracted. Isn't that what worry is really like? "What will I do if...maybe this will happen...what if this goes wrong or that occurs..." Your thinking goes back and forth and what happens is that it distracts you from the main direction you should have, the main thing that should be occupying your life. And, of course, the things we worry most about are often material. So, Jesus warns us that:

1. material things should not occupy our attention (25) Jesus says, think about:

a. the nature of life Life is not just the sum total of what we eat and drink and wear. That's existence. Life is far more than that; life is what we accomplish for God. Life is our investment in eternal things while we're here. Worrying about material things distracts us from what life is really all about. And the reason we don't need to be anxious about them is:

b. the nature of God (26) Just think about it. God takes the time to feed the birds; the Psalmist said, *He ...gives food to every creature. His love endures forever* - 136:25. Watch the nature channel sometime and you'll be amazed at God's provision for even the tiniest creatures and the ones who live in the most inhospitable places. Don't you realize that as His child you are of far greater value to Him than anything He created? What father would leave his children without food or clothing or shelter? When we worry about those things, we are being distracted from our true relationship with God our heavenly Father! When we focus on material things and wonder whether we're going to have what we need, we're forgetting whose child we are! My children never worried that there wouldn't be supper tonight or that they wouldn't have clothes to wear tomorrow. They never worried about those things because that was Dad's realm. They simply expected it because that's what children do. We should be that way with God; we have a Heavenly Father who, in His love, takes care of those things for us! Yes, we should ask Him for our daily bread (verse 11), but we should always do it in the confidence that He knows what we need before we ask Him (verse 8) and He intends to provide the material things we genuinely need! Then Jesus went on to explain:

2. why they should not occupy our attention, why we should not worry about them. First of all:

a. it is useless (27) There's a slight translation issue here; some versions say you can't add a single cubit to your height.. Either way the point is the same: you can worry about being short, but it won't grow you an inch, let alone a cubit, will it? You can worry about when you're going to die, but it won't add a single hour to your life. Worrying accomplishes nothing; fixing your attention on circumstances of life that you can't control anyway is useless. Worrying is a waste of time and energy that could be devoted to serving the King, plus it makes you feel bad. But worse than that:

b. it is unbelief (28-30) He goes to all the trouble of arraying the flowers of the field in gorgeous splendor, even though they are only plants that last a little while and dry up and get burned for fuel. We're His children; wouldn't He care that we are clothed? He is well capable of clothing us in any fashion He chooses. Worrying shows we have little faith; we really don't trust God. We think we've got to take care of it all ourselves; we really don't believe that God will take care of us. Worry is unbelief and besides that:

c. it is a poor testimony (31-32) People who don't know God have to worry about all these things; they don't know a Heavenly Father to trust who cares for them. That's why when things are tough, they run around going, "O my gosh, what am I going to do? How am I going to survive?" But we DO have a Father, so when we worry just like they do, what a poor testimony it is! We're not acting any differently from them. Why would they want to know our Father if He doesn't make any difference in our daily life? And the saddest thing of all is that worrying:

d. it is unnecessary (34) Now, shouldn't we plan ahead for things? Certainly! Shouldn't we save up for expenses we know are coming? Of course! Shouldn't we put money into an IRA for our care in old age? That's perfectly fine, if God provides it. But do we really need to retire with a million dollars in investments as the financial pundits tell

us? Do we need to worry that we don't have a year's worth of income in savings in case we lose our job? Listen, most of the people in the world don't have that luxury anyway! God doesn't promise you any of that; He promises to take care of our needs TODAY. And when we arrive at tomorrow, it will be TODAY and God will take care of that too! Worrying about the future adds a needless burden upon our shoulders. Trying to carry tomorrow around on our shoulders today is a tremendously heavy load that we don't need to carry. Watch God take care of today's needs and leave tomorrow with Him. He's got that too.

But we skipped the punchline to this whole discourse in verse (33). There's:

III. What Should Captivate Our Hearts: God's Kingdom and His Righteousness We've quoted this verse and even sung it as a song for years, but have we ever thought about what it really says? It's a command, actually. Jesus is *telling* us what He wants us to do. He wants us to:

1. place ultimate value on advancing God's rule on earth, to care about that above all other things. We are not here for us; we are here for Him, to serve His purpose, that all the peoples of the earth may know and worship Him so that the earth may be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as it ought to be! We're here to see people come to Christ and grow in Christ in Glenside and Philadelphia and in India and in Kyrgyzstan and Mexico and Guatemala and Indonesia and China and wherever else He's led us to thrust ourselves into the harvest. That's what should occupy our praying and occupy our time and energy and occupy the use of our money, "How can we advance God's Kingdom?", not "How is God going to take care of me?". And along with that, Jesus told us to:

2. place ultimate value on carrying out God's will in our life *His righteousness* here means righteous living, living out the life He intends us to live in righteous acts of love and caring that reflect His character to all around us. My life should be about, "How does He want me to serve Him?" not "How can I take care of myself?".

And if I focus on those things, if I give myself with all my heart to being about My Father's business the way Jesus Himself did, He gave me this wonderful promise: *all these other things* that you need, the physical stuff that everybody else worries about, *will be added to you, taken care of. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in the late 1500's, a certain wealthy merchant was chosen by her to go abroad to represent her on a delicate mission as her ambassador. When he was informed of his Queen's wishes, the merchant asked to be excused on the grounds that to go would cause him great monetary loss and it might even ruin his business. To this the Queen replied, "You look after my business abroad, and I will look after yours at home." The merchant accepted the appointment and was gone for several years, but when he returned, he found that the Queen, true to her word, had indeed taken care of his affairs, and that he was much wealthier than he would have been had he remained at home.* God has made you the same offer, "I want you to give your life to doing MY business, and if you do, I will take care of yours". Will you take Him up on it?

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Message Of The King - Mt. 5-7

Part 6: Others - 7:1-12

We continue our study through Matthew's Gospel and through the Sermon on the Mount which he records for us in Chapters 5-7. By way of review, in chapter 5 Jesus exhorted us to look for God's true intent, rather than merely outwardly obeying the letter of His instructions. In chapter 6 He exhorted us to serve God out of sincere motives rather than self-centered ones and to simply trust our Father to meet our needs. Now in chapter 7 He exhorts us concerning our relationships with other people and in the first half He lays down three principles that we must be careful to follow. The first one is this:

I. We Must Not Judge Other People (1) Now this has become a very famous phrase; it is quoted by believers and non-believers alike, particularly when they want to defend something which they are doing that someone else is objecting to. People say, "You're judging me. Stop judging me! Who are you to judge me!" In one blog I read, someone was poking fun at the way we use this phrase by posting a picture of Saddam Hussein with the caption "Don't Judge Me!" underneath, followed by a picture of Hitler with the caption, "Who Do You Think You Are!" In this generation, "judging others" has been labeled as the ultimate sin. Evangelical Christians are regularly called accused of "judging others" because they oppose the practice of abortion or homosexuality. So right away it is important that we understand clearly:

1. what Jesus DID NOT mean when He said this He obviously did not mean:

a. that morality is relative People say, "What's right for me is different from what's right for you!" They believe that right and wrong are a matter of society's consensus or their own personal belief. So, to them, "Judge not" means that ***we must not declare the acts of others evil***. Well, if that's the case, Jesus did it all the time! We just studied chapter 6 where Jesus condemned the Pharisees and directly called them hypocrites for the way that they practiced their giving and praying and fasting! Wait until we get to chapter 23! Morality is NOT relative; what God says is right IS right and what He says is wrong IS wrong. **1 Cor. 2:15** says, *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one*. We are *supposed* to judge all things, to evaluate them carefully and discern what is right and wrong, what is good and evil, what is of God and what is of the devil. Then sometimes when people say "Don't judge me", they simply mean:

b. that correction is wrong, that **we must not tell others they are doing wrong**. It's not our place; it is making ourselves better than them and making them feel bad. It means we should just let everybody do their own thing and mind our own business. Oh, really? Look ahead with me to **18:15**. There Jesus commands us to go and tell our brother his fault when he's wrong, so that can't be what this means either. What Jesus actually means when He says *Judge not* is simple:

2. we must not adopt a haughty, critical, condemning attitude toward others Remember, I told you that most of this sermon is aimed against the Pharisees. The word *hypocrite* in verse 5 gives it away; that's what He has called them repeatedly; He's warning us against something the Pharisees did all the time. Look with me at **Lk. 18:9**. That's the "judging" he's talking about; they saw themselves as righteous and pure and had contempt for others. Literally, they despised them, looked down on them and regarded them as of no worth. And of course, the person displaying this attitude in the story that follows is a Pharisee. Paul applied this concept, not to moral right and wrong, but to secondary areas where Christians often differ in their opinions, like whether they should eat meat or whether they observe a Sabbath day of rest. Look at **Rom. 14:3, 10, 13**. He's warning us to not elevate ourselves above others and look down on and criticize them as though we sit in the seat of God Himself and they are nothing. You know people with that kind of an attitude, don't you? *I read the illustration of a church where one member of its board had fallen into sin, so the pastor called together the other board members, and with love and compassion he told them the sad story. Then he asked them: "If you had been tempted as our brother was, what would you have done?" The first to respond said, "I'm sure I would never have given in to that" and several others made the same statement. Finally, the pastor asked the last member of the board, a man the others respected as being deeply spiritual. "Pastor," he answered, "I feel in my heart that if I had been tempted and tested as he was, I would probably have fallen even lower." After the awkward silence that followed, the pastor said, "You are the one to go with me to try to restore him."* "Judging others" as Jesus meant it, was not about discerning right from wrong; He was warning us about developing a proud, critical attitude where we see ourselves as dwelling on the mountaintop while despising the poor peons in the valley beneath us. Now the reason He gives is that:

3. our attitude directly impacts the way others will treat us (2) You now, for years I assumed this meant God would judge us the way we judge others and so do many Bible commentators. But think about it for a moment, God can only judge us in one fashion, righteously, faultlessly, perfectly. He doesn't dish out to us what we dish out to others! But people do! They tend to treat us the way we treat them, don't they? When Luke recorded this teaching of Jesus in **Lk. 6:37-38**, he put it like this in the King James, *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall MEN [there's the key, in Greek "they"] give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.* He was talking about others responding to you. If you're critical of others, they'll be critical of you. If you're forgiving of others, they'll be forgiving of you. If you're generous with others, they'll be generous with you! Others will tend to treat you the way you treat them, not always, but as a general rule; we'll get back from them what we dish out, so that's one good reason to be careful what we dish out! But on a deeper level, Jesus went on to point out that:

4. a judgmental attitude reveals something about ourselves (3-5a) Isn't it amazing how we can always notice and complain about the smallest thing in other people's lives, yet we can completely fail to notice huge things about ourselves that everyone else can see clearly? I think that's more than an interesting observation; it's an insight into the nature of human flesh. On the one hand:

a. we are unwilling to examine our own faults *A man was having difficulty communicating with his wife and concluded that she was becoming hard of hearing. So, he decided to conduct a test without her knowing about it. One evening he sat in a chair on the far side of the room. Her back was to him and she could not see him. Very quietly he whispered, "Can you hear me?" There was no response. Moving a little closer, he asked again, "Can you hear me now?" Still no reply. Quietly he edged closer and whispered the same words, but still no answer. Finally, he moved right in behind her chair and said, "Can you hear me now?" To his surprise and chagrin, she responded with irritation in her voice, "For the fourth time, yes!"* How like us! We would never consider that the fault lies with us. We inherently believe that there's nothing wrong on our part. Like the Pharisees, we are often **intentionally blind**, refusing to see the obvious that everybody else can see about us, or if we do:

b. we are unwilling to admit our own faults Pride keeps us from it. "Log? What log? I don't have a log in my eye?" The need to appear before others as though there is nothing wrong with us is also built in. But when we want to criticize others without admitting our own glaring issues, Jesus called that **hypocritical** in verse (5):

5. we must be willing to correct our own faults before helping others Seeing them is not enough; admitting them is not enough. We must take the log OUT of our eye in order to see clearly enough to help others deal with their issues. It's not that we can't help each other by correcting; we *should* do that. When done right, it's not judgmental; it's a vital, necessary part of life in the body of Christ that matures us. But while we have a proud, haughty, critical attitude

toward others, we can't see clearly enough to do it properly. In fact, that very attitude *is* the log we don't see in ourselves that keeps us from it! To correct others, they must know that you genuinely want the best for them and are working on your own issues at the same time. And now Jesus makes that famous statement in verse (6). What on earth does that have to do with He's talking about? Most interpreters say "Nothing! Matthew appears to have put it in there randomly." But I can't buy that; it is a parable, to be sure, but I believe that all passages of scripture are *where* they are for a reason and you have to keep looking until you discover the reason. In my view, Jesus hasn't left his subject at all; He's continuing His subject and telling us that once we take the plank out and are actually ready:

6. we must be cautious when we do help others with correction Both dogs and pigs were unclean animals to the Jews. Dogs, which in that day weren't house pets but rather street dogs living on garbage, have no discernment; they will eat almost anything. They love to roll in anything that stinks. If you take a sacred offering, a part of a sacrificial animal that has been presented to God and would normally be eaten by a priest, and throw it to a dog, he has no discernment; he'll eat it as readily as he will garbage. It means nothing to him. A pig would have no idea of the value of precious pearls. To him they would look just like the corn and fodder he normally sees and he would try to eat them. When that failed, he would just trample the precious pearls underfoot in the mud. And some people are like dogs and pigs; they have no discernment. They would not receive or understand correction for the precious gift of love it truly is, even if given lovingly and humbly. So, we have to understand that:

a. it may not be understood or received at all Some people are so stubborn, so blind, so bent, that they will never understand what we are talking about. And what's worse:

b. it may generate a great deal of animosity toward us Both animals are dangerous. That pig or that street dog may get angry that you didn't give them what they wanted and turn right around and attack you. And so may a person of that disposition. Instead of receiving our help, they may lash out and try to hurt us for it! **Prov. 9:7** says, *Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.* So, we need to be really cautious with correction; it is a holy gift to be bestowed on those who will profit and grow from it, not to be wasted on those who are blindly ignorant, uncaring and hostile.

Now that makes this whole idea of helping others by correction seem impossible. Between our self-blindness and their unwillingness to receive it, why would we even attempt such a thing? Well, remember later in chapter 19 when Jesus told His disciples it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God and they despaired, saying, "Well who then can be saved?! How could such a thing ever be?" *But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* - Mat 19:26. That's why Jesus now turns again to the subject of prayer. He wants to encourage us that:

II. We Can Trust Our Father To Accomplish Whatever He Wants Through Us (7-8) The way to face difficult challenges like this one or any other is not simply to do the best we can; it is to pray, to ask God to do it! He exhorts us here that:

1. we must ask with determination Those three verbs are all in the present tense and indicate continuing action. He does not mean to simply ask one time and count on receiving. He's telling us that:

a. we must keep on asking until He gives provision We can't simply ask once and figure, "Oh well, it looks like God isn't going to provide", and then go try to figure our own way through the situation. We must ask and ask and keep on asking until we receive. It is those who persist in asking out of genuine trust and a desire to obey God and do His will, who receive. Everyone who asks that way, God provides for. Likewise:

b. we must keep on seeking until He gives direction When we don't know what to do or lack wisdom to know which way to go, we can't simply seek once and then make our own decision. We must seek and seek and keep on seeking, knowing that everyone who seeks, finds, and that to everyone who lacks wisdom He gives it freely, if they keep on asking without doubting. And when it seems the door is closed:

c. we must keep on knocking until He gives opportunity When He is sending us forward and the way is barred, we can't merely knock once and say, "I guess that wasn't His will." We must knock and knock and keep on knocking, knowing that God always opens the door to those who keep on knocking because they really, really want to get in! To put it another way, Jesus is telling us that:

2. we must ask with confidence (9-11) Honestly, if your child was hungry and asked you for a loaf of bread, would you deceive him and give him a brown rock instead? If he asked for a fish, would you give him a snake instead that might hurt him? No human father would ever do that, and we are sinful creatures! But God is a perfect, holy, loving Father. We can pray and ask Him for anything in absolute confidence and He will always give us exactly what is best for us. He will never give us anything false or harmful. That's why we pray and pray and keep on praying, not because we have to pray a lot to make Him hear us, but because we absolutely trust Him as our loving Father and refuse to give up talking to Him about it, because we're confident He cares and is going to do something for us, no matter how impossible it seems! The well-known Civil War era preacher and professor John Broadus said it like this, *One may be a truly industrious man, yet poor in temporal things, but one cannot be a truly praying man, and yet poor in spiritual things.* Our Father loves to give them to us; that's why we persist in asking!

And now in verse 12 Jesus concludes, saying *Therefore...*, “In light of all I’ve taught you so far, here is:

III. The Rule For How To Treat Others (12) We call it the “Golden Rule”, the simple, one sentence, boiled down, practical way to understand how God would want us to act:

1. in every situation we must consider how we want others to treat us As we encounter a person with a problem or an issue or a need or whatever the situation may be, the simplest thing to do is to ask ourselves, “How do I want others to treat me?” This is not quite the same as, “How would I want to be treated if I were in their situation?” If I were, I might actually want the wrong thing, something that isn’t good for me. Rather, it’s a more general question: “How do I want other people to treat me?” The answer comes pretty easily, “...with compassion, respect, mercy, generosity” and so on.

2. then we must actually treat the other person that same way, whatever the situation. It’s built right into us to know what brings us joy, what gives us relief, what truly helps us and is good for us. We can simply turn around and treat the person in front of us the way we desire to be treated. It’s a simple rule, one that can be followed by everyone from the young child who believes, to the simplest, uneducated follower of Jesus who knows literally nothing of the Scriptures and yet, Jesus says:

3. this sums up the core of God’s intent to love others Remember later on when someone asked Him what the greatest commandment in the Law is and He said, *...You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.* - **22:39-40**. Caring for others the way you naturally care for yourself, treating them the way you naturally want to be treated, that fulfills the core of everything God is trying to convey through all the relational commandments of Scripture.

In one of his sermons, John Wesley tells a story on himself. There was a man he regarded with contempt because he considered him to be miserly and covetous. One day he actually had the audacity to tell him so to his face and when the man asked why he thought that, Wesley replied, “A year ago when I made a collection for the expense of repairing the Foundry, you subscribed 5 guineas. At the subscription this year, you subscribed only half a guinea!” Wesley then reported that the man, speaking humbly about himself indirectly, told him, “I know a man that goes to the market at the beginning of every week. There he buys a pennyworth of parsnips which he boils in a large quantity of water. The parsnips serve him for food and the water for drink the ensuing week. So his meat and drink together cost him only a penny a week.” Wesley adds, “This he constantly did, though he had then two hundred pounds a year [salary, in order] to pay the debts he had contracted before he knew God!” In other words, he was being so frugal and was able to give so little because he was obeying God and honestly paying off his creditors. Wesley concludes, “And this was he whom I had set down for a covetous man!” Beloved, don’t be critical and judgmental of others. Always treat them the way you want to be treated. And never stop praying for God to work seemingly impossible transformation, both in you first, and also in them.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Message Of The King - Mt. 5-7

Part 7: Warnings - 7:13-29

Today we complete our study through the Sermon on the Mount. After exhorting us not judge others and giving us the simple rule to treat them as we wanted to be treated in the first half, Jesus finished this sermon of His with a series of three serious warnings. When we look at them, we often think of them as warnings that apply primarily to people who don’t believe in Jesus and they certainly do. They are three very grave warnings about receiving eternal life. We want to be careful, however, to remember that in this sermon, Jesus was teaching His disciples and we must be diligent to see the message that these warnings have for us who believe. Jesus used three similes to express His warnings, three comparisons with things his audience routinely experienced in their lives: walking on roads, trees bearing fruit, and houses weathering storms. And each comparison lays out before us two options. Jesus begins by telling us:

I. There Are Two Routes To Take Through Life (13-14) Every walled city or town in the land had gates in its walls and people passed through them every day as they went out from their homes inside the city to work in their fields or travel elsewhere. The gates opened onto roads that led away from the city in various directions. Some would be very large, wide, heavy, double-doored entryways. The broad gates are the ones leading out onto the broad roads, the main roads, the ones everybody travels to get to the next city or some oft-visited destination. But each city would also have smaller, lesser-used side or rear exits. The narrow gate would be used only by relatively few who probably lived near it and opened onto a much smaller road or path, perhaps one that led through more difficult terrain. Of course, our towns no longer have gates but we can easily understand the analogy and we can certainly picture the difference between a main expressway and a little dirt road winding up into the hills. Jesus was saying that in life:

1. there is a wide gate onto a broad road leading to eternal destruction There is a route of life that the majority of people in the world choose to follow. It is a self-centered route; they follow their own desires and make their own decisions and live their own way and do what they think is best for them. The gate is wide since so many go through it and

it's an easy road to travel on because it comes naturally. But if you follow this route, out there at the end of life when you get to the destination, you discover that the road leads to destruction, and Jesus wasn't simply talking about the fact that you die and find that your life was wasted and meaningless and has nothing of eternal value to show for it (though that is true); He was talking about eternal destruction in hell. It's easy to be lost forever; you don't have to do anything. Just let yourself be swept along by the mass of humanity all around you and live the way they do. Follow the broad easy road, until you drive right off the cliff at the end! But there is another route, Jesus said:

2. there is a narrow gate onto a difficult road leading to eternal life That route is actually Jesus Himself; He said *I am the way...* - Jn. 14:6, that is, the road that leads to the Father's House, the ONLY road that leads there. The gate is narrow; only one person at a time can squeeze through by coming to Jesus and placing their trust in Him. And the road of life that gate leads to is difficult. It goes up steep hills and through narrow passages between rocks. When we go hunting in the fall in the mountains of Cameron County PA, we drive the little dirt roads that wind up to the top of the mountain. It's so steep that the road switches back and forth and is only one vehicle wide. There's no winter maintenance and in snowy weather it's a tough road to stay on! If you were walking it, you'd be exhausted by the time you reached the top. The narrow road of following Jesus is like that. It involves suffering and toil and leads into all kinds of difficult circumstances if we live in obedience to Him and follow what He told us. But when we get to the end of the road and death claims us, we find that it has led us to the Father's House, to life that is truly life in the Kingdom of God and therefore, Jesus exhorted us that:

3. we must choose to enter the narrow gate! We must choose Him! We must choose to love Him and follow Him and obey Him and live our life according to His commands, according to all the things He has just taught us in this sermon!

Now of course this is a warning to be saved, to trust Christ as Savior, but it is more than that. It is a lesson to us who have already entered the narrow gate. First of all, we are going to be a minority. Comparatively few are going to enter this way with us and we should be prepared for that. We are always going to be swimming against the tide of the human race that surrounds us as they rush down the broad road. And that is going to make us not merely unpopular, but despised and opposed and rejected and even persecuted, just as Jesus was. He told His disciples in 16:24, *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*. The narrow road is a hard road, a difficult road, a road that involves suffering and sacrifice and maybe even death; it is the way of the cross, but take heart, the way of the cross leads home! Then Jesus went on in verses (15-23) to His second analogy. He said:

II. There Are Two Kinds Of Prophets To Follow (15) A prophet is someone who speaks for God, who receives a message from God to be delivered to His people. Jesus knew He was leaving and that His people were going to need leaders to show them the road, pastors and teachers and prophets who would continue to bring them His instructions. True prophets are absolutely necessary to His people in this world to keep them walking on that narrow route. But here:

1. Jesus warned us to beware of false prophets A false prophet is someone whose claim to speak for God is not true; he or she really doesn't speak God's message and so, if you believe what they say, you will be led astray off the path. Peter later said it like this, speaking of Israel, *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.* - 2 Pet. 2:1-2. He is not talking about the enemies of Christianity, which we've always had. He's talking about people that arise from within our own ranks!

a. they come to us clothed in outward appearance as sheep They claim to be and seem to be one of us, Christ's sheep. They look just like us. They go about doing much good, telling people to love each other, concerned about world peace, wanting social justice, concerned for the helpless and the downtrodden. The words *false prophet* always bring to mind some evil charlatan who is putting on a fake front while stealing money out of the account or sleeping with the women who were serving at the tent of meeting, like Eli's priestly sons did. But most false prophets are not that way; most are really nice people, good people. Where do you find them? They pastor some of our churches; they teach in many of our colleges and seminaries; they are respected leaders in our community and they are very sincere. But:

b. their hidden inner nature is that of sheep-destroyers, wolves who actually destroy people by leading them away from the narrow gate, by keeping them on that broad road that leads to destruction. Their ravenous inner hunger is that they are eager in their own eyes to help people understand their so-called version of "truth". They go out of their way to do what in their eyes is serving and helping people, but in reality, is leading them astray to their doom! It may help you understand more of what I'm talking about if we skip ahead to verse 21 where:

2. Jesus explained that many of these are self-deluded (21-23) Notice the word *prophesy* that connects the thought. He's still talking about those who are leaders, who do the very things that He sent out His own trained disciples to do, and saying that they actually believe they ARE His disciples. In fact, He says:

a. they will do many powerful things in His Name They will preach in His Name. They will even cast out demons using His Name and do miracles acting in His Name. Somehow these folks will even display supernatural power at

times, albeit they get their power from a different source. Satan is always quick to empower those who lead folks astray; witch doctors and shamans have known that for centuries and preyed on people with their powers. But here these people are, just like Simon the magician, right there among the Christians wanting the very power of God and thinking they are seeing it. Look at what they say in verse 22; they call Jesus Lord:

b. they believe that they are serving Him and expect to enter heaven They pray; they speak in His Name; they devote their lives to what they think is His cause and fully expect that when they come to the end of the road, that He will welcome them with open arms, but:

c. in reality He does not KNOW them They have no genuine personal relationship with Christ because they are not trusting in Him alone and what He did at the cross to save them. So, Jesus says that **what they are doing is evil**, because they are leading people astray and keeping them from eternal life. Therefore:

d. they will be eternally separated from Him Why? Verse 21 says, **because they don't do His Father's will**. Saying, *Lord, Lord*, is not enough. Prophesying and even doing miracles in His Name is not enough. Those who enter the Kingdom are those who do the will of the Father, who obey Him and enter the narrow gate and live their lives on the narrow road. The character and the nature of a person's life is dramatically changed by an encounter with Jesus and that change is the proof that they know Him!

Now, who on earth exactly am I talking about? Let me give you some examples. The Pharisees of Jesus' day were certainly the first target in the center of Jesus' sights. They claimed to speak for God as they taught and made followers of themselves, but were leading people straight to hell, as sincere and as godly as they appeared. They even had some among them who practiced the casting out of demons! The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons who knock on your door are extremely sincere. They believe they have the real truth Jesus came to declare and genuinely want to help you. They look just like us and do all the same things we do, but by leading people away from trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, they are actually wolves! Every seminary professor that I had in the institution I went to was kind and caring and prayerful and sincerely thought that the heresy he or she was teaching was truth and that people were being ministered to, but I don't think that one of them was genuinely saved, and in reality, they were keeping people from being saved by leading them away from the faith once for all delivered to the saints. It was an enigma to me at first; I didn't know what to do with it. How could a person SEEM so good and religious and yet deny the inerrancy of the Bible and the miracles it tells us of, deny that Jesus was actually God and say He didn't literally rise from the dead and heaven and hell are just ancient myths? It was so confusing, until the Holy Spirit simply opened my eyes to see that not everyone who says *Lord, Lord* is real. If they don't do the will of the Father, they are not the real thing, no matter how like us they appear. The religion professors in the college I attended were the same; I saw student after student who came there with faith out of a local church like this one, go out believing that the faith of his childhood was a myth held by uneducated people who didn't know any better. There are thousands of liberal pastors in every town and city, chaplains in hospitals and prisons, who claim to love God but in actuality are driving people away from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that would change their lives. These are nice, kind, even beloved, people but according to Jesus, they are FALSE PROPHETS and false prophets are extremely dangerous! That's why:

3. Jesus told us how to recognize false prophets Now go back to verses (16-20). *By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. - Lk. 6:43-45*

a. we recognize them by their fruits Everybody knows you tell a tree by its fruit. Personally, I have a hard time identifying trees by bark and leaves, but if I see a tree with apples or acorns on it, I have no problem; it is a visible giveaway. Thistle bushes don't have figs; they have stickers. Thornbushes don't have grapes, they have thorns. And prophets have fruit too. Our immediate thought is that *good fruit* means *good deeds*, but that is not so. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses do multitudes of good deeds, but they still don't trust in Jesus Christ and lead people to Him. So, what really is fruit? The key is in verse 21. It is not those who say "Lord, lord" but those **whose lives reflect the will of God** who truly know Him. Fortunately, in our Bible we have an objective standard by which to measure the will of God, and the message of the Bible is that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation and that God wants everyone to come to Him and walk that narrow way! So, the fruit of a prophet is, in essence, the effect that their message has on people's lives; does it bring people to trust in Christ for salvation or does it keep them from coming to Him? That's the test. You see:

b. fruit always matches the true identity of the tree If the tree has apples, it is not a thornbush; it's an apple tree. If the prophet is bringing people to true faith in Christ and they are growing and demonstrating real spiritual life as measured by the Scriptures, then he's true. But if the tree has thorns on it, no matter how much it looks like an apple tree, it is still a thorn tree. If the real result of the prophet's message is that people don't actually become Christ-followers but follow something that is non-scriptural instead, then he or she is false. **That is as unalterable** as the laws of nature. And the sad fact is that:

c. prophets who produce bad fruit are burned forever, just like thornbushes and thistle plants are cut down and dug out of the field, piled up and burned. How sad to imagine the shock of realizing that in all their years of sincerely calling “Lord, Lord” they were deluded and wrong and missed the narrow gate to life.

The warning here to us, folks, is to be careful not to be deceived and led astray from true Biblical faith by people like the Pharisees and so many who have followed in their footsteps through the centuries, ...*having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*. As Paul told Timothy, *Avoid such people*. - 2 Tim. 3:5. Then finally, Jesus explained that:

III. There Are Two Types Of Foundations On Which To Build Life (24-27) This parable is so familiar that we often overlook its meaning. One man builds a house and he digs down and finds bedrock and builds on it. Another simply builds on the dirt (which in most of Israel is largely sand) without a sure foundation. And the analogy in life is that:

1. hearing Jesus’ words and DOING them is a sure foundation He’s talking about the words He’s just spoken over these three chapters. Hearing them is wonderful, but DOING them is what counts. Doing them is living out the Father’s will. Spending our life doing what Jesus has told us to do is to build everything we do in life on a foundation that cannot move. But:

2. hearing Jesus’ words and IGNORING them guarantees certain disaster You see, a day of testing is coming, a day when there is a storm and the creek rises and the wind blows, a day when the house on the rock survives while the house on the sand is washed away.

I grew up living alongside the Quittapahilla Creek in Annville Pennsylvania. Our house was old, and not much to look at; my dad built out over an old cottage by the stream. But it was built against the side of a hill and if you went down in the cellar, you could see sections where huge limestone slabs were still sticking through the cement. It was cemented right to the rock. Across from us was a beautiful flat acre of property on a plain on the inside of the curve of the creek. A wealthy doctor and his wife built a lovely new ranch home there and for years enjoyed it very much. But in 1972 Hurricane Agnes blew through southeast Pennsylvania and dropped 12 inches of rain in a day and a half. The creek rose out of its banks, 17 feet straight up. The angry water broke our back cellar wall and flowed right through our basement and out through the wooden garage doors which floated up like piers. Our whole bottom level and 3 feet of our living area on top were under water. But across the creek the plain became a flood plain and the ranch house found itself squarely in the middle of the raging flood up to its roof peak. When the waters finally receded, our rickety old house still stood, albeit covered with mud, but the new house on the plain had crumbled to ruins. How could that be? Our house was not nearly as well built as its neighbor, but its foundation was on the rock. One day when we reach the end of the road of life, there is a storm coming. Paul said, there is only one foundation on which to build your life and that is Jesus Christ. If you haven’t built on that foundation, if you haven’t given yourself to Jesus Christ, if you don’t KNOW Him, you’ll be swept away, not by water, but by fire. However, Paul also warned us who are believers in 1 Cor. 3:11-15, that how we build on that foundation is also subject to a test. If we really follow Christ and obey Him and live His way, what we have built will last. But if we invest our lives in things that are self-centered and not His will, all those things will burn up like so much wood, hay and stubble and we’ll be left with only the foundation. The warning here for us is that we can be just as deceived as these false prophets are into thinking that we are living a God-pleasing Christian life, when in reality we are living selfishly and doing nothing to build the kingdom. Let’s build our lives right. And notice at the end:

IV. The Authority Of Jesus That Amazes His Hearers (28-29) He didn’t mince words; He didn’t cite references and quote famous teachers. He said, “This is the way IT IS!” He taught with the authority of God Himself. This message may, indeed, seem strong; you may be amazed at the audacity of declaring that there is only one way and everyone else will be lost, but the content of what we’ve studied is from God. This IS the way it is! There is one route, one fruit, and one foundation. It IS all about Him. Choose Him.

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The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Authority Of The King - Mt. 8-10

To Heal Disease - 8:1-17

Chapters 8-10 of Matthew form a unit and there is one key word that keeps coming up throughout them, the word *authority*. In these chapters, Jesus is demonstrating His authority as the King or, to say it another way, he is proving that He IS King by demonstrating His authority over ALL things, authority to heal disease, to rule nature, to command demons, to forgive sins, and to control lives. So, let’s begin by trying to understand:

I. The Meaning of Authority The preface to this section is **7:28-29**. The teaching that people were used to hearing in Jesus’ day was from the scribes, the teachers of the law. And their method was to explain things by quoting others, “Rabbi So and So said...”, “Our wise men say...”, always appealing to the authority of someone else. It had been over 400 years since there had been a prophet who said, *Thus says the LORD!*, who claimed to speak directly with the authority of God. But Jesus went a step further; repeatedly He said, *Truly, truly I say to you....* He spoke as one who Himself had the very

authority of God! No wonder the people were amazed! He claimed to speak as God. But their real amazement came, not just from the way that He spoke, but from the fact that when He spoke, whatever He commanded to happen happened. The sick were healed, demons were cast out and storms ceased. His words carried the authority of God. In chapter 8 we meet a Roman centurion and he apparently had a very clear understanding of authority. Look at **8:9**. Authority is understood by people who are in the military.

1. authority is the right to command obedience A captain has the right to command the soldiers under him and they must obey. A general has the right to command ALL those under his rank and they must obey. Our president is Commander in Chief and our entire military must obey whatever he commands, because they are under his authority. Well, Jesus is commander in chief, King of the entire universe, and He has the right to command obedience from any and all of it. However, authority is more than just the right to give commands:

2. true authority implies having the power to enforce that right If the soldier doesn't obey the commanding officer, the MP's come and throw him in the brig. If it is a serious enough infraction, he is court-martialed and discharged or if a crime, he may be imprisoned or even sentenced to death for treason. The right to command comes with the power to enforce the command, to make it happen. That's a major reason why soldiers obey authority; they know that authority is not just words; it comes with power. Well, look at:

3. the extent of Jesus' authority - Mt. 28:18 *ALL authority* is given to Him, both in heaven and on earth! He has both the right to command and the power to enforce His will over everything in heaven and on earth. That means that:

a. all objects, animate and inanimate, obey His will When He commands the wind and the waves, *Peace! Be still!*, they stop immediately. When He commands a fig tree to wither and die, it dries up. He commanded the ravens to bring food to Elijah and a vine to grow up over Jonah outside Nineveh and a worm to eat that vine. He spoke and the world came into existence. He formed the mountains and He said to the seas, "Come this far and no further" and they obeyed. Hebrews says that Jesus sustains all things by His powerful word. Everything in the natural world from the stones to the stars, from the demons to the angels, obeys His every command. They have to. The power behind His authority compels them to. It also means that:

b. all events and circumstances obey His will The birth stories are full of it. Barren Elizabeth becomes pregnant at His Word and a virgin conceives a child. The Roman Emperor commands a census that brings Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. A star sends wise men from Persia on a quest to see the newborn king and they arrive at just the right time. The star reappears and leads them to Bethlehem. Then Herod dies, so Joseph can bring his family back from Egypt to Nazareth. Everything happens under His authority, everything, even the evil things. The very slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem after Jesus' birth fulfills the prophecy of Jer. 31:15, given 600 years earlier. Even the evil things that happen fall somehow into His plan and under His authority. And, as King, He doesn't have to explain His reasons to us; He simply expects us to trust that He is good and is working all things together for His good purpose. But you see, He has made one exception in all the universe. To human beings alone, He has given the temporary privilege to choose whether to submit to His authority and obey it or not. I say temporary because:

c. all people will ultimately obey His will One day at the Name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess His authority, whether they're in heaven, on the earth or under the earth in hell! But now while we're alive and before He returns, we alone of all things get the freedom to choose; it's the only way for Him to get what He wants most, people who love Him freely of their own accord. But, if the whole universe immediately responds to His every word, does it not follow that we should also? Who are we to think that we should do anything less than the very rocks who stand ready to cry out His praise at His command?

THAT is what Jesus' miracles were all about. In verses 1-8 of chapter 8 we see Jesus demonstrate His authority as King in an area which touches all of our lives. We have:

II. Three Demonstrations of Jesus' Authority To Heal Disease Sickness is something that touches all of our lives. It is an experience we all have personally in some way or another, but for many of us it comes to play a major role in our lives or the lives of those we love. Every week there is a long list of names of people connected to our little congregation who are engaged in serious physical struggles and we are praying for their healing, despite them having the best medical care that exists in the world. You can only imagine how much fear people have of illness in the huge portions of the world where there is only limited or no medical care at all, where people live in conditions much like those of Jesus' day and to get sick, even with a simple infection, could easily mean death. It is when you strip away that sense of "safety" that modern medicine has given us who live in the west, that you realize that Jesus is really the One with authority over disease. First, we see that in:

1. the healing of the leper (8:1-4) Just as He finished teaching and came down the hillside, this man with leprosy took a deep risk and violated societal law by running up and kneeling at His feet. He should have stayed at a far distance and covered his lip and cried, "I am unclean, help me!" And the first thing Jesus did was to reach out his hand and touch the man. You see:

a. healing displays Jesus' compassion Nobody had touched that man, probably for a very long time, not his wife, not his children, no one. He lived apart from them somewhere. He was isolated; people avoided him at all costs be-

cause he was unclean and unclean things can't be touched! Jesus could simply have said, *Go and show yourself to the priests...* as He did with the ten lepers who came to him later. But he didn't. He touched him *before* He healed him! Why? For one thing it shows His compassion for those who suffer from disease. Listen, the fact that you or a loved one have a disease is not some curse from God; it is not some sign of His judgment or disfavor. In the midst of that sickness, He loves you; He cares about you; He will touch you; He will commune with you and draw you into intimate closeness in the midst of your suffering, if you will let Him, if you will come and kneel at His feet and ask. Then notice that this leper believed something very important:

b. healing depends on Jesus' will He said, *If you are willing...* In saying that, He recognized Jesus' authority. To him, it was not a question of Jesus' ABILITY to heal, but of Jesus' WILL. He acknowledged His right as a Sovereign to heal or not to heal as HE wills. Of course, by approaching Him, he was risking everything, betting that Jesus was willing. And indeed:

(1) it is often Jesus' will to heal How many of you have ever been sick in your life? And how many of you are well today? Most of us have been sick dozens of times in our lives and were healed. That was God! The fact that your flesh knits itself back together after it's been cut, that's God! I would guess that a great many of us have had some life-threatening issue at some point, a burst appendix, a heart attack, something that would have killed you 200 years ago but you're sitting here. That's not just medicine; that's God. In fact, the majority of the times that we get sick, Jesus heals us, just as in this case He was willing. But that is not always the case:

(2) it is not always Jesus' will to heal If it were, there would be no sick people in the world. Then Paul would not have had to continue to live with his thorn in the flesh for years after praying about it three times; he wouldn't have had to leave Trophimus sick in Miletus, and Epaphroditus would not have nearly died of an illness delivering the Philippians' gift to him at Rome. As we come to pray about our sicknesses or those of others, we ought to come like this man, humbly kneeling before Jesus, recognizing that He is Lord over sickness and what matters the most is His will, and sometimes He would rather take us or our loved one home! But when He does heal, it's evident from this encounter that:

c. Jesus does not wish to glamorize healing He said, *Say nothing to anyone...* Why? Because as soon as desperate people hear that there is healing to be had, they flock to the place, not because they want to meet a loving, compassionate King and submit to Him, but because they want out of their misery. Jesus never organized a healing crusade or set up a miracle campaign. Even though Jesus healed thousands like this man, miraculously, and still does today, healing itself is never the point or the object of any of it. Rather:

d. Jesus uses miraculous healing to witness to His identity If this man went to the priests with an offering claiming to be a healed leper, they would have to investigate and would find out the truth. Never in all of the history of Israel do we read that a leper was healed, ever, except in the case of Naaman the Syrian who was healed by a direct miracle from God. Not even among all the sick people Jesus healed early in His ministry do we read that there was a leper. This was thought to be an impossible case. When Jesus said, *I will; be clean!*, He was exercising the authority and the power of God. Investigation would prove that He had done the impossible and that He was who He claimed to be, the King! What we call "normal" healing, He grants all the time, but miraculous healing He often does to prove to those trapped in darkness that He is the true God!

On our trip to India, we met an older man named Luke. Luke was a Hindu who used to play drums and dance at the festivals in the Hindu temples. He also practiced fortunetelling and acted as a witch doctor, but his wife had an issue of constant bleeding for 10 years. They visited many doctors and spent a lot of money but there was no help. Then one day Luke passed by an open-air meeting and heard a man preach on Mt. 11:28, *Come unto ME all you who labor and are heavy laden...* and at the end he asked him to pray for his wife's healing. On Christmas day 1991 he attended a church service for the first time and three days later his wife was miraculously healed. He gave up all his former practices and became a faithful member of the church. Today he is an evangelist reaching village after village with the good news that Jesus is the True God and our church helps support him! That's why Jesus does miracles of healing, not so we can get what we want, but so that HE can get what HE deserves, the worship of people who don't know who He really is! In the next portion we read about:

2. the healing of the centurion's servant (8:5-13) This man is not even a Jew; he's a centurion, an officer in the Roman army and commander of a hundred soldiers. In the parallel account in Luke 7, Luke reveals that the centurion did not even feel worthy come to Jesus personally, but rather he sent some of the Jewish elders to implore Jesus on his behalf, and they did it because he obviously cared about their people so much. At any rate, he has heard the reports about Jesus and sends the messengers back to tell Jesus that it is not even necessary for Him to come to his house. He has come to the conclusion that:

a. Jesus' healing power depends on His word alone The sick man doesn't have to hear Him give the command nor does Jesus have to physically touch him. In fact, the sick man doesn't have to believe in Jesus at all or even know that Jesus gave the command. Jesus' authority works like his own does, only it is obviously far greater. A command given to anyone under his authority is instantly followed because He speaks with the authority of the

Emperor. But Jesus speaks with the authority of God Himself and all things, even sickness, must instantly obey His command! Thus, this soldier shows us that:

b. true faith is believing the authority of Jesus' word, that whatever Jesus says, WILL happen, no matter how impossible it may seem. So many well-meaning preachers and teachers today tell you, "Believe that you are healed and it will be done!" In other words, the more you believe that Jesus IS going to do this to you, that's what makes Him do it! Faith becomes, in that sense, a good work, a good deed, something you hold up to God and expect Him to credit to your account. Then, if you're not healed, they guilt you with, "You didn't have enough faith!" Don't ever buy that! The faith Jesus wants and commends is simply believing that He has complete authority and whatever He chooses will happen! If He wants you to be healed, you will be! Now Jesus was surprised at hearing this kind of faith coming, not from a Jew who might be expected to understand this, but from a non-Jew, and He took that opportunity to make a statement:

c. Jesus declared that some from all peoples will share in His Kingdom The Jews thought it would be just them, but Jesus repeatedly throughout His ministry declared that all nations are part of His plan. This centurion was among the first of many, of many millions, of billions, including us, from all over the world, who will share the joys of His Kingdom! Now finally in the third portion of this section we read about:

3. the healing of many people at Peter's house (8:14-16) Not only was Peter's mother-in-law healed but many came to be healed and helped. And He drove out the demons with a word in every case and He healed all the sick who came, regardless of what was wrong with them. You see:

a. Jesus' authority extends to all sickness, to every kind. Through the course of his ministry Jesus healed blindness, leprosy, paralysis, hemorrhaging, lameness and more. It extended **even to demon oppression**. The very demons obeyed His authority. His authority doesn't apply now and again, in this case but not that one, for this person but not that one. It is universal. In every case, He is in charge and His will will be done in the end! But there is one last very important thing that Luke points out:

b. Jesus' healing ministry was prophesied in the Word (17) Matthew says that Jesus' healing of the crowds fulfills **Is. 53:4**, *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...* And I want to be sure you understand what he means because:

(1) healing is not guaranteed in the atonement as some teach Many Pentecostals and healing evangelists quote this verse, attempting to prove that when Jesus died on the cross, He bought healing for us as well as salvation, so that we can claim healing, so that it is for everyone in every case, just the way salvation is for all. But that is not what Matthew is saying. He is saying that:

(2) Jesus' healing ministry identified Him as the Messiah He says that these verses were fulfilled during His life, not through His death. If you read the context in Isaiah 52, the prophet is saying, "We should have seen; we should have known. He healed our diseases and we should have recognized Him, but we didn't." In **11:2-5** Matthew records what happened when John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Jesus "Are you the One?" What was His answer? *Go tell John the lame walk and the blind see and the deaf hear and the lepers are cleansed and the dead are raised!* Every time Jesus healed another person, He proved that He was the Messiah, the Promised One, because He was doing what Messiah was to do! And He is still proving Himself to be the true and living God today by performing miracles of healing, here and all over the world.

So, Jesus has all authority to heal disease, unquestionably, and has demonstrated it time and again. But what's the bottom line? How do I pray when I myself or someone I love is suffering from disease? Well, *the Norwegian theologian Ole Hallesby said we should pray something like this: "Lord, if it will be to Your glory, heal suddenly. If it will glorify You more, heal gradually; if it will glorify You even more, may your servant remain sick awhile; and if it will glorify Your name still more, take him to Yourself in heaven."* That sounds a bit cold and unemotional, but it makes an important point. Our lives are not about us and about getting what we want. Ultimately, they are about His glory and, in everything, even in sickness, our response is to yield to His will and trust Him.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Authority Of The King - Mt. 8-10

Over The Natural And Supernatural - 8:18-34

In chapters 8-10 of Matthew, Jesus is demonstrating His authority over all things. Last week in the first half of chapter 8 we saw Him demonstrating His authority as God the Son to heal disease. Now, in the second half, He demonstrates that He is not only Lord over sickness, but also over people's lives, over the very forces of nature, and over the spirit world. What we see is that the same authority that the centurion said that Jesus had, the authority to command and to have His will be done, belongs to Jesus in each of these three areas. The first thing we see is:

I. His Authority Over People's Lives (18-22) We forget sometimes just how many people did follow Jesus about as disciples during His ministry. There were many more than the Twelve. Sometime later we're told that Jesus sent out 70 in teams of two to preach the Kingdom of God. There were 120 in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost and they were all people who had followed Jesus. Paul tells us that more than 500 of His followers were gathered in one location at one point and the resurrected Christ appeared to them. Here in our text, Jesus is on His way down to the shore of the Sea of Galilee to get into a boat to cross it and get away from the crowds, but before He reaches it, two men come to Him, ostensibly to follow Him as disciples, however, each of them had an obstacle which stood in the way of their following Jesus. And we are not told whether these two ever did follow Him or not! I have always thought that they turned back, but it is possible that they didn't. They may indeed have overcome their obstacles and become true followers, however, the point of application for us is that these two incidents tell us something about the authority that Christ claims over the lives of people. In the first case, Christ claims that His authority:

1. it supersedes earthly comforts (18-20) This man was literally a scribe, a man who was used to a quiet room with a candle, pouring over scrolls and carefully copying them. He was used to standing up and reading the Scriptures and explaining them in the local synagogue. And here he is, making the offer to leave home and follow Jesus about, wherever he goes. One would think that's a good thing. So why did Jesus respond in what seems like a discouraging fashion? Evidently, because he knew what was in this man's mind. The scribe calls Him *Teacher*. He's been deeply touched by the explanation of the Scriptures Jesus has just given on the mount. John Gill comments, *The preaching of Christ had riveted and charmed him; his heart had swelled; his enthusiasm had been kindled; and in this state of mind, he will go anywhere with Him, and feels impelled to tell Him so. "Wilt thou?" replies the Lord Jesus. "Knowest thou whom thou art pledging thyself to follow, and whither haply He may lead thee? No warm home, no downy pillow has He for thee: He has them not for Himself. The foxes are not without their holes, nor do the birds of the air lack their nests; but the Son of man has to depend on the hospitality of others, and borrow the pillow whereon He lays His head."* Jesus knew this man hadn't counted the cost; he hadn't thought about the life change it would mean. Jesus was saying, "If you follow Me, you'll have to give up the nice quiet comfortable life you have; I don't have a house to come home to and you won't either; we stay in others' homes and sleep in the open when we're on the road. Are you willing to give up all this for Me?" His answer is not recorded, but that question is for us as well. On another occasion, Jesus declared openly, *In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. - Lk. 14:33.* Like this man, we say we want to follow Jesus, but in reality, often our deeper expectation is that Jesus should give us a nice comfortable life like we're used to, that He should provide for us the things that we expect. And if we follow Him and lose our job or our house or struggle financially, we are prone to think He isn't keeping up His end of the bargain! Listen, Jesus claims authority to control our lives completely, to lead us into any circumstances that He chooses, even into suffering, for His glory! His authority supersedes our desire for earthly comforts and what's more:

2. it supersedes earthly relationships (19-22) Now if this man's father were lying dead and ready for burial, do you honestly think Jesus would have denied him that privilege? In that culture they buried people the same day, so if his father had died, this man wouldn't have been out in a crowd somewhere listening to Jesus teach, but home in the midst of the funeral already! And if his father was an invalid near death and with no one else to care for him, would Jesus tell him to forget that responsibility? He meant that he wanted to stay where he was and continue to be with his father until he died, (probably to ensure that he would receive his inheritance) and THEN go and follow Jesus. He didn't want to let go of Dad until he absolutely had to. Jesus said, "No, let that kind of earthly thinking for those who are spiritually dead; you come follow me! I am more important than your father!" In fact, it is more important to follow Christ than to cling to any earthly relationship. In 10:37-38, Jesus said, *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* Loving Jesus and doing what He wants us to do supersedes our loyalty to any other person we hold dear; He is Lord! And yet, how many who claim to follow Him won't go into ministry or to the mission field because of father or mother or children, even when they know Christ is calling them. We don't know what this man did, but what we do know is that:

Jesus clearly claims complete authority over the lives of His own followers! Steve Richardson of Pioneers was challenging people to follow Jesus to the unengaged peoples of the world, the ones that nobody is even TRYING to reach and he wrote, *Who will learn their complex and difficult languages? Who will labor in difficult, often primitive conditions, partnering with nearby groups to reach these unengaged before it is too late? Who is willing to spend years helping to reach remote ravines in Southwestern China, nomadic peoples of the Sahara or desert tribes of Chad, or swampy areas of Papua New Guinea? I have seen firsthand the challenges and rewards of such a life. It's an extraordinary privilege. I can imagine no greater joy than to see people brought out of darkness, conflict and fear into the peace and joy found in Christ and his cross. [Mission Frontiers, Jan/Feb 2012, P. 11].* Following Jesus means being willing to leave the earthly comforts you enjoy, being willing to leave behind the loved ones you cherish, if He calls you to do that, in order to serve His greater purpose! He has complete authority to control your life, but by grace He allows you the rare privilege to choose whether to obey that authority. Now Jesus and the disciples finally get to the shore, and in the second scene in our text, we see:

II. His Authority Over Nature (23-27) Jesus said He didn't have any place to lay His head, so this night He used a boat! And while He was sleeping soundly, a violent storm came up, so violent that it began to actually swamp the boat. They

were taking on water and the disciples, several of whom were experienced fishermen who made their living on this lake, became so afraid that they woke Jesus and said, *Lord, save us! We are about to die!* It must have really been bad, but Mark says, *He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.* He actually spoke directly to the wind and to the waves and commanded them to stop and they did. Nobody had ever seen anything like it! No wonder the disciples were astonished and said, *What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?* Simple; this man is God the Son! He is the King!

1. He has complete control over nature He can make the wind stop blowing and the waves stop their crashing on command! Just go down to the beach on a day when the surf is up and let the waves hit you and feel their power. Look outside when there's a violent storm and see the wind and how it breaks the trees. Jesus is in complete control over the incredibly powerful forces of nature that we can't begin to control. The most powerful forces of nature that completely terrify us, obey His every word! And:

2. He arranges it according to His will At this moment He wanted the storm to stop, so He stopped it! His will prevails in all of nature. The droughts and hurricanes and floods and earthquakes of the world are not accidents; they are not merely geologic forces at work. Listen to the Psalmist, *He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.* - Ps. 147:15-18. *Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word!* - Ps. 148:7-8. All the forces of nature do His bidding and He uses them to bring Him glory. He uses them to cause men to be amazed and say, "How great is God that He controls such powerful forces!" But, by way of application, we need to remember what the disciples forgot in their fear:

3. we can trust His control We can rest in the fact that He is the Lord of nature, that He works all things under His authority, even nature, together for His good purpose! Yes, I need to take normal, natural precautions and not be foolhardy, but I don't need to cower in terror when there's a hurricane or a flood. We get afraid because we don't trust Him. Listen, if God wants me to be struck by lightning and die, then He will take me to heaven. If He wants my house to burn up in an out-of-control wildfire, He will provide for me.

As I shared with you previously, in 1972 Hurricane Agnes dumped 12 inches of rain in a day and a half, and the creek beside our home rose 17 feet. Our house was flooded and ruined; when the water went down, it was left with an inch of mud throughout the first floor. We took shelter in the local high school and thought, "How are we going to live?" But we did. We cleaned the house and before many months had passed, every room was remodeled and better than before, with new furniture. The flood that ruined us, blessed us in the end. At the time of the flood, it was raining so hard that I couldn't see as I was trying to get our vehicles out of the long driveway and up to higher ground. So I stuck my glasses in my shirt pocket. However, in all the running, they fell out and if you know me, you know that without glasses I can hardly do anything. But as I lay in the high school gym that night, rueing my loss, someone walked in and said, "Anybody lose a pair of glasses?" In the midst of the fury of the elements, God cared for those glasses, kept them from being swept away or trampled, had someone find them and deliver them directly back to me! It was a miracle, a sign, that said to me, "I am in complete control of this thing!" Jesus is in control of all things, even the most powerful forces of nature and I can trust that they will only do His bidding! Well, when Jesus and the disciples landed on the eastern shore of the lake, they were immediately confronted with another situation, one which gave Jesus the opportunity to display:

III. His Authority Over Demons (28-34) The boat landed in the region of Gadara or Gergesa and as they ascended to a plateau overlooking the sea, they passed through the area of a burial site, a cemetery where they were met by two men. The other Gospels only mention one man, so most probably the one was more prominent and violent than the other. These men were controlled by demons and everyone in the nearby town knew it, but Jesus freed them with a word. Now the first thing we need to talk about is:

1. the reality of demons Modern western culture tends to write off the kind of behavior these men displayed as some form of mental illness or insanity. Simply put, we don't believe in the existence of demons; we rationalize accounts like this, calling them ancient superstitious ways of looking at things. But, my friends, do not be fooled. Demons exist. They are real.

a. they are living personal beings Look again at verse **29** and verse **31**. Jesus talked to them and they answered Him back in a rational, personal, individual way. Demons are spirit beings like angels; in fact, they are angels that fell away from God long ago before creation through following Satan. But they are every bit as real as God is, and every bit as individual and personal as He is. And notice in the text that:

b. they recognize the authority of Jesus Look at the middle of verse **29**. They know who He is; they know that He is the Son of God. None of Jesus' own followers knew that about Him at this point; that had never been said publicly. But they knew it, because they know Him from before creation. And they know what that means. Look at verse **31**. They know He's in charge and they must obey His command. They had to beg Him, to get His permission, before going into the swine. Just like their leader, they can do nothing without His permission. Christ is absolute Lord over the spirit world! And further:

c. they know their own destiny Look again at verse **29**. They insolently said, “Why are you interfering with our work now? Do you plan to torment us, to punish us, before the time?” You see, they know there is coming a day when they and their leader will be cast into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels and be tormented forever. And that is exactly what gives them tremendous motivation to wreak all the havoc they can now, while they are permitted to roam freely, because they know their days are numbered! Now let’s talk about:

2. the reality of demonization You might be interested to know that the term “demon possessed” does not actually occur in the Bible. In the original Greek, people like these men are simply called “demonized ones”. Demons always:

a. they seek to control human beings In this case they actually entered these men’s bodies and took total control over their minds, used their lips to speak their own thoughts, and controlled their actions. Mark tells us that (at least the one man) was able to break chains with supernatural strength and was always cutting himself with stones. They were fierce, that is dangerous, and would attack people; nobody would go down that road. Listen, this is NOT a fairy tale. It’s real. Demons can take complete control over a person under certain circumstances. It happens in Voodoo trances in Haiti as they invite spirits to possess them; it happens in tribal fetish worship in Africa; it happens in the pagan idolatry of India and it happens in Satan worship right here in the United States and even in this very community. I have seen a person rolling on the floor, frothing at the mouth, cursing with a voice not their own, being so strong that it required three or four men to restrain them. And let me tell you, once you’ve seen it, you don’t doubt that it’s real! Here we mostly lock up and sedate people like that, but almost universally outside the western world, people have seen demonization and know clearly what it is. Satan always wants to unseat God, to usurp His authority and obtain complete control over human beings. So, demons are constantly trying to obtain that control over people’s lives, however:

b. they do it in varying ways In these demoniacs, they physically entered and controlled every function and move. But look at verse **34**. The townspeople were just as much under their control, just as much demonized even though none of them became violent and lived among tombs. Why do you think they begged Jesus to leave? Shouldn’t they have rejoiced and begged Him to stay and deliver them from demonic powers? By the way, I don’t think it’s really about their pigs, as many say. If it were, they would have been angry at Jesus and complained about their loss or perhaps have tried to take revenge on Him. But look at them; they’re afraid! They’re just like the natives in many lands who are afraid of what the spirits will do to them if they stop worshipping them and their idols. They want the missionary to go away and not anger the spirits. Their minds are almost as much under the control of the demons as the two who were freed! Demons use many methods to control people. 1 Cor. 10:20 says, *...what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons*. Demons create false systems of worship. The 330 million gods and goddesses worshipped by Hindus are all demons controlling a billion people, demanding their worship and reducing millions of them to squalid poverty through what they are told to believe. 1 Tim. 4:1 says, *...in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*. Demons start false teachings and cults and control people. Demonization does not have to involve seizures and fits of violence; it can parade in the guise of Nazism and cause educated people to commit planned genocide or it can strut the halls of academia under the guise of knowledge-falsely-so-called that says there is no God! Millions of people in our world are demon-controlled and haven’t the faintest clue! But, more personally, demons:

c. they engage us in constant conflict Look with me at **Eph. 6:12**. Demons wrestle against us; they engage us in hand-to-hand combat continually as we try to serve Christ. They attack our minds and plant wrong thoughts in our heads. They tempt us to fall into sin. They try to arrange our harm. They try to influence us to keep and excuse our bad habits, so that we blow up and get angry, so that we disobey God. We are under constant demonic assault, even though most of us don’t realize it and they will control even us to whatever extent we let them. But the good news from this whole incident is:

3. Christ’s authority over demons Despite all their deceptive power and superhuman strength, one thing is clear. They must obey Him! And therefore, we don’t have to live in fear of them or let them have any degree of influence over us as long as we realize two things. First:

a. we must trust Christ’s power - Eph. 6:10 Demons are more powerful than the strongest man by himself. So, we must literally empower ourselves with the strength and might of the Lord. Christ has all authority over demons and the power to enforce that authority. No demon, not a whole legion of them together, is stronger than Him. And we must trust in His power; we must rest secure in the knowledge that He who dwells in us is greater than he that is in the world! To fight in our own strength is to fail. We must trust in His power alone and realize that:

b. we have Christ’s very authority against demons. We too can command them in His Name to depart whenever we sense their presence. Later on, when the seventy that Jesus sent out came back, they said, *Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your Name!* - Lk. 7:17. And they are!

Whenever an evil thought comes into my mind, one that I know isn't something I want to think and surely isn't something God put there, I recognize that it's a demonic suggestion and I command it to leave and it stops! I do that multiple times every day and so must you! Dozens of times in the counseling room I've had people say, "I hear this voice in my mind telling me God will never forgive me" or "I can never change" or "God doesn't love me" or something similar. And I encourage them, "Tell it to leave in Jesus' Name" and they do, and instantly that demonic voice is gone and they're free. I've seen it over and over. And when we were in India, we prayed over dozens and dozens of people with all kinds of problems. But there were at least two occasions when the interpreter told us, "She says she has an evil spirit" and when we stood firm and commanded it to leave in the name of Jesus or prayed for Jesus to cast it out, on each occasion you could see the person nearly fall over as it left and then recover with a big smile on their face, knowing they were free. You've got to see it to appreciate the joy of that freedom! No wonder Luke tells us that this man, freed at last from a legion of devils, wanted to get into the boat and go home with Jesus! But Jesus told him to go to his own home and tell everyone what great things the Lord had done for him and he did! He preached it everywhere. We should do the same. Jesus is Lord of ALL; He has authority over the very forces of nature, over all the power of the enemy and wants us to willingly yield our own lives to His authority!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Authority Of The King - Mt. 8-10

To Forgive Sins - 9:1-17

The last verse of John's gospel tells us that Jesus did many other things which were not recorded, so many that if all were written in books, he supposes the world would not have room for them. So, it is clear that, of the myriad of things which Matthew saw Jesus do and was told of Him doing, he only wrote down for us a few of them. In this three-chapter section, Matthew is recording those things which specifically pointed out the complete authority that Jesus has. We have seen in chapter 8 that Jesus has authority to heal disease, that He has authority over the very forces of nature and the demonic spirits who oppose us, as well as the authority to direct and control our lives. But the truth that we find demonstrated in 9:1-17 is the most precious of all to us. Jesus has not only complete authority to forgive sins, but also the strong desire to do it! Having sailed back home to Capernaum after being rejected at Gadara, Jesus now has three encounters in a row that all speak to this theme of forgiveness. The first is the familiar story of the paralyzed man, and there we are told clearly that:

I. Jesus Has Authority to Forgive Sins (1-8) Matthew shortens the story in order to make his point, while Mark and Luke emphasize how crowded the house was and how the man was lowered through a hole in the roof by his friends. So often we focus on those details and talk about how great their faith was, but Matthew hones in on the real point of this story, which has to do with what Jesus said to the man. He was lying there on his pallet unable to move; it was obvious to everyone what he wanted and needed. Yet instead of healing him immediately, Jesus chose this opportunity to continue His teaching and make a powerful point. In a caring tone, he said to the man, *Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven!* Why did He do that? Luke tells us that in his audience that day there were both Pharisees and scribes or teachers of the Law *who had come from every town of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem*, and evidently some of them had managed to squeeze into the house, so his audience at the moment was not exactly a friendly crowd. Now there were:

1. two basic premises the Jewish leaders held The Jews commonly believed that:

a. sickness is a result of sin In **Jn. 9:2** Jesus' own disciples saw this man who had been blind since birth and asked him, *Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?* They believed that sickness or disease was a judgment sent from God and that it was a result of your sin, or at least of your parents' sins being visited on you. Think about Job; his three friends all tried to prove that he must have sinned horribly because he was suffering so badly. That's the Jewish mindset. The book of Job does teach, however, that that is not the case and so did Jesus. This paralyzed man was not sick because of some awful sin; he was merely a common sinner like all the rest of us are. But as this man is being lowered down through the roof, Jesus knew the Jewish leaders would be thinking, "What sin caused this? What must this man have done to deserve this?" And maybe the paralyzed man himself believed it; maybe he actually thought that his sins must have been great enough to deserve this. So, Jesus addressed the issue head on, by tenderly telling the man, *Son, your sins are forgiven*. Now that brings up the second belief that the Jews held:

b. only God can forgive sins - **Mk. 2:7** tells us exactly what those Jewish leaders were thinking and murmuring. *Who can forgive sins but God alone?* And on this one, they were right. No man can forgive sins. No pastor, no priest, no rabbi, can absolve a man of guilt. Only God can pardon sins! So, Jesus knew that when He said *your sins are forgiven*, the Jews would understand immediately that He was claiming to be God and call it blasphemy. Yet He did it purposefully. There are:

2. two basic claims Jesus proved by this miracle His logic goes like this: "I know you think it's easy to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' because no one can verify whether it's true or not. The effect of the words is not outwardly visible. To you, it seems harder to say, 'Rise up and walk' because, if the person doesn't do it, it proves that you are a fraud.

However, in truth, the forgiveness of sins is a much harder thing; it requires the Cross to make it possible. And actually, BOTH things are things that only God can do! So, I will heal the man in order to prove to you that I can also forgive sins!" You see, Jesus is both claiming and demonstrating that:

a. He is God By offering forgiveness, He is claiming to be God. The Jews thought, "He's obviously a man, so that can't be true". Jesus said, "I can heal the sick with a word; therefore, I am God and therefore, I can forgive sins!" You see, all the miracles Jesus did were done with one purpose, to testify to who He was, to prove visibly that He was no mere man, but rather that He was God come in the flesh. But this miracle also proves that:

b. He has authority to forgive sins He can declare that our sins are forgiven and they ARE! Oh, aren't you glad about that! People all around us are taught by their religious leaders that it is a great presumption to assume that you know that your sins are forgiven. They are taught that you can never be sure. You must wait until you die to find out whether God will forgive your sins and then you'll probably have to suffer some to atone for them. But the Jesus I know forgives sins and He does it without any works or any deeds of penitence on our part. We all come to him just like this helpless paralytic. There's not a thing we can do to get our sins forgiven, except to lay ourselves at His feet. And He has the wonderful authority to forgive us flat out, based simply on His own merit at the cross. Hallelujah! And then, just in case there are those listening who think they can never be forgiven for what they have done, who have given up all hope of getting into heaven, this miracle is Good News! Jesus has the rightful authority to forgive sins, ALL of them, even the worst! *Not long before she died in 1988, in a moment of surprising candor on television, Marghanita Laski, one of England's best-known secular humanists and journalists, said, "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me." [John Stott in The Contemporary Christian].* Hallelujah! We have Somebody to forgive us! We have Somebody who wanted to forgive us so much that He went to a cross and died a horrible death to forgive us! And we have Somebody with the very authority of God Himself to declare us forgiven! What a privilege! No wonder the crowd was awestruck and glorified God who had given such authority to a Man, to Jesus! We should be too! Now moving on to the second encounter, we learn that:

II. Jesus Has Authority to Seek Sinners in verses (9-13) What we read about here are really:

1. two acts which offended the Jewish leaders First of all:

a. Jesus called Matthew, a publican, to follow Him (9) Here Matthew for the first time mentions himself in his own record. Mark and Luke call him Levi on this occasion, though they call him Matthew in their lists of the 12 disciples. So, he probably had two names, Levi Matthew, and he was a publican, that is, a tax collector for the Roman government. The Jews counted all publicans as defiled, because of their constant contact with Gentiles and as sinners, because they cheated people more often than not and because they were traitors to their own country. No Pharisee could become a publican for a living; he would be immediately thrown out and disfellowshipped from the group and probably the synagogue. Plus, Matthew was no ordinary low-brow publican. He was a *mokhes*, a customs-house official, the most hated type. His booth was by the shore of Galilee and he no doubt collected taxes from the fishing boats on their catch. No Jewish Rabbi would ever call Matthew to become a disciple and, if he did, most people would not accept him even though he gave up his publican life entirely! Does anything about that sound vaguely familiar? I've known Christians who feel that pretty much the same way about people who are living a life of sin! But Jesus shocked everyone by publicly calling Matthew to follow Him, and then He went even further:

b. Jesus ate with Matthew's guests who were "sinners" (10-11) Matthew was so thrilled with Christ that he wanted all his friends (who obviously were publicans and other types of "sinners") to a dinner at his house so they could meet Him. He wanted them to experience the love and acceptance that Jesus had given Him! But again, no religious Jew would ever do that! To be forced to hand money to a sinner was bad enough, but to eat with them was too much! To show any care, any concern, any desire for relationship, was defiling. After all, it is more important that I be clean, is it not? Well, I have no idea how or why any Pharisees got in to this dinner, but some did. I imagine they just observed (they surely didn't eat!), but they gave Jesus' disciples a hard time, probably hoping to discredit Jesus in their eyes. But Jesus heard them and gave them a short lecture and in that lecture are:

2. two facts which comfort our own hearts, just as much as they must have Matthew's or his friends'. (12-13) First of all, isn't it wonderful that:

a. Jesus knows that sinners are the ones who need help In fact, He specifically seeks them out. He is not looking for people who are healthy or who put on the appearance of being healthy. He is a spiritual doctor at heart, one whose heart looks for people who need His mercy and help. That's where God's heart is. Jesus quotes Hos. 6:6 and challenges them, "Go and look it up, God says *I desire mercy and not sacrifice!* Mercy, caring for the plight of others, is more important to God than the offering of sacrifices, than the carrying out of religious actions!" Hallelujah! Jesus knows that all of us are lost without Him, that if He didn't seek us out, we'd never have come to Him! So, the good news is that:

b. Jesus came to call sinners to follow Him Paul said, *Christ died for the ungodly*. Praise the Lord, that's me! *While we were yet sinners Christ died for us*. Praise the Lord, that's me! How glorious it must have felt to Matthew,

for the first time in his life, to hear from somebody that God actually wanted him! All his life he had been told that God hated him and all people like him. No wonder he left everything follow Jesus! Friends, Jesus has the authority to seek sinners; in fact, that's what He's about, offering mercy rather than demanding some sacrifice, calling sinners to become worshippers and followers. And there are people all over the world, sinners who need to hear the Good News that Jesus is calling them to be part of His kingdom! Religious people will probably give you a hard time if you join Jesus in seeking them, but that's alright, Jesus' authority is greater than theirs!

And still this day was not over. Some of John the Baptist's disciples are there at this same feast somehow and they are not upset about who He's partying with, but rather about the fact that He's partying in the first place! And in this third encounter, we learn that:

III. Jesus Has Authority to Change Traditions (14-17) John the Baptist is in prison at this point, but his followers are still maintaining loyalty to him and to one another, and they want to know why they and also the Pharisees follow the Jewish religious tradition that had been passed down from their elders for generations of fasting twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays, and yet, here are Jesus and his disciples feasting (probably on a Monday or Thursday!) In fact, Jesus never followed this tradition of fasting at all during His ministry, and these "religious" folks wanted to know why. And in reply we have:

1. three parables in Jesus' explanation First He uses the analogy of:

a. the wedding feast (14-15) He says that not only this dinner, but in fact His whole ministry, is like a wedding banquet and the people are His invited guests. As long as the bridegroom is there at the celebration with them, it's a glad occasion, so they won't mourn or be sad. They don't fast because it's not appropriate! Rather they feast and celebrate His presence! But later, when the bridegroom is taken away, then there will be sadness and fasting and in saying that, He was implying the sadness that His followers would endure later after His death and how they would fast and pray. In other words, something that is merely a tradition, a religious habit, should not be followed just to impress God with the fact that we do it or simply because it's a habit we're used to. Whatever we do as an expression of our love to God should have genuine meaning and purpose and be done on an occasion that is appropriate. We could apply that to lots of things like praying, Bible reading, churchgoing, giving, or any of the "religious habits" that we have. All of these are good and wonderful things in themselves, but when they become empty, insincere actions that we follow simply as a routine or merely to impress God with the fact that we're "religious", then they lose their value altogether. In Isaiah's day, the lost, but religious, people in Judah fasted regularly yet their lives revealed the sin that was really in their hearts, so through Isaiah God said, *Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?* - 58:5-7. ANY religious practice loses its value if it is not done out of a sincere heart and as an appropriate response to the situation God has you in. We must constantly guard our hearts against this tendency we all have of letting our good habits become insincere and empty actions. But then Jesus went on to share two more parables from everyday life that are really the heart of his answer. First, He talked about:

b. a torn garment (16) Everybody knows cloth shrinks when you wash it, but after it's been washed many times, it doesn't shrink any more. So, if you have an old garment with a hole in it and you take new unshrunk cloth and cut a patch that fits the hole exactly, when you wash it, the patch will shrink and the garment will tear again and be even worse than before! Everybody knows that old cloth has no place in new garments, right? So then, Jesus went on to talk about:

c. old wineskins (17) Wineskins are something you and I aren't familiar with, but Jesus' hearers used them every day. Wine ferments as it ages and creates pressure in its container until the process comes to a halt. So in that day, since they didn't have plastic or glass that could withstand the pressure, they used tanned animal skins tightly sewed because, as the pressure builds, the skin containers will stretch! However, as any child would know, to put new unfermented wine into old skins which have already been stretched and have become hard and brittle, will burst them. New wine must always be put in fresh skins, right? So, what does all this mean? Well, here's:

2. the point that Jesus was making

a. He did not come to patch up the old system He wasn't some new Rabbi out to reform Jewish religious practices. Essentially, that's what John the Baptist was. He was a prophet calling his followers to repentance, to return to sincerity of heart in following the practices already so familiar to them. He was calling for a reformation under the old system and that was a good thing. But that's not what Jesus was about:

b. He came to create a brand new body Jesus was not starting a new sect within Judaism; as He called followers to Himself, He was starting a brand new organism, His own body, the church! And as the head of that body, He has the authority and the right to abrogate old religious traditions that are not appropriate to it. Because He fulfilled the

Law, we are no longer under the Law. We don't have to keep the Passover and the Feasts or bring animals to sacrifice at the Temple. Jesus is claiming the right to set aside all those religious practices that were part of the Old Testament order and to make His own demands of His followers, to have them fast or feast as He wills. Now I'm sure that claim was a real shocker to the Jewish mind. Indeed, Acts shows us that it was unbelievably hard and took many years for believers from Jewish background to let go of the practices that were so much a part of them, such as requiring circumcision and not eating with non-Jews and all that went with Temple worship. Like John's disciples, they kept wanting to enforce those traditions that had been so important to them upon EVERYONE who believed everywhere. Eventually, the church realized fully that it was a new body and let go of the old, but not without much pain and controversy.

But before we point the finger, it's hard for us, too, isn't it? We deify our traditions and try to enforce them on the world. The church has had to wrestle with this over and over. Within my own lifetime, at points Christians have insisted on certain dress codes for women or short hair and clean-shaven faces for men, or on not touching alcohol, or not dancing or going to movies or on reading only one Bible translation. Other times, it is more subtle; we have insisted on our own style of music and worship or on our own ways of doing things within the church body, simply because these things are familiar and they're what we know. Listen, Jesus is Lord and He is always doing a NEW thing. He's always giving His people NEW methods of serving Him, NEW ways of reaching people, NEW music to praise His Name, and NEW opportunities to be seized. Yet, like John's disciples, we always want to linger in the old and familiar and insist on it. In fact, *Brett Blair said, The second time you do anything it becomes a tradition.* We have to constantly guard our own hearts against falling into this trap, every one of us, even you, even me. Way back about 350 AD, if you wanted to be serious about following Christ, this is part of the advice you would likely have been given in Syria where the Gentile church once started: *...it is not lawful for thee, a believer and a man of God, to permit the hair of thy head to grow long, and to brush it up together, nor to suffer it to spread abroad, nor to puff it up, nor by nice combing and platting to make it curl and shine; since that is contrary to the law, which says thus, in its additional precepts: "You shall not make to yourselves curls and round rasures." Nor may men destroy the hair of their beards, and unnaturally change the form of a man. For the law says: "Ye shall not mar your beards." For God the Creator has made this decent for women, but has determined that it is unsuitable for men. But if thou do these things to please men, in contradiction to the law, thou wilt be abominable with God, who created thee after His own image. [The Apostolic Constitutions - Book I, Section 2]. Elizabeth Elliot suggests the advice would have gone on to include, "Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don't eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths or shave your beard."* [The Liberty of Obedience, Nashville, Abingdon, 1968, pp. 45-46]. These were the marks of godliness these early folks treasured, traditions they revered and held sacred. And today we laugh, but I wonder who is going to be laughing at our list of traditions a generation or two from now? May God give us discernment to guard the core of our faith which never changes, while always being willing to change the secondary things that He is trying to change to get more glory to Himself.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Authority Of The King - Mt. 8-10

Over Life And Death - 9:18-34

As you remember, in chapters 8-10 of his Gospel, Matthew is recording specific events that deliberately display the authority of Jesus. In chapter 8 we saw Jesus demonstrate His authority over all varieties of disease, over the forces of nature, over demons and over the lives of His followers. In the first half of chapter 9 we saw Him prove His authority to forgive sins and to seek out sinners. He is Lord over everything! And now, beginning with verse 18, we see Him demonstrate the ultimate authority. He has complete authority over life and death! Whether a person is alive or dead is not merely a function of their heart pumping or stopping; in the beginning God breathed life into a dead lump of clay to make Adam a living soul, and in Hezekiah's day God withdrew the life from 185,000 healthy Assyrian soldiers in their sleep so that the next morning they were all dead. As the Scripture puts it, *man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!* If Jesus says, "Live!" then you live, even though you're dead! And if Jesus says, "Die!" then you die, no matter how "alive" you are! That is because:

I. Jesus Has Authority Over Death and He demonstrated that in two incidents which happened together, with the second one occurring in the midst of and interrupting the first, in verses **(18-26)**. But let's consider them separately. In the first story we see:

1. a dead daughter raised (18-19, 23-26) Jesus was apparently still talking with the disciples of John there at the banquet at Matthew's house, when he was interrupted by a man coming in and falling at his feet with an urgent request. This man was actually the ruler or leader of one of the synagogues in Capernaum, a very important person in the community, but now desperate because of a tragedy in his family. Mark and Luke tell us that this man's name was Jairus and that his little daughter was only twelve years old. By comparing their accounts, it appears that she was at the point of death when he frantically ran out to get Jesus, and actually died while Jesus and Jairus were on their way

back to his house. One of Jairus' servants met them on the way to tell them that she had now actually died, but Matthew abbreviates the whole account, because he wants to emphasize the main point which is that:

a. at Jesus' command the dead live Imagine the despair that must have washed over Jairus when the messenger came, "I'm too late! She's gone!" But Jesus reassured him, *Don't be afraid! Only believe!* When they arrived, He told the crowd, *The girl is not dead! She's sleeping!* But they all "knew better"; they knew what death was! And they knew the earthly maxim that "Dead is dead!" It's final; there's no coming back. And they laughed at Him and mocked Him for His ignorance. But after He put them all out, Jesus took the girl by the hand and tenderly commanded her, *Little girl, get up!* And she did! Her life returned to her body and she got up and was perfectly, normally alive! Imagine the shock that must have been! What if someone did that at one of our funerals? We can't even conceive it. There is nothing more final to us than death. When death lays claim to us, we are convinced there is no reversal, but Jesus has complete authority over death itself! Yet in case you might skeptically think, "Well, she had just died. There could have been a spark of life left in her.", on another occasion at Nain, Jesus ruined a perfectly good funeral by commanding a widow's dead son to come back to life as they were already carrying him to the tomb! And in Lazarus' case, his body had been in the tomb for four whole days when Jesus commanded, *Lazarus, come forth!* When Jesus commands the dead to live, they live! Do you believe that? You should! Several years ago, when I spoke with a leader in the India Missions Association, he shared with me that there had been seven confirmed cases in India that very year where a dead person had been raised in answer to prayer and he had personally met all seven! Jesus has that power, and in fact, He has already given us proof of it. In reality, the very same thing:

b. it has already happened to us Look with me at **Eph. 2:1, 4-5**. Each of the physical miracles in our text today also has a counterpart in the spiritual realm. And even though you can't see it with the eyes, the miracle is no less difficult. God tells us that we were dead in trespasses and sins. We were spiritually exactly like dead people are physically; we were utterly incapable of responding to God, completely cut off from Him with absolute finality. The dead cannot live, yet God spoke the word; He resurrected us and made us alive spiritually and brought us into a relationship with Himself. That is even *more* of a miracle than bringing a physically dead girl back to life! It's impossible, yet Jesus has complete authority over death, no matter what form it takes, physical or spiritual. And that is exactly what:

c. it guarantees our resurrection Now look with me at **Jn. 5:25-29a**. There is coming a day when the same thing that happened to Jairus' daughter is going to happen to us. Unless He comes first, our dead bodies will all be lying in tombs somewhere or maybe in scattered ashes in the earth, but at His coming, Jesus is going to give the command and, at the sound of His voice, our dead bodies will be resurrected, raised to life and completely transformed. We can hardly imagine that! Maybe we can picture existing after death as a spirit in heaven, but having a body that's been dead and in the grave rise again and be given back to us seems absolutely impossible! It's too final, but listen, we have all the evidence that Jesus is Lord over death and He is calling us to do what He called Jairus to do:

d. we like Jairus must trust Jesus' authority Jairus confessed his faith back in verse 18, "If you lay your hand on her, she will live! No matter what!" He trusted that Jesus had the final authority, even over death, and we too must rest in that authority for our own selves.

Now as Jesus was on the way to Jairus' house, a second incident happened in which we see:

2. a dying woman rescued (20-22) This woman had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Luke tells us that she had spent all her money on doctors, so she was broke. Mark tells us that she had suffered through all kinds of treatments (most of which I'm sure were painful) and that she was growing continually worse. To put it bluntly, she was desperate because she was gradually growing weaker, slowly dying; sooner or later this thing would kill her. On top of that, it meant that by Jewish law she was perpetually unclean. Anything she touched or anyone who touched her became unclean. For her to enter a crowd and even plan to touch Jesus was a bold infraction, except for the fact that her heart was convinced that in that touch, instead of making Him impure, His power would make her pure! Matthew shortens the whole story a bit to focus on the point which is that:

a. at Jesus' command the dying are saved Jesus can not only bring people back to life when they are already dead, He can stop them from dying if He chooses. In this case, there was not a formal command by Jesus; the woman merely touched His garment because she believed in her heart that is all that was necessary. She did not even need to have Him speak with her; His healing power and His obvious compassion were so great that the simple touch of his garment would be enough! But Mark and Luke tell us that instantly Jesus knew that power had gone forth from Him and He stopped and asked the crowd who touched Him and waited until the woman came forward and knelt down, trembling. What she had hoped would be an unnoticed touch, He turned into a big public scene, but He didn't ask the woman to identify herself so that He would know who it was. He did it so that she would publicly confess her faith before all the people and His authority would be declared! And when she did, He lovingly encouraged her, *Take heart, daughter, [literally] your faith has saved you.* That is, it has delivered you, it has rescued you, it has saved your life. Jesus willed that she would live and He can will whether we live or die. In fact, in the spiritual realm this:

b. it has already happened to us Now look with me at **Eph. 2:11-13**. In one sense we were already spiritually dead, cut off from God, when we were unsaved. But in another, more physical, sense, we were in the process of dying. We had no hope. We were Gentiles who had no connection with Israel or Jesus Christ, and were dying of the terminal disease of sin. There was no balm in Gilead that could stop the process and no physician who could cure us. Every day brought us closer and closer to an eternity in hell. And, by the way, that is the tragic condition of more than 2 billion people in our world right now! They have never even had the opportunity to believe in Jesus; they don't know who He is and what He did. They are dying by inches every day, old and young, men and women, lost, edging ever closer to the brink of a Christless eternity and totally without hope unless WE do something about it, so that what happened to us can happen to them too! Jesus Christ rescued us; He saved us spiritually. When we believed, He spoke the word and we were made totally and completely whole. And now, as Jesus put it, *...He who believes in me will live, even though he dies [physically]; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die [in eternity]*. We can't die, not in the eternal sense! We've been rescued! Our faith has saved us! Hallelujah! And now that we're rescued from eternal death, there is a very practical example for us here concerning our lives:

c. we like the woman must trust Jesus' authority Listen to **Rom. 14:8**, *For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's*. We belong to the Lord; our lives are completely under His authority. It is He who controls whether we live or die physically and either way we are His.

Let me be very clear that the lesson from this story is NOT that all we have to do when we get cancer or some other deadly disease is to believe that Jesus is going to make us well and He will heal us. That kind of presumptive belief always eventually leads to hurt and disappointment; it is arrogantly assuming that you know God's will, which you don't on matters like this. The faith that Jesus was commending in all of these instances was trust in Him, trust that He has the ultimate authority over whether we live or die. No matter what happens to us in life, we will not die physically one moment before HE wills it and when we do, we will be with Him because we belong to Him! Now in the rest of the chapter, Matthew records two more incidents which show us that:

II. Jesus Has Authority Over Life itself, that is, over the very way that our bodies function or don't function. In the first encounter Matthew tells us that:

1. two blind men are given sight (27-31) I'm guessing these men were born blind, that they were not simply men whose eyes had been injured or had grown gradually worse until they became blind. When the NIV says *their sight was restored*, it is inaccurate; the text literally says *their eyes were opened*. Their eyes had been "closed", non-functional, inoperative, probably all their lives. They lived in darkness and knew they would always be that way, apart from a miracle of God. That's why they so persistently followed Jesus crying out along the road and then followed Him into the house. The point Matthew is making to us is that:

a. at Jesus' command the blind see Blindness is a pretty final thing and most of us dread it for that reason. Even modern medicine can only restore some measure of clarity to existing sight through eye repairs; it cannot make blind eyes see. We can transplant a heart or a lung or a kidney, but not an eye. The eye has over a million nerve connections to the brain and if they're damaged or nonfunctional, they simply can't be repaired or reconnected. Nevertheless, when Jesus commands it, the blind see! Of course, that:

b. it has already happened to us in the spiritual realm. Look at **2 Cor. 4:4-6**. We were all blind, not physically but spiritually! When we were unsaved, our minds were literally blinded; we could not understand; we had no capacity to comprehend spiritual truth. 1 Cor. 2 tells us that the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. It's impossible! And yet, one day God did in our hearts what He did at creation. He said, "Let there be light!" And suddenly we could see! In a flash of light we comprehended who Jesus was and what He did for us. We saw the glory of God in Jesus Christ and we embraced Him! So, our lives were eternally changed. Now we really see! But we still live in the midst of a world of blind people who need us to pray, "O God, open their eyes!" Jesus Christ can make them see, and:

c. we like the blind men must trust Jesus' authority Notice again what Jesus said to them. "Do you believe I am *ABLE*, that I have the power, the authority to do this?" Again, we must be careful not to presume to know His will, what He will choose to do. We place our trust in His ability, in His authority. When we trust that Jesus is really the final authority over every factor in our lives, then we accept the choices that HE makes for us, whatever they are, and, more importantly, we obey Him.

He gave these two a stern warning to keep this miracle quiet, I suppose because He didn't want another crowd of people thronging Him right away. Mark tells us that after someone else who was healed disobeyed a command like this earlier in His ministry, *...Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter*. But these two didn't obey! They went out and told everybody; in their enthusiasm they spread His fame through the whole district! That's understandable, I guess, but it does point out that it's more important to actually DO what Jesus tells us, rather than what seems like the right thing to us. Our good intentions may create problems that we don't realize for Him. Now, after healing the two blind men, in the second encounter:

2. a mute man is given back speech (32-34) The Greek word that is used here about this man often refers to someone who is a deaf-mute, who can't hear and can't speak. In the natural, the two maladies usually occur together, because a person who can't hear usually can't learn to speak. However, this man was unable to talk and perhaps hear, not because there was something wrong with his vocal cords or ears, but because a demon had taken control of him and would not permit him to use them. And Matthew is showing us that:

a. at Jesus' command the mute speak There's a good chance this man had never said a word in his entire life, that all his days he had been denied that kind of communication which is such a normal part of our daily existence. Yet when Jesus says "speak", it doesn't matter whether you can speak or not. You speak! It doesn't matter whether a demon is standing in the way either; whatever Jesus orders happens! And, of course, in the spiritual realm, this same thing:

b. it has already happened to us - Rom. 10:9 says that you must not only believe in your heart, but you must confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord to be saved. And that's what we did, isn't it? We confessed to God with our mouths that Jesus is our Lord! But 1 Cor. 12:3 clearly says *...no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit*. You can't say that and really mean it by yourself. It's not in you. You can say almost anything under the sun that you want, but that is the one thing you were mute to. Yet by the Holy Spirit you did what you could not do. Your tongue was loosed from Satan's control and you confessed Jesus as your Lord to God and to other people. Of course, you were probably not demonized to the extent this man was, but Satan and his demons certainly did all they could to keep you from speaking those words! Yet Christ's authority prevailed over them. And you know what? Satan is still opposing you and doing everything in His power to keep you mute when it comes to being a witness for Jesus Christ! He wants you silent. He uses every tactic in the book, every force at his disposal, to stop you from talking about Jesus to others. So, what must we do? Again:

c. we must trust Jesus' authority Jesus is Lord of our lips! His authority is greater. Satan cannot stand against Him. He wants you to speak and, as you yield to His Lordship, He will make you speak as He wants. If you remember, Moses didn't want to go to Egypt and speak for God; he claimed he couldn't. And *Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" - Ex. 4:11.*

That's the point of all these encounters. Jesus is the final authority. He is in complete control, life or death, blind or seeing, mute or speaking, He is in charge and I can trust Him no matter what. *James Brown writes: Some years ago when I was learning to fly, my instructor told me to put the plane into a steep and extended dive. I was totally unprepared for what was about to happen. After a brief time, the engine stalled, and the plane began to plunge out of control. It soon became evident that the instructor was not going to help me at all. After a few seconds, which seemed like eternity, my mind began to function again. I quickly corrected the situation. Immediately I turned to the instructor and began to vent my fearful frustrations on him. He very calmly said to me, "There is no position you can get this airplane into that I cannot get you out of. If you want to learn to fly, go up there and do it again." At that moment God seemed to be saying to me, "Remember this. As you serve Me, there is no situation you can get yourself into that I cannot get you out of. If you trust me, you will be all right."* [James Brown, *Evangeline Baptist Church, Wildsville, LA, in Discoveries, Fall, 1991, Vol. 2, No. 4.*] Listen, dear friends, there is no situation that you can find yourself in where Jesus is not in control. If you trust HIM, you will be all right!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Authority Of The King - Mt. 8-10

To Call And Send Out Disciples 9:35-10:15

Matthew has shown us incident after incident in chapters 8-9 to demonstrate that Jesus has the final authority over everything. But now we need to begin to make application of that. What does it mean to us who are His followers that Jesus has kingly authority? It means that Jesus as our King has the right to call us or to assign us to carry out his tasks. From our standpoint, we think of that as Him calling us to perform a task. From His standpoint, it is sending or assigning those under his authority. In our text today, we have the record of how Jesus exercised His authority over His disciples and we will be able to see in that how He exercises that authority over us. But Matthew begins this whole section by first revealing to us:

I. The Heart Of Jesus (9:35-38) Here Matthew gives us a glimpse into Jesus' heart by telling us about:

1. the deep compassion He feels for people (35-36) Picture Jesus now on a tour of Galilee, going to village after village, gathering crowds of people every day in a new place, teaching for hours upon hours, preaching powerfully that the Kingdom of God had come, healing dozens upon dozens of sick people as they are brought to him and on Friday, teaching in the local synagogue. When our team was in India in 2011, we went to seven villages in a week, just one per day and held services and prayed over lines of sick people. It was just a small taste of what it must have been like for Jesus. After 7 days of it we were exhausted, and we had a van with air conditioning most of the time to travel in!

But Jesus walked everywhere and camped someplace or stayed in a simple hut with some family each night. No doubt:

a. He was burdened with the size of the task Galilee had dozens of villages and everywhere He went, hundreds gathered, sometimes four thousand or five thousand. The stream of humanity coming before Him seemed never-ending and He was the only one doing what He was doing. Because He had chosen the limitation of having a human body, He was able to feel what we feel. He could not be in two places at once; He could not reach everybody all by Himself; the task of sharing the Good News of the Kingdom with every person in even one small region was immense, let alone the whole world. We tasted it there in India; like Jesus we got a glimpse of the endless sea of humanity stretched out before us needing to hear and feeling so inadequate, wondering who is ever going to reach them all. And at the same time:

b. He was overwhelmed with the depth of the need He saw that they were *harassed*, that is, they were bewildered, confused and exhausted. They were worn out from trying to keep all the religious rules they'd been taught by their culture and finding themselves no closer to God. And they were *helpless*, scattered in all directions trying to find their own way and get their own needs met, like a flock of sheep without a shepherd to lead them and guide them to the green pastures and the still waters they needed.

Dear friends, that is how the world looks to Jesus still today. Multitudes, masses of people with no one to guide them, no one to tell them He has come, living hopeless wearying lives, exhausting themselves running after all the things they think that will help them and not finding Him. And, as He sees them, Jesus is moved with love for them in the very depths of His being. He cares that they are lost without Him and desperately wants to rescue them and give them true life. I would dare say that that's the heart He wants to develop in us. Here's:

2. the great dilemma He faces He voiced it in verse (37). The world is like this huge immense field of standing ripened grain at the end of summer, at the time for harvest. And *the harvest is plentiful*:

a. there are a GREAT MANY waiting to be gathered into His Kingdom According to the 2010 statistics I read from the Pew Foundation, 1.6 billion of them are Muslims, 1 billion of them are Hindus, another half billion are Buddhists, a second half billion practice folk and traditional religion or belong to one of the smaller of the world's religious groups, and some 1.1 billion declare no religious affiliation at all! Two thirds of the world, 68% (and if we talk about who actually knows Christ, probably WAY more than that), is still standing in the field all around us waiting to be brought in. The harvest is plentiful; it's immense; it's huge! *But the laborers are few*:

b. there are PRECIOUS FEW actively working to gather them in Among the thousands of Galilee, Jesus saw only Himself hard at work gathering them. His own followers didn't seem to understand. And in the world, precious few of those who know Jesus are actively engaged with Him spending their lives trying to gather people in. And I'm not talking only about overseas missionaries going to remote peoples in faraway places. I'm talking about believers who actively pray for and pursue other people for Christ right where they live, college students, coworkers, neighbors, internationals. Precious few believers catch enough of the heart of God that they care and invest their efforts in seeing a portion of this great harvest brought in! That's Jesus' dilemma and it breaks His heart! But He has a plan to do something about it! Here is:

3. the Divine solution He proposes (38) His answer, not surprisingly, is prayer! Those who catch the depth of His compassion must pray! For what?

a. we must earnestly pray for workers, for God to touch more believers to care and get involved in the harvest. There are already enough believers to do the job; the church is already plenty big enough to reach the whole world, IF we only cared about it enough to do it! And the only One who can make people care enough is God Himself. So, we have to pray from our hearts, literally we must *beg* the Lord of the Harvest to send laborers out into the field. And as we beseech Him:

b. God will thrust them out into His harvest He will literally, drive them out, push them out, throw them out into the work. The sense is that they don't want to go, or they'd already be there! But we didn't either! God actually compels His reluctant children to go and get involved in His work. They have all these other things they'd rather do, but as He works in their lives, He overwhelms them with His love and gives them His heart and thrusts them out into His work! So, our first command is to pray! But then notice this, that:

c. those who pray are also sent! Jesus tells His followers to pray for God to send laborers and then He turns right around in chapter 10 and calls twelve of them and sends them out into the harvest! Later on, we read that Jesus did the exact same thing again in **Lk. 10:1-2**. He gathered 70 this time, gave them the same words, told them to pray for laborers and then *sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go*. It is not just that some pray for laborers and some go as laborers; those who pray are also to be involved in the harvest! They are also sent! God wants you to pray, but God also has a place for you to SERVE in His field!

Now let's move on to briefly look at:

II. The Calling Of The Twelve (10:1-4) Mark puts it like this, *He appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach - Mk. 3:14* What I want you to see is that:

1. He transformed "followers" into "sent ones" He had many *disciples* (the word in **1a**), many learners who followed Him about. But He chose or appointed twelve of them to be *apostles* (the word in **2a**). The word *apostle* is simply an English transliteration of the Greek word *apostolos*; the church's ecclesiology has made *apostle* into some high, holy office, but it simply means a "sent one", someone who is sent on behalf of another. When you put the same word into Latin, you get our word *missionary*, a person sent out by someone on a mission with a purpose. Jesus simply took twelve of His closest followers and sent them out as laborers to work in His field in **(5a)**. And just take a quick peek at:

2. the persons whom He called (2-4) Who were these guys? Let me just mention that Bartholomew is also called Nathanael and Thaddaeus is also called the "other Judas" elsewhere. At any rate, the first four of them we know were ordinary fishermen. Only Matthew was a little more well off, because he had been a tax collector. Simon had been a Zealot, a rebel, one of those seeking to foment a rebellion against Rome. The rest were just normal everyday folks; later when they were arrested by the Sanhedrin in Acts, they described the apostles as *uneducated, common men* who had been with Jesus [4:13]. Listen, Jesus loves to use the weakest, most ordinary things He can find to serve His purpose. When someone asked St. Francis of Assisi why and how he could accomplish so much, he replied: *"This may be why. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the earth and said, 'Where can I find the weakest, the littlest, the meanest man on the face of the earth?' Then He saw me and said, 'Now I've found him, and I will work through him. He won't be proud of it. He'll see that I'm only using him because of his littleness and insignificance.'"* That's what Jesus did; He took twelve ordinary men and sent them out to change the world. And that's what He's still doing, using ordinary people like you and I to bring in His great harvest. But notice in verse 1:

3. the authority they were given (1b) They were not simply sent out; they were equipped for the job! He gave to them the same power and authority He had, so that they could go and do what He Himself did, preach the Good News of the Kingdom, cast out demons, heal the sick, and, in verse 6, even raise the dead! As they went and proclaimed that He is King, His power would go with them and confirm what they were saying with powerful deeds.

That was the plan; His own work in the villages of Galilee would be multiplied at least six times over because Mark says he sent them out in pairs. So, let's look at:

III. The Sending Out Of The Twelve on this specific mission. In **(10:5-15)** Jesus gave them detailed instructions for the task on which He was sending them. First of all:

1. He sent them to a specific people (5-6) They were only to go to the Jews, not the Samaritans or the other non-Jewish peoples around them. They had a specific target, the villages of Galilee. Now it's interesting that in the end of the Gospel, **Mt. 28:19** records a new set of instructions for the final mission on which He sent the twelve and us and they were somewhat different, *Go and make disciples of ALL nations...* His ultimate goal for all of us together is the whole world, but He accomplishes that goal by sending each of us to specific places and specific persons. It may be to the Yenadi in India or to college students in Glenside or to the company where you work or the school where you're enrolled, but within His great field, He has a specific place where He has sent YOU to labor for Him. Secondly:

2. He sent them to declare His reign as King (7) The promised Messianic Kingdom was right there in their midst; they could be in it if they would accept the person of the King, Jesus! When Jesus later sent all of us, He said, *Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation - Mk. 16:15*. What's the Good News? That Jesus came to earth, God in the flesh, that He died on a cross for our sins and rose again and that He is now King, ruling on high in heaven and calls us to bow at His feet and submit to Him as our Lord and worship Him as the true God. Make Jesus your King! Let Him rule your life! That's what we are sent to proclaim, wherever He sends us! Thirdly:

3. He invested them with His Divine power (8) They were to do the same miracles Jesus had been doing as signs that their message of the Kingdom was authentic. He would verify His message. After His resurrection, **Mk. 16:20** says, *the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed His word by the signs that accompanied it*. Now we don't have time for a full discussion of signs and gifts; simply note that we don't do this on our own. We still have His authority to cast out demons and we can still pray over people and when God chooses, He heals them. A ton of mighty and miraculous things still happen in people's lives when we pray for them and it assures them that what we're telling them is true, that Jesus is the true God. As we go, God is always at work before us and with us and after us! He brings in the harvest, but He uses us. Fourth:

4. He promised them Divine provision (9-11) They weren't to take anything with them for this specific trip. They were simply to trust Him to provide their needs through the people that received their message. Again, let's simply extract the principle which He so clearly articulated earlier in **Mt. 6:33**, if you *seek first the Kingdom of God*, if you devote your life to serving together with Him in bringing in His great harvest, *all these things* that you worry about, what you'll eat and what you'll wear and where you'll live, they'll all be *given to you*. God will see that you have what you need as you serve His purpose! How many times have we tested and proved that? And finally:

5. He warned them of a mixed reception (12-15) Some would receive them and their message gladly, and God would bless those. But others would reject them and their message and they were to shake off the very dust on their feet as a testimony against them. God would take care of their judgment for rejecting His sent ones. But either way, they were to keep on going, keep on working to bring in the harvest. We'll find the same thing. Some will listen and we'll have the joy of making new disciples; some will not and we'll have the pain of being rejected and mocked, maybe even persecuted. Expect it and leave that with Him.

But the point of everything we've seen is this. Most of you are disciples of Jesus; you believe in Him as Savior. But He wants more than that. He has sent you to have a purpose in life of working in His field, of bringing others to Him. He has a specific place in the field where He wants you to work. He wants to tell you where to go, what to say, and what to do. He wants you to trust Him to provide for your needs and to leave the reception of the message up to Him. The question is, have you submitted to His authority? Have you made His purpose for your life, your purpose, or are you living for something else? Lanny Wolfe wrote a song that says:

*There is peace and contentment in the Father's house today;
Lots of food on His table and no one is turned away.
There is singing and laughter as the hours pass by,
But a hush calms the singing as the Father sadly cries:*

*My house is full but my field is empty,
Who will go and work for Me today?
It seems My children all want to stay around my table,
But no one wants to work in my field.*

*Push away from the table, look out through the window pane,
Just beyond this house of plenty lies a field of golden grain;
And it's ripe unto harvest, but the reapers, where are they?
In the house, oh, can't the children hear their Father sadly say.*

*My house is full but my field is empty,
Who will go and work for Me today?
It seems My children all want to stay around my table,
But no one wants to work in my field.
Who will go and work in my field?*

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Authority Of The King - Mt. 8-10

To Send His Disciples Into Persecution - 10:16-42

In these three chapters, Matthew has been relaying incidents that demonstrate Jesus' authority over all things, the forces of nature, demons, even over life and death. In Chapter 10 Jesus demonstrated His authority as King and Lord to call His disciples and send them out on His mission of reaching, not only all of Israel, but all the world with the Good News of the Kingdom. But, as we finish the chapter today, it is clear that Jesus' authority goes beyond merely instructing His followers to carry out His will. He demands a loyalty of His disciples that is final, that is ultimate, that is above all other loyalties. That's hard for us to grasp so let me illustrate. In ancient Japan, a Samurai warrior owed ultimate loyalty to his lord. Not only did that mean that any command the lord gave, the samurai would obey, but it meant that the lord could send him into battle and even order him to give up his life and he would do it. In fact, if he dishonored his lord or if his lord died, he was obliged to take his own life. His lord commanded a loyalty dearer than life itself. Of course, that was an ungodly system set up by ungodly people who cared nothing about the value of human life. Yet maybe it can help us understand that we have a Lord too, a Lord who loves us and has given His life for us, and He expects from us essentially the same thing, a loyalty that is dearer than life itself. Jesus has the authority to send us into suffering and pain in the spiritual battle to establish His Kingdom on earth, to send us into persecution, and even to demand that we lay down our very lives for Him, if He requires it! That's what you signed up for when you confessed, "Jesus is Lord!" Now this is a bit of a difficult passage, so before we examine it closely, here are a few facts to help in:

I. Understanding Jesus' Teaching About Persecution In Matthew 10 First, and most obviously:

1. some of it applies to the disciples' immediate mission Remember from our look at verses (5-15) last week that Jesus was sending out the Twelve on a preaching trip through Galilee and giving them specific instructions. He told them in 14-15 that as they went, some places would not receive them, but it's obvious that almost everything that Jesus went on to predict in this passage did not happen to them on this brief trip. Mark and Luke tell us that they soon returned and told Jesus all that had happened. But as Jesus continued on:

2. some of it looks ahead to the experience of the early church Verses (16-20) say things like *...they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake...* That didn't happen on this trip, but it sure did in the book of Acts. You can see Peter's and Paul's lives written ahead of time here. Jesus was preparing His followers in advance for what to expect after His death and resurrection and what the reaction, particularly of the Jews, would be. He taught the same thing in the upper room the night before His death in Jn. 15-16. He was preparing them for what they and their disciples would have to face the rest of their lives after He was gone. But His exhortation goes even further than that:

3. some of it looks far ahead to believers who will live in the awful suffering of the **end-time Tribulation**. That's the only way to explain some of the things in (21-23) where He talks about enduring to the end and the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus repeated those words again in chapter 24 where He was clearly describing the time immediately before His return to the earth and the awfulness of that time. So, at least part of His words here look all the way to the end. It's like His vision grew and He looked further and further ahead as He continued to speak. But most importantly:

4. all of it can be applied in principle to believers during this current age We can draw out from His words three important truths that apply to all followers of Christ through all the ages. First of all, clearly:

II. Jesus Told Us To Expect Persecution (16-25) I have no idea how so many preachers can, in good conscience, proclaim that God always wants you to prosper and have the best and have this wonderful life where He takes away all your problems. Jesus said, *...In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.* - **Jn. 16:33**. Paul said clearly, *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.* - **2 Tim. 3:12-13**. History has borne out the truth of those words. True followers of Christ have been hated and persecuted in every century since, in varying degrees in different areas of the world. They are today all across North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Indonesia, in portions of China, in North Korea, in the "Stan" countries and many other places. Christians are killed, tortured, raped, put in prison, have their homes burned or property confiscated. Today! The American Church has been lulled into a sense of false security by our few hundred years of freedom; we really believe that serious persecution will never happen here. But that is to ignore both the facts of history and the words of Jesus! We must expect it. If we don't get it, that's a blessing, but Jesus clearly instructed us that:

1. we must be wary about it (16-17) There are ALWAYS wolves out there who want to destroy us and, like sheep, we have no weapons to defend ourselves, except this: we can be...*wise as serpents*. Now in what sense is a snake wise? Well, how many snakes have you ever actually seen? Few, I expect. That's because snakes are extremely alert; they feel the vibrations in the ground when you are coming and they get out of the way! They hide when they see danger coming. We're to be as harmless and innocent as doves and never try to hurt our persecutors in return, but we should still always be alert and watching for persecution to come and do whatever is practical to avoid it if we can, for example verse **23a**. In the unregistered house churches in China, they always have a lookout watching for the police and they worry that their loud singing and praying will attract neighbors' attention, so they are very careful where they meet, because they can be arrested and fined or imprisoned. If one area is dangerous, they meet somewhere else. They don't arrive all at the same time so as not to draw attention. Yet they're not afraid or ashamed; they're just being wise and staying out of harm's way, if they can, so that they can continue their ministry.

2. we will be witnesses to our persecutors through it (18) Believe it or not, God wants to reach the very people who persecute us, our enemies! While Stephen was on trial before the Sanhedrin, he preached a whole sermon to them as a witness about Jesus in Acts 7. As he was being stoned, he was a witness to those stoning him and among them was a man named Saul, whose conscience was pricked by it somehow, I believe. Later, Paul was brought on trial before Festus and King Agrippa and he preached the Gospel to them in Acts 26. Later on, he was sent to Rome to be tried before the Emperor and he says that he was a witness to the whole palace guard and that some in Caesar's very household had believed! And not only are we a witness to the ones doing the actual persecuting, but we are a witness to the nations, the peoples. Iran ranks #5 in the world for nations that persecute Christians. In 1979 there were only 500 known believers who had converted from Islam. Today some say there are over a million! The growth of the church there is explosive; the harder the leaders persecute believers, the more of a testimony it is to the people and the more believe! The same happened in China. An almost wiped-out church mushroomed to over a million believers through years of intense persecution, because God uses our testimony to Him in the midst of suffering to draw many more to Himself! Chinese church leaders will tell you that persecution is a key tool He uses to grow His church. Thirdly:

3. the Holy Spirit will give us words to say during it (19-20) You don't have to worry, "What will I say if anyone ever arrests me for my faith? Will I be like Peter and Paul? Will I say the right thing?" God promises to provide the words, to have the Holy Spirit speak through you in that moment. Actually, that's true whenever you get put on the spot to be a witness. Just ask Him, "What shall I say?" and the Spirit will be quick to put His words in your mouth. Now the next verses seem to indicate that persecution:

4. it will grow deeper and more widespread as the end approaches (21-23) Eventually, by the time of His coming there will be a worldwide hatred of anyone who would dare to believe in Christ; simply read the Book of Revelation and see how His followers are hated and the innumerable multitude who are martyred during that final tribulation period. But in saying these things, Jesus was implying that persecution is not going to be merely a temporary local thing. It is something that is going to be everywhere, something that will be longstanding, something that will occur down through the ages and intensify in the end. Already today in some Muslim areas we see that a father will have his son or daughter killed for believing in Christ and will see it as his duty before God. This is not some myth; it happens commonly today and it will get worse as the end gets near. So:

5. we should see it as a normal part of following Christ (24-25) Jesus used this proverb, *a disciple is not above his master*, four times in the Gospels; it must have been something He said all the time. At its most basic level, it can mean something like, "If they treat ME like this, why would you expect them to treat YOU any differently as My followers? If they call Me Beelzebul, the chief prince of the demons or the devil himself, they'll do it to you!" In other words, "Expect it; it's normal!" But that's not all that the phrase means. It implies that:

a. we have no right to expect better treatment than our Master We're not above Him. We're not better than Him. Why should we think that He is somehow obligated to spare us from pain and suffering and give us lives of ease, when He Himself was hated and plotted against and betrayed and crucified for us? Why should we think ourselves entitled to protection from all evil when He did not exempt Himself from it? We have no such right. But the full meaning is even deeper still:

b. we should count it a privilege to be like our Master *It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher...* The whole goal of being a disciple is to become exactly like your master. There should be a satisfaction in realizing that we have become so like Jesus that we are treated like Him. Paul came to understand that. Look with me at **Phil. 1:29**. It has been granted to us; it is a gift, a high and holy privilege, to suffer for His sake, who suffered so much for ours. It is to enter into what Paul calls elsewhere *the fellowship of His sufferings*. There is a deep intimacy with Christ that occurs in the midst of our experience of suffering for Him, if our hearts are open to Him while we endure it.

If we truly grasp what Jesus is saying, we find ourselves able to say things like Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who spent years in a Soviet prison camp and wrote: *That is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me, "Bless you, prison!" I...have served enough time there. I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation, "Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!"* (*The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956, Vol. 2, 615-617*) And that leads us to consider the second important truth in our text:

III. Jesus Is Sovereign When We Experience Persecution I realize that this is scary talk. We don't like to think about this, even if our brothers and sisters in other places are living through it right now, because we become afraid for ourselves and for our children. But listen, Jesus did not tell us all this to make us afraid. Quite the opposite:

1. He does not want us to be afraid (26-31) He tells us *...have no fear...do not fear...fear not!* He tells us NOT to be afraid and He gives us three reasons why. First:

a. He will bring about justice for us in the end (26-27) Those who harm us will not get away with it! Their evil will not be hidden and covered up, but it will in the end be revealed to all and justice will be done by God Himself! It is a truly fearful thing to find yourself before Almighty God as one who persecuted His children! We should not fear to declare God's message because, in the end, the whole world will know that we were right! Second, we should not fear because:

b. He has taken away all reason for us to fear death (28) Who is the One who can cast soul and body into hell? God! If you want to be afraid of somebody, be afraid of God! Persecutors can only kill the body. That's the worst they can do; they cannot harm your soul which is eternally safe with Jesus. And if they kill your body, that merely sends you to glory earlier than you expected! Look with me at **Heb. 2:14-15**. We do not have to be afraid of death. It no longer holds any power over us. Jesus took all the sting out of it and we don't have to let Satan make us afraid of it any longer! We don't have to live in fear, even if we happen to live in a situation of danger. And the third reason we shouldn't fear is that Jesus:

c. He lovingly controls everything that happens to us (29-31) God keeps track of the very sparrows that live in your bushes and, amazingly, of the very hairs of your head that go down the drain every time you wash your hair! You are far more valuable to God than sparrows and His care for you extends to the most insignificant details of your life! He loves you! And you have to trust that if He allows persecution and suffering into your life, He knows what He's doing. He is sovereign! He is in control, not the nasty people who want to hurt us! Not one thing will ever happen to us that our loving Heavenly Father does not choose for us! And therefore, in verses **(32-39)** Jesus tells us that:

2. He does expect us to follow Him in spite of persecution Persecution is a sifting process. When we endure through it:

a. it demonstrates that we genuinely belong to Him (32-33) Persecution distinguishes the true from the false. It shows who genuinely knows Christ and has truly made Him Lord of their life. The one who caves in and gives up his faith and renounces Christ is not for real. He is one of the people who say, "Lord, Lord" back in Mt. 7 whom Jesus never really knew. When we endure, it proves to us ourselves and to all the world that we are the real deal! But sadly, we must realize that persecution:

b. it divides us, sometimes even from people we are closest to (34-36) Jesus repeated these words on another occasion in **Lk. 12:51** and there substituted the word *division* for the word *sword*. He did not mean that His coming to earth was to bring war or armed clashes, but that it would create a division between us and other people who reject Him. And sometimes those people will even be our parents or our children or those in our own household. It cannot be otherwise. Whoever is not with Him is against Him in the end and our choice of Him can cause even people we love to stand on the other side and reject us completely or even persecute us. In many places in the world, it does exactly that. But in the end persecution:

c. it demonstrates what we truly love most (37-39) When persecution comes, it makes us choose what we really love; it causes us to realize that Christ means more to us than our mother or father, more than our children or our parents, indeed, more than life itself. Taking up the cross means dying, giving up your life, and our choice displays what we truly love above all things. If we love Him, we cannot really lose our lives. As Jim Elliot put it, *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose*. And Jim demonstrated his first love by choosing to die of an Auca spear on a sandbar in 1957, rather than returning fire against his attackers. He and his companions were no fools; they were among that precious company of those who conquered Satan *by the word of their testimony and who loved not their lives even unto death* - Rev. 12:11. If that time ever comes for us, may we choose as they did!

But finally, all this talk about persecution makes it sound like absolutely everyone will be against us and that's not the case either. There will also be those who choose to listen and to help us, even if they don't believe right away, and Jesus closes by saying that He:

IV. Jesus Will Reward Those Who Help Us During Persecution (40-42) There will be those who receive us, who welcome us and do good to us, maybe even something as small as giving us a cup of cold water when we're hot and thirsty. And God will certainly reward and bless them for it, just as surely as He will bless us when we help our own brothers and sisters who are persecuted and stand with them and pray for them. Even if we are not suffering, these words should cause us to *remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body*. - Heb. 13:3.

Well, if nothing else, this passage should make us think deeply about ourselves, about the love that we profess to have for Christ and what we would do if it was put to the test. *In March 2001, Dayna Curry (now Masterson) and Heather Mercer followed God's call to Kabul, Afghanistan, working with the relief organization Shelter Now International. On August 3 they were arrested by the Taliban in Kandahar for spreading Christianity, after showing the "Jesus" film to an Afghan family. Under the Taliban regime, the penalty for sharing the Christian faith with Afghani Muslims was death. For 105 days, throughout the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the ensuing war between the U.S. and Taliban forces, the girls were held as prisoners. Their trial before the Taliban hung in the balance and so did their lives. In the early morning of November 15, God answered their prayers when U.S. Special Forces miraculously rescued the prisoners. Here is their testimony: "When Heather and I were in prison under the Taliban, God gave us this Scripture to encourage us. It's 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 (NLT), 'I think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and completely overwhelmed, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead. And he did deliver us from mortal danger. And we are confident that he will continue to deliver us. He will rescue us because you are helping by praying for us. As a result, many will give thanks to God because so many people's prayers for our safety have been answered.' As our friends and I spent those days in that Taliban prison facing the pressures of death, we knew many days that our only hope was to put our confidence in the promise of God: that for those who believe, nothing is impossible and that God can and will do a miracle. And God raised up many, millions from all over the world, to pray for the impossible, to pray for a move of God. And as we've seen, God has not only set us and our Afghan friends free, but He's done a move of His Holy Spirit in the nation of Afghanistan and the nation has been changed."* ["Somebody's Praying Me Through" - Created by Karla Worley and Gary Rhodes - Word Music - 2003 - p. 60]. Of course, not all such stories have such an earthly happy ending. But the common thread to all such stories is that suffering for Christ invariably strips us of all other things and causes us to put our complete confidence for life and eternity in God alone. I hope that's where yours is today.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Rejection Of The King - Mt. 11:1-16:13

The King's Messenger Rejected - Ch. 11:1-19, 14:1-12

Chapters 8-10 of Matthew emphasized Jesus' AUTHORITY and, during that period of His ministry, He had done miracle after miracle, visibly proving to everyone who He was, the King! Now, in chapters 11-16, we have recorded for us Israel's reaction to that. And it was not what you would expect. You would think Israel would have welcomed Him with open arms after seeing the marvelous things He did, but they didn't. Instead, Jesus faced REJECTION time and time again. Israel and her leaders rejected her King, which, of course, ultimately led to the cross. Chapter 11 begins just as Jesus is sending out the 12, two by two, on their preaching mission to the villages of Galilee in verse (1). While they were gone on their mission, Jesus Himself went alone throughout Galilee preaching and teaching. News of His ministry spread everywhere. It was heard by Herod in his palace and it was heard by John the Baptist in his dungeon. Now John has been in prison since the very beginning of Jesus' ministry; his arrest is mentioned in 4:12, which is now more than a year earlier. At this point John sends some of his disciples, whom he is still leading from prison, to Jesus to ask a question, and we have the record of:

I. The Inquiry Of John The Baptist - 11:1-19 Here is:

1. the question John had (2-3) Over a year ago John had baptized Jesus and at that time he had positively identified Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Christ, the One who was to come. The reason he knew Jesus was the Son of God was that God had shown the heavenly sign of the Spirit descending in the form of a dove. There had been no doubt in his mind. But a year in prison can do a number on your thinking. All this time:

a. he heard reports of Jesus' miracles Now Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that John was imprisoned in the fortress of Machaerus. Machaerus is on the East side of the Dead Sea, not far from the region of the Jordan River where John carried out his ministry. Jesus was way up in Galilee, 80 miles to the north, but news of the wonderful things He was doing, the healings and the miracles, traveled far. John, I'm sure, understood those things to be Divine confirmation of Jesus' ministry. But his question was basically this, "If you're actually the Messiah, then why am I still in prison? Are you just a prophet and not actually the One who will deliver us?" You see:

b. he didn't understand God's plan In one sense, John was no different from the other Jews of his day. He expected the Messiah to set up His Kingdom right away when He came. He himself expected to be the forerunner of that Kingdom and to literally usher it in. Being in jail for the rest of his life didn't seem to fit with his understanding of what God was up to! He was not doubting Jesus' power or authority; he was simply trying to understand what was going on, what God was doing. I think we can identify with that. How many times do we think God is doing one thing, but circumstances don't turn out as we expected and hoped and we begin to wonder what He is really up to? Well, look at:

2. the answer Jesus gave him (4-5) Now, I know you and I would prefer that Jesus had simply said, "Yes I am" but Jesus usually didn't work that way. Instead, He told John's disciples, who had evidently followed Him around for a little while and done some talking to the crowds, to go back and repeat to John what he had already heard about, the miracles and signs. Why? Because those:

a. the signs verified Jesus' identity The words Jesus used in His reply were chosen very carefully. They directly referred to the Old Testament, to Isaiah the prophet. He said, *In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.... Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy....* - **Is. 29:18-19, 35:5-6**. And especially they point to **Is. 61:1**, *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound....* John knew those words; he knew those predictions. The Word of God said that when the Kingdom came the lame would walk, the blind would see, the deaf would hear, and the poor would have the good news preached to them! Jesus was doing the very things that would be done in the Kingdom right now! And that made Him the King! He encouraged John to do what He expected all Israel to do, to recognize Him from their own Scriptures! But then he added one more statement in verse (6). In other words:

b. He made Himself the test of stumbling Jesus literally said, *Blessed is the one who does not stumble over Me.* This phrase is a reference to **Is. 8:13-15**, *But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.* He is in essence saying, "I AM the Lord of Hosts and I am the One over whom Israel will stumble and be broken! Happy is the one who chooses to follow Me!" He's basically telling

John, "Yes, I am He! The works prove it; I am the Promised One! I'm still doing what I said I would do and things are on track! Keep trusting Me!" Listen, when we can't figure out what God is doing, He's doing exactly what He's always been doing, working out His eternal plan, whether it looks like it or not!

But Jesus did not stop with answering John. John had often borne witness to Jesus, so now Jesus bears witness to John. Here we have:

3. the explanation Jesus gave to the crowd about John in verses (7-19). Multitudes of the Jews had listened to John's preaching and most regarded him as a true prophet of God, yet now he had been in prison and Jesus was the new voice in the land. I'm sure the people of Israel were perplexed about the connection between the two. In fact, you may be also! So here:

a. He declared who John was (7-15) First he says that John was:

(1) a prophet (7-9) He was not somebody that was like the reeds along the Jordan that bent whichever way the wind blew. He preached a straight, stern, message, a call for repentance. He wasn't some rich impressive man dressed in fine clothes like King Herod sitting in his palace. He wore garments of camel's hair. There was nothing about his message or his person to attract an audience or a following, and yet people went out in droves to listen to him. Why? Because they knew he was God's messenger! They knew they were hearing from God through him. Their very going acknowledged it! God had not sent them a true prophet in 4 centuries! But he was more than that; he was:

(2) the forerunner of Messiah (10) Jesus quotes **Mal. 3:1**. God had said through Malachi that He would send a special messenger to prepare things before the long-awaited Messiah would come. He was to prepare the hearts of Israel to receive their King. John's own father, Zacharias, had prophesied at his birth, *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways - Lk. 1:76*. And if you read it in context, you see that Zacharias knew what John's birth meant. If the forerunner had come, then the Kingdom was about to come, the Messiah was about to come to rescue his people! That's what Jesus is saying to the crowd, "John fulfilled the prophecy. The Forerunner came, so now the King is here!" Then He goes on to say that John's ministry is:

(3) the conclusion of the Old Testament era (11-13) John's ministry was a turning point in God's program. The Old Testament law and prophets had fulfilled their ministry. They pointed to the future coming of the Christ. But from the time John began to preach a year earlier, he preached that the Kingdom was at hand. Messiah was here and the promised kingdom was being set up. The Kingdom was advancing powerfully; thousands were seeing Jesus and following Him. Yet powerful opposition was also growing in men like Herod and the Pharisees, who were trying to attack it by force. John was the greatest man born up until that time because he directly prepared the way for the King, yet Jesus seems to imply that he would not get to see the promised Kingdom come. He would not be privileged like those who became part of that kingdom with complete understanding after Jesus' death and resurrection. So really, John was the end of an era in God's administration. The Old Covenant was on its last legs, giving way to a New one. And finally, Jesus says that John was:

(4) the promised Elijah (14-15) All the Jews knew that in **Mal. 4:5** God had promised to send Elijah back, just prior to the Day of the Lord when the Kingdom would be set up. Now, mark Jesus' words carefully; He was not saying that John was some kind of reincarnation of Elijah. He very carefully said that if they would accept it (that is, accept Him as King and the coming of the Kingdom), then John would be the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy. He would be the Elijah who was to come. In fact, the angel Gabriel told John's father, *and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah...* - **Lk. 1:17**. Before his birth, God declared that John would occupy the place of Elijah, the forerunner of Messiah, if the Jews would receive their King. John was a landmark in spiritual history. He was the sign to Israel that the Kingdom was about to come, if they would accept Jesus the Messiah as their King. But sadly, they didn't; Israel rejected both the Forerunner and the King, so Jesus went on:

b. He chastised Israel for rejecting God's messengers (16-19) Jesus said that Israel was like a bunch of children playing with their friends in the marketplace. And some of the kids are trying to play their little flutes and get the other kids to dance. So, they play a happy wedding tune and try to get them to dance. But the other kids say, "Na, I don't want to". So the musicians say, "Fine, let's play funeral" and they begin to wail out a funeral dirge, but they don't want to play that either. No matter what the musicians play, the crowd doesn't want to play! Jesus said, "That's how it is with you, Israel; you just will NOT cooperate with God! You rejected John for his asceticism because he lived in the desert ate locusts! You said, 'He must be demon possessed or something,' and wouldn't respond to his message. But then I came walking among you and eating with you at your invitation and you call me a glutton and a drunkard and accuse me of not being holy enough because I will eat with those you call sinners!" God can't win! No matter who He sends them or what they're like, Israel will not respond! *Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds*. God's wisdom will be seen in the end by the wonderful results it produces!

Hey, just a thought. Sometimes God has that same problem with us! He can't seem to please us either. When things are tough for us, we complain. Then when things are going well, we complain and don't like it that way either. But in the end,

we'll see how wise He was to do things HIS way! We certainly wouldn't choose the ending for John that God did, but all the while God was doing exactly what He planned and John was fulfilling the role God had planned for him. Flip over to chapter 14 and look with me at:

II. The Death Of John The Baptist - 14:1-12 Not long afterward:

1. Herod Antipas executed John (1-2) This Herod is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who had tried to kill Jesus as a baby. He was the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea and he is also the Herod before whom Jesus later stood at His trial. We'll come back to these verses in a moment, but to explain them, Matthew tells:

2. the story of John's arrest and imprisonment (3-5) Herodias was his own niece, his brother Aristobulus' daughter. She was first married to his other brother Philip I who lived in Jerusalem, but when Antipas and his first wife came to visit, an intrigue developed between them and he plotted to divorce his wife and take Herodias as his own. Thus, he not only married his own niece but stole his brother's wife! Well:

a. John openly opposed his immoral behavior, probably publicly, but also straight to his face. Herod was furious and arrested John and though at first, he himself wanted to kill John, he seems to have thought better of it. **Mk.**

6:19 reveals that his wife *Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not...* The real hatred was in Herodias. She kept on urging Herod to kill him, but he wouldn't. Why? Matthew says:

b. Herod denied his wife's desire out of fear of the people He was afraid of creating a riot among his subjects if he did. Plus, **Mk. 6:20** also adds that *Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe*. He was afraid of what God might do to him, so he kept him locked up and, amazingly, it seems that:

c. John was actually impacting Herod - Mk. 6:20 concludes with, *When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly*. That year in prison was not wasted! The more Herod talked with John, the more he became perplexed and confused. He knew John was right, even though he had no intention of changing. The point is that despite all of his evil behavior, he was still reachable. The Spirit of God was still dealing with him. And God was still using John, even in prison! Don't give up because you think someone is too hard for God to reach or because you think you can't be used by God in your circumstances! Here's:

3. the manner of his death (6-12) It was Herod's birthday celebration in his palace at Machaerus. John was held in one of the fortress towers and the party was held in an open area beneath. Imagine the hall filled with a hundred guests. The entertainment of the day for Herod's friends was a dancer. Of all people to use, he chose his wife Herodias' daughter by her first marriage, Salome, who was only perhaps 14 at the time. But don't think this was some artistic cultural display; from what we know of Herod, Herodias and Salome, you can picture it as a bunch of drunken men watching a beautiful young woman tantalize them with a very sensual dance. And she did her vulgar job well.

a. impacted by sensuality (and alcohol) Herod made a rash promise, anything she wanted up to half the kingdom! And he made it firm by swearing an oath in front of all his guests. Mr. Big Shot! But:

b. his wife used his pride to manipulate him (8-12) Herodias sees her golden opportunity and tells Salome to ask for John's head. Now Herod sees how rash he was, but pride takes over. He's afraid to break his oath, plus he doesn't want to look like a fool in front of his guests. So, he goes against what he knows is right and sends the executioner to the cell block to bring back John's gory head. But this whole story simply explains the setting for **(1-2)**. Herod:

c. he was haunted by this incident. He hears of the fame of Jesus and in his twisted mind thinks it is John come back from the dead with miraculous power. He can't get rid of the guilt. For the rest of Jesus' ministry, he really wants to see Jesus in person, but when he finally does meet Him on Good Friday morning, Jesus won't say even one word to him, nor do one of the miracles which Herod is dying to see, so Herod's heart is hardened and he ends up mocking Jesus and sending him away, becoming **party to the blame for Jesus' death**. Herod died in exile in France along with his wife. Salome continued the family incest by marrying, first her own elderly uncle and later, her cousin. John went instantly from prison to Paradise.

No, God certainly didn't do things the way John expected! Nonetheless, God had reason and purpose in the way He chose to do things. *Samuel Rutherford was a Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian. In the 1630's he was banished from his parish and sent to Aberdeen for being a nonconformist, that is, one who did not agree that the Church of England was the only true church. He was not allowed to preach and other ministers shunned him. From there he wrote this letter to encourage a friend: "Brother, this is His own truth I now suffer for. He has sealed my sufferings with His own comforts... Go on, my dear brother, in the strength of the Lord, not fearing man who is a worm, nor the son of man that shall die. Providence has a thousand keys, to open a thousand sundry doors for the deliverance of His own, [even] when it [appears dead past all hope]. Let us be faithful, and care for our own part, which is to do and suffer for Him, and lay Christ's part on Himself, and leave it there. Duties are ours; events are the Lord's. When our faith goes to meddle with events, and to hold a court... upon God's providence, and begins to say, 'How will You do this and that?' we lose ground.*

We have nothing to do there. It is our part to let the Almighty exercise His own office, and steer His own helm. There is nothing left to us, but to see how we may be approved of Him, and how we may roll the weight of our weak souls in well-doing upon Him who is God Omnipotent: and when what we thus essay miscarrieth, it will be neither our sin nor cross." If we are faithful and obey and things don't turn out well in our eyes, we bear neither the blame for, nor the burden of, the situation. All of that belongs to Him. Are you struggling today in some difficult circumstance like John was? Hold on! Stand firm. Cling to Jesus and follow Him with all your heart. Leave all the rest to Him.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Rejection Of The King - Mt. 11:1-16:13

The King Condemns Rejecters But Calls Followers - 11:20-30

The greater majority of Jesus' 3 ½ year ministry was spent in the region of Galilee, away from the Jewish heartland of Judea and the holy city of Jerusalem. Beginning at chapter 10, Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the message of His Kingdom in all the towns of Galilee? Then 11:1 adds that He Himself did the same thing while they were gone, that He personally made a circuit again of the major towns. Many miracles were done, many demons cast out, many sick people healed. But what was the reaction to this huge effort to saturate one province with the Good News? Sure, great crowds of common people flocked to Him; there was always a warm reception among the poor and needy who wanted relief from their suffering. But by and large, these cities of Galilee, where Jesus spent most of His ministry and where most of His miracles were done, rejected Him. We saw last week in verses 11-19 how after the messengers from John the Baptist came, Jesus explained to the crowd who John was and chided them, because they not only didn't listen to John's preaching, but now they wouldn't listen to Him either. And then we read some really harsh words as:

I. Jesus Condemned The Cities Of Galilee in which He had invested so much ministry **(20-24)** Jesus names three of the chief cities of Galilee where He had done most of His miracles: Chorazin, a major town about 2 miles north of Capernaum, Bethsaida, the little fishing village where Peter, Andrew and Philip lived near Capernaum and Capernaum itself which was actually Jesus' own residence for a time. Three towns clustered together where He had invested the most and He condemns them saying, *Woe to you*, "Be warned of the judgment that is coming!". Why? Verse **(20)** tells us it is because:

1. they did not repent What did He mean? Well, look ahead to **12:41**. You remember the story of Jonah, don't you? After God straightened out his obedience problem in the belly of a fish, he went to Nineveh and went through the whole city and preached that God was going to destroy it. And the people of Nineveh repented! *...the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."* - Jonah 3:5-9. That's what Jesus was wanting to see, whole towns touched by the guilt of their own sin, believing His message and turning to Him *en masse*. A greater than Jonah walked their streets and preached in their marketplaces! Jonah never did a single miracle; Jesus displayed His power and authority time after time. Yet was there any of that sort of repentance in the towns of Galilee? No! Jesus says that:

2. they were given an incredible opportunity It was in Capernaum that Jesus cast a demon out of a man in the synagogue, that He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever and many, many with various diseases that same evening. It was there He healed the Roman centurion's servant with a word and also the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof. Think how great an opportunity this was for the people in these towns to hear and believe. Isaiah foretold this very thing: *Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.* - **Is. 9:1-2 NLT**. Galilee was an area of great spiritual darkness, but into that very area Jesus shined this intense bright light of spiritual truth. It was an opportunity:

a. one so great that those without any knowledge of God would have seized it In His omniscience Jesus said that if He had left Israel altogether and done those miracles in pagan idol-worshipping cities like Tyre and Sidon up along the coast, they would all have put on sackcloth and ashes like Nineveh did. They would have recognized the presence and the power of God and turned from their evil ways, though they knew nothing about the true God. But the Jewish cities, for all their background in the Scriptures, didn't! In fact, Jesus said that it was an opportunity:

b. one so great that the most wicked would have been changed by it Sodom and Gomorrah were completely destroyed by God through fire from heaven for their wickedness. He couldn't find five righteous men in them to cause Him to spare them according to His promise to Abraham! Yet if He had gone there and done these same miracles, even these worst of all cities would still be standing because they would have repented!

The light Jesus shined upon these cities of Galilee was so bright, so intense, such an opportunity given them by God, that:

3. they were deserving of an awful judgment He says, "God's day of judgment is coming for you! You, who think you're so important and so wise, who lift yourselves up, as it were, to heaven, you will be cast down to hell! God will judge you and you stand condemned!" What is Jesus saying? Well, first of all:

a. this is a collective warning of physical destruction for these cities God can't send cities *per se* to hell. Sodom's judgment was a question of being destroyed or remaining. God judged Samaria and Jerusalem in the Old Testament by invading armies destroying the cities. Jesus said Capernaum would be cast down to *Sheol*, which is literally the grave. He's warning that those cities would be physically destroyed, and they were. All three today are ancient ruins. But more importantly:

b. this is an individual warning of eternal punishment for people Notice the future tense in verse 24, *it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment...* Sodom, even though it was judged physically and is gone, still hasn't faced the day of judgment. He must also be talking about the individual inhabitants of those cities. These people who had seen this great light and rejected it will face a greater degree of punishment when they stand before God at the Great White Throne, than those who had little light. Now that brings us to consider:

4. the truths Jesus is teaching us here First; it is clear that:

a. receiving the knowledge of Christ is an act of God's grace Jesus chose to give that great light to Galilee and not to Tyre and Sidon, or to Syria or Egypt. He can choose to do that; it is His right. He is not obligated to shine the light of the knowledge of Himself on everyone equally. He owes us nothing. So, the fact that we have received the light, that we know about Christ and can respond to Him, is an act of pure grace that we don't deserve. We could have been born in North Korea or Saudi Arabia and never heard His Name! Like these cities, we have received an incredibly tremendous privilege that some 2 billion people don't even realize they're missing! But, secondly:

b. having the knowledge of Christ increases our responsibility to respond God expects us to respond to that knowledge, to repent and follow Christ, just as Jesus expected those cities to respond. He holds us accountable for what we know, for the light He gives us! Jesus' principle is, *Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required!* - Lk. 12:47. Knowing what God wants makes us accountable to obey it! And that's why Jesus seems to be teaching us that:

c. knowingly rejecting Christ increases the severity of punishment Some time ago on the radio I heard a caller ask, "Are there degrees of punishment in hell?" The host answered "Yes" and used this passage as a proof. That didn't sit right with me, somehow. I guess I've always thought that hell is hell, everlasting fire, undying worms, weeping and gnashing of teeth; how can there be degrees of that? But I didn't have time to really think about it until I prepared this message and it truly does make sense. Else why would God open the books on that last day and judge the wicked dead *according to their works* in Rev. 20:12, if everyone's punishment is exactly the same anyway? Other texts imply the same.

Now please hear me carefully; I'm not saying that some who are without Christ will get off easy in eternity. Without Christ, ALL human beings who die go to hell and simply being there at all is an unimaginably awful, eternal punishment. Yet within that awfulness, evidently somehow there is even greater torment for the Hitlers and the Stalins of the world than for some others who were guilty of less heinous things. And Jesus' strong warning here is that there is greater suffering ahead for those to whom God has given grace to know the truth about His Son and reject Him outright, than for those who have not had that privilege! If you are an American with the news of Christ on the radio and TV and internet and a church on every corner and have chosen NOT to follow Christ, I'd think long and hard about what Jesus says right here! We have the brightest portion of the light in the world, probably, but that heightens our judgment if we refuse it! That's the bad news, but in the second half of the passage we have the Good News:

II. Jesus Calls All To Respond And Come To Him (25-30) This ominous condemnation is followed by one of the most gracious invitations in all of Scripture. Even as He finishes those harsh words, Jesus breaks out in a prayer of praise (25-26). You see:

1. God chooses to whom He will reveal spiritual truth Turn over to **1 Cor. 2:14** with me. We can't perceive spiritual truth in our natural state; none of us can. We can't look at a miracle and discern the presence of God on our own. It's not in us. God does not allow spiritual truth to be discovered by natural means, by the wisdom of earthly learning. He gives the knowledge of Himself only by revelation. He reveals it and Jesus notes that:

a. He chooses to hide it from the "wise" Paul said the same thing in **1 Cor. 1:26-31**. Do you notice in the Gospels who it is that responded to Jesus? Never was it the Pharisees or the elders or the priests, the ones who should have been the first to see the light. In fact, God hid it from them because they were bent on getting spiritual truth their own way. Rather:

b. He chooses to reveal it unto the “simple”, to the child-like people who are willing to innocently and simply believe Him. That's who the crowds were, common people, fishermen, poor people and suffering people. Just look around you this morning. There aren't many rich people here today. There aren't many people with fancy high-sounding titles from the halls of academia. That was true in Corinth. That was true in Jesus' ministry. It wasn't the leaders of society; it was common ordinary people, people who were willing like little children to say, "Yes, Lord, I believe!" It's true here today. Who gives their hearts to Christ? The ordinary, the simple, the hurting and wounded, the weak and needy! God most often reveals the truth of the Gospel to those who come simply and from this prayer you can see that:

c. Jesus is pleased that He chooses to do it that way! He is delighted with it and praises the Father. He is not interested in having a bunch of self-centered human beings with Him forever who would only boast of themselves and how good and how learned they were. But He is thrilled at having a multitude of those who humbly recognize their own need and cast themselves completely on Him! Now look at the next verse carefully **(27)**. This is one of the most powerful claims that Jesus makes for Himself:

2. God has entrusted the revealing of Himself to Jesus alone I don't know exactly how to say this, but:

a. there is a self-enclosed world of relationship between Father and Son The Father and the Son (and the Spirit) know each other in a depth of satisfying relationship that only they can know. I never really thought about this until I read *The Shack* (which I do recommend, by the way). In one scene the author symbolically portrays the main character walking into a remote cabin and finding the Father, Jesus and the Spirit making and having breakfast by themselves, joyously talking back and forth, perfectly satisfied with one another. It's intended to be a goofy picture, but it makes you think about the fact God is completely satisfied in Himself and has been from all eternity. The Father and the Son know and love one another in a depth of relationship we can't even imagine, yet:

b. it is opened to others only as the Son chooses to reveal it to them Jesus lets US into that relationship! Through Him we can KNOW the Father and love the Father and be satisfied in the Father as He is. But ONLY through Him! He said it clearly, *I am the way...no one comes to the Father except through Me!* Jesus has to choose to reveal the Father to us so that we can know Him. But look what He chooses to do **(28-30)**:

3. Jesus graciously calls all people to become His disciples The invitation always stands open and it is extended to everyone. *Come to Me!* Now the language of this invitation requires some background understanding. We see that word *yoke* and get hung up on thinking about the analogy of oxen pulling wagons but that's not the kind of yoke He means.

a. take my yoke means to learn from, serve, and become like, a Rabbi In the rabbinical system of the day, there were different schools of thought, different systems of interpreting the Torah and they were referred to as “yokes”. To become a disciple of a particular rabbi was to take his “yoke” upon you. Even today in converting to Judaism a person is required to “accept the yoke of the Commandments”, which includes not just the Bible but the Talmud and all the codes of Jewish law. When Jesus said, *Take my yoke upon you and learn FROM me*, everyone knew that He was inviting all to become His personal disciples. A disciple did not learn ABOUT his rabbi; he learned FROM his rabbi, as Jesus put it, but a disciple was not a casual learner; rather, he was one who left everything else in order to follow his rabbi day and night. He absorbed his rabbi's Life. A disciple learned from his rabbi a way of thinking and living; he listened to his rabbi; he discussed and debated his rabbi; he ate as his rabbi ate; he slept as his rabbi slept. As much as was possible, the rabbi reproduced himself in his disciple. [*Secrets Jesus Shared - Jennifer Dean*]. Isn't that exactly what Jesus did with the Twelve during His ministry? And here He invites ALL of us to accept that yoke of discipleship from Him, to follow Him about and learn from Him all our lives and become exactly like Him! Now, as Jesus intimated:

(1) the yoke of Judaism was difficult and produced weariness In **23:4** Jesus warned the crowd about the scribes and Pharisees like this: *They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.* The religious leadership that dominated the Jewish nation knew every one of the 614 commandments in the Law and had surrounded them with hundreds more commands in their own traditions over the centuries. Only the cream of the crop, the best of the best, could even begin know them all, let alone try to keep them! That attitude continues even today; MyJewishLearning.com says that, *explicit rejection of even one of the commandments in a manner considered rebellious toward rabbinic authority invalidates the conversion process.* What a heavy yoke to bear! What a difficult way to approach God, an endless round of trying to follow thousands of rules! No wonder people were weary! All who try to approach God through trying to be good enough on their own eventually know that weariness! But unlike other rabbis who made their yoke hard:

(2) the yoke of Jesus is easy to bear and light to carry It is to love Him with all our hearts and to love each other the way we love ourselves and it is made easy and light because He places His own Spirit inside us to give us the power to do all that He asks of us! You see, just as the other rabbis made their followers like themselves:

b. Jesus is a gentle and humble Master and will make us like Himself He will make us, not proud and demanding and harsh, but humble and gentle. He will reproduce His own character in us as we enter into relationship with the Father through Him! So rather than a life of hard, difficult service always striving in vain to somehow please God:

c. Jesus offers us rest and rejuvenation for our souls We experience a sabbath-rest. We cease from our own striving and trying and rest in the peace of a relationship with God through him and we find our very souls infused with new life and energy to serve and follow Him.

Oh, what a gracious invitation after such an awful condemnation! *Evangelist D. L. Moody said that his "greatest mistake" occurred on October 8, 1871. On that night Moody preached about the Lord's trial and his message was based on Pilate's question, "What shall I do then with Jesus?" (Mat. 27:22). As Moody concluded, he said to his audience, "I wish you would seriously consider this subject, for next Sunday we will speak about the cross, and at that time I'll inquire, 'What will YOU do with Jesus?'" Ira Sankey then sang the closing hymn, and in it were the lines, "Today the Savior calls; for refuge fly. The storm of justice falls, and death is nigh." Little did anyone know that these words would be the last ever heard in that huge hall where the service was held. Even as they were being sung, the soloist's voice was nearly drowned out by the sound of clanging bells in the street. That was the night of the great Chicago fire which destroyed more than 2000 acres of the city, and left 100,000 people homeless. Among the several hundred people who died were some who earlier had been in Moody's audience. The evangelist was greatly distressed by this and lamented his tragic error in not asking those men and women to receive the Lord that very evening. He later said, "Now, whenever I preach, I press for a definite decision. I would rather lose my right hand than give people even a day to decide for Christ, for I don't know if I'll ever see them again."* Listen, that night pictures so clearly what Jesus was saying in the two halves of our text. He offers an amazingly gracious invitation, *Come to Me, all of you and find rest...*, but if you reject it, there's an unbelievably awful fire waiting. I'd take it today, if you haven't. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Rejection Of The King - Mt. 11:1-16:13

The King Rejected Over Sabbath Keeping - 12:1-21

In chapters 11-16 Matthew is showing us how Jesus was rejected as King by His people, in spite of the myriad of mighty works that He did. Although there were many things that caused Jesus to be rejected by the religious establishment of His day, one of the biggest issues centered around His observance of the Sabbath Day as a day of rest. Of course, the Old Testament Law was very clear that no work should be done on the Sabbath day in Israel. The very word *sabbath* means rest and that's what they were to do. It was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, given to them in the Ten Commandments. No other people rested one day a week; they all worked 7 days straight through! It was part of their national identity. But over the centuries, the Jews added to the commandment a huge set of rules in their tradition to explain what they thought that command meant. The Mishna presents 39 classes of prohibited activity on the Sabbath, some of which are: planting, plowing, reaping, gathering, sorting, sifting, cooking, tying, untying, sewing, tearing, writing, erasing, igniting a fire, carrying things from one place to another, and so on. Further, each one of these was minutely defined. For instance, here is a modern example applying the law against sorting: *if there is a bowl of mixed peanuts and raisins and one desires the raisins and dislikes the peanuts, removing (effectively sorting) the peanuts from the bowl, leaving a 'purified' pile of raisins free from unwanted peanuts, would be [prohibited] as the peanuts are removed. However, removing the desirable raisins from the peanuts does not purify the mixture, as one is left with undesirable peanuts (hence unrefined) not a refined component as before, and is thus permissible.* Or how about cooking: *Baking, cooking, frying, or any method of applying heat to food to prepare for eating is included in this prohibition. This is different from "preparing". For example, one can make a salad because the form of the vegetables doesn't change, only the size. However, one cannot cook the vegetables to soften them for eating.* The prohibition to ignite a fire ...was (and in many circles, still is) commonly understood to disallow operating electrical switches. *One reason is that, when actuating electromechanical switches that carry a live current, there is always the possibility that a small electric spark will be generated. This spark may be thought of as a kind of fire...* [Wikipedia] Can you imagine trying to live under mountains of tiny regulations like this? Pious Jews still do today! Jesus always rested on the Sabbath; it was His seeming willingness to violate some of these ridiculous man-invented traditions that infuriated the zealous Pharisees who kept every one of them. Matthew includes two instances in chapter 12 of direct conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over this issue. The first record we have is:

I. The Conflict Over Working on the Sabbath (1-8) On this occasion, Jesus' disciples simply walked through a field of wheat, probably on their way to the synagogue, and picked some of the heads of grain and ate them because they were hungry. Out of that comes:

1. the accusation of the Pharisees (1-2) The action of plucking heads of grain to eat from someone's field was specifically allowed in Deut. 23:25. The problem is that this was the Sabbath. To the Pharisees, picking the grain was reaping, rubbing it between the hands was threshing and dropping or blowing away the chaff was winnowing, violating

three of the 39 prohibited activities! Of course, the disciples were not breaking the Sabbath law at all, but they *were* violating the strictest interpretation of the traditions, which the Pharisees considered as sacred as the Law itself. So, they accused the disciples of violating the Law, but look at:

2. the answer of Jesus He took them right to the Scriptures (3-4). Now realize that David was the Jewish hero above all others; he was greatly respected. And Jesus points out that:

a. David's hunger superseded the Law This refers to **1 Sam. 21:1-6** where David was fleeing from Saul who was trying to kill him. He and his men were traveling hard and were hungry and came to Nob where the Tabernacle was at that time. The High Priest gave him the bread that had just been removed from the table in the Tabernacle before God, which was only supposed to be eaten by priests! But the text says he did that *because there was no other bread there*. If there had been other bread, he would have given David's men that, but there was a real need. David was in an urgent situation and in that circumstance, to give aid to one in great need superseded the Law. Moreover, David is never rebuked by God or anyone else for it in Scripture! Jesus says, "What about that?" Then He went on to point out that:

b. the priests' obligations regularly supersede the Law (5) The priests are commanded to offer the required sacrifices on the Sabbath day as well as other days. But that is work. It includes killing, skinning and cutting up animals, making fire, and a number of other things that are directly prohibited in their traditions. God in His own instructions showed that there were things that superseded the Sabbath Law. When two of His commands came into conflict, as in this case, the more important of them had to be followed. And this was something that went right on under their noses every week, yet they were not offended by it! Then Jesus made His point (7). How can you tell what God really wants? Well, with God:

c. the right heart supersedes the ritual Jesus quotes **Hosea 6:6** to show God's priorities. He would rather have you show mercy to someone in need than bring Him a lamb for a burnt offering. Meticulous rule keeping is no good without a right heart. Offering sacrifices and keeping sabbath laws mean nothing unless the heart is right. The right heart, the heart that is devoted to do what God wants, is more important than ritually doing commanded actions. You can see this on several occasions in the Old Testament. One that comes to mind is King Hezekiah who celebrated the Passover with his people in the second month, the wrong month, because they couldn't do it in the first month and God blessed and approved it anyway. Why? Because their hearts were right; they were trying to genuinely please God! In the New Testament, Paul said, *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.* - **1 Cor. 13:3**. God is not interested in you ritually doing all the right things to try to gain His favor; He wants your heart! He wants you to act because you love Him with all your heart and want to please Him and because you love others with His love! But there is an even more important point that Jesus is making here (6). Jesus chose His two illustrations carefully. There are no two things the Jews revered more than David and their Temple but here's what He's claiming:

d. Jesus is greater than both David and the Temple That must really have shocked the Pharisees! He says, "I am greater than the Temple! I am greater than the law." Why? In essence, He's saying, "because I made them both!" There is one piece of His reply that Matthew leaves out but Mark records, *...The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* - **Mk. 2:27**:

(1) He made the sabbath to benefit man, not enslave him He made it to give him a day of rest and rejuvenation, that his body might be healthy and strong and his mind relieved of stress. He never made it to bind man to the stress of remembering and keeping a thousand minute little rules. He says, "I made it; I gave the rule to bless man but you've made the institution superior to the people it was given to bless!" But then He added this in verse (8):

(2) He has the right to abrogate His own Law He made the Sabbath law; He was the determiner of what was compliant with that Law, not them! He declared that his disciples were innocent, guiltless, and they had no right to say otherwise!

Well, that must have set them to fuming. But Luke tells us that it was on another sabbath day later on that they deliberately provoked:

II. The Conflict Over Healing on the Sabbath (9-14) This time Jesus is in the synagogue for services. And there is a man present whose hand is withered and atrophied, probably deformed from birth. And they bring the subject up.

1. the question of the Pharisees (9-10) is, *Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?* Their answer to that comes again from the teachings of the Rabbis which basically say, "Not unless it is necessary to save life!" A person must be in danger of dying in order to receive help. For instance, it was prohibited to set a broken bone. One could not pierce an abscess to drain it. One could not apply oils or lotions to heal or drink something for medicinal purposes. Even praying for the sick on the Sabbath was prohibited by some. Only if a person is about to die may they be given any of those things on the Sabbath! Well, the Pharisees think they have Him. They are sure He's going to heal the man, so they are going to trap

Him into working on the Sabbath right in front of a whole congregation of people who are zealous for the Law! But Jesus is too wise for them. Luke tells us that He begins His answer to their question with a question of His own:

a. Jesus' question to them *But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" - Lk. 6:8-9.* He raises the issue to a higher plane. Of course, doing harm or destroying life were *always* prohibited. Saving life was mandated; it was an obligation, even on the Sabbath. But somehow, simply doing good, was not so clear to them, so Jesus proceeds to illustrate it for them. But, by the way, notice:

b. Jesus' veiled accusation against them When he says, *is it lawful to destroy life?*, look what's in their minds in verse 14! Who's really violating the Sabbath here? Hold that thought and let's look further at:

2. the answer of Jesus (11-12) He poses to them a situation where He knows *they* would break the Sabbath! He says if one of their sheep fell into a pit on the Sabbath, they would not leave it there to die but would pull it out, Sabbath or not, figuring that saving the life of the sheep was more important. They can't argue with that so Jesus draws some conclusions for them:

a. some obligations supersede others He proved to them what they already knew, that when two obligations to God conflict, there has to be a priority; some obligations are more important to God than others. And hence He proves that:

b. the obligation to do good supersedes the sabbath law It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. It is within the Law to forego one of its provisions in order to do a higher good! A man is much more important to God than a sheep and to do good by rescuing him from a life of suffering is entirely within the Law. By the way, at that time there does not seem have been a specific prohibition about rescuing an animal, but later rabbis taught, *if a beast fall into a ditch, or pool of water, it is forbidden a man to bring it out with his hand; but if he can give it food where it is, it may be fed till the going out of the sabbath.* In other words, leave it in the ditch and let it suffer and take it out tomorrow! This appears to be a direct reaction against this teaching of Christ! At any rate, Jesus left no doubt. Here is:

3. Jesus' definitive answer: He healed the man (13) And notice, he didn't even violate one of their prohibitions. He didn't apply anything or even touch the man; He simply spoke the words and it was done! The miracle showed God's own approval of His words; God healed the man! God agreed with Him, not the Pharisees, and they couldn't accuse Him of doing anything besides talking! Yet rather than falling on their faces in awe, look at:

4. the Pharisees' definitive reaction: they plotted to destroy Him (14) They were so furious, so enraged, that they left in a huff and began planning how to kill Him! Can you imagine how hard their hearts were? The very law which says *Thou shalt not kill*, they were willing to violate in order to see that their Sabbath regulations were kept! They themselves prioritized the Law, only they did it in the reverse order of God's priorities!

But it is important for us to look at:

III. Jesus' Reaction To These Sabbath Conflicts (15-21) Jesus didn't go out angry, fuming at the blind Pharisees. Instead:

1. He strove to avoid further controversy, yet kept on doing good (15-16) Did you ever wonder why Jesus told people not to tell who He was or tell what He had done for them? I think the answer is implied here. You see the violent reaction it created in the leaders. He did not want the level of that reaction against Him to rise too soon; He did not want to go to the cross prematurely. He waited until He Himself chose to push their buttons on Palm Sunday by riding in, claiming to be Messiah, and by openly cleansing the temple and chastising the leaders during Passion Week. He waited until the time appointed by the Father, but for now, He left the area so as not to provoke them further, yet continued His ministry, healing huge multitudes by the Sea of Galilee, Mark tells us, yet still trying to keep them from openly rallying as His followers. The point is that:

2. He demonstrated His Kingship gently (17-21) Matthew says this is a fulfillment of **Is. 42:1-4**. Messiah, when He came, would not quarrel nor cry out. He would not raise His voice in the street like some rebel leader or politician trying to raise an army of followers. He would not bring about His Kingdom by public strife with the national leaders. And further, the bruised reed which was ready to break, He would be careful not to break off and the smoking lamp wick which still had a spark of life in it He would not snuff out. He would keep on showing tender mercy to the suffering and the broken and the hurting, to those who would receive it, until the time came to set up His Kingdom in all its fullness.

That could well be a good model for us to follow, to do what we can to avoid unnecessary controversy with those who disagree with us and just keep on gently, quietly, changing lives by sharing our Jesus with those who will listen. But before we leave this particular subject altogether, let's take a moment to address:

IV. The Continuing Sabbath Controversy The conflict over keeping the sabbath has been handed over to the church and continues even today. Is Sunday God's sabbath day of rest and is it right to play ball on Sunday or go to the store, or work on something? In fact, some Christian groups, like the Seventh Day Adventists, have gone so far as to actually worship on Saturday which is literally the sabbath day. Well, let me say clearly that there is not one line of Scripture that says the church is to observe the sabbath. That is the only one of the 10 commandments NOT repeated in the New Testament and nowhere does it say that Sunday is the sabbath day, as our American forefathers often called it. Sunday is the first day of the week, the day on which we celebrate our Lord's resurrection. It is a voluntary day which we consecrate to God for worship, not a commanded day of rest. The New Testament has only two things to say about the sabbath. First:

1. we are freed from Sabbath regulations - Col. 2:13-17 The Sabbath is part of God's ceremonial law given to Israel and is on the same plane with the dietary laws, the feasts of Israel, and the other ceremonies they held like the monthly new moon celebration. As far as obligation goes, it was cancelled at the cross. It is no longer an obligation on us in the church, in the exact same way that none of those other things are. If somebody wants to observe Sunday (or Saturday) as a day of rest or if they want to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, for that matter, that's OK. We cannot judge them as long as they are not counting on it for salvation. But they also cannot judge us, which is usually what happens. When you judge somebody by saying that they don't keep the sabbath, you put yourself in the position of a modern-day Pharisee judging others by a rule that you have made up! So then, what good is the sabbath to us? Well:

2. the Sabbath is a type of our rest in Christ - Heb. 4:9-11 Like the sacrificial system and the feasts, the Sabbath was cancelled because it was only a picture, a shadow. It was fulfilled in Christ. Just as God rested on the sabbath day when His work of creation was finished, so, when Jesus died on the cross and rose again, His work of redemption was finished and when we believe on Christ and cease trying to work for our own salvation, we enter into a perennial Sabbath rest spiritually! And since that Sabbath rest was never permanent in the Old Testament, but had to be repeated every week, it shows the Old Covenant was incomplete, it could not save. But now we enter into that rest by faith in Christ once and for all, just as God ceased from creating once and for all; He didn't start up again on the eighth day! His rest was permanent and so it pictures for us our permanent sabbath-rest in Christ.

The trap that the Pharisees fell into is called legalism, the creating and keeping of rules that we assume gain favor with God, all the while missing His very heart. Sadly, the church in every generation has always tended toward this very same practice, demanding that its people follow certain rules that seem to make sense in their day. Just one generation ago many Bible believing churches, including this one, declared that it was wrong to attend movies, to dance, to touch a single drop of alcohol, for men to have beards or long hair or for women to wear pants or lots of makeup (at least in church). None of that is in the Bible; we made it up ourselves, thinking that by keeping our rules we were pleasing God. And many churches were so focused on those minor things and declared them so loudly, that we sometimes missed the heart of God to reach those who looked and acted the exact opposite of us but who desperately needed Jesus, not just a makeover. Chuck Swindoll tells of a friend who, *when he was a youth worker many years ago in an ethnic community, attended a church that had Scandinavian roots. Being a rather forward-looking and creative young man, he decided he would show the youth group a missionary film. We're talking simple, safe, black-and-white religious-oriented movie. That film projector hadn't been off an hour before a group of the leaders in the church called him in and asked him about what he had done. They asked, "Did you show the young people a film?" In all honesty he responded, "Well, yeah, I did." "We don't like that," they replied. Without trying to be argumentative, the youth worker reasoned, "Well, I remember that at the last missionary conference, our church showed slides--" One of the church officers put his hand up signaling him to cease talking. Then, in these words, he emphatically explained the conflict: "If it's still, fine. If it moves, sin!" You can show slides, but when they start movin', you're gettin' into sin.* [C. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, Word, 1990, pp. 160-161]. May God guard us from stepping outside of Scripture and insisting that the way WE think things should be in order to please God is absolute and forcing those things on others in His Name.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Rejection Of The King - Mt. 11:1-16:13

The King Rejected Over Exorcism - 12:22-50

This entire section of Matthew is showing how Jesus was rejected by the leaders of Israel. The first 21 verses of chapter 12 recount one major issue they had with Him; they rejected Him because He didn't keep the Sabbath according to their myriad of rules. However, the second half of the chapter deals with a much more serious issue; they rejected Him over exorcism, the casting out of a demon, and ended up committing what we have come to call the Unpardonable Sin. On this occasion they make this:

I. The Unbelievable Charge Against Jesus (22-30) It begins with a miracle much like many others Jesus had done. [Read 22] This man couldn't see and also couldn't speak, but not because he was born that way or because his physical eyes and tongue were defective. He was demonized; an evil spirit had at some point gained control over him and shut down those faculties and when Jesus commanded it to leave him, he could instantly both see and speak. I realize that our western scientific minds want to reject that or explain it away, but Jesus absolutely knew that demons are real and dealt

with them and even spoke with them audibly many times in his ministry. And if you go Asia or Africa and many other places today, you'll find that the existence of demons is very real and openly recognized. Well, when Jesus so easily set this man free with a word, He immediately won:

1. the acclaim of the crowd (23) They were astonished! They knew what an impossible thing had just happened before their eyes! They knew the power that this requires. Like the man born blind whom Jesus healed in John 9, they realized that this could only be possible through the power of God Himself (Jn. 9:24, 30-33). They saw and recognized the very presence of God as Jesus acted and all began saying, "Could this be the Messiah, the One we've been waiting for God to send us? ***Could this be the long-awaited King of Israel?***" But when the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees who were standing there, heard this, they could not bear to let it go unchallenged. They could not deny the miracle; it had happened right before their eyes, so in the heat of this moment they gave their own explanation to the crowd; they made an accusation to defame Him.

2. the accusation of His enemies (24) They said simply, ***This is the work of Satan!*** The name *Beelzebub* seems to be derived from a false Philistine god, Baalzebub, whom they worshipped back in Elijah's day, but by Jesus' time it had basically become a popular name for Satan himself, the king, the ruler of the whole organized realm of evil spirits. They could not deny the power Jesus had displayed, but instead of attributing that power to God as the crowd did, they attributed it directly to Satan! They essentially accused Jesus of being a sorcerer, an evil man who traffics with Satan Himself and uses evil spirits and black arts to gain power over the minds of people like Simon the Magician in Acts 8. To the Jewish mind, they could not have said anything more heinous or reprehensible if they had called Him a serial killer and a cannibal! To a people whose identity was rooted in belonging to God, this was the absolute worst thing they could have accused Him of! But it made no sense. Look at:

3. the answer of Jesus (25-26) First of all, Jesus calmly pointed out that:

a. Satan would not oppose himself Why would Satan cast himself (that is, his own representative) out of someone? That's defeating his very purpose, to control the human race, to rule. If Satan's kingdom operated that way, if there were segments of demons who competed with and tried to overrule and cast out each other, it would have fallen long ago. Satan's grip over the human race is so strong because he has a tremendous organization of demons that is a united effort. To think that he would oppose himself is crazy! The truth is that:

b. only the Spirit of God can drive out demons (27-28) Jesus was not the only one to ever cast out demons. Jewish exorcists also did it with at least some degree of success. We have a brief record of it in Acts 19:13-16 where we read that the seven sons of Sceva, a Jew, were exorcists. The Jews recognized that demons needed to be cast out and when their methods worked, they attributed it to the power of God's spirit. They already knew that only God's power and God's spirit could cast out demons, but they would not bring themselves to admit that concerning Jesus, because if they did, they would have to also acknowledge that His message was from God and that He was the promised King as He said He was. If they admitted that this was the hand of God, then the Kingdom of God was here and Jesus WAS King, so they attributed that power to Satan. But Jesus argued thus **(29)**:

c. I must be greater than Satan Everybody knew Satan was a powerful being. You can't go into some professional fighter's house and walk out with his TV; he'll beat you to a pulp! You have to be stronger than the person you're robbing; only then can you take what belongs to him. To make Satan release his hold on a person, to cast out a demon, you have to be stronger than Satan; you have to have power greater than his. Jesus is saying "Look, I am obviously greater than Satan and my power is greater than his or I couldn't free this man! Therefore, ***I AM the King!*** I am God in the flesh standing here before you! So, choose! **(30)**. Are you for Me or against Me; you can't be gathering God's harvest, you can't be truly drawing people to God, unless you're with Me! If you're not, then you are scattering, you're driving people away from God! You are opposing God!"

Now remember, Jesus said this to the most religious people in Israel, to the ones who prided themselves on obeying God the most carefully. And then Jesus explained the nature of what they had done; they, who thought themselves the most righteous of all, had committed an unpardonable sin. So, we move on to look at:

II. The Unpardonable Sin His Enemies Committed (31-37) We don't like the notion very much that there is a sin which can't be pardoned, do we? We passionately proclaim that God can save the worst of human beings, that even the likes of a Hitler or a Stalin or a Saddam Hussein or an Osama Bin Laden can fall on his knees and repent and be forgiven for even the most heinous things we can imagine! Yet Jesus tells these religious people have committed a sin which has no pardon. That's troubling, so we need to understand clearly:

1. what this sin was (31-32) It is not simply rejecting Christ; Paul wanted to wipe His Name off the face of the earth and still Christ took the initiative to knock him to his knees and save him. Nor is it simple blasphemy; the word blaspheme means to speak against, but this is more than merely the speaking of words. Many people blaspheme God by cursing using His name or Jesus' name. And although I've never heard the Holy Spirit used as part of cursing, even if somebody did invent a way to use the Spirit's name that way, that in itself would not constitute the unpardonable sin. The Pharisees were not simply saying awful words in some mindless fashion. For them:

a. it was a conscious repudiation of the work of the Spirit The Pharisees were the most informed people in the world as to what the Scriptures said, what God was like, and so on. Jesus came to these people and confronted them with miracle after miracle after miracle. He calmed storms and multiplied bread. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons right before their very eyes. The Jewish leaders knew this had to be the power of God. When Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to Jesus by night in **Jn. 3:2**, he said, *Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.* Nobody but God can do those things. They didn't have to understand Jesus completely; but they had to know that the miracles were the work of the Spirit of God. Nobody with their background (and we're not talking about a spirit-worshiping jungle tribe here) could look at those miracles and NOT know that it was God's spirit and power at work. And with eyes wide open they deliberately called THAT the work of the devil! And because of that, Jesus said that:

b. it was never forgiven, not in this life nor in His Kingdom that was to come. In fact, in **Mk. 3:29** Jesus actually says that **it is an eternal sin**, a sin whose guilt lasts forever. It was not forgivable. Now from our human point of view we might be tempted to think, "that's not fair", but just think about it from God's perspective for a moment. Imagine having done all this to show yourself to a person, having sent all of the awful plagues of Egypt before Pharaoh's eyes so that even his advisers recognized that it came from the hand of the true God, and then being blasphemed, being spoken against and being called the devil himself by an insolent, arrogant creature that You made for Your glory! Wouldn't you draw a line and say, "Enough is enough; I will destroy THAT one from My universe and punish them forever"? God is not obligated to provide everyone the opportunity for salvation; the fact that He has provided it to ANY of us is only by grace! Now Jesus went on to explain:

2. why this sin was unpardonable (33-35) It is not simply the words they said that concerned Him. Words are an overflow of what's in the heart. Good trees produce good fruit; bad ones produce bad fruit. Rather:

a. their words proved the completely evil condition of their hearts Note the words, *you are evil*. Here are the most "godly" people in Israel, keepers of the Law to the nth degree but their hearts are totally and completely set in evil. Nothing God has been able to say or do can shake them from it, not the presence of His Son, not the mighty display of His power. They had put themselves beyond the limit and God gave them up. God quit on them. His mercy was removed. He gave them what they really wanted inside themselves. But you should also note that they had progressed to this condition. They had said the very same words, *He casts out demons by the prince of demons*, earlier in 9:34 but they weren't at the line of unpardonability yet. It was not a once and done thing but a condition they progressed to as evil became more entrenched in them. Somewhere a line was crossed and only God knew where that line was! Of course, the big question is, "Can someone commit the unpardonable sin today?" or more specifically, "Could I commit it?" Well, I suppose a person could. It certainly must be possible to become one of those of whom Hebrews 6 speaks when it says, *For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened--those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come--and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame.* - 6:4-6 NLT. There are some people walking around in this world who are beyond pardon and some of them are very religious! Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter was a well-known British Bible teacher and theologian who died in 1999. In one of his books, he says, *"Men can allow and foster in themselves a process of hard refusal toward God which eventually becomes their master and destroys the possibility of repentance. Men cannot repent merely at will."* Then he went on to tell the true story of a man, a friend of his, who in turn had a friend to whom he was ministering. This man was dying, and on his death bed he was writhing and struggling, and fighting the air in a piteously futile effort to fight death off. He was in stark terror at the thought of leaving this life and passing into the life beyond the grave. Eventually, the friend said, he died demented, but both before and after his brain gave way, he would periodically groan and wail in loud tones, *"I said I would repent before I died, but it won't come! It won't come! I can't repent."* It is never safe to reject God's grace once you've seen and known it! However, to set the record straight simply, if you're worried about committing the unpardonable sin, then by definition you certainly haven't committed it! What touches us more directly is the next statement **(36-37)**:

b. we are accountable for our words God takes us at our word. With our mouth we confess that "Jesus is Lord" and are justified; we are saved, pardoned! The Pharisee who says, "Jesus is Satan's agent" is condemned by his words. Why? Because words come from inside; they reveal what's in the heart. And while this is a pronouncement against their blasphemy, it certainly is an admonishment for us to guard our words, to control our tongues, to not let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, because it reveals what we're truly like inside and God takes it very seriously!

Now having answered the evil charge that some lodged against him, Luke says that others of them demanded a sign. So we read next about:

III. The Unmistakable Sign He Offered To Israel (38-45) Think:

1. how arrogant this demand for a sign was (38) They had just seen Him heal a man with a crippled hand and cast out a demon so that a man who was blind and mute could see and hear! Now, like proud Pharaoh of old who told Mo-

ses, *Perform a miracle!*, they wanted a miracle on demand! Well, at that Jesus draws the line **(39-40)**. *This generation* means just that, the generation of Jews to whom He came. This generation was wicked and adulterous spiritually. They were unfaithful to God and were rejecting His Son, and yet He offered them a final definitive sign once and for all. He refers to the well-known story of Jonah and says that:

a. Jonah's "resurrection" was a sign to the Ninevites Did you ever stop to think about why the people of Nineveh listened to Jonah's preaching when he finally went there? These were really wicked people, so bad that God was going to destroy them outright. Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, the most powerful city on earth at that time. Why did they ever listen to a lone Hebrew prophet who told them that their city was going to be destroyed in 40 days? **Lk. 11:30** says that Jonah was a sign to them. Somehow, they knew he was swallowed by the fish and spit out three days later alive, either because he told them and they believed it or because the story was somehow passed to them by the ship's crew or something. At any rate, they knew no man could live after that and yet he did. So, they took his "being sent back from sure death" as a sign from God and they listened to Him; they repented and God withheld judgment. And in like manner:

b. Christ's Resurrection was THE sign to Israel Early in His ministry He had cleansed the Temple the first time and in **Jn. 2:18-22**, the Pharisees had come to Him and demanded a sign to prove his authority to do that. His response was, *Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up*. What He meant was, "Kill this body of mine and in three days I will rise!" That was THE definitive sign that He planned to give Israel to demonstrate once and for all that He was God the Son, their King. Yet in the end of the Gospel, after it happened, the Jewish leaders didn't even deny it; they merely paid the guards at the tomb to lie about it! Even Jesus could hardly believe:

2. the utter depravity of this generation in Israel He said, and this must really have angered them, that even:

a. the pagan men of Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching (41) They were totally pagan wicked idolaters and Jonah didn't do a single miracle, yet even they had enough sense to recognize the presence of God through Jonah's preaching because his God had delivered him from death! Then He adds that even:

b. the pagan Queen of Sheba sought Solomon's wisdom (42) She lived all the way in the south of Arabia, Yemen today. She simply heard of the tremendous wisdom that God had given Solomon and it was enough to make her travel more than a thousand miles of desert and wilderness, from the very edge of civilization, just to hear him. And she, a heathen Gentile Queen! Oh, if these idolaters can see the hand of God at work, why can't these Jewish Pharisees? Something greater than Jonah and his fish is here. Something greater than Solomon's famous wisdom is here. The Messiah is here, God come in the flesh, the King, and still they refuse to believe the greatest sign God can possibly offer! That's why Jesus said that:

c. Israel was in a worse state now than in former years of idolatry (43-45) We often take this as a lesson about demons and demon possession but that's not Jesus' point at all. Verse 45 makes it clear that the house he's talking about is "this generation". Israel was like a demon possessed man whose demon had left. For centuries Israel was possessed by the spirit of idolatry. She had been unfaithful with every foreign god imaginable. But God had exorcised her. He had cast out that idolatrous spirit through the Babylonian exile. She never worshipped idols again after she returned; her house was swept clean, but it was empty. So then that wicked spirit found seven others and came back with them. In place of her idolatry, Pharasaism had risen with its outwardly clean appearance, but now she was doing more wickedness than when she was idolatrous! Her current state was worse than her former condition! At least before there was an open rejection of God but now there was the pretense of loving Him, all the while being full of evil and wickedness that rejected Christ and sent Him to the cross! And note how Jesus turned the tables on the Pharisees. They had called Him demonized but, in the end, He declared that THEY were the ones demonized!

And then in the midst of all of this, Jesus' family showed up and we close by looking at:

IV. The Unimaginable Privilege He Affords To Us (46-50) Jesus' mother Mary and his half-brothers came to see Him. For what purpose we don't know and for that matter we don't know whether He took the time to see them or not. That's not important, but Matthew recognized that it happened at a tremendously opportune moment for Jesus to use it to teach the Jews and us a spiritual lesson:

1. Jesus' true family are not those related to Him in the flesh Israel thought she had a relationship to God by natural means, by the fact that she was physically descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that made her His covenant people. But Paul put it this way, *They are not all Israel who are called Israel* - **Rom. 2:28-29**. It takes more than that.

2. Jesus' true family are those with hearts that do the will of His Father If there is a relationship to God, there will be the obeying of His will! There will be a life that matches the relationship. These Pharisees, this generation, had no heart for God's will and hence no relationship to God. And if we are truly born again, the same will be true of us. We will be doing His will.

But look what He's saying; WE are His family. We are His very brothers and sisters and mothers, the very children of God, just as He is! *Watchman Nee tells about a new convert who once came in deep distress to see him. "No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm losing my salvation." Nee said, "Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir! Oh, sometimes we're a mess, aren't we? And yet, as John said, How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that [dear friends] is [exactly] what we are! - 1 Jn. 3:1.*

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Rejection Of The King - Mt. 11:1-16:13

The King's Message Veiled In Parables: Part 1 - Ch. 13:1-23, 34-35

The events of chapter 12 were truly a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. The leaders of Israel rejected Him multiple times. They began plotting to kill Him and ended up blaspheming the Holy Spirit and committing the unpardonable sin. Even though they have not gone all the way to nailing Him on the cross yet, their course is sealed at this point. Despite His popularity because of His power to heal, the people will ultimately follow their leaders. At this point, Israel has rejected her Messiah. And because of that, from this point on, several key things begin to change in Jesus' ministry. For instance, we have recorded in chapter 13 a large block of Jesus' teaching, one that we usually call "The Parables Of The Kingdom". It is a series of seven stories that Jesus taught the crowds, but His teaching is now very different from the last large block of teaching that we have in the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7. And before we look at the actual parables themselves, let's notice first that in the process Matthew carefully gives us:

I. An Explanation Of Jesus' New Tactics (1-2) This day in Jesus' life is often called "The Busy Day" because so many things are recorded as happening on that same day. Jesus went from the conflict in the synagogue in 12:9 and was followed by crowds, healed many sick people, and evidently, entered into a house where he had another conflict with the Pharisees and as that finished, His family arrived to see Him. As He left there, even greater crowds gathered as He went down to the shore of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. The press was so great that He stepped into a small boat and pushed out a little way from land so that He could be heard by all as He taught them. All of this was a common occurrence in His ministry. But notice:

1. what He did differently (3a) This time, instead of teaching the crowd and giving them moral instruction:

a. He began to use a different teaching method: He spoke to them in **parables**. Matthew does not record any parables before this point, yet here are seven in a row. Indeed, it must have been something brand new because in verse 10 after He just finishes the very first parable, the disciples run up to Him and ask Him why He's doing that. It's obviously something new. Parables are simple stories or illustrations taken from everyday life, intended to convey a spiritual meaning. Yet, contrary to what we usually think, they are not for the purpose of making something understood in simple terms. The disciples who had walked with Jesus and listened to Him for years had no idea what the parable meant and had to ask Him to explain it! They were stories given to the crowd without explanation. Suppose this morning, I had stood up to teach and said, *This spring I went out to plant grass seed in my yard using my Scott's broadcast spreader. Some of the seed fell on my sidewalk and driveway and it never grew. I have a few brown spots in my yard now where the new grass died after a few weeks. In some places there were weeds whose seeds drifted over from the neighbor's yard and the weeds kept the grass from growing. But much of my lawn is bright green and in some places it's really tall. Think about that story. Have a nice day! See ya!* You'd be utterly confused, but that's exactly what Jesus did! If you came to the parables of Mt. 13 without all your prior knowledge of Christianity and the New Testament, you might clearly understand the story of the parable, but you would be totally lost as to its meaning, wouldn't you? That's why this flabbergasted the disciples; it was something new for Jesus. But then as we look at the actual meaning of these stories, we notice a second thing:

b. He began to proclaim a different message about the Kingdom. Up to this point Jesus' preaching has had a particular message, *The kingdom of heaven is at hand, it's near, it's about to be set up!* You see it in passages like 4:17 and 10:7. There is an urgency for Israel to repent, to change their ways and receive their King. But the nation did not; they rejected Him. So now Jesus begins to feed His disciples a new message, one which you clearly see in these parables: the kingdom is not going to come for a while. It's a message of **postponement** and that will be particularly clear in the later parables in the chapter. There's going to be a period of sowing the seed. The wheat and the weeds will grow together until the time of harvest. The mustard seed will grow into a huge tree and the yeast will work through the whole batch of dough. The fish caught in the net will be sorted at the end of the age. He makes it clear now that there is going to be an interim period of time before the Kingdom comes, a period that we call the Church Age. The coming of the Kingdom will be postponed, put off until a later time when Jesus will return. This is a new message for Jesus. Now let's look at:

2. why He did these things differently The disciples asked Him that directly (10). And Jesus proceeded to give them three reasons, actually four. First, Jesus wanted:

a. to reveal important truths to His disciples (11a, 16-17) The word *secrets*, literally *mysteries*, is a special word. It refers to something that was previously hidden but is now being revealed. **1 Pet. 1:10-12** explains again what Jesus said, *This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven...* [NLT] The righteous men and prophets in the Old Testament longed to know God's program, how His Kingdom would come and what the words meant that they were given. But they weren't given that knowledge; it was kept a mystery to them. They had to be content to trust God. How privileged we are to know things that were hidden for centuries to godly people! The mystery Christ is revealing now to His disciples is the mystery of the Church Age, the fact that there will be an extended period of time between His first and second comings. He begins now to make that clear to them using these parables. But at the same time, He used parables:

b. to veil these truths from those who rejected Him (11b-13) Jesus did not want to reveal these precious truths to the wicked unbelievers who were rejecting Him. These people saw Him do the miracles but they did not see that the miracles meant that He was the Messiah. They refused to see! They heard with their ears but their hearts were too cold to listen. And because of their rejection of the great light that had been given to them, now judgment was beginning to fall. Their opportunity was being taken away. Jesus would speak to them often in parables that they could not understand, unless and until their hearts believed in Him. Those who had a trust in Him, they were given more understanding by the parables. But those who didn't, their little bit of understanding was taken away in judgment. Yet even in that there was mercy. The simple stories were easily remembered, even if not understood. They could easily lie dormant in the mind, waiting for faith to come, and if it should, they would suddenly spring to life; understanding would bloom and blossom with faith. So, on the one hand Jesus used parables:

c. to conceal, fulfilling the words of Isaiah (14-15) He quotes **Is. 6:9-10**. The people of Isaiah's day were the same way. Isaiah's ministry was to people who would not listen. And now Jesus says His generation has become the real fulfillment of that statement. And note the reason: not because God hid the evidence from them but because their hearts were calloused and they refused to open their eyes and look! So, Jesus gave them what they wanted. They didn't want to understand, so He adopted a method that would give them what they wanted. They would hear and not understand, unless they repented and turned to Him. But on the other hand, Jesus used parables:

d. to reveal, fulfilling the words of Asaph (34-35) Here He quotes **Ps. 78:1-3**. Asaph says that his teaching in this long Psalm would be a parable, a story that would explain the difficult things that had been hidden from days of old, things that God wanted His people to know about the stories of their own history. And Matthew says that's exactly what Jesus was doing here and even more, using parables to reveal to His followers precious truths that had been hidden ever since creation!

Now with all of that background, we're ready to pursue:

II. An Examination Of Jesus' First Parable, the Parable of the Sower, as we've come to call it. Actually, we should probably call it the Parable of the Soils, because it is not really about of the planting of seeds, but rather about the soils in which seeds grow. Let's read:

1. the content of the parable (3b-8) Sowing or planting seed, was something so common that everyone knew how it worked. The vast majority of the crowd listening to Jesus had actually participated in it. Around the Sea of Galilee there were many fertile fields and maybe even at this moment Jesus could point in the distance to a man sowing seed in his field as He talked. Seed was held in bag around the waste and strewn by hand over the ground. Jesus noted that in this or any field there were four types of soil and He was illustrating the kind of reception that the seed would get in the various kinds of soil. Now, fortunately for us, Jesus' disciples did not understand the meaning of His simple story at all, so privately He gave them:

2. the explanation of the parable (18) The sower or the farmer is one who sows the Word (Mark 4:14 adds); in particular he broadcasts the message about the coming of the Kingdom. The sower represented Jesus Himself at that moment, but it would apply to them as they became His witnesses and messengers sowing His Word in the world and, certainly, it applies to us. When the Word of God is spread to people, it falls on four types of soil, that is, four very different kinds of people. First, some falls on:

a. the hard soil (19) In those days seed was spread by hand in broadcast fashion, not planted in neat little rows the way we plant crops. Some of the seed would fall on the walking path or dirt road that went by the field where the soil was hard and packed down. That soil wouldn't open up and receive the seed, so it lay on the surface and the birds quickly came and devoured it. That hard soil represents **the person who refuses to believe** the Word

when he hears it. He has no understanding and doesn't want any. Like the Pharisees, his mind is already made up, so when he hears the Word, it falls on a deaf ear and, of course, Satan doesn't want to take any chances so he does everything he can to make sure that person forgets what he heard! Next, some of the seed falls on:

b. the shallow soil (20-21) I had places like this in the lawn where I grew up where there was a thin layer of soil over rock and the grass stayed green until the summer got hot and the roots had to suck water from deeper down; then it browned and died. I have patches in my lawn like this now, that, for whatever reason, are hard underneath and they always turn into brown patches in summer. This shallow soil represents **the person who falls away from believing**. This person has an immediate joyous reception of the Word. He makes a profession of faith, reads his Bible and goes to church, but it doesn't last. When trouble comes along in his life or perhaps, he is persecuted for believing, maybe his family or his employer threatens him, when his faith is actually put to the test, he throws it away and quits. He walks away from the faith. We've all known people like this who used to believe but they don't any more. This person doesn't lose his salvation; he simply never really had it to begin with! His roots didn't really make contact with the Source of Life! Then, some seed falls on:

c. the thorny soil (22) You know, if you don't pick your weeds out this year, they leave seeds in the soil that sprout next year. So, there are places in a field where a weed patch has been and the soil, though it has been tilled, has weed seeds in it. So, when the wheat seed grows, the weeds grow up with it and literally choke it to death. It may continue to stand but it is dead to the farmer because it produces no fruit. The thorny soil represents **the person who merely professes to believe**. His heart is full of weed seeds like the desire to make money and to pursue selfish pleasure and it really isn't cleansed by a new birth experience. So, the person makes a profession and says, "I believe" but the weeds are still there and they control his life. He lives, not for the Lord but for himself; there is no real change in his life. He may profess salvation and perhaps even attend church, but he has never truly given his heart to Christ; he basically lives like the rest of the people around him. But hopefully, much of the field is made up of:

d. the good soil (23) The good soil is where the seed grows and produces a plant and the plant bears fruit or grain, whether a hundred seeds or sixty or thirty on its stalk. The good soil is **the person who genuinely believes**, one who hears the Word and whose heart is truly open so that he receives it genuinely and it produces spiritual fruit in his life. In this little verse there are two lessons for us. First:

(1) genuine believers consistently produce fruit in their lives Jesus said this repeatedly, *by their fruits you will know them*. A good tree always produces good fruit; a bad tree always produces bad fruit. Fruit is the evidence of the nature of the plant, and in specific terms, that means a person consistently begins to display a character that is like Christ's and behavior that is like Christ's because the Spirit of Christ is now living in him and producing that. There is love and caring, compassion, willingness to sacrifice for others. There is moral purity, integrity, honesty and good works toward others. There is a genuine desire to know more of Jesus and to be with Jesus and, most importantly to see others come to know Jesus. Jesus never told us to get people to make decisions. He sent us to make disciples, to reproduce ourselves in people who will genuinely follow Jesus and let Him rule their lives like we do! That's the goal; anything less than that is not real! However, the second lesson is that:

(2) genuine believers produce varying quantities of fruit All true believers have SOME fruit but not all have the SAME AMOUNT of it, just like some tomato plants may bear two and others will bear a bushel. We are not all made the same nor given the same gifts nor provided with the same opportunities to reach others in ministry. And if we are genuine, we all increase in fruitfulness over time, displaying more of the character of Christ, more and more behavior that is Christlike and often touching more people's lives. But that's a message for another time. Let's close by making personal:

3. the application of the parable It certainly shows us:

a. the importance of a right heart Jesus made the application right as He told it **(9)**. You need the right ears to hear. You need a receptive heart in order to understand. The Jews had hard hearts and so never received the seed. The problem is not in the seed; the problem is not in the sower, nor in the sowing process. The problem is in the soil, in the heart that is listening. Personally, that ought to challenge us about the softness of our own hearts as we read God's Word or listen to it preached. Are we open? Do we come with a receptive attitude and a desire to hear from God? Those are things that even we must cultivate. But this story also helps us to understand:

b. the responses we can expect in ministry There will be plenty of people you try to minister to who don't listen, who really don't want to hear it and won't believe in Christ, no matter what you say. Why? Their hearts aren't receptive; they're hardened. There will be those who seem to make such a good start and then fall away after a while. Don't be discouraged by that; expect it. And there will be those who say they believe, but their lives don't show it at all. They're all wrapped up in life in this world and have no time for Jesus; they really have no real spiritual life no matter if they prayed a prayer way back when. These things aren't signs that you have failed. This is what happened

when Jesus sowed His message and this is what will happen when you sow it too. But take heart, every field has some good soil in it! Some will listen and believe and bear fruit and grow! Don't get discouraged; keep on sowing. The Gospel will always save some but it will never save all! And finally, notice in the story:

c. the time required to reveal genuineness You can't tell if the soil is good right away; it requires time for the seed to grow. It is not the initial response, not the prayer prayed, not the momentary joy on the spot, that is the true indicator of life. You have to wait and watch over time to see whether a person is really genuine or not. Time is required to bring forth a harvest.

One final admonition: it is not for you and I to decide what kind of soil a person's heart is. *Bruce McNicol tells how frustrated he was with his witness for Christ a number of years ago. He writes: "I registered for a seminar on lifestyle evangelism. The day was to begin with inspiring testimonies--new believers affirming the power of God in their lives. Before and after stories. As I looked up for the initial narrative a young man approached the podium. Vague familiarity turned to sudden recognition when he said, 'My name is Allan.' In my backrow seat I whispered to the Lord, 'You handpicked him, didn't You?' Five years earlier as a university student Allan had been an atheist who practiced his un-faith religiously. But God had plans for Allan. So He put us together in several finance classes, and we ended up becoming study buddies. Whenever accounting grew boring Allan would ask questions about my faith, more to ridicule than to search for answers. Routinely I tired of the aggressive interrogation, but I kept repeating to myself, 'What would Jesus do?' I knew the only option was to accept Allan where he was, encourage his questions, and let God take care of him. Over time in a major metropolitan city, we lost track of one another, but on this day, it became clear that God had kept track of both of us. He pursued Allan to save him. Then He brought us together that day to give me hope. Allan told the audience that he had had many questions during college days and that he hadn't liked Christians, but some fellow students who were believers had patiently listened and befriended him. God used this to reshape his thoughts about Christ. Until that morning I had no idea that Allan had trusted Christ, much less that God had chosen to use what I considered feeble efforts at representing Him. That conference session filled me with hope."* [Interest, Oct 1992. Page 3.] So be encouraged, dear friends. Even though some of the soil will prove not to be receptive, let us not grow weary of sowing the precious seed, ...for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. - Gal. 6:9.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Rejection Of The King - Mt. 11:1-16:13

The King's Message Veiled In Parables: Part 2 - Ch. 13:24-33, 36-52

As we began our look at Chapter 13 last week, I spent a lot of time explaining that Christ at this point began teaching in parables, which was a new thing, because from this point on He had deep new truths that He wanted to reveal to His disciples, but He did not want to cast them openly before the fickle crowds and particularly the Jewish leaders who had rejected Him so clearly. So, He told them a series of four simple stories, stories easily understood by anyone from everyday life, with no public explanation, but then in private later explained the meaning of two of them to His disciples and added three more parables for them alone. We already looked at His first story, that of the Sower, and we noted that Jesus Himself was the sower who was sowing the Word and they, the ones who truly responded to the Word, were the good soil in which it grew and produced fruit. Now, through the rest of these stories, He proceeds to unveil for them a new concept. He starts each one saying, *The Kingdom of Heaven is like...* Well, they already thought they knew what the Kingdom was going to be like: Christ would be the King and Israel would be delivered from Rome and by His mighty power He would soon rule the world from Jerusalem. End of story! Through these parables, Jesus is saying, "No, it's not going to be like that at all. Here's what is going to happen. You, the good soil, are going to go and bear fruit and I am going to show you what I am going to do with you and those who will believe in Me through your word." So, the second parable He tells describes:

I. The Nature Of Christ's Kingdom: We call it **The Wheat and The Weeds (24-30)** Older translations use the word *tares* instead of *weeds* because the term actually refers to a specific species of weed that commonly grows in Israel called bearded darnel. Darnel is poisonous to humans and so if it is found in a wheat field, it must be carefully separated out. This man had an enemy who wanted to ruin his harvest and deliberately planted darnel in his field of newly planted wheat at night. He didn't discover it until much later but the point of the story is his decision:

1. wheat and weeds will grow together in the field until the time of harvest Instead of weeding the field the way one might pull weeds out of a garden, the two crops would be left to grow side by side all summer until harvest time. The field will contain both until then. Well, fortunately for us, later on Jesus privately explained the meaning of the story to His disciples in **(36-39)**. The field is the world and YOU, who belong to My Kingdom, are the good seed, the wheat! But the world will also contain a great deal of bad seed, darnel, those who belong to Satan. In other words, the story teaches that:

2. Christ's followers will coexist with Satan's in the world until He returns Instead of setting up the Kingdom of God in all its fullness on earth right away, there's going to be a long growing season first, a season that has now lasted 2,000 years and the time of harvest has not yet arrived. Now the fact that this story hinges on is that:

a. the two are often difficult to distinguish Darnel looks so much like wheat that it is often called "false wheat"; one can barely tell the difference in the growing stalks until the heads appear and ripen; the wheat ripens brown while the darnel ripens black. That's what verse (26) is referring to. Of course, there will surely be other kinds of weeds in the field that are easily seen; there will be people that are obviously evil in the world. But the point of the story is that there will also be many, many that look almost like the real thing! Take Jesus' greatest enemies, the Pharisees, as an example, religious people with the law of God constantly on their lips and yet in their hearts servants of the Evil One plotting to murder God's Son. The world contains many, many of those, yet:

b. Christ cannot remove the evil ones from the world during this age When darnel grows in a field of wheat, the roots of the plants all wrap around and intertwine with one another, so when you pull up a stalk of darnel, you will most likely uproot wheat with it. That's what verse (29) means. So the farmer lets both grow until he's ready to harvest and that's what Christ is doing during the age in which we live. He is ruling as King over the hearts of those who follow Him, but letting the Enemy's children grow side by side with his own. However, when this season ends and it's time for the harvest:

c. Christ will remove all evil at His return and reign with His own (40-43) When it is time, when this age of Gospel sowing and reaping ends, we read in chapter 25 that Christ Himself will return and sit on His throne and all the living people of the earth will be gathered before Him. Those who are not His children, who don't belong to Him will be sent away to be burned in everlasting fire, while His children will go together with Him on into the wonderful Kingdom that the Father will set up on the earth.

This is the new message: God will bring His Kingdom about on earth, but much later. For now, God's Kingdom will consist of ruling over those who come to believe in Jesus Christ. Christ planted His followers in the world to grow and increase until harvest. And speaking of that, immediately after telling this parable, Jesus went on to tell two more smaller ones, the subject of which is:

II. The Growth Of Christ's Kingdom The first one is the Parable of:

1. The Mustard Seed (31-32) The mustard seed is an extremely tiny seed which the Jews commonly planted in their gardens. It is so small that it was used in proverbs; Jesus Himself talked about having faith as small as a mustard seed. And yet the mustard plant can reach a height of 10 or 12 feet and assume the characteristics of a small tree or sapling, even though it isn't one, large enough for birds to nest in. Jesus' point is obvious:

a. the tiniest seed produces an immense plant It's amazing if you think about it; the tiniest known seed produces the largest plant in the whole garden. But follow the thought from the parable before; Christ planted His followers as good seed in the field of the world, here He is planting a tiny seed in the field that will grow into a huge tree. It means that:

b. the number of Christ's followers will grow amazingly large and it has. From the handful of a dozen disciples and 120 gathered in the Upper Room, today there are over two billion people who claim in some fashion to be followers of Christ, fully one third of the population of the earth. And even though not all of those are probably genuine believers, still Christianity is actually the largest religion on earth and remember, earth's population has grown from perhaps 250 million total in Jesus' day to more than 7 billion today. The growth of the church has far exceeded population growth! Jesus said He planted something extremely small that would grow into something amazingly large, and it has, but right away Jesus added the Parable of:

2. The Yeast (33) Now to understand this one you have to know something about making bread. The thing that makes bread rise is yeast and yeast is a tiny fungus that causes a kind of fermentation process when you put it in bread dough that causes the dough to rise. Of course, in those days Acme didn't sell yeast in nice little packets. So, every housewife would keep a lump of yeasted dough or sourdough, in a bowl somewhere. And when bread was made, that small lump was taken and kneaded together into a fresh batch of dough and all mixed together and a piece of that was saved for next time. The point is that:

a. a small amount of yeast spreads itself through a huge batch of dough It just keeps on multiplying and spreading. And notice that Christ mentions 3 measures, or 3 sata of flour. That's approximately a 50-pound sack of flour. One small piece of yeasted dough mixed into this huge amount and left to rise will thoroughly permeate the whole thing. Just so:

b. Christ's followers will thoroughly permeate the entire world Christ sent His disciples into all the world to all the peoples and in Revelation we see people gathered around His throne from every people on earth. Jesus put a tiny pinch of followers into Judea 2000 years ago and today there is literally not a country on earth where there are no believers and His church is rapidly closing in on the goal of having followers of Christ from every people on earth. It has taken a long time to rise but it is permeating the whole!

Well, at that point Jesus left the crowd in verse (36) and went into a house to speak privately with His disciples. After he explained to them the story of the wheat and the weeds, He went on to give to them two more stories to help them understand:

III. The Cost Of Establishing Christ's Kingdom The first is **The Hidden Treasure (44)** You know there were no banks in those days, so a person with a large bag of gold or silver might resort to hiding or burying it on their own property. Of course, the secret might die with the owner and the land be sold. This man found a treasure, something of immense value, hidden and covered up in a field, but by law, whoever owns the field owns whatever is in it. So, he had to buy the field and it cost him everything he had, yet he joyfully sold everything else to get this treasure because it was of such great value to him. Then comes the story of **The Pearl of Great Price (45-46)**. This man is a lover and a seeker of pearls and when he finds one that is of immensely great value, he willingly sells all that he has in order to buy it. The obvious point of both stories is that:

1. a man will joyfully give all he has to get what he treasures most We will gladly give up everything in order to get what we value most highly. Now many interpreters try to say these stories are about US getting Christ, but if you think about it, in all these parables, Christ is the one doing the acting, sowing the word, planting the wheat, planting the mustard seed, putting the yeast into the flour. So, Christ is the man finding the treasure and the merchant finding the pearl of great price. These are about CHRIST getting US! And they teach us that:

2. Christ joyfully sacrificed EVERYTHING to obtain US because He treasures US most Listen to **Heb. 12:2**, which mentions *Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...* There was a great joy that was set before Christ, that was on His heart, a joy so great that He was willing, not only to sacrifice His own life but to suffer the very wrath of God by taking our sins upon Himself. And what was that joy? What was so valuable, so precious to Him, that He would sacrifice everything, all that He had? It was US! In **Eph. 1:18** Paul prayed that we, all believers, would comprehend, *...what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.* We're the precious treasure He knew was hidden in the field of the world! We're the pearl of great price that He wanted for His own. And He paid an awful price to get us for Himself, *...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.* - **1 Pet. 1:18-19**. Never forget that; it cost Christ everything to begin to establish His Kingdom by purchasing us for Himself. Oh, but one day there will be:

IV. The Consummation Of Christ's Kingdom, as Jesus explains in the Parable of **The Net (47-48)** Fishermen on the Sea of Galilee commonly used dragnets or seine nets, where one end would be held on shore and a boat used to drag the other in a large semicircle out into the lake and back to shore further on, thus surrounding all the fish in that area. The two ends were then pulled in together and the enclosed fish dragged onto shore. People saw this happen every day, but His point was that:

1. fishermen sort out the bad fish when the net is full and drawn to shore, not while it's out in the water. The fishermen can't control what comes in the net; the edible fish and the worthless fish are all dragged in together and then have to be sorted from one another. Fortunately, Christ chose to explain His meaning to the disciples in **(49-50)**.

2. Christ will sort out and destroy the wicked at the end of this age The wheat and the weeds grow together through the long growing season until the harvest, when they will be separated at last. So, the good and bad fish swim together in the sea surrounded by the net, until the net is full and it's time to drag it to shore. Just so, when this age is over and Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom, He WILL sort out and destroy forever all those who are evil and don't belong in His Kingdom. For those who are not His own, who have not received Him and followed Him, there will be a fiery furnace with weeping and gnashing of teeth that lasts forever!

Well, there you have His plan for this whole age laid out in simple parables. And as He finishes, He asks His disciples... **(51)**. They reply, "Right! Sure! Absolutely!" But of course, they didn't really; they couldn't, not yet. But Jesus goes on to give them one more parable which is not really about the Kingdom itself, but is actually a parable about the parables! It's about:

V. The Understanding of the Kingdom It's the story of **The House Owner (52)**. In that day, the owner of a house would often have a storeroom, a treasury, a protected place where he kept his valuable possessions. Some of the things that were part of that treasure had value because they were old, for example, a ring or piece of jewelry passed down from the parents, just like your precious antiques or old coins. But other things have value because they are new; they are fresh and unused, like the quilt or the knife you just finished making or maybe your new iPhone that you might keep in a safe place. So, when the owner had guests and wanted to honor them, he would bring forth out of that storeroom things that are both old and new to give as gifts. His point was that:

1. a house owner brings out of his treasury things new as well as old The new things have great value and are needed, not only the old. We don't discard the old things; they have value too, but we must also have the new things to bring out. But then notice that Jesus says the owner of that house is like a scribe, like a student of the Scriptures (which were what we call the Old Testament at that time), one who brings out things from this wonderful treasury valuable truths to give to his students. Now, Jesus says, if this scribe is instructed and understands and believes the news

about the Kingdom of Heaven and becomes a disciple, a child of the Kingdom, then out of his study of the Old Testament, he, like the houseowner will bring forth valuable things, both old ones and new ones. Put simply:

2. believing students of the Old Testament who understand the Kingdom will bring forth from it new treasures as well as old His disciples thought they understood the Scriptures. They thought they knew what God was going to do, how He would set up His Kingdom. But this teaching about the Kingdom opened up a whole new range of understanding to them eventually. Look with me at Jesus Himself walking in veiled form with two of His own disciples on the Emmaus Road after His resurrection in **Lk. 24**. They couldn't understand how it could be that Jesus had died (**verse 21**). They had in their own minds how the Kingdom was supposed to work. But look what Jesus did in verses **26-27**. He brought new things out of the old. He went back and showed them how Moses wrote about Him, how David wrote about Him, how Isaiah wrote about Him. And by the time He was done, they understood how Christ would come to suffer first and then enter into His glory later! Then as He appeared to all the disciples look at verses **45-47**. He opened all their minds! He gave them new understanding of the Old! He showed them all how the Scriptures predicted both His death, His resurrection and how the news of Him should be preached to all the world. He brought out new treasures from the old. All through the Gospels and Acts you see again and again His followers writing, "This was to fulfill what was written..." and quoting the Old Testament; the rest of their lives they were busy bringing new treasures out of the old treasury.

And you can be too! Look for Jesus on every page. You'll find Him there...

In Genesis He's the Seed of the Woman who will crush the serpent's head.

In Exodus He's Passover Lamb.

In Leviticus He's our Sacrifice and High Priest.

In Numbers He's our Pillar of Cloud to guide us.

In Deuteronomy He's the Prophet like unto Moses.

In Joshua He's the Captain of our Salvation.

In Judges He's our Deliverer.

In Ruth He's our Redeemer.

In Samuel He's our Refuge and Strength.

In Kings and Chronicles He's our Righteous Ruler.

In Nehemiah He's the Rebuilder of our Broken Walls.

In Job He's our Ever-Living Redeemer.

In Psalms He's the Lord our Shepherd.

In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes He's our Wisdom.

In Song of Solomon He's our Lover and Bridegroom.

In Isaiah He's our Prince of Peace.

In Jeremiah He's our Righteous Branch.

In Daniel He's the Fourth Man in the furnace.

And in Malachi He's the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings.

He has all kinds of wonderful precious things He wants to give you, to reveal to you, out of the ancient treasury of His Word, if you will have ears to hear! And when you don't understand them, do what His disciples did. Don't just gloss over and forget them. Don't presume that you know all you need to know because you learned stuff in Sunday School. Seek Him out! Ask Him what He's saying, and if you persist, He will reveal it to you! The first study book I ever got was a Strong's Concordance. It's gone now, but on the flyleaf, my pastor had inscribed these words from 2 Tim. 2:15 and I leave them with you as words I've tried to live by: *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Rejection Of The King - Mt. 11:1-16:13

The King Received By The Masses - 14:13-36, 15:21-39

As we enter Chapter 14, Jesus is finishing up His two year long ministry in Galilee. Even though He has been rejected time and again by the Pharisees and leaders of the people, that has not been the case with the common people; they have come to Him in ever-increasing numbers. What I have done for you this morning is to lump together five events that occurred in four different geographical areas of Galilee in Chapters 14-15 and omit until next week more stories of rejection by the Pharisees, so you can see just how well the masses of people received Him. Let me begin with a brief:

I. An Overview Of Jesus' Later Galilean Ministry The first thing you'll notice as we study this section is that:

1. He gained great popularity and drew huge crowds It seems He cannot go anywhere without drawing a crowd, and I mean not just a handful. On two of these occasions the crowd that came to Him contained 5000 men one time and 4000 men the next. If someone had counted women and children, there may have been 10,000-15,000 people

flocking after Him at once. Of course, when that sort of thing happens repeatedly, it creates a huge disturbance in the land and may be viewed as a great disruption by authorities. So, during this same period, you also see that Jesus:

2. He repeatedly attempted to withdraw from them Christ now begins to try to get away from the crowds, to seek out solitary places, wilderness places, which is quite a contrast to sending out His disciples to preach in all the village synagogues. In our study today we'll see Him go by boat from Capernaum to a deserted wilderness area near Bethsaida-Julias on the northeast of the Sea of Galilee, but a crowd of 5,000 follows Him, so he sails back and lands on the plain of Gennesaret on the western shore of the sea, where another crowd gathers. Then He strikes out all the way north outside of Israelite territory, to the region of Tyre and Sidon, 50 miles out of the way, and when He returns, He skirts the Sea of Galilee, going down its eastern side into a sparsely populated area along its southeast shore which is part of the Decapolis, another Gentile area. But another crowd of 4,000 finds Him, so He sails across to Magadan (near Magdala). Then, in chapter 16 you'll see Him swing north again to Caesarea Philippi and then on to the Mount of Transfiguration, Mt. Hermon, before returning to Capernaum, and finally leaving Galilee permanently, never more to return. Can you see that He's trying to stay away, to stay out of the limelight, to avoid the crowds? Now, why is He doing that? Well, besides obviously not wanting to create unnecessary trouble, He had two other reasons. First:

a. He desired to focus on training His disciples Now that it is perfectly clear that the Jewish leaders have rejected Him, He needs to be alone with the disciples to teach and train them so that they will understand His death and resurrection and the concept of the church which He will begin through them. He has a whole brand-new set of things to teach them that they don't yet understand, but they desperately need to. And second, He wants to get away because:

b. the people sought Him out for the wrong reasons Some of them had political motives in mind and wanted to make Him King and start their own revolution. Others came simply for the benefit of being healed or fed, for their own gain, without any desire to really follow Christ. For instance, after feeding the 5000, John 6 tells how they followed Jesus and wanted Him to keep on giving them physical bread, but they refused the true Bread of Life. That's why Jesus withdrew to these solitary places. So now let's look at the:

II. Five Major Events Of Jesus' Later Galilean Ministry The first is:

1. the feeding of 5000 near Bethsaida (14:13-21) See how the crowds follow Him on the shore and He can't get away? But rather than try to pull out all kinds of specific lessons from the details of the story, let's try to look at the bigger picture. Please notice that this miracle was not done primarily for the benefit of the crowd. Yes, Matthew tells us that Jesus had compassion on them and healed their sick, but it was the disciples who thought of the fact that everybody was getting hungry and proposed a solution, "Let's dismiss the crowd now!" However, Jesus puts it squarely back on them in verse 16, *YOU give them something to eat!* What a crazy thing to say! He tells them to do something that is obviously impossible. Why? Because He wanted to show them something. As He took the two little fish and the five loaves and they multiplied in His hands to feed the entire crowd:

a. He demonstrated to His disciples His ability to supply immense needs He even showed them the process; He made them bring what they had to Him, the 5 loaves and 2 fishes. Then He blessed and multiplied what they had. He wanted to make clear to them that He was the source of what was about to happen. What they had could only be multiplied through Him as the inexhaustible source, but through Him, their little bit could touch thousands of people! And at the same time:

b. He taught His disciples their responsibility to minister In verse (16) He's showing them that they have a responsibility to do something about the need of the many; they couldn't just ignore it because it was too big. As He had them distribute the bread, the miracle of His multiplication passed directly through their hands and the many were satisfied. He showed them that through Him they could and they must minister to the many. Now when you read John 6 which tells what happened after this, and how Jesus later explained to the crowd when they found Him again the next day, *I am the Bread of life*, you begin to see the real point of this miracle. Jesus is saying to them, "As I have done with the bread, so you can do with Me! You can share Me with the multitude, with everyone and there is still plenty left over. You have responsibility to do this very thing, to share ME with the whole world, and through you, I will turn this little handful that you have now into millions of those that will receive Me!" Friends, He's still doing this ongoing miracle today with you and I, still multiplying the Bread of Life through our hands over and over to thousands and there's still plenty left for more! We have a responsibility to the multitudes of spiritually hungry people on earth who have no way to get anything to eat spiritually. Will we say, "The task is too big; there are too many!" and turn away from them? Or will we give Jesus whatever little loaves and fish we have and let Him multiply it to reach millions? Next, we have the story of Jesus:

2. the walking on the water afterwards (22-33) That evening, Jesus sent the crowd home and put the disciples in a boat to head back across the Sea, while He spent some time alone with the Father. And sometime after 3 AM He caught up with them by actually walking out to them on the sea. However, the amazing thing about this story is not Jesus walking on the water, but rather, Peter walking on water! Peter gave Him the opportunity to provide a tremendous lesson by his daring request to walk on the water like Jesus was doing. So, in that moment:

a. He demonstrated to His disciples His ability to empower them Verse (29) says, *Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus!* Think about that. He, the fisherman who had jumped into the sea hundreds of times, now stood on its surface and walked, not just a step, but walked toward Jesus until he was within arm's reach. And though we focus on how he got overwhelmed by fear and began to sink, notice that Jesus' reply was, *Why did you doubt?* His point is, "If you trust Me, I can empower you to do anything I say, even if it seems impossible, even if you're afraid, even if it involves walking on water! But you have to trust Me! If you trust Me, you can do anything!" What a valuable lesson that was going to be when He gave the Disciples their impossible assignment, *Go and make disciples of all nations!* It's as impossible as walking on water! But He prefaced that by saying, *I have all authority in heaven and on earth* and He followed it by adding, *And I will be with you always, even to the end of the age!* "If I tell you to do it, you WILL do it; I will be with you and empower you to do it! Further, by walking on water and by stilling the storm instantly:

b. He confirmed His identity to His disciples yet again Look at verse (33). The last time He stilled a storm in a boat on the sea in 8:27 they *...marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"*. This time they figured out the answer; they realize that He's the Son of God! And they fell down in the boat and worshipped Him as God and He did not refuse it. Listen, to serve Jesus you first have to know who Christ is. He is God the Son, Lord of the Universe. And when you are convinced of that, you can trust Him. You can do whatever He bids you to do! Fearsome circumstances blowing all around you don't matter; He's the Master of the winds and the waves, so you can do anything He commands! Only believe! Now we come to the third event:

3. the healing of many at Gennesaret (34-36) The storm blew them slightly off their intended course and they landed on the northwest side of the lake, the Jewish side, but a bit south of Capernaum on the tiny plain of Gennesaret. He was no sooner there than He was recognized and a crowd began to gather once again and Jesus healed quite a number of sick folks as He passed through, evidently slowly walking back toward home in Capernaum, with people simply begging Him to touch the hem of His garment as He went. From the little that is written about it, the only point I see is that:

- **He demonstrated to all the sweeping extent of His love** The key word appears three times in most translations: *ALL*. *All* the sick folks in the area came, they *ALL* touched Him and they *ALL* were healed. There was no preference or distinction; Christ did not love one more than the other or deliver one but refuse someone else. The whole subject of physical healing we'll have to save for another day, but what we see here is the heart of Jesus. He loves *ALL*, He wants to save *ALL*, and He will save and help *ALL* who come to Him, who simply reach out to touch Him! None are excluded! *The Lord ...does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.* - 2 Pet. 3:9. What an example this must have been for His disciples! Well, now comes some more conflict as we enter chapter 15 but we'll save that and move ahead to look at:

4. the deliverance of the Canaanite woman's daughter at Tyre (15:21-28) To get away from the crowds, this time Jesus withdraws all the way north completely out of Jewish territory, to the region of the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon which were part of Syria. And there, this woman comes out to meet Him, by ethnicity a Canaanite, one of the ancient enemies of Israel. She is not part of Israel and she knows it, yet interestingly enough, she calls Jesus, *Son of David*, the Jewish title for the Messiah. She is showing Him that she is not an idol-worshipper, that despite her heritage she worships the God of Israel and she begs for mercy and help for her oppressed daughter. At first Jesus puts her off by silence, which is unusual for Him. It seems He was waiting for His disciples to respond and eventually they do, because she's annoying them by following after them and crying out. It seems they're actually wanting Him to heal her daughter so she'll go away. Notice it is to *THEM* He says in verse 24, *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. In saying that:

a. He affirmed to His disciples the primary nature of His mission Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. He sent His disciples out to the lost sheep of the House of Israel to preach that the Kingdom was at hand and told them not to go into any of the towns of the Gentiles. John says, *He came to His own and His own did not receive Him*. God's order of things was "to the Jew first and also to the Greek". Even the early church went first to the Jews, and it took tremendous movement on God's part to get them to go to the nations! But when the woman came and fell before Him, she did not argue about that; she knew He was Israel's Messiah; she simply begged for grace. And as Jesus interacted with her:

b. He previewed to His disciples His heart for all nations He wasn't really being derogatory like many Jews would have been. He's merely illustrating, "You wouldn't take your child's plate from the dinner table and feed it to the family pet, would you? That wouldn't be right!" But in faith she responds, "Even the little dogs live by the children's crumbs that fall from the table!" Jesus marveled at her faith. In contrast to Peter's *little faith*, she had *great faith*. She believed that there was more than enough for everybody, that the Messiah of Israel could be the King of the whole world, that His power was enough to help all, and that His mercy was great enough to want to help all! She understood. She had it right and so He did what she asked and He used her faith to help his disciples begin to catch a glimpse that the salvation He came to provide was big enough and planned to include all nations. In fact, next Jesus takes a bold step to reinforce that idea. As He returns from Tyre and Sidon, He passes around the Sea

of Galilee to the east and south to another barren section in the area known as the Decapolis, where we have the miracle of:

5. the feeding of 4000 in Decapolis: (29-39) The people of this area were largely Gentiles, heathen idolaters, although they had lots of contact with Jews. They swarmed out of all their towns to Jesus and what does He do? For three days He teaches them and heals all of their sick just like He did the Jewish crowds at Bethsaida and at Gennesaret and then He feeds them exactly the same as He had fed the Jewish 5,000! In other words:

a. He now poured out before His disciples His love toward non-Jews He welcomed them, He touched them, He healed them, something that pious Jews would never have done. His own disciples must have been taken back by how openly He embraced these Gentile people, just as openly as His own people. And look at the result in verse (31):

b. He brought them to glorify the true God, the God of Israel! They recognized Jehovah, Israel's God as the True and only God. None of their gods ever had power to make the blind see and the lame walk. Christ healed so that He might draw them to Himself. He wanted the pagan world to recognize and believe in Him. And so:

c. He displayed and taught His disciples compassion for them Look at verse (32). The same compassion He had on the Jews who were like sheep without a shepherd, He had on the non-Jews who might faint on the way home! Jesus is beginning to prepare the way for something brand new, for the church, for that new body of believers in Him which no longer has a middle wall of partition that divides, where Jew and Gentile alike are brothers. It took a long while before those early Christians could stop thinking, "For God so loved the Jews, that He sent His only Son..." and start thinking "God so loved the world...", but Jesus was planting the seeds for it even here, showing His disciples His love for the whole world.

Oh, how the people came to Him. Everywhere they had their arms open wide, they wanted Him. And He wanted them too; He had great compassion on them. Yet He knew most of them did not truly understand; their hearts were still too blind. They wanted His benefits, His healing, His deliverance, His help, but most were not prepared to follow Him as their Lord and God. So even as He loved the masses, He deliberately invested His life in the few who were, and through them He changed the world. Those are the two poles of the ministry which He entrusted to us: compassion for the multitudes while investing deeply in the few. *Erasmus was a devout scholar who remained loyal to the Catholic Church while sympathetic to the cause of the Reformers. He gave the church its first published Greek New Testament in 1521 which in turn became the basis for Luther's German translation, Tyndale's English translation and a century later, for the King James Bible. Erasmus is credited as being the source of a classic fictional story that has been retold many times over the years. In the story, Jesus returns to heaven after His time on earth. All the angels gather around Him to learn what happened during His days there and Jesus tells them of the ministry, of His miracles, His teachings, His death on the cross, and finally of His resurrection. And when He finishes his story, Gabriel the Archangel asks Jesus, "But what happens now?" Jesus answers, "I have left behind eleven faithful disciples and a handful of men and women who have faithfully followed me. They will declare My message and express My love. These faithful people will build My church." "But," responds Gabriel, "What if these people fail? What then is Your other plan?" And Jesus answers, "I have no other plan!" Jesus' plan was simple; love the whole world but invest in the few and instill in them your vision for the world, because through them you'll change the world. We're it, folks. We're Jesus' plan; He has no other. Let's let Him instill in us His vision for the whole earth and let's reach it by imparting that vision to others like us who are ready to step out on the water with Him and give Him their loaves and fishes and let Him reach the world through them.*

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Rejection Of The King - Mt. 11:1-16:13

The King Rejected By The Leaders - Ch. 13:53-58, 15:1-20, 16:1-12

At the same time that Jesus has been finishing up His ministry in Galilee and trying to withdraw and escape from the crowds in order to have time with His disciples, every time He crosses back into Jewish territory the Jewish religious leaders stand ready to attack Him and try to discredit Him. They had already rejected Him with finality back in chapter 12, where they committed the unpardonable sin by blaspheming the Holy Spirit. From that point on they continued to try to discredit Jesus before the people. I have lumped together for our study today three occasions where Jesus was further rejected in chapters 13-16. Immediately after that busy day in Capernaum where Jesus taught the parables of chapter 13, He tried to get away from there by going to visit his home town of Nazareth, about 20 miles away, but there we read that:

I. Jesus Was Rejected Because Of Familiarity (13:53-58) This was not the first time Jesus had attempted to teach here. Luke 4 tells us that, very early in His Galilean ministry, the very first place He went was his hometown of Nazareth. On that occasion in the synagogue, He openly claimed to be the Messiah and they dragged Him out of town and tried to throw Him over a cliff! But now months have gone by, maybe a year. Jesus has been all over Galilee and so have His disciples. He has become famous. His miracles are well-known; the people of Nazareth have heard the reports of the heal-

ings and the casting out of demons. So now Jesus comes back home to give them one last opportunity to receive Him. So He waited until Saturday and took the opportunity once again to teach in the synagogue. Well, Matthew records that:

1. the people of Nazareth were amazed at His wisdom and miracles They were astonished. They had known Him for 30 years; He grew up there. He never went to any religious school; He was a carpenter like Joseph His father. Nothing like this happened in all that time. Yet, with their own ears they can hear His great wisdom and they have heard the reports of His miracles; Mark says he even healed a few sick people there. They were awed that these things were happening through Him and they didn't deny them:

2. yet they were offended at Him because of familiarity The word *offend* in verse 57 in the Greek is *skandalizo* from which we get our English word *scandal* and it means, literally, to put a stumbling block in the way. A *skandalon* or stumbling block was a very technical term; it meant the part of a trap which springs it, the trigger stick. So, the animal goes for the bait, pushes against the trigger stick and the trap springs shut and catches him. These people of Nazareth were caught in the trap of unbelief. They couldn't get out of it, and the trigger stick, the thing that sprung the trap was familiarity. They had known Jesus as a regular human being for 30 years. He had brothers and sisters that Mary and Joseph had after Him who also grew up there and became normal people like the rest. His brothers and his sisters all still lived in the village with their families. For his neighbors to acknowledge that He was different from them, that He was greater than they were, indeed to believe that He was the Messiah of Israel, seemed preposterous to them. They had known Him too well! So instead, they became angry at Him. And therein is:

3. the lesson for us (57b-58) Jesus seems to be quoting a proverb that was well known in his own culture; we have a proverb that is similar but shorter: **familiarity breeds contempt**. When you are familiar and comfortable with something or someone and they change, it's hard to change your view of them and when they ask you to, you get negative! Jesus was saying that you can expect that in sharing the Gospel or any time you're speaking for God, there will be two places where you may have difficulty getting a hearing: first, in your hometown among people who have known you all your life and second, in your own house, that is, among your relatives and family who have known you all your life. Now this is a *proverb*, which, in my thinking, means a *probability*. It is not true in every case. In some cases, on the mission field and even here, when one person comes to faith and changes, it eventually leads to their whole family or even their whole village coming to faith. Yet many times, even in cases like that, that person has to endure through a lot of rejection first before it happens. Why? Because people who know you well and whose hearts are not in tune with God can't bring themselves to honor or respect you in spiritual things, because they know you merely on an earthly level. To them you are still "little Johnny" or "old uncle George" or "my spouse". In their eyes you are just like them; for them to admit you have a relationship with God that they don't have, to have to give you that respect or honor, often causes contempt and even anger, at least at first. Sometimes over time God will use your life to overcome that initial rejection, but other times, people just can't get past the familiarity, even as the people of Nazareth couldn't. Now Jesus is NOT saying that you shouldn't witness to or share Him with your family or your neighbors or those who know you well. Of course, we should do that and He can often use it greatly. He is warning that when we do, we should be prepared for rejection and not surprised by it.

Dr. James Boyce writes, *"During WWI one of my predecessors at Tenth Presbyterian Church, Donald Grey Barnhouse, led the son of a prominent American family to the Lord. He was in the service, but he showed the reality of his conversion by immediately professing Christ before the soldiers of his military company. The war ended. The day came when he was to return to his pre-war life in the wealthy suburb of a large American city. He talked to Barnhouse about life with his family and expressed fear that he might soon slip back into his old habits. He was afraid that love for parents, brothers, sisters, and friends might turn him from following after Jesus Christ. Barnhouse told him that if he was careful to make public confession of his faith in Christ, he would not have to worry. He would not have to give improper friends up. They would give him up. As a result of this conversation the young man agreed to tell the first ten people of his old set whom he encountered that he had become a Christian. The soldier went home. Almost immediately--in fact, while he was still on the platform of the suburban station at the end of his return trip--he met a girl whom he had known socially. She was delighted to see him and asked how he was doing. He told her, 'The greatest thing that could possibly happen to me has happened.' 'You're engaged to be married,' she exclaimed. 'No,' he told her. 'It's even better than that. I've taken the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior.' The girls' expression froze. She mumbled a few polite words and went on her way. A short time later the new Christian met a young man whom he had known before going into the service. 'It's good to see you back,' he declared. 'We'll have some great parties now that you've returned.' 'I've just become a Christian,' the soldier said. He was thinking, That's two! Again, it was a case of a frozen smile and a quick change of conversation. After this the same circumstances were repeated with a young couple and with two more old friends. By this time word had got around, and soon some of his friends stopped seeing him. He had become peculiar, religious, and -- who knows! -- they may even have called him crazy! What had he done? Nothing but confess Christ. The same confession that had aligned him with Christ had separated him from those who did not want Jesus Christ as Savior and who, in fact, did not even want to hear about Him. [J.M Boyce, *Christ's Call To Discipleship*, Moody, 1986, p. 122-23]* Now I'm not advocating that particular method of sharing; the point is that familiarity will often lead those closest to us to reject us in the spiritual realm; we can expect it. Next, we move on to chapter 15 where:

II. Jesus Was Rejected For Breaking Tradition (15:1-20) To us today, a tradition means a quaint little custom like standing when the Hallelujah Chorus is sung. But that's not what it means in this passage. To the Jews, tradition was a huge body of sayings and rules that had been taught by the Rabbis and although it was unwritten, it was passed down orally over the centuries. Later it was codified into what is called the Mishna and eventually the Talmud. It was the commentary of respected men on what the Scriptures really meant. Now with that in mind, let's look at Jesus':

1. the confrontation with the Pharisees (1-2) This party of Pharisees and scribes, professional students of the Scriptures, were not local people; they came all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee. They were probably a delegation sent to confront Him and here's their:

a. the complaint: You break the Rabbinic tradition of handwashing! Jesus' disciples were breaking the "tradition of the elders", the "unwritten law" because they did not wash their hands before eating. Therefore, their food would be considered defiled and unclean. Now please understand that this had nothing to do with personal hygiene, like they were eating with hands full of mud or something. The rabbis had developed a process that was to be followed before eating. One must always take a handful of water and wash the hands before the meal in case one had, for instance, been to the market and touched a Gentile or had touched anything that a Gentile had previously touched and made unclean. It was to protect against ceremonial defilement. One entire section of the Mishna is called *Hands* and specifies things like this: *If a man poured water over the one hand with a single rinsing, his hand is clean; but if over both hands with a single rinsing [they] are unclean, unless he pours over them a quarter-log or more.* And they took these rules so seriously that *Rabbi Jose[ph] says, "whoever eats bread without washing of hands, is as if he lay with a whore" and Rabbi Eleazer says, "whoever despiseth washing of hands, shall be rooted out of the world."* [John Gill - Mt. 15:2]. Mark's account adds that they had many rituals like these, including the special washing of pots and pans, and other things. So, it is not that Jesus and His disciples never washed their hands; the charge is that they did not follow Jewish ceremonial law, however, instead of answering that charge, Jesus made a:

b. the countercharge: You nullify God's law by your tradition! (3-6) Jesus turns the matter back on them by citing an illustration to prove they that they hold tradition higher than the Scripture itself. The Scripture declares that a man is to honor his father and mother under penalty of death. Jesus quotes **Ex. 20:12** and **21:17** and interprets it to mean that that included caring for them if they were destitute or elderly. But the Jews had developed a tradition that a person could dedicate whatever he had to God. He could pronounce the word *Corban*, "it is a gift", over it and then it was set apart to God's use. Once he did that, it remained there in his house until he physically gave it at the Temple and he could not use it, even to help needy parents. It's similar to a case I read about in the news some years ago, about a family whose child starved while they had hundreds of dollars in the bank that "belonged to God", even though God says if you don't provide for your own family, you are worse than an infidel! His point was that they actually held their own traditions in higher regard than they did the Word of God itself. And that led to His:

c. the rebuke (7-9) For the first time He calls them *hypocrites*, actors. He quotes **Is. 29:13** and says it was written about people like them. Their lips said they loved God, but their hearts were far from His. Their worship was empty and useless because they taught human traditions in place of God's Word. Sadly, there are millions like them today, people who profess to believe in and worship God, but their hearts are far from Him because they value and keep human traditions and disregard the authority of God's Word. Mainline church denominations in America and elsewhere are filled with them. Some practice the keeping of ornate rituals which they hold very dear, thinking that by this they please God and He accepts them. Others simply ignore the Scripture and teach the accepted "traditions" of our culture, affirming things like the theory of evolution, the practice of homosexuality or the taking of human life through abortion. See how greatly angered Jesus was by people like that; it moved Him to give an:

2. the exhortation to the crowd (10-11) He made it clear to all: **Defilement is in the heart!** Uncleanliness is a moral matter, not a physical one. What goes into your mouth does not make you unclean in God's eyes; what comes out of your mouth does! Well, this upset the disciples **(12-14)**. They were worried about Jesus making enemies of the leaders, but He answered by plainly:

3. the denouncing of the Pharisees He said they are not plants that God planted; that is, they do not truly belong to or represent God despite their religiosity! Moreover, though they claim to be leaders of the blind, they themselves are blind leaders who don't understand the very Scripture they claim to venerate. They are leading people astray, away from God! Now that was hard for them to grasp and accept. I know. I studied in a college and a seminary full of professors who were just like them, regarded as providing exemplary religious leadership, yet totally dismissing the very core truths of the Word of God. It was very hard for me to grasp that such people did not truly belong to God and were blind guides leading people astray. But they were! Peter still couldn't get it and that led Jesus to give a:

4. the deeper explanation to the disciples (15-20) He desperately wanted them to see that:

a. what is in the heart is what matters to God, not what we eat The things we eat go into the stomach and are eliminated. They never touch the heart, the real person, and cannot make a person unclean to God. But evil actions of all types come out of the heart and they are the evidence of true moral uncleanness. It is sin that breaks fellow-

ship with God; eating with unwashed hands defiles nobody in His sight. Now in **Mk. 7:19**, Mark comments that by saying this Jesus was declaring that:

b. all foods are clean in themselves The disciples were surely thinking about all the dietary laws in Leviticus 11, the various animals that were declared clean and unclean to eat. But if you look closely, 15 times in that chapter, God says this or that shall be unclean *TO YOU!* Jesus is revealing something nobody really noticed. These things were not unclean in themselves; they were to be regarded as unclean because of God's command not to eat them. Now I believe that the reason God gave dietary laws to Israel was very practical; they needed protection from germs and diseases and exposure to things that we now know to be harmful. Eating raw pork can give you trichinosis, for example. Meat eating animals carry infection and rodents carry diseases. Without telling them why, God simply gave Israel a set of rules that protected them physically but the uncleanness came not from the thing itself, but rather from the breaking of God's command! Here Jesus actually declared all foods clean and the New Testament reaffirms that repeatedly, with Paul saying things like *all food is clean* in Rom. 14:20 and *everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving*, in 1 Tim. 4:4. We are no longer bound by Israel's dietary laws, nor are we cleansed by the keeping of human traditions; whether we are clean or unclean before God is determined by the state of our hearts!

Finally, we move on to chapter 16. Now Jesus returned from Tyre and Sidon to the Decapolis and then back to Magdala in Jewish territory on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, and this time the Pharisees, along with their own rivals, the Sadducees, were waiting for Him, and this time:

III. Jesus Was Rejected For Refusing To Give A Sign (16:1-12)

1. the Jewish leaders once again demanded a miraculous sign (1) They were testing Him, trying to put Him on the spot and force Him do a miracle on demand for them, hoping to discredit Him in some way. The demand seems rather ridiculous in light of the myriads of healings and exorcisms Jesus had done, but they wanted a bigger sign, a sign from heaven, more than just a healing or casting out a demon. They wanted a sign that was unmistakably of God, that could not be denied as being from God, but Jesus would not produce such a sign on demand. Instead:

a. He rebuked them for not understanding the clear signs of the time (2-3) Here's the source of the old proverb, "Red in the morning, sailors take warning; red at night, sailors delight". The Jews, especially those in Galilee who lived by the sea where the weather was so changeable, were very well versed at reading the weather. They could look at the sky and see what it meant, but Jesus was implying that there were a multitude of signs already in front of their noses that pointed to what time it was on God's timetable, not the least of which were the miracles He did! The signs of the presence of God's Kingdom were all around them, yet they were unable to discern them, so Jesus refused to give them any further miraculous sign from heaven, except:

b. He repeated that He would only give the sign of Jonah (4) This was the same answer He had given them the last time they asked back in **12:39-40** and it referred to Jesus' own death and resurrection. Jesus Himself would be the last and final sign to them. He would die and then rise again after 3 days; that was to be the sign to end all signs, but even that one they didn't discern when it happened. Some people today would still like to have a sign; they want us to produce some proof that Christ is truly God. Well, the Scripture says God gave proof of that to all men by raising Him from the dead! That sign is all He is going to give to hardened hearts!

Well, with that Jesus got into a boat and sailed off across the lake again with His disciples toward Bethsaida, intending to head north to Caesarea Philippi and, as they arrived:

2. Jesus warned His disciples against the "yeast" of the Jewish leaders (5-7) Amazingly:

a. they misinterpreted this to refer to them forgetting to bring bread Somehow, they thought that He was talking about baking bread and warning them not to borrow any lumps of sourdough from the Pharisees. I can't imagine why, but while they are discussing this, Jesus speaks again **(8-11)**:

b. Jesus chided them for not yet grasping that He could provide They should've learned the bread lesson long ago. They were near or perhaps AT the very place where He had fed the 5,000! Bread is no problem to Him; He can feed thousands! Rather:

c. Jesus was warning them against the teaching of the Jewish leaders (12) Ah, now they get it. He's talking about the teaching, about the doctrine, of the Pharisees and how insidious and penetrating and evil it was in their society! Their teaching spread so easily and so thoroughly, just like yeast does in a lump of bread dough. Even a little bit of it can contaminate the whole lump in no time.

There is a warning here for us today. Jesus wants us to be careful, careful not to take the traditions of men, elevate them above the Scriptures, and cling to them so tightly that we can't hear God as He tries to point it out. How quickly this can occur! *There is a legend about a very poor monk who lived in a remote part of China. Every day before his time of meditation, in order to show his devotion, he put a dish of butter up on the window sill as an offering to God, since food was so scarce. One day his cat came in and ate the butter. To remedy this, he began tying the cat to the bedpost each day before*

the quiet time. This man was so revered for his piety that others joined him as disciples and worshipped as he did. Generations later, long after the holy man was dead, his followers placed an offering of butter on the window sill during their time of prayer and meditation. Furthermore, each one bought a cat and tied it to the bedpost. [sermonillustrations.com] Generations after Jesus, here we are. What things do we teach and practice that are merely human traditions we're still clinging to, perhaps so tightly that we'd rather ignore God's voice than let go?

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Preparation Of The King - Mt. 16:13-20:34

The King Announces The Building Of His Church - 16:13-27

Chapter 16:13 marks a turning point in the book of Matthew and in the ministry of Jesus. His rejection by the nation is now sealed and from here on, He is going to give the last months of His life almost exclusively to ministering to His own disciples, preparing them for what lay ahead, specifically for the cross and the resurrection and ultimately, for their lives in the church after His return to heaven. They needed to be ready to face the huge things that were about to come upon them. So, Jesus continued His pattern of trying to escape the crowds and took the disciples out of the boundaries of Jewish territory altogether. They walked about 25 miles north of Galilee to the area of the Gentile town of Caesarea Philippi which lies at the foot of Mt. Hermon. Actually, it was a pretty strange thing for Jesus to do, but it was in this area, far from Jewish life and leaders and crowds, that He chose to give His disciples the two deepest revelations that they would need to sustain them. First of all, it was in this setting that:

I. Jesus Brought His Disciples To Fully Comprehend Who He Is (13) It was a leading question, the kind a Rabbi would ask his disciples to test them. In asking it, Jesus claims for Himself the title *Son of Man*. That's a name of the Messiah. I think the old King James puts it best, *Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?* He's saying, "I am the Messiah; what do THEY say about Me?" Of course:

1. there were many popular misconceptions (14) All Israel was speculating about Jesus' identity. Herod and his cronies thought He was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Of course, everyone knew from the prophet Malachi that Elijah would return one day before Messiah came, and some thought Jesus was he. The apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees said that the prophet Jeremiah had hidden the ark of God in a cave before the captivity, and some thought Jesus was Jeremiah come to bring it back. Others thought Him to be just another in the line of the prophets. But almost nobody comprehended that He was the long-expected Christ! That's not much different from our own day. People still think of Jesus as merely a man, perhaps a religious leader, a great teacher, a prophet of old, but nothing more. Yet that question was simply meant to draw out of the disciples:

2. the true understanding they had come to (15) "After all that you've seen, after these years of being with Me, what conclusion have YOU come to?" And Peter speaks for them all as he confesses his true belief **(16)**. He says:

a. you ARE the Christ That is, You are the long-promised, long-awaited Messiah of Israel, the Promised One spoken of all through the Law and the Prophets. And further:

b. you are the Son of God Of course, they didn't yet have a full comprehension of the Trinity or even of the incarnation, but they had come to know one thing: that in this man was God or God was in this man. He was more than a man. He was more than a prophet. He was not an angel. He was God's Son, of like power and authority with God Himself. The Living God was somehow standing before them in the body of a man! And as Peter confessed that and the rest agreed, THAT fulfilled the purpose of Jesus' whole ministry up until then! He needed them to fully comprehend who He was! And that's what people must come to realize today! It will do no one any good to view Jesus merely as a man. If that's all He is and you look at His actual words, He was either a liar or a lunatic! He claimed to be God and in order to be saved, a person must come to understand that He is more than a man, that He is God. They must bow before Him as Thomas later did, saying *My Lord and my God!* I'm sure Jesus was thrilled with this and He immediately pointed out:

3. the source of their comprehension (17) You can't come to that understanding merely from somebody else telling you. It is not academic information; it is something you have to become convinced of on the inside, in your very heart, by the work of God, by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. It is not enough to say "Oh yes, He's God" in an intellectual sense and go on with life. We must know that in our hearts, and when we do, it will transform our lives! *Calvin Miller, in his book A Hunger for Meaning, has written: "At the person of Christ two roads diverge. Those on the barren road disappear over the horizon of time, muttering in hunger that He was only a carpenter. Those on the other road, the road of faith, admit that they cannot answer all questions. Still, they are on a pilgrimage to drive a stake in a promised destiny. And ever and anon they stop and cry for the overwhelming joy that fills them and spills over the brink of meaning. 'He is the Christ!'"*

Well, now that the disciples had passed the test and were firmly convinced of Jesus' true identity, He was ready to reveal to them a second thing:

II. Jesus Now Fully Revealed To His Disciples What He Planned To Do (18-26) Now for the first time, Jesus:

1. He revealed that He would form His own assembly: the Church (18) Jesus says He is going to create something new, not a kingdom but a church. The Greek word is *ecclesia* which means a *called-out assembly*. It was commonly used to indicate the calling out of people to a public meeting. Jesus is not planning, for now, to reign directly over every person, rather He is planning to call out of all the people in the world a select group to follow and belong to Him, a church, of which He is the head. And further, He says that, not only is He going to form or create such a thing, but He is going to build it. That word *build* literally means *to build a house*; He's going to lay the foundation and construct it all the way through until it is a finished building, just the way a builder constructs a house. Now you remember from the Sermon on the Mount that a wise man builds his house on what? A rock! So, Jesus declares that He will build His church upon a *rock*! But here's where the difficulty in understanding comes in. The name *Peter* means *rock* so our Roman Catholic friends say *this rock* means Peter himself and out of that stems the belief in the authority of the popes as his successors. We, of course, don't believe that in the way they do, even though Peter WAS essentially the one to start the church by his sermon on the day of Pentecost. Protestants have typically said that Jesus either meant that He Himself was *the Rock* or that the confession of faith voiced by Peter was *the Rock*. Personally, I think that rather than get involved in that debate which has gone on for centuries, we should look at what the rest of the New Testament says about it. In **Eph. 2:20** Paul wrote that we, *the household of God, are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Chief Cornerstone*. I think Jesus is saying that:

a. His disciples would form the foundation of it He Himself was the cornerstone from whose lines the whole building was designed and Peter and the rest were the critical foundation layer upon which the whole building would rest. Come over to our house sometime and look at the wooden deck around our pool. The top rail goes up and down and one post leans this way and another that. It's because I was young and cheap when I put it in and didn't use any cement; I didn't pour any footers to set them on. So, the deck has a poor foundation. The bottom of the posts rests on the ground or on a piece of loose cinder block and over the years they've moved and settled. I didn't really intend on it lasting 30 years! That's why Jesus invested 3 ½ years grooming 12 men, investing Himself in them day after day, pouring His life into them, so that they would be a sure foundation layer for the huge assembly He was planning to build who would come to faith, not through Jesus Himself, but through *THEIR* word! So, them being absolutely convinced of who He was and following Him no matter what, was the foundation of the whole thing and:

b. He would build it as they added new disciples - 1 Pet. 2:4-5 says *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...* He's building a spiritual house for Himself to dwell in, a house made of people and He has been building it bigger and bigger. He built it from the Twelve to 120 to 3,000 then 5,000, then sent the apostles out all over the Roman world and gathered in thousands. Today it's millions upon millions and He's still building it, still calling out people from all over the world to belong to HIS assembly, the CHURCH! And here comes the neat part. In verse 18 He boldly declares that:

c. He would send His church to assail Satan's Kingdom Where He took His disciples to tell them this was no accident. The town of Caesarea Philippi was only built around the time Jesus was born and it was named in honor of the Roman Emperor when He was about 18. For several centuries before the town was built, the location was a religious shrine called Paneas, because it was dedicated to the Greek god Pan. The side of the mountain at Paneas was an immense rock face with a huge gaping hole in the middle of it. Out of that huge "mouth" in that day poured a large stream of water which became one of the sources of the Jordan river. An earthquake has since shifted the plates and the water today comes out of the rock below the cave, but in that day inside that cave was a pool of water so deep that the ancient historians say that no one had ever been able to measure the depth. To the superstitious pagans it was like this cave was the opening to the underworld; they believed that spirits came and went from that world to this through that hole. Sacrifices were thrown into the pool as an offering to the god. That gaping maw was literally known as "the gate of Hades" or in 1611 English, *the gates of hell*! All over that rock face the pagan worshippers carved niches in the stone and put up statues of their god Pan, and eventually whole temples to enclose them. Now in Greek mythology the god Pan had the face and torso of a human but the legs, hooves and horns of a goat. Pan was a fertility god; the myths about him always involve seducing some nymph or goddess. You see statues of him committing sexual acts with women, with men and even with a goat, and that's exactly what his followers did. His shrine was a continual hotbed of ritual prostitution of all sorts and detestable sexual acts with goats. Let me assure you that Paneas or Caesarea was not a place that any good Jewish man went - EVER! Yet Jesus deliberately took His disciples to that detestable place. I'm sure wherever they're standing they can see the mountain face, even from a great distance, and I can just imagine Jesus pointing to the gaping hole in the mountain and saying *I will build my church and the gates of hades will not be able to stop it!* He's essentially saying, "That's the kind of people I'm going to send you to, to the goat people, the pagan idolaters!" The Roman world was filled with them, temple after temple in city after city dedicated to this god or that god, and in almost all of them, rampant sexual immorality combined with the worship of demonic spirits. Outside their smug home in Israel, that's what the world was like and Jesus was saying, "That's the world I'm sending you into, a world dominated by Satanic worship and vile practices. It is out of THOSE VERY people that I am going to build My church and the worst that Satan has

to offer will not be able to stand against you! I WILL have worshippers from among all the peoples of the earth and the worst of heathen paganism will not stop My church from saving people!" THAT's the plan! Oh, it must have been a powerful lesson to them! And it should be to us today! We live in a world where teen girls are kidnapped or sold into sexual slavery in brothels or temples in South Asia, where children are forced to work in factories 12-15 hours a day in India or abandoned on the streets of Brazil and millions of babies are killed before they are ever born right here in America! We live in a world where people are forbidden to worship Jesus Christ under penalty of death in several countries and imprisonment in many more. We live in a world where sexual immorality is everywhere and is normal. It's an evil world, a world that Satan has dominated and organized to resist God from ruling over people's lives. But that's the world He is sending us into with the Gospel and listen, the very gates of hell, the worst evil that this world can put up to oppose Christ, will not stop Him from building His church! It IS not stopping Him and it WILL not stop us from bringing people into His assembly! Hallelujah! What a promise of victory! And in that moment:

d. He gave His followers a grave responsibility (19) He turns to Peter and gives him the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Trust me, this has nothing to do with the jokes about St. Peter sitting at the pearly gates and letting people in. When He says *the Kingdom of Heaven* He's still talking about His church, His assembly, and keys are a sign of authority. A steward was given the keys to his master's home and the authority to open the doors. And while Jesus may be hinting at the key role that Peter is soon going to play in the church, I think what He is saying applies in principle to all of the disciples and even to us: **they would hold the "keys" to His Kingdom by their witness.** As they go forth and share, those whom they brought into the Kingdom on earth get into heaven; those whom they keep out of the doors on earth are blocked from it. In other words, **the entrance of people to Jesus' assembly on earth and thus His home in heaven would depend upon them!** Oh, brothers and sisters, Jesus does not have any other way of building His church; we hold the keys! Whoever believes what we tell them will be saved; whoever does not will be condemned! That's the way it works! Whoever we reach and bring in, gets in; whoever refuses or whoever we neglect and don't tell, remains lost and gets blocked out! What a grave responsibility we have!

But it wasn't time to share that message yet, so in verse (20) Jesus warned them to wait and not tell anyone who He is just yet. He had another important thing to share with them. Now:

2. He plainly revealed that He would suffer and die and be raised (21) While Jesus had hinted at His death before, this is the first time that He clearly spelled it out for them in detail. What a shock it must have been to them! It was the last thing on earth they expected! So, Matthew tells us that:

a. the new focus of His ministry was to prepare His disciples for this From this time on, He began to emphasize this over and over and we'll see it repeated in 17:9, 22 and 20:17-19. He had to make them understand what was about to happen to Him and the necessity of it, but:

b. their minds and hearts were strongly resistant to it Look at Peter in verse (22). Here's the "Rock" telling the Son of the Living God how things are going to be! I'm sure the rest felt the same way, and Jesus rebukes him (23). Wow, what a contrast to what He had said five verses earlier! We often think Jesus is being harsh here, but what we miss seeing is that:

c. Satan tried to use their reaction to tempt Jesus but He refused Satan was using Peter's gutsy negative reaction to try to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross. And Jesus says, *you are a hindrance to Me*; that's that word *skandalon* or *stumbling block* again, the trigger of a trap. "Satan is trying to use you to snare Me!" and, of course, when Jesus tells Satan to leave, just as He did at His temptation, he does. But the lesson here is that:

d. whenever we value our earthly thoughts over God's, we obstruct Him in what He's trying to do. God's ways are not our ways and when we try to insist that He make His plans conform to our way of thinking, we stand in His way instead of serving Him; we block what He is doing. And now Jesus comes to the real punch line of this whole occasion:

3. He plainly revealed the true cost of discipleship (24) The cross is not some difficulty we bear in life; the cross was a Roman instrument of torture and death. To carry it was to be on the way to the place of execution. Jesus was bluntly telling His disciples that:

a. a Christ-follower must surrender his life and be willing to die for Him They would have to do what Jesus was going to do, to deny their own wills, to deny even their own lives and pick up their crosses and follow Jesus to Calvary! It means death, death to my will, death to my own dreams for life, death to life the way I want to live it. It means putting my life completely into God's hands, even if that means literally dying to accomplish His mission! Then He added verse (25). In other words:

b. choosing to save life destroys it If I choose to retain control over my own life and live it my way and do whatever it takes to stay physically alive, I end up destroying the very thing I'm seeking to keep. But **giving it up retains it eternally.** Even if I die, I shall live forever! And:

c. nothing (not the whole world!) compares to the value of your eternal soul (26) You can have it all; you can amass everything this world can offer and it doesn't hold a candle to the eternity of life Jesus offers. That's why He expects us to choose to die, to die to self, to surrender our very lives to Him and even lose them for His sake if He wills it. Jesus said we can do that because ultimately, He:

d. Christ will come to reign and eternally reward each according to what he has chosen (27) Those who choose to follow and die here and now will enjoy the glory of life in God's Kingdom with all its joys forever. Those who refuse the cross receive their eternal reward of being shut out of it forever.

Facing what Jesus shared with them that day was a scary thing for His disciples as they contemplated the scary task He gave them, then His own impending death and the call to join Him in it. *As German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis because of his testimony, put it: "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."* Jesus calls us to choose, to follow Him and carry out His plan in whatever way He tells us at the cost of everything we hold dear, even our own lives. *When asked, "What does it mean as far as my life is concerned to be crucified with Christ?", one older believer replied, "It means three things: (1) a man on a cross is facing in only one direction, (2) he is not going back, and (3) he has no further plans of his own."* T. S. Rendall comments, *"Too many Christians are trying to face in two directions at the same time. They are divided in heart. They want Heaven, but they also love the world. They are like Lot's wife: running one way, but facing another. Remember, a crucified man is not coming back. The cross spells finis for him; he is not going to return to his old life. Also, a crucified man has no plans of his own. He is through with the vain-glory of this life. Its chains are broken and its charms are gone."* Jesus bids us all come and die. What will you choose?

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The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Preparation Of The King - Mt. 16:13-20:34

The King Demonstrates The Reality Of His Return - 16:27-17:13

As we pick up the story today, Jesus and His disciples are still about 25 miles north of Galilee in the Gentile region of Caesarea Philippi. He is now devoting Himself to the preparing of His disciples for the things that are about to happen. Last time we explored the powerful lesson He taught them about the building of a new body of people that He called His church and His plain declaration that He will have to die and be raised again to accomplish it. Of course, not only is this concept new to them, but it is also very repugnant and certainly something they're unsure about. But in that same exchange, Jesus began to introduce to them the concept that He's going to leave and then return to set up His Kingdom. In other words, He wanted them to understand that after His death and resurrection the church would be built and THEN He would return to reign as King. He needed to do something that would burn this concept of His return in glory deep into their hearts and He chose to do that through a tremendous visual object lesson that we have come to call the Transfiguration. Let's begin by looking at:

I. The Prelude To The Transfiguration (16:27-28) *And after six days Jesus took...* You see, the editor who created chapter divisions some 1200 years later, chose a very unfortunate place to put one here. This is all one story as you can see by the *And*. What Jesus promised that they would see in 16:28 is fulfilled six days later in 17:1 in the Transfiguration experience. So, these two verses are the prelude to it.

1. Jesus had introduced the concept of His return in verse (27). Jesus has mentioned it in parables but never clearly explained it. Here He connects it directly to His death and resurrection. He has just told them plainly that He is going to die and rise again; now He assures them that He IS going to return in glory to set up His kingdom. In between the two, His church must be built, but His return was a truth that He wanted them to believe and proclaim and to be absolutely sure of, so in verse 28:

2. He now confirmed the certainty of His return (28) The words *Truly I say to you...* are the "Stop, look, listen" sign in Jesus' teaching. He uses them when He's saying something particularly important. He wanted the disciples to take it to heart, to really know for sure that He's going to return in glory. He says, "Some of you standing here will not die before they SEE this!" Now how can that be, if He's just said that He's going to build His church first? Well, the fact is that in just a few days He was going to give to a select few of them an unforgettable visual confirmation of His return. He was going to visually show them the glory of His coming, which is exactly what He did in:

II. The Experience of the Transfiguration (17:1-4) It is easy to figure out where this happened. The town of Caesarea Philippi with the shrine of Pan and the "Gates of Hell" lies at the foot of the highest mountain in the entire region, Mt. Hermon. Its three peaks are over 9,000 feet high and are snowcapped for most of the year. Jesus essentially took His disciples on sort of a retreat in this remote region for a week and at the end of that time, He took His inner circle of three, Peter, James and John, way up onto the mountain itself in order to give them this experience. Now if we turn to Luke's account in chapter 9, we have:

1. **the details of the experience** recorded for us a little more clearly. Notice first of all that:

a. it was prefaced by prayer (Lk. 9:28-29a) Don't get thrown by the 8 days here while Matthew mentions 6. Luke evidently counts the day on which the promise was made and the day of the event as part of the whole, while Matthew is thinking of the days between the two. The purpose of this outing alone with them was to pray. In fact, this experience is almost exactly like that in the garden of Gethsemane would be later on. Jesus took the whole group of disciples only to the foot of the mountain as He later did to the entrance of the garden. Then He went on alone with these three closest to Him. Why? For the same purpose; He took them up there to pray, to pray with Him, probably to pray with Him about His coming death and resurrection. And just as it would later happen in the garden, you also have here:

b. the sleepy state of the disciples (Lk. 9:32) By the way, it appears that the Transfiguration experience occurred at night, not in the day as we usually picture it in our minds! Think about how much more dramatic this must have been! According to verse 37 they did not come down the mountain until the next day. So, after they had climbed the steep slope during the day, it seems that evening had arrived and as they prayed their eyes were heavy with sleep and they could hardly keep them open. It seems to be pattern with them! At any rate, Jesus seems to be praying by Himself a little distance away and their eyes begin to sense a brightness in the dark of the evening due to:

c. the glorious change in Jesus (Lk. 9:29) As He prayed, Jesus began to shine with Divine glory. His face shone like the sun, Matthew says! Picture it casting light like a bright lantern in the darkness. And His clothes became dazzling white and they also glowed. The glory of His Divine person was breaking through the earthly form that He had taken. For that brief moment, He was restored to the Divine glory He had with the Father before the world began! They were seeing Him as John did in his Revelation, as Daniel did in His vision, bright and shining with the glory of God, only it was NOT a vision; He was actually standing right before their eyes! And if that was not enough to terrify them, two men suddenly appeared with Jesus:

d. the appearance and conversation of Moses and Elijah (Lk. 9:30-31) Somehow the disciples instantly knew who they were. Moses and Elijah had been gone for hundreds of years but were the two greatest people in all of Israel's history. The giver of the Law and the greatest of the Prophets were suddenly standing there with Jesus talking! And the subject of their discussion was His death and resurrection. Luke uses the Greek word *exodos*, His *going out* of this world. His death and resurrection was a new exodus; He was crossing a new Red Sea of Death and going to stand victorious on the far shore of Resurrection and lead out with Him a new people, the Church! And Moses and Elijah have been sent back to speak with Him about it! Now the disciples more or less wake up to this scene in the dark and there is Jesus shining as bright as lightning in the night and Moses and Elijah standing there also shining with glory. They are dumbfounded. They stand there with their jaws hanging open as the conversation goes on. But then Moses and Elijah turn to leave and you have:

e. the reaction of Peter (Lk. 9:33) Peter can't bear to see it stop. He desperately wants it to continue, but doesn't really know what to say, so he basically butts in and offers to build booths for them to stay in, to celebrate the Kingdom feast, the feast of Tabernacles with them, right then and there. He now clearly sees that Jesus really IS God and He's going to be glorified and reign. He doesn't want to go back to normal, to the mundane normal life he'd known. He wanted the Kingdom to start then and there, as I'm sure they all did, but it can't be that way and suddenly they hear:

2. **the voice of God from heaven** Now let's go back to Matthew's account (17:5-8) God interrupted him with a glory cloud that wrapped them all about and a loud voice saying in essence, "Be quiet and get the point: THIS IS MY SON; I LOVE HIM; I AM WELL-PLEASED WITH HIM; LISTEN TO HIM!" Here is the sign from heaven that the Pharisees wanted, only now it is given to the disciples who never asked for it, the very voice of God speaking from heaven and notice what He said. First:

a. He confirmed that Jesus IS the Son of God That is what Peter confessed just a week earlier, *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!* And here is God Himself saying, *He IS My Son, the Son I love!* Never after this could they doubt who Jesus was! Never after this could they ever go back to thinking that He was only an extraordinary man or a great prophet. This moment drove a stake into their thinking forever: Jesus IS GOD come down in a body! And secondly:

b. He commanded that Jesus MUST be obeyed The command to listen doesn't mean simply to listen to His words. It means to DO whatever He says. God is saying, "Quit trying to get Him to do things your way and believe what He's trying to tell you and do what He commands! To use modern parlance, it is not optional!"

And therein lies our problem; we think it is! We don't fully get who Jesus is; if we did our reaction would be that of Saul. When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, His glory knocked him to his knees and blinded his eyes and His voice from heaven called Saul's name! And his first words in response were, *Who are you, LORD?* And when he tells the story himself in Acts 26, he says, *I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision!* As soon as He knew who Jesus

really was, he obeyed Him! That's what God expects of us! *Prior to her coronation, Queen Elizabeth sent out to her friends and various Commonwealth dignitaries engraved invitations which read like this: "We greet you well. Whereas we have appointed the second day of June 1953 for the solemnity of our coronation, these are therefore to will and to command, all excuses set apart, that you make your personal attendance upon us, at the time above mentioned, there to do and to perform such services as shall be required of you."* [Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay, by Gary Inrig. Moody Press, 1979. Pages 68-69.] When someone is Queen or King, that is the rightful response! Whatever You say, I do, no excuses, no options! If we really see Jesus for who He is, that's how we respond! But before we leave this glorious mountaintop moment, I want you to see that this:

3. the experience was truly a vision of the Kingdom It was more than merely a sign for the disciples. Jesus had said they would see the Son of Man in His Kingdom with power and they did. They had a miniature glimpse of what it will be like when Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom on earth. First, they saw Jesus glorified as He will be in the Kingdom. He metamorphosized before their very eyes and His veiled glory shone through brighter than the snow on Mt. Hermon's peak! And each of the other characters will be there in the Kingdom too. Moreover, each one is a representative of a group who will be there. Moses went up to a mountaintop like this one and died and God buried him, yet here he is with Jesus in the glory. He represents all those who enter the Kingdom through death. In the Kingdom there will be those who have died in the Lord and they will be raised to share in His Kingdom. Elijah never died. He was taken up alive to heaven in a whirlwind; he was translated to heaven and transformed without dying and here He is. So too there will be those who are caught up to heaven without dying at the Rapture of the Church and be transformed on the way up. Some of us will enter the Kingdom that way! And then there were disciples still in their earthly bodies standing in the presence of it all. Just so, at Christ's return there will be living believers who stand before Him at the end of the tribulation and go into the Kingdom of His Father which was prepared for them. And in that day, they WILL ALL go ahead and celebrate the Kingdom feast! But symbolism apart, they SAW it, in all its glory! They saw it in REALITY. And that moves us to consider two:

4. the lessons from the transfiguration First, this experience:

a. it gives us the assurance of our future This may be a side-point, but it's a very important one. People ask, "Is there really a heaven and can we know one another there? Will we be reunited with those who have gone before and will we be able to communicate with them?" This is one of the clearest answers in the Bible to all those questions. There were Moses and Elijah. Moses had been dead a thousand years and he was still alive and he could still talk and he was with Elijah who lived 500 years after his time and they knew one another and were able to talk and converse! And to top it off, the disciples who obviously had never met either of them knew who they were and understood them! Of course, there is recognition and communion and personality in heaven! The disciples saw and heard it firsthand! Then secondly, this experience:

b. it gives us the assurance of His coming This experience really touched these three disciples They never forgot it. Turn with me to **2 Pet. 1:16-18**. Peter wrote this at the very end of his life. At this point Christ has been gone from earth some 30 years and Peter and the rest have been preaching His return, His coming. When you think about it, 30 years is a very long time! It can get very discouraging to preach a second coming that never happens. People begin to scoff or to think they've misunderstood, yet Peter says, "This promise of His coming is no fable! We were eyewitnesses of His majesty; we saw Him in His glory, in His kingdom! We heard the voice of God who cannot lie! What we have seen MUST come to pass in reality!" The transfiguration is our guarantee that Jesus really will return to set up His kingdom. What they saw MUST be and one day it WILL be!

So, the vision passes, and when they look up, Moses and Elijah are gone and Jesus is touching them and reassuring them and things are back to normal. Soon, it is morning and they begin to descend the mountain. Their minds are still trying to grasp the meaning of what they saw and how it fits with what they know and that eventually leads to a question:

III. The Question About Elijah (17:9-13) Here's how it developed **(9)**. Jesus warns them not to tell anyone what they had seen and they evidently didn't, not even the rest of the disciples. But notice how:

1. Jesus connected this experience to His own death and resurrection He told them to wait until AFTER He had risen from the dead. Both things MUST and WILL happen. He must die and be raised AND He will come in glory to establish His Kingdom. What they saw is a vision that displays the glory of the future, but the agony of the cross must come in the present first. He didn't want them to tell anyone until afterward because He didn't want anyone to mistakenly think the glory was going to come NOW! But the disciples were still somewhat confused. After all, they had just seen the prophet Elijah and all:

2. the Jews expected Elijah's return (10) They had been taught by the scribes that before Messiah's Kingdom can be set up that Elijah would have to return and prepare the way. This was based on **Mal. 4:5** where God promised to send Elijah the prophet before the day of the Lord which would usher in the Kingdom. This was commonly known and acknowledged. The second cup of wine at Passover was known as "Elijah's cup" at Passover and they always set an empty chair called "Elijah's chair". Everybody knew Elijah had to come. So, the disciples are wondering, "Are they

wrong?" or perhaps they're even wondering, "Was this Elijah's return? We just saw him up on the mountain!" But Jesus explains to them that:

3. John the Baptist fulfilled that expectation (11-13) In **Lk. 1:17** we are told that John the Baptist would have the spirit and power of Elijah to go before the Lord's Christ. In **Mt. 11:14** Jesus had said that if the Jewish nation would receive it, John would be the Elijah who was to come; he would be the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy. That is, if the nation had received Christ as their Messiah, the prophecy would have been fulfilled in John. But they didn't receive Him, so Jesus says here, "That is still true; Elijah will still come (that is before My return), but the fulfillment of the prophecy has already come in John and look what they did to him!" And so:

4. Jesus reconfirmed His own pending death (12b) If they killed the "Elijah who was to come", they are certainly going to kill the "Christ who was to come". Again and again, Jesus lays it out for them, "I'm going to die but I'm going to rise again and I'm going to return."

The point is that BOTH things were absolutely certain. Jesus came to die. He came to go to the cross and rise again to save us. That's the purpose for which He came into the world and it could not be thwarted. But His return in glory to set up His Kingdom is equally as certain. He demonstrated it visibly that day on the mountain to assure us of it for all generations to come. No matter how long the process of building the church drags on in this age, HE WILL COME AGAIN! He has promised it and He will DO it! *Michael Faraday was one of the most renowned British scientists of the early 1800's. To him we owe the discovery of electro-magnetism which gave us the electric motor. He discovered benzene and gave us the terms electrode and cathode. The unit measuring capacitance, the "farad" is named in his honor. Albert Einstein kept a picture of Faraday on his study wall. But Michael Faraday was also a serious Christian, a member of a small offshoot branch of Scottish Presbyterianism and a lay elder who preached in his church with an intimate knowledge of the Scriptures. When asked about his speculations on life beyond death, Faraday replied, "Speculations? I have none. I am resting on certainties. I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."* [The Homiletic Review? (April 1896), p. 442]. Peter said, "Speculations? We did not follow speculations when we declared to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! We were eyewitnesses of His majesty! We saw it! We heard it! He WILL come again in glory!" Our faith does not rest upon speculations but upon certainties. Christ DID die and DID rise again and He WILL come again in glory! He proved it in every possible way! Rest on it! Hallelujah!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Preparation Of The King - Mt. 16:13-20:34

The King's Instruction Concerning Authority - 17:14-27

Let me remind you that Jesus is still away with His disciples in the northern region of Caesarea Philippi, away from crowds of Galilee. He has taught them two very important lessons, the first about the building of His church as they looked down on that shrine of the pagan god Pan in the face of the mountain, and the second about the reality of His return as He was gloriously transfigured before three of them up on Mt. Hermon. Now, the next day, Mark informs us, He has just come down from the mount with Peter, James, and John, only to find a crowd gathered around the other nine disciples whom He left at the bottom and a party of scribes attacking and arguing with them. And this blossoms into an occasion for Him to demonstrate to His disciples a third extremely important lesson:

I. Jesus Possesses Complete Authority As God (14-21) The whole incident began with:

1. the failure of the nine disciples to cast out a demon (14-16) A man had come to them while Jesus was away with a son who was demonized. Don't let that word *epileptic* mislead you. It's not a modern medical term. The King James uses the word *lunatic*. It simply means, as the NIV says, that he had seizures, during which he couldn't speak but, the other gospels tell us, he would scream and he would be thrown to the ground and foam at the mouth. Everyone recognized that the problem was not a sickness but a demon, which often tried to throw the boy into water or into fire to kill him. So the disciples tried to cast it out; they commanded it to go in Jesus' Name, but it would not leave. Now, they found that strange, because they had often cast out demons before, when Jesus had sent them out to the villages of Galilee in chapter 10. Jesus had previously given them authority to do it and we're told that they came back rejoicing that even the demons were subject to them. They couldn't understand what was wrong, but Jesus openly declared:

a. the reason for the failure (17) It's hard to specify who Jesus is addressing as He vents the weariness of His own soul. It seems to embrace the whole crowd; certainly it includes the father of the boy, and in some measure, it is even a rebuke to the disciples. Yet the problem is clear: there is unbelief, literally, **no faith**. The people in general did not believe who He was; the father did not believe and even the nine did not quite fully grasp it. So, He simply commanded them to bring the boy to Him and:

b. Jesus displayed His complete authority to them all (18) That settled that! Jesus clearly demonstrated absolute authority; He commanded and the demon came out immediately. Why? Because He's the King, the One in charge and heaven and earth obey His every command! After His resurrection proved it once and for all, He declared to them and to us plainly in **Mt. 28:18**, *...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me!* That's what He wants us to understand! Now, we don't have the whole story before us here. Let's turn to Mark's account in **Mk. 9:20-26**. The first thing I want you to notice is that:

(1) unbelief was clearly illustrated in the father Hear the father's statement, *if you can*. Jesus picked that up right away and turned it around. "The problem is not IF I can; the problem is whether you believe in Me!" This man came to Jesus, merely looking for a cure in his desperation, as so many do. He probably came thinking, "Well, I know He helped many others; maybe He can help me too". But as soon as the disciples fail him, he doubts Jesus too and so, he says, *if you can do anything....* For him the issue was believing in Jesus' ability, whether or not He has power to help. Many folks today want to make that the issue too: "Do I really believe He CAN do what I ask?" But that's not the issue. Faith is trusting that Jesus IS who He claims to be, God the Son. If He is that, then ability is never an issue; everything is possible. That's what Jesus said to the man. To God nothing is impossible! He is saying, "You really don't believe in Me!" and that touched a cord, a nerve. The man responded, "I do, but it's difficult; I confess my unbelief; please help me overcome it!" And that little bit, that mustard seed of faith, was all Jesus needed. You see, the first issue is faith; we must believe that Jesus is God and has all authority, and even if that seems difficult, we must cry out to Him for help and hold to it! That's the first thing that was wrong in this situation. But now let's go back to Matthew 17 and notice that that same:

(2) unbelief was imitated in the "little faith" of the disciples (19-20) They had the same problem that was so clearly evident in the man. They had little faith. In what? Certainly not in Jesus' own ability, because they had often seen Him cast out demons and heal the sick. But remember, only a week before Jesus had questioned them, *Who do you say that I, the Son of Man, am?* Peter had quickly confessed, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!* Well, maybe Peter had come to that realization in full, and James and John no doubt did up on the mountain when they saw His glory, but I'm not sure all the rest of them had grasped it fully yet. Perhaps that's why they didn't get to go up on the Mount and the other three did. Jesus said, "Faith is not an issue of quantity; it is not about *how much* faith you have." He made it clear that if you had even the smallest amount of faith, an amount as tiny as a mustard seed, you could do what seems to be the most impossible thing, like moving a mountain, because you realize that it is not you doing it, but God. You see:

(3) faith in Jesus' authority is what empowers us The issue is squarely, "Do you believe that Christ is the omnipotent, omniscient God?" You either do or you don't. If you do, then you have no doubt that He can do anything that He wills to do! The issue then becomes not "Can you," but "What is your will Lord!" If we know that something is absolutely His will, then we keep on expecting Him to do it. That's where the nine got off the mark. They had a sense that the doing of it depended on them and confessed, *we could not do it....* Here's:

(4) what true faith would have looked like (21) Did you notice the verse is missing? Verse 21 is probably in the margin of your Bible because it is not found in a number of the manuscripts of Matthew that we have. However, Jesus did say it, because Mark records it in **Mk. 9:28-29**. He says that the problem here actually goes a bit deeper. The words *this kind* probably mean that the particular demon they were dealing with was of an especially strong and tenacious variety. The fact that there are various layers of demonic power and organization is implied in many places in Scripture. But in this case, it seems that when they tried once and it didn't work, they gave up in defeat and began to doubt and argue, rather than standing firm. So Jesus told them, "There are going to be some difficult situations where faith means continual prayer and fasting and waiting for Me to work, expecting that I will do it, and not giving up when there is not an instantaneous answer! If you really trust Me, if you really believe who I am and what I will to do, you don't give up!"

What good advice for us! If we are sure of who He is and certain that something is His will, then we must be willing to keep on trusting and praying and not give up! *The story is told of an old woman who was known for the wonderful answers to prayer she received. People would ask her to pray for them when they had needs and she would do it gladly. Many marvelous answers came because she prayed. Then one day a person came to her to ask for her help and asked, "Are you the woman with the great faith?" She replied "No, I am the woman with a very little faith in a very great God!"* That's the very lesson Jesus is trying to get across! And combined with the dramatic exorcism at His word, it must have had a powerful effect, because Luke concludes his version of the story by saying, *And all were astonished at the majesty of God...* - **Lk. 9:43**. Now as their path turns home toward Galilee:

2. Jesus called His disciples to faith in facing a coming greater event (22-23) As He had in each of the previous lessons, He again emphasizes to them that He is going to die and rise again. He reiterated to them over and again that the cross was coming. Luke mentions that He prefaced it by saying, *Let these words sink into your ears!* He wanted them to understand that He was God and that the cross was HIS plan, because He knew that:

a. believing Jesus would rise was even harder than casting out a demon He had just told them that if He is God, then nothing should be impossible. So, neither should this thing of His death and resurrection be impossible. It

should not stop their faith. By His authority He had decreed that He would die and rise again and it would happen just as surely as that impossible demon was cast out. But

b. the disciples could not properly grasp it Luke says, *But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.* - **Lk. 9:45**. It saddened them and they just couldn't understand how it could be. It was a lesson they could only learn at the feet of the Resurrected Christ later on.

Now, in the second portion of our text we have another component to this lesson that He's been trying to teach about authority.

II. Jesus Chose To Submit To Earthly Authority (24-27) Jesus has been away from His home town of Capernaum for some time, trying to stay away from the crowds, but now, as He returned, He was faced with:

1. the demand to pay the Temple Tax (24-25a) This was not a Roman government tax. The Mosaic Law had authorized the collection of a half shekel tax per person for the support of the Tabernacle. The Jews were still following that law and collecting it for the support of the Temple each year. Since Jesus had not been in town for some time, they evidently felt this could be another opportunity to accuse Him of breaking the Law. Peter must have seen it as a serious thing because he immediately replied, "Sure He does!" So, he went to remind Jesus about it. However, the text says that Jesus spoke before Peter could, and here is:

2. the lesson Jesus taught Peter (25b-26) He used a comparison, saying, "Now think a minute. If you were a king and were going to collect taxes to support yourself, who would you tax? Your own family? Or outsiders!" The answer is obviously "outsiders". And the conclusion is that the sons should be free of the tax even if it was a law for all the king's subjects! Now His point here is actually pretty ingenious. Once again, He used this situation to point out who He is:

a. He asserted His identity as God's Son The poll tax was for the Temple but He had called the Temple "MY Father's House" at the very beginning of His ministry when He cleansed it the first time. The second time later on He even implied it was His house, saying, "MY HOUSE SHALL...". He's saying to Peter, "Remember who I am, the Son of the Living God!" And notice that He uses the plural, *sons*. He included Peter with Himself as a son, **and** by so doing He **included us with Him**. We are sons of heaven, daughters of the Kingdom! And by this:

b. He inferred His freedom from being taxed by His own Father By rights He should not be subject to Temple tax. It is His Father's house; indeed, His house! No earthly religious system should have the right to collect that from Him. And by the same token, there are lots of things that earthly systems demand that we must do that are not fair and not right and if justice were done here and now, they would not be laid on us. But Jesus turned right around and paid the tax anyway in verse **27**, *However, not to give offense to them... Take that shekel and give it to them for me and for yourself.*

c. He chose not to use His right in order not to give offense There's that Greek word *skandalon* again, a stumbling block, the trigger of a trap. Go pay it, lest we put something in the way that will keep people from faith, that will keep them from believing, because they will think that we are rebelling against God Himself and His law and will never be willing to listen to us. I am reminded of Paul's admonition to us in **1 Cor. 9:5-12**. Paul chose to work to support Himself rather than being supported by the churches he planted, though he had the right to it, scripturally. He even chose not to marry and take along a wife, though he had the right. Why? He would not do anything that would put an obstacle, a stumbling block, in the way of the Gospel, anything that would keep people from believing, just so that he could exercise his own rights. That was the mindset of Jesus and it should be ours also! We should *give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God* - **1 Cor. 10:32**; we should do nothing to benefit ourselves that will keep others from faith. Always be thinking of others. But then look at:

3. the miracle Jesus performed that displayed both Deity and submission Now let's read all of verse **(27)**. He doesn't just get out His purse and pay the tax. He sends Peter down to the lake to fish and says that the fish will have the money in its mouth, not just in loose change but in the form of a coin called a *stater*, a Roman coin worth 4 *drachmas*, just exactly enough to pay the half-shekel tax for both of them. Now, Jesus never did a frivolous miracle just to show off, but what a royal way to show Peter that He really was God and did have all authority, yet even He submitted to earthly authority in order to bring people to faith! And what a great way to demonstrate one more time the principle: trust in Me and even the impossible is possible!

I'm sure you all recognize the name *Chuck Norris*, the well-known actor and martial arts expert. *Chuck is also a very outspoken Christian. He tells about one time when he was filming his television series in Texas. After work one day he stopped to have something to drink. He was alone. As he was relaxing in a corner booth, a big man walked up and said in an irritated tone that Norris was sitting in HIS booth. Norris says, "I didn't like his tone or his implicit threat, but I said nothing and moved to another booth. A few minutes later, though, the big fellow headed back in my direction. 'Here it comes,' I thought, 'a local tough out to make a name for himself.' When he arrived at my new booth, he looked directly at me. 'You're Chuck Norris,' he said. I nodded. 'You could have whipped my butt back there a few minutes ago,' he said. 'Why*

didn't you?' 'What would it have proved?' I asked. He thought that over for a moment and then offered me his hand. 'No hard feelings?' he said. 'None,' I said and shook his hand. I had avoided a confrontation and made a friend. I won by losing." [Reader's Digest, Mar 1996. Page 37.] Know who you are, the son or daughter of your Heavenly Father, but give no offense. Release your "rights" so that others will see your example and believe the message of life that you desperately want to share with them.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Preparation Of The King - Mt. 16:13-20:34

The King's Instruction Concerning Relationships - Part 1 -18:1-14

Jesus has now returned with His disciples from the region of Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration to Capernaum in Galilee. Mark tells us that on the long walk back the disciples had been having a dispute among themselves. They did not settle it, however, and now that they were home again, they brought it up to Jesus. It may sound generic, but the question really was which of them would be in the greatest position in Jesus' Kingdom. So, Jesus seized upon this as an opportunity to teach them about the new sort of relationships they were to have as part of His new assembly, the church. And at the top of His list is:

I. Our Need of Humility (1-4) Now picture:

1. the pride which the disciples displayed (1) The Jewish Rabbis always taught that there would be degrees of greatness in God's Kingdom. They were concerned, not only about getting honor here and now from people, but about keeping it going forever! So that sort of thinking had been ingrained in the disciples, without them even realizing it. They want to know what it takes to be the greatest in the Kingdom when it comes, so they can figure out who Jesus' right-hand man is going to be and so they can work toward the position! In response, Mark tells us that Jesus ...*sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."* - Mk. 9:33-35. Wow, that must have blown their minds; it was completely the opposite of the way they thought and the way most people today think! But even if becoming great means striving hard by doing good things, the motive is still self-centered! It's pride! So, Jesus sees a young child, maybe a little 4 or 5 year old, standing nearby and calls him over and holds him and gives them a very poignant object lesson. First, He says that:

2. child-like faith is necessary for salvation (2-3) For a person to get into the Kingdom, they have to turn, to change, to become like a little child. A little child accepts with complete trust whatever Daddy says. A little child does not worry about prestige and status; he simply puts up his arms and says, "Daddy, hold me". He doesn't ponder whether Daddy's going to give him a new toy or take him on a neat vacation; his mind doesn't think that far. He just loves Daddy! You see, salvation is not merely the repeating of a certain prayer or the believing of a set of doctrines; it is a response to a Person! It is becoming like a little kid and raising your arms and saying, "Father, I want You; I love You!" And therefore:

3. child-like humility is God's measure of greatness (4) A little child has no position. They have no authority. They don't care whether they're a pauper or a prince; they're not even aware of the difference. What makes a little child feel important? Being able to help Mom or Dad with whatever they are doing! And they have no sense that a task is beneath them. You can ask them to help you take out the trash or to help you wash the car and they'll do it with joy to help Dad. It's when they get older that they say, "Do I have to? I don't like doing that! I have more important things of my own to do!" The goal for the believer is to get back to a little-kid stage, to develop a genuine simple desire to serve God and others. That is real greatness in His eyes. *T. W. Hunt writes: "At first I thought he was showing special deference just to me. He worked hard to help me find a retirement house. He watched our house and cared for it in the year of our absence before we moved into it. He saw that the lawn was mowed. When I mentioned painting the closets, he recruited fellow church members to do it, and then worked with them. It seemed that I could not mention a need without him hurrying to fulfill that need. Then I moved to his town and joined the same church. His name was Lucian Stohler, and I soon discovered that his name was synonymous with service. He continued to attend to me and my family, but now I became aware that he attended to everybody. He met needs quietly and without officiousness. He was constantly available and working behalf of others. I asked Lucian to tell me what brought this attitude into his life. He said that a crisis led him to dedicate his life and his whole personality to servanthood. He led a 'normal' Christian life until a retreat in Michigan brought a confrontation with his life purposes. The preacher spoke on the deeper life in such a way that Lucian realized the importance of the lordship of Christ. He struggled with that concept as he went back to his cabin and poured out his heart to the Lord and over the next three years, the Lord taught him the meaning of servanthood. He learned the walk of ministry, which is to say, the walk of a life given to the service of others. He learned that ministry and servanthood were synonymous. His own words were, 'My drive to serve has given me a love for people that makes me want to help them, to serve them, to witness the love of Christ to them.'" [The Mind of Christ by T. W. Hunt. Broadman & Holman, 1995. Pages 65-66.]*

If Jesus commented in our modern slang, He'd say, "Now dat's what I'm talkin' 'bout!" And now He continues the lesson by going on to speak about:

II. Our Treatment Of Those Who Are Humble (5-14) The great fear is that in this world, both children and humble child-like people get stepped on! They get hurt and taken advantage of. And sometimes we're the very ones doing it! So, look at this:

1. Jesus personally identifies with "little ones" (5) Now:

a. this obviously can be applied directly to children and you must realize how much different our culture is from theirs. Though parents have always loved their children, children are seen much differently today. In that world, a child had no rights. He existed to serve adults and did the most menial jobs. Children were often seen as a nuisance or unimportant and not to be bothered with by men. Remember chapter 19 where, immediately after this, the disciples try to chase the little children who are coming to Jesus away! It was not the norm for a man to sit and pick up a child like Jesus did and love on them. Jesus is saying, "And if you want to know real humility, here, make yourself a servant of the lowliest of all, of the least, the little child! That's humility!" Jesus came into the human race as a child and His heart remained with children. The way that we treat children is the way we're treating Him! It's almost like the father who warns, "Now you treat my child right or you're going to have to answer to me!" When you love and care for and minister to children, whether your own or others, you are literally doing it unto the Lord. Maybe we parents ought to think about it that way more often when we get frazzled! However, as Jesus continues, it is apparent that He is not talking about literal children only; He begins to use the term *little ones*, so it appears that:

b. it further applies to all truly humble disciples, to all who humble themselves and become child-like in believing. And His teaching here seems to apply **especially to new believers**, people who are young and small and untaught in the faith, much like the dear Yenadi believers we serve in India. Whoever receives one of *them*, serves one of *them*, does it directly to Jesus! And just look at how:

2. Jesus warned strongly about misleading "little ones" into sin (6-9) It is a heinous thing to God to take a little trusting child and turn him or her away from simple faith in Christ, to put a stumbling block in the way of a child and to teach them to sin instead of following Jesus. Likewise, it is a monstrous thing to destroy the simple faith of a new believer by telling them how antiquated and foolish it is and pressuring them with all kinds of scientific this and that. I would not want to be in the shoes of some of our college and university professors today who actually seem to delight in doing this. Jesus said it would be better to have a heavy millstone (the kind a donkey would turn) tied around his neck and to be drowned in the open ocean beforehand, rather than have to face the judgment they'll receive for doing such a thing! Jesus said it would be better for that person to cut off an arm or gouge out an eye, if that would stop them from misleading little ones (which it wouldn't), because they stand in danger of the lake of fire! Listen, there are a whole host of drug pushers and child abusers and even parents out there who are standing under an awful weight of judgment for what they're doing to kids! And there are a whole host of teachers and professors and role models and even pastors out there who are standing under an awful weight of judgment for how they're leading simple trusting folks astray. But don't think this warning is just for folks like these:

3. Jesus cautioned us about looking down on "little ones" (10) We have to be careful never to look down on children, to think them unimportant or a nuisance or not worth bothering with. That includes the kids in our Pioneer clubs or in children's church and Sunday School who mess up the building and drive us crazy! They are important to Christ! And because we're educated and sophisticated and well off, we have to be careful never to look down on simple believers who don't know much and don't have much, but just trust in Jesus. They are precious to Him, so precious that **He has charged angels with the responsibility of caring for them!** Now, you can't infer from this the popular sentiment that every child or every person has their own personal "guardian angel", but there are angels that God has directly assigned to care for "little ones" of all ages and varieties, and they report straight to Him, so we'd better join them in their work; these "little ones" are important! In fact:

4. Jesus greatly desires the salvation of all "little ones" Verse (11) is in the margin of your Bible because it's not in some manuscripts, but Jesus did say this exact thing on other occasions and it certainly fits here:

a. it is the very purpose for which He came These lost "little ones" are the very ones He came to rescue! Then in (12-14) Jesus tells the story of the lost sheep. In our text here, this story is focused on "little ones", while Luke records that Jesus used the same story differently on another occasion. Here the lost sheep in the story are children and simple persons with a new blooming faith. Jesus wants every little one to be saved. In fact:

b. it is His greatest joy A child asks Jesus into their life and we may feel it's no big deal, but God rejoices because He knows that it can rescue an entire life from ruin and sin! Some may complain that reaching children is a poor way to reach whole families; that may be, but it doesn't make God any less happy! Think how happy He is when one of our little Nursery School kids or Sunday School kids asks Jesus into their heart. Think how happy He is when the simplest rural villager or the poorest slum dweller in some megacity turns from idols to worship Jesus. He loves them so much that:

c. He does not want even one of them to perish He doesn't want ANY of them to be lost. It breaks His heart and it should break ours!

Paul Eshleman, the founder and longtime director of Campus Crusade's Jesus Film Project writes this: *I was in a small Karamoja village in northern Uganda. One hundred and eighty thousand people had died of starvation the year before. On the outskirts of the village was a pile of human skulls that stood as a stark testimony to the tragedy. I picked up two of the skulls in my hands and realized that just six months before, these had been living, breathing, human beings. I wondered if anyone had ever told them the message of Jesus. As we gathered some of the people together, I began to ask them, through my interpreter, to tell me what they knew about Jesus. One by one, the answers came: "I don't know who he is, sir." "Does he live in Nairobi?" "I've never heard of him." Or in some cases, they just shook their head "no" as they looked at the ground. Finally, there was just one little eight year old boy left. As I asked the question again, a tear ran down the little boy's cheek. "Sir," my interpreter said, "He would like to tell you about Jesus, but he has never, ever heard his name."* The experience was a seminal moment in my life. Everything inside me shouted, "It's not fair! It's not fair that he doesn't have at least one chance to hear the message of Christ." That night I prayed, "Lord, I'm only one person, but whatever I can do, I don't want there to be any eight year old boys—or girls, or men, or women—who don't get one chance to know You." Passion for those beyond the reach of the Gospel became the driving force of my life. [Paul Eshleman in *Mission Frontiers*, Jan/Feb 2013, p. 6] The result is that under Paul's 26 year leadership, the Jesus film was viewed some 5.6 billion times and more than 195 million people made decisions to follow Jesus! No, we can't all do what Paul Eshleman did, but we can all have the heart and the passion that Paul had, because it is the heart of Jesus. We can all say, "Lord, I'm only one person, but whatever I can do, I don't want any of these "little ones" who doesn't have the opportunity to know You to be lost. Use me!"

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Preparation Of The King - Mt. 16:13-20:34

The King's Instruction Concerning Relationships - Part 2 - 18:15-35

In the first half of chapter 18, Jesus was teaching His disciples about our need for humility. He held this little child before them and said, "You must become humble and child-like; that is greatness in God's eyes!" And He warned them how angry God is when someone mistreats or leads astray a child or even one of His humble child-like followers. But Jesus can just hear the disciples thinking, "OK, humility is great, but what about when somebody sins against me; what do I do then?" So, He goes on to teach them plainly in this second half of the chapter that among ourselves in the community of believers, we have two very important responsibilities toward one another that we must continually exercise. First of all:

I. We Must Hold One Another Accountable When We Sin (15-20) In the church, the body of believers, we are not simply to ignore each other's misbehavior; rather we are to confront each other, to admonish one another, to rebuke one another, so that we help each other grow more and more into the image of Christ. And Christ details for us here:

1. the process we are to use in verses (15-17). The process:

a. it must always begin with private confrontation (15) This is not what the Rabbis taught. They said, "The offending party must come to you and ask forgiveness in the presence of witnesses". Jesus said, "You go to the person who has sinned against you! You don't sit there and hold a grudge and let it fester and wait for them to feel convicted and come to you and admit their fault. And you don't go to the pastor or to some good friend to complain about it and incite them to join you in your feelings of being hurt unjustly. You go directly to your brother or sister, alone and in private so as not to embarrass them and do your best to explain what they have done and how it's wrong or how it has hurt you!" The goal is not to be vindicated, to be proved right, or to get an apology that is owed to you; rather it is to gain your brother, to restore a relationship that has been damaged with them. That's what is important! Now let me add this disclaimer; this does not mean that we have to constantly be confronting each other about every little thing we do. If I'm a little grouchy on the phone with you today when you call, on your part you might just assume that I'm having a bad day, overlook that in love and forget it. If you said, "Hi," but I didn't respond, you might assume that I didn't hear you or I was preoccupied and overlook that in love and forget it. 1 Pet. 4:8 says, *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.* We do this within our families constantly. Most simple offenses like an unkind word are covered over and forgotten daily by the love we know that we have for one another and so should ours in the body be. Jesus' intent is not for us to play Holy Spirit by running around and pointing out each other's minor imperfections all the time. However, when there is an actual offense, one that is intentional and causes significant hurt, and one that perhaps the person is continuing to do, we are to take the initiative, confront our brother or sister privately and restore the relationship. 99 times out of 100 that process works. The person responds and asks forgiveness and we grant it and go forward. But in the rare case where they refuse to listen to you:

b. it may expand to include group confrontation (16) You go back to that brother or sister again and this time you take along one or two more people who are witnesses, who can see and understand what is going on and will vouch for the truth of what you are saying. You take with you people that the person would respect and listen to in order to lend weight to the truth, not to "gang up" on the person. You might take two of the person's friends who are

concerned for them or two of the elders of the church and go over the matter again. If the person is at all sensitive to the Spirit, this will work. But if it doesn't, Jesus said that the matter should:

c. it proceeds to the level of church confrontation (17a) The entire assembly, the local church body, should be made aware of the issue and an appeal should be made to the offending brother or sister by the whole body. I'm guessing that would not normally be done by publicly chastising them in front of some large group meeting, but that the church would send its appointed leaders or elders to them to admonish them, so that the weight of the entire fellowship is thrown on the side of truth and right and the person is forced to make a choice: "What is most important, continuing to defend what I'm doing or my fellowship with this body of Christ?" If the person is a genuine believer and is sincere before God, it should really matter to them that their whole local body would stand in opposition to them on this issue. This should be enough to cause a person to listen but if they still don't, Jesus said:

d. it can ultimately result in excommunication (17b) They are to be counted as and treated like an unbeliever and not a part of the body. Now what does that mean? Jesus wasn't saying that now it is OK to treat them hatefully or spitefully; He Himself ate with tax collectors and reached out to pagan Gentiles! It means they are to be told they are no longer counted as part of our communion and fellowship, that we can't see how they can genuinely know the Lord and act this way, that they are simply no longer one of us, yet they must always be reminded of our love for them and our desire to see them repent. The door always remains open. They may worship with us. We will certainly pray for them. But they are no longer one of us! Now that is an awfully serious step to take; the times we have had to do it during my tenure as pastor, you could count on one hand. But sometimes, take it we must.

Bob Ahlberg, pastor of Roscoe Evangelical Free Church in Illinois shares the following: About two-and-a-half years ago we had the sad experience of disciplining a man by removing him from membership for repeated and unrepentant adultery. We followed the guidelines of Matthew 18 and his response was, "I know what I'm doing...I know what you have to do...so do what you must because I don't care! I plan to never darken the doors of this church again anyway! So why should I care!" He proceeded to divorce his wife in civil court. His wife continued to attend church, and there were many tearful times with her during prayer meetings. At cell group meetings, we prayed God would do whatever necessary to open this man's eyes and bring him back into a right relationship with himself. Last August, this man called me and asked if we could meet. At my office he threw himself on my shoulder and wept, and said he wanted to confess his sin. He said "the Hound of Heaven" had been on his trail for nearly two years, and he couldn't take much more. He set aside his divorce and sought to renew his marriage. Even his wife, who had said she probably could never trust him again, was amazed at the change in his life. This man was active in the Army Reserves, and his unit had been sent overseas to process the bodies of the military who died in Iraq and prepare them for their return to the States. God's hand was working in his life as he was confronted on a daily basis with the brevity of life and permanence of eternity. Following this tour of duty, and upon returning home, he met with the elders, confessed his sin, and asked to be forgiven for his arrogance and the impact his life had on the local body. What a joy to announce at the congregational meeting, after 2½ years, that discipline against this man was lifted and that he was restored to the fellowship! I am reminded that, when we do things God's way, he does not always respond in our timing nor with the short-term results we desire, but His way is always right, best, and true. With praise, the whole church got to see God at work restoring both the man and his marriage. [Bob Ahlberg, pastor of Roscoe Evangelical Free Church, Roscoe, Illinois (November 2005); submitted by Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois - <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2006/march/7031306.html>] This process Jesus has given us is powerful and effective. Of course, God cannot always guarantee such a positive outcome; He will not violate a person's will. Therefore, it is important that before we take that step with anyone, we must understand just how serious it is. Jesus went on to explain that:

2. the judgment of the church carries the authority of Jesus Himself (18) The word *you* here is plural, meaning *all of you*, the assembly, the local church. *Whatever you [the church] bind [that is, prohibit or forbid] on earth shall be, having already been bound in heaven; whatever you loose [that is, permit] on earth shall be, having already been bound in heaven.* In other words, the determination that you together make concerning the reality of someone's faith on earth shall be the way it is in truth in heaven! The way it is here is the way it already has been there. If the group discerns that this person really can't possibly be a true believer and behave like this, the reason they have that discernment is because it is already known to be that way in heaven and it has been communicated to them and they have Christ's authority to declare it, to speak it in His name! Whoa, that is a powerful statement! In fact, Jesus goes on to add that the:

a. agreement of the group, even if small, is validated by the Father (19) This is not a general promise about prayer that Jesus somehow suddenly thought of and threw in haphazardly at this moment. It doesn't mean that if two people agree to ask God for a million dollars or for a miracle of healing that He will guarantee to do it. He means that the agreement of even two or three sincere followers is a genuine indicator of the will of God and reflects what God will do. How can that be?

b. this is because the presence of Jesus infuses the group (20) Wherever two or three genuine followers of Christ gather together with the sincere desire to know and discern His will, to do what will honor Him, He is right

there in the midst of them! His Spirit lives inside each and their agreement is the sign that together they have heard the One Spirit speaking. By their agreement, the group shall have the wisdom of the ever-present Christ to know what God's decision and view on the matter is and, therefore, His authority to declare it!

Wow, you mean if the church tells a person that their behavior is so far out of line that they are not a true believer, that they're not one of us, then they are actually NOT one of us and they are deceiving themselves? Yes, if the group is really genuine Bible-loving, Spirit-filled followers of Christ, that's pretty much exactly what Jesus is saying! That's why these are deep things; they're fearsome responsibilities and not to be taken lightly or ignored! But we must move on to look at the second responsibility Jesus declares that we have. We must not only hold one another accountable when we sin:

II. We Must Forgive One Another When We Sin (18:21-35) [Read 21] As Jesus is speaking, Peter's wheels are turning and he thinks, "Yeah, but how often do I have to put up with people hurting me? What if my brother sins against me and is sorry but then does it again? Do I have to keep on forgiving him over and over?" We all know people like that, people you have to forgive over and over and they keep on repeating the behavior. Well, the Jewish Rabbis had an answer. They taught that three times was enough; it was all that God required. But Jesus declared that:

1. our forgiveness is not to be limited (22) Peter thought he was being generous by suggesting 7 times. But no matter whether you translate the Greek to mean 70 times 7 or 70 times and 7 like the NIV does, the number is not the point; in fact, concentrating on a number shows that the heart is all wrong in the first place. What Jesus is really teaching is that FORGIVENESS HAS NO LIMITS! You can't say, "I forgive this often, but no more. I am done forgiving!" You can't say, "I forgive this transgression, but not that one!". Jesus declares that we must continually and always forgive one another and then He tells a story to show us why:

2. the parable the unmerciful servant (23-35) It is a story about the heart of a man, which ends up being a story about our own hearts. Now in this story:

a. the servant was forgiven an infinite debt by the King (23-27) Somehow this man owed the King an extremely significant sum of money, 10,000 talents. A talent is a unit of monetary value in silver or gold that is roughly equivalent to 6,000 Roman denarii, that is, 6,000 days wages for a common laborer. So, to find its equivalent, let's use an average wage today of \$100 a day, which makes this the equivalent of some 6 billion dollars! To the hearers it was clear that Jesus chose a ridiculously high number, basically an infinite amount. And Jesus never said how he got in such debt; maybe he was a gambler and used the palace credit card! At any rate, he didn't have enough to cover this debt; he couldn't possibly have! Yet when he merely begged the king to be patient, the king went all the way and actually forgave him ALL that debt; he simply wrote it off! Now by that, of course, Jesus is painting a graphic picture of what God has done for us in Christ, how He has forgiven us an absolutely infinite debt owed Him because of our sins, a debt that there is no possible way we could have paid. It was a debt that would have merited an eternal punishment and yet we are completely forgiven! Hallelujah! Such was the joy and relief this man must have felt:

b. yet he selfishly refused to forgive a relatively small debt (28-30) There was another man who owed this same servant money, a hundred denarii, which was 100 days wages or the equivalent of maybe \$10,000, a significant debt, yet conceivable of being paid. And this debtor did the same thing, asked him only for patience, but the unmerciful servant would neither be patient nor forgive. He had him imprisoned. Of course, this second man is meant to picture our brothers or sisters who sin against us. The hurts they have caused us are significant; they are serious. Jesus is not saying that whatever someone may have done to us is a trifling nothing. Often there is a serious hurt or wrong done to us, but the point is that we who have been forgiven so much, may conceivably take absolutely no thought of our own case when it comes to our willingness to forgive others! However, the punchline of the story is that:

c. the King was very angry at his ungratefulness (31-35) The way the servant acted toward his fellow man revealed the true nature of his heart. He was not at all the poor, pitiable person that he seemed when down on his knees begging; he was wicked and cared nothing about other people, only himself! However, the real point of the story is to show the attitude of God, how angry He is when He has forgiven us SO much and we refuse to forgive others. The principle that we derive from the story is clear:

3. we MUST forgive others because we have been infinitely forgiven It is a moral obligation. It is the only righteous thing to do. To refuse forgiveness when we have been so greatly forgiven is actually immoral and wicked! If we are followers of the King then we should have the same attitude that the King had. Look again at verse (27). When people sin against us, first of all:

a. we should have compassion on them as God had on us God saw that we could never pay our debt, that no amount of good could ever erase the evil we had done. We were hopelessly lost, with the sentence of eternal death already pronounced against us, but He cared about US. He was so moved with compassion that He gave up His own Son to pay our debt! When people hurt you, it is so easy to see them as objects or to see them as wicked awful people who deserve to suffer. Yet because we know what it is to feel the compassion of God, He can enable us to see them as poor, wretched people who owe a debt they cannot pay to us. There is no way they can make it up

to us. They can't go back and change it; they can't fix it. They stand under the guilt of it with no way out, just as we stood helpless before God. And so just as God did for us:

b. we should release them completely and hold it against them no longer We need to make a conscious decision to let them go, to say, "They no longer owe me anything. I release that debt. Their forgiveness is now between them and God. As far as their debt to me, it is clear." Oh, that may be tough! Especially when the wound is deep! But that is the choice God expects us to make and from that point on, we refuse to hold it against them any longer. We don't bring it back up the next time we're upset; we don't keep harboring it in the back of our minds. We release the person freely and without any further requirement. But understand this:

c. God is very angry when we refuse to forgive You remember how Jesus taught us to pray, don't you? Look back at **6:12-15**. Does that mean that you will be eternally lost if you don't forgive? No, our salvation is secure; the actual guilt of our sins is paid for and gone forever. But if you want to experience the relational closeness of the Father, you can't continue to sin by refusing forgiveness to others! You can't tell Him, "I'm sorry Lord for what I did yesterday" and expect Him to draw near to you again, while in your heart you're hating the person who hurt you the day before, not when He bore the agony of His Son dying on a cross out of His compassion to forgive you! Being infinitely forgiven compels us to forgive in an unlimited fashion. It compels us to forgive, as Jesus said, *from the heart!* The Apostle Paul put it like this, *bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* - Col. 3:13.

H.A. Ironside tells the story that one Lord's Day many years ago a group of missionaries and tribal believers in New Guinea were gathered together to observe the Lord's Supper. After one young man sat down, a missionary recognized that a sudden tremor had passed through the young man's body that seemed to indicate that he was under a great nervous strain. Then in a moment all was quiet again. The missionary whispered, "What was it that troubled you?" "Ah," he said, "The man who just came in killed my father and ate his body. And now he has come in to remember the Lord with us. At first, I didn't know whether I could endure it. But it is all right now. I realized that he is washed in the same precious blood." And so together they had Communion. These two principles, accountability and forgiveness, are tremendously powerful things that should always characterize our relationships in the body of Christ. May God give us each the grace to exercise them regularly.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Preparation Of The King - Mt. 16:13-20:34

The King's Instruction Concerning Marriage And Children - 19:1-15

As we enter the 19th chapter of Matthew, be sure not to overlook the first two verses because there Matthew records for us:

I. The Final Transition In Jesus' Ministry (1-2) In the fall of Jesus' final year, within six months of Passover and the Cross, a huge change occurred in Jesus' ministry. Matthew tells us that:

1. there is a geographical change Even though most of His ministry happened in the region of Galilee and great crowds responded to Him there, His opposition there has also grown and He now leaves Galilee behind permanently. At the time of the events in chapter 19, He is in Perea, the region across Jordan on the east side, across from Jericho, the territory ruled by Herod Antipas who had put John the Baptist to death. And there during these months, He is also seeing crowds of people come to Him and is ministering to them. But what we don't see in the text is that in Matthew's record:

2. there is a chronological gap If you compare the four Gospels, you discover that Matthew has omitted events which occurred over several of those intervening months. All the material from **Lk. 9:51-18:15** occurs after His leaving of Galilee, and so do all the events that are detailed for us in **John** chapters **7-11**, including visits to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles in late September or early October and the Feast of Dedication in late December, as well as the visit to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. By the time of the events Matthew records in chapter 19, Jesus is already on His way up to Jerusalem for the last and final time in late March of 33 AD just before His Triumphal Entry. Now on this last trip, Jesus had occasion to speak strongly about three very important things that touch all of our lives. The first thing we read is:

II. Jesus' Strong Defense Of Marriage (3-12) The Pharisees are relentless and even here on the other side of the Jordan, they are still after Jesus. They ask Him:

1. the loaded question: what is the lawful cause of divorce? (3) Divorce evidently had become a very common thing in Jewish culture in Jesus' day, just as it is in our American culture today. I read online that the divorce rate has actually declined somewhat, trending downward toward maybe 40% in the last couple of years, but that is still tremendously high. And among religious people who actually say they care what God thinks about divorce, there is always a

debate as to what are actually legitimate grounds for divorce. In Jesus' day there were two prevailing schools of religious teaching on this. Those who followed the teaching of Rabbi Hillel took a very liberal view on the subject. A man could divorce his wife for almost any and every reason, including burning his food or even if he saw a prettier woman. Of course, it never worked in reverse! Those who followed the teaching of Rabbi Shammai were much more conservative. They said a man could divorce his wife only if he discovered moral uncleanness in her, such as adultery. Pretty much the same opinions prevail today; there are those who say that marriage is just a contract and can be dissolved for almost any reason, including "falling out of love" or finding someone else and there are those who feel it is a much more serious bond and should only be dissolved when there are extremely serious issues. Now Matthew says this was a test, that the Pharisees hoped to gain something against Jesus through His answer. I'm guessing that they hoped He would speak out very strongly against divorce so that they might find a way to accuse Him to Herod. After all, Herod had already killed John the Baptist for preaching against his divorce and remarriage and Jesus was in his territory, very near his palace at Machaerus! But instead of jumping into a debate on causes of divorce, Jesus strongly declared:

2. God's timeless principle: He declared that **marriage is a permanent union (4-6)**. Of course, Jesus took them right to the Scriptures and quoted Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Marriage is much more than an agreement or a contract or even a promise; it is a bond, a union, a joining of two bodies and two minds and two lives into one. And God does it; when we marry God joins us. Malachi 2:15 in the ESV says of marriage, *Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?* God's Spirit creates this powerful mystical union between husband and wife such that they are no longer two independent beings, but are one. And man should never try to take apart what God has joined together! If you'll pardon a food analogy, a married couple is like a well-made cheese omelet where the cheese is thoroughly melted and mixed in. Once it's made, you can't go back and separate the cheese from the egg anymore; you can only cut it in half to get half an omelet. Marriage, by design from creation, is meant to be permanent, and of course, that means that you should think really hard about it before you enter into it, because once you're joined, you're joined! That's God's perspective and it's why in Malachi God says, *I hate divorce!* It is not that He hates divorced people; He hates the act of the breaking of a marriage because it is the dividing of a bond that He himself created to be forever! Well, the Pharisees weren't satisfied with Jesus' answer at all and were quick to point out that even in the Scriptures we see:

3. the sad need for an exception (7-8) There are times when divorce occurs and, indeed, when it **MUST** occur. In Isaiah and Jeremiah God even speaks of Himself having given Israel, His bride, a writing of divorce, because of her prolonged and flagrant spiritual adultery in worshipping other gods. Divorce happens. Why? **It occurs because of hard hearts.** I know that I am speaking to quite a few people who have been through a divorce or are in the middle of a divorce and some who have been divorced and remarried. For many of you, this has happened through no fault of your own. It was not your idea or desire. You saw this bond being for life, but the other didn't. Their heart was hardened toward God and toward you. You couldn't reason with them or prevent their behavior. And maybe in your case, it was even your own heart that was hard many years ago, but is now softened toward God. You know what Jesus was talking about. God intended marriage to be a permanent union, but because of the control that sin gets over human hearts, He knows there will be times when it is broken and when it has to be broken. As the Pharisees duly noted:

a. Moses' law permitted, but controlled divorce If you really read **Deut. 24:1-4** closely, you'll see that Moses never "commanded" divorce; he simply commanded that when there IS a divorce that there must be a written certificate and that after remarrying there can't be a second divorce and going back to remarry the first husband. In other words, you can't just divorce and remarry repeatedly as a way of "legalizing" adultery. Through Moses, God was simply attempting to control the divorce that was already happening among the people; it was never his intent to make it easy or legitimize it. At any rate in verse 9 we have:

b. Jesus' clear standard (9): Here you have God Himself declaring clearly that **to divorce and marry another is adultery**. That is the rule: marriage is permanent and to break it and remarry is the same thing as cheating on your spouse while you're married. It is immoral. And Mark's account [10:11-12] makes it clear that it doesn't matter whether it is the husband or the wife; it is wrong for either one to do this. However, in that same sentence:

(1) He stated the lone exception of sexual immorality That word in the Greek text is *porneia*, which you might recognize, and it includes all varieties of sexual sin. If a spouse violates the marriage bond that God created by sexual unfaithfulness with another, the innocent spouse has the legitimate freedom (not the *command* but the *freedom*) in that case to divorce without guilt before God. Joseph had the legitimate freedom to divorce Mary for assumed unfaithfulness, before the Lord explained the miracle to him and he was never blamed for considering that. Now to be fair, Jesus was answering a question, not delivering a whole treatise on the subject of marriage and divorce, so Scripture has more to say on the subject:

(2) Paul added the exception of abandonment in 1 Cor. 7:10-15. If the spouse is not a believer, for instance, and abandons you, if he or she just leaves and says, "I want out", then the bond is severed and you are free. Even if they ARE a believer and abandon you, they in essence end up acting like an unbeliever. So, desertion or abandonment can be another legitimate reason for divorce. Beyond that:

(3) the church has recognized the obvious exception of cruelty and abuse, something that Jesus and Paul didn't even see the need to speak of, something that everyone simply assumes as obvious. If a husband violates his marriage by battering and beating and terrorizing his wife, or vice versa, nobody expects her to stay there and subject herself to that. It is sad that we even have to mention it, but it occurs. Years ago, we had one lady in our church whose husband actually took a shot at her with a gun! So, because people have hard hearts, there are times when divorce is a legitimate and even a proper thing, but it should always be the exception, not the rule as it has become for so many today. And while we're talking about this doctrine, let me mention that:

c. a legitimate divorce always includes the freedom to remarry At times we have tried to say that divorce may have to occur, but remarriage is the real issue; I used to feel that way myself. But if you look more deeply, divorce is the actual breaking of the marriage. It no longer exists. And if it no longer exists, the person is now unmarried and free to unite in marriage with another. Paul was talking about non-legitimately departing from a spouse, simply deciding to leave for any and every reason, and in that case, the separated person should remain single or go back and be reconciled. But if there is a legitimate divorce on biblical grounds, the person is not still under bondage; they are free. Now Jesus' disciples had been listening to all this and it is apparent from their response that:

4. the disciples had absorbed a low view of marriage from their culture (10) What a sad opinion! "If marriage is that permanent and you can't get out of it, it would be better not to marry!" They had accepted the view that the right to divorce, to change partners, is important! How many all around us hold that same sad opinion today! So many simply live together without the commitment of marriage because marriage is too binding; they want to make sure they have a way out if things don't work out to their liking, instead of accepting God's standard of permanence. But instead of chiding the disciples for their sad way of thinking, Jesus took their statement at its face value and commented on it, "It is better not to marry..." **(11-12)**

a. Jesus recognized the spiritual value of celibacy, of remaining single and not marrying for the sake of advancing God's Kingdom. He says, "Some people remain single and don't marry because they are born with defects that prevent it; some people don't marry because they have been physically harmed or injured in a way that precludes normal marriage. But some people CHOOSE to remain single and not marry in order to increase their opportunity to serve God!" Paul said the same thing: *I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am [single]. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.* - **1 Cor. 7:6-9**. Remaining single can be a good thing if it allows you to devote more of your time and energy to serving the Lord, but like Paul, Jesus:

b. He also understood it was a gift given only to a few It is not the norm. Some are given that gift of being able to remain single and being content with serving God, without fighting sexual desire all the time. But not everyone is given that gift and in fact, the vast majority are not. It is both normal and actually good to marry.

But the point is that the true purpose of not marrying should be serving God; it should NOT be a way of insisting on your freedom to change sexual partners at will as our society views it.

Here's an interesting tidbit: in verse 5 Jesus says that married people should "cleave" together or "hold fast". That word is based on a Greek noun that actually means GLUE. The word "joined" in verse 6 literally means "yoked together", the way two animals are put in the same wooden yoke to pull a wagon. T. S. Randall says: "Years ago a company wanted to illustrate the strength of the glue it manufactured. Their ad pictured two blocks of wood that had been glued together. Attached to each block was a chain, and to each chain, a large horse. The horses were shown pulling with all their strength in opposite directions. But the artist added one more feature - a giant hand that clasped the two pieces of wood in a vise-like grip. The hand represented the wonderful adhesive glue made only by that particular company." That's a good illustration of what Jesus was teaching here, that husband and wife are "glued" together inseparably; the mighty hand of God has joined them in a powerful union and so, like a good team of horses, they ought to pull in harness together in the same direction instead trying to pull apart from one other! Then as He continued on His way, another incident occurred in which we see:

III. Jesus' Great Love For Children (13-15) Here you see:

1. the desire of parents for Jesus to bless their young children (13a) Mark actually uses the word *infants*. We saw this repeatedly in India among the village people. Mothers or both parents would bring their young child up to us after the service for us to put our hands on them and pronounce a blessing from God, that is to pray for the child. Evidently, they did this in Jesus' day too, desiring religious teachers and holy men to bless their children. It is such a natural thing for any parent to want God's blessing and protection on the child which they love so dearly. But look at:

2. the ignorant rebuke of the disciples (13b) They saw these mothers with their little ones as nuisance, an annoyance, a hindrance that would hold them back on their journey, something that was in some way beneath Jesus to bother with, and they began to rebuke the parents and tell them to go away. But look at:

3. the strong response of Jesus (14-15) He rebukes the disciples! Literally He says, *Let them alone! Stop hindering them from coming to Me!* To me, that echoes the awful warning Jesus gave back in chapter 18 to anyone who would lead little ones astray. It seems very clear that:

a. Jesus has a strong desire for children to know Him - Mk. 10:16 says ...*he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.* Can't you just see Him smiling and ogling over each one the way we do with babies and taking time to personally gather each little child into his arms and putting His hand, the very hand of God, on them, asking the Father to put a love for Him in their hearts? Listen, if you don't have time for children, if you see them as a nuisance and a bother, if your heart doesn't well up with joy at the smile of a little one, then you'd better get your heart checked, because the heart of Jesus loves kids! He desperately wants each little child that comes in to the world to come to Him and to know Him personally, yet so many of them don't have the opportunity and how that must sadden Him! But He goes on to utter that powerful phrase, literally, *for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.* Now what does that mean? Well, I for one, am willing to simply take it at face value first:

b. His Kingdom is composed of little children; they belong to it It is older people who mess the world up with sin! Children are His and if they should die in childhood, they will be with Him in heaven forever. You can hardly picture Jesus picking up some cute little boy and saying, "Oh wait, I know that you're going to be a thief and a murderer when you grow up; I can't love you, so you're lost...off with you." He loves them all, every last one! And until that point in their lives where they deliberately choose and follow the way of sin and must be held accountable, they are all His! But that is not all that He meant. **Mk. 10:15** says that Jesus continued, saying, *Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*

c. children are our example of the way we must believe They love simply from the heart and they simply believe what you tell them. And that's what we must become like to belong to His Kingdom and enter it. We must love Him simply with a child-like love that comes from the heart and believe with our very hearts that He loves us and has died for our sins to save us. Of such, of people with simple faith like the faith of these children, the Kingdom is composed. So, children lead the way for us.

I know I've told you this story before but it is worth repeating here. A number of years ago, LuAnn's one aunt, who was a believer, died in the hospital. In the process of visiting her there regularly, some of LuAnn's relatives had gotten to know the woman in the next bed pretty well. So, after the funeral, they went back to visit this dear lady and when they came in, the woman said, "I'm so glad you came; I was hoping and hoping you'd come back. I was here beside your aunt when she died and I just have to tell you about it. You know that for some time she had not been responsive at all, just lying there. But that morning her eyes opened and a glow came on her face. She sat straight up in bed, staring upward and began to say, "Oh look! I see it! Don't you? It's so beautiful." Then she paused and added, "And just look at all the children!" And with that she fell back on the bed, gone!" Now I don't want to build my theology on someone's vision, but it sure does square with what Jesus said, and what others who've been given similar glimpses of heaven have reported. The little children belong to Him. Oh, Jesus loves marriage and he wants husbands and wives to stay together permanently and work at it rather than giving up and finding someone else. And He wants them to provide a loving home to nurture their beautiful children who belong to Him and whom He loves so much. It may not always be an easy thing to do. But I promise that He will give you the grace to do it if you ask Him.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Preparation Of The King - Mt. 16:13-20:34

The King's Instruction Concerning Rewards - 19:16-20:16

Jesus is now in the last two weeks of His life on earth. He is still across the Jordan in Perea, headed across the Jordan to Jericho and up to Jerusalem for the Triumphal Entry. On his way He's been stopped by the Pharisees with their question about divorce and then by a crowd of parents wanting Him to hold and bless their children. It has given Him the opportunity to teach on the permanence of marriage and then on His love for children. As He continues on, He's now stopped a third time, this time by:

I. The Rich Young Ruler Who Came To Jesus, a story very familiar to us all in **(19:16-26)** and this gives Him the opportunity to address a third very practical issue for all of us, the issue of our attachment to material things **(16)**. Verse 20 tells us that this man was young; verse 22 tells us that he was rich, and Luke adds that he was a ruler, possibly a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council. But that description tends to leave us with the wrong impression of him. Evidently:

1. he was very sincere about seeking eternal life In fact, **Mk. 10:17** says that this rich, important young man actually came running after Jesus to catch Him because He had walked away, and when he caught up, he actually knelt down before Jesus to ask his question. He is not some self-righteous Pharisee trying to tout his own self-righteousness. He is a man who is a good Jew, a student of the law, a man who is convinced for the most part that he is doing all that he should be doing out of a genuine desire to please God, but there is still this nagging doubt. He knows somehow that, despite all of it, he has no peace, no assurance that he will be granted eternal life and he really desires that. He's ask-

ing, "How can I settle this? What should I do to demonstrate once and for all that I am worthy of entering the Kingdom?" He felt there must be something more, something beyond what he'd already done, to show that he was righteous and a fit subject for God's kingdom. And **Mark 10:21** comments, *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him...* Jesus looked right past the outward appearance of this young rich guy on his knees begging for help and saw the sincerity of his heart and Jesus loved him. He wanted him to have the desire of his heart; He wanted Him to become a true disciple. But in that heart, he could also see something else, something deep, which the young man himself could not see. So first:

2. Jesus sought to help him see that only God is truly good (17a) Mark and Luke tell us that he actually addressed Jesus by saying *GOOD Teacher*, then then he expressed wanting to do a *GOOD* thing. Jesus picked up on his use of that word *good*. He challenged him to think about what he had just said, telling him that *There is no one good except God alone*. What's Jesus trying to teach him? Well, on the one hand, it means that:

a. if Jesus is truly good, then He must be God The man had used the term in a light way, in a customary way of address, but Jesus wouldn't settle for that. If God is the only one who is truly good, then nobody but Him should be called good. Jesus is not saying, "Don't call me good." He's saying, "Realize that if I truly am good, then I must be GOD!" He was quietly claiming His own Deity. But on the other hand, He was also implying that:

b. if only God is good, then no mere human is truly good "You can't do anything truly good, truly worthy of Him granting you eternal life. Being truly good is beyond your reach!" And then I think Jesus paused, waiting for the man to comprehend what He was saying and respond, but he didn't, so Jesus went on to give him more or less the standard answer that he expected to get:

3. Jesus challenged him to be good by keeping the commandments (17b-19) The young man was sharp and asked Jesus specifically which commandments He meant, because through the years the Rabbis had added literally hundreds of commandments that weren't actually in Moses' law. Could it be those that Jesus meant? So, Jesus simply quoted five of the Ten Commandments from the second table of the law and then tacked on Lev. 19:18 about loving your neighbor as yourself, which He had earlier taught as being the summary of the whole thing as far as it concerns other people. "Do all those things and you will inherit life!"

a. he had pursued this method of pleasing God from youth but still knew something was lacking (20) He replied, "I've been doing these things all my life! I know all that, but isn't there something else still missing?" Well, it might seem easy to think, "Of course, I haven't murdered or committed adultery or stolen or lied about someone or dishonored my parents," but you would think it would at least give a person pause before saying, "I have always loved my neighbor as myself." Yet somehow the young man didn't get it.

b. he was unable to see the depth of the commands and how short he fell Jesus had explained back in chapter 5 that these commands meant more than the average Jew understood them to mean. You could commit adultery in your mind by looking, even without touching, and you could murder someone in your heart and with your tongue, without ever using your hands. In point of fact, he really had NOT been doing all those things; nobody has ever kept them all perfectly except Jesus. This young man was blind to his own sinfulness, even while he was sincere in his desire to please God. But Jesus didn't even go after that; there was an even deeper issue that needed to be dealt with:

4. Jesus drew out his deep love for his material possessions (21-22) Jesus spoke directly in terms that he could understand: "*You want to know what's missing? Do you want to be completely perfect? Go sell all your possessions and give them to the poor, then come be My disciple.*" Now why did Jesus command him to do that; He never commanded anyone else to do that! Well first, Jesus is really restating the very first commandment, which is to love God with all your heart and to let nothing take His place. So, when Jesus assumed the place of God and ordered him to go sell all his possessions, he was forced to consider on a real, instead of a theoretical, basis which he loved more, God or his possessions. And in the end, he turned and went away sorrowing:

a. he just could not become a disciple if it meant parting with his wealth John Gill comments, *...he went away sorrowful; ...he was ashamed and confounded, that he could not perform what he had just now so briskly promised, at least tacitly, that whatever else was proper he would do; as also grieved, that he had not arrived to perfection, which he had hoped he had, but now began to despair of, and of obtaining eternal life; and most of all troubled, that he must part with his worldly substance, his heart was so much set upon, or not enjoy it for he had great possessions; which were very dear to him; and he chose rather to turn his back on Christ, and drop his pursuits of the happiness of the other world, than part with the present enjoyments of this. [Matt 19:22 John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible].*

b. he actually loved his money more than he loved God and I think in that moment he realized it. Yet in that same test, Jesus is also spelling out what Lev. 19:18 really means. "Here's a real test for whether you genuinely love people. Go sell your possessions and give the money to people who really need help! You won't need it; you'll have plenty of treasure in heaven!" He didn't really love God with all his heart and he didn't really love his neighbor

as much as he loved himself. He failed miserably on the whole law, as do we ALL! None of us loves either God or others perfectly; none of us is good! There is NO good thing we can do to inherit eternal life. That's why we need Jesus to save us! But before we judge this fellow too harshly, let's ask ourselves the same question! What if Jesus told YOU to sell everything you have and give it away, all your bank accounts, your house, everything, and go off after Him in some mission opportunity. Would you do it? Would you really? Do you REALLY love Him with all your heart, more than ANYTHING in life?

Well, I'm sure that when this young man turned away, it saddened Jesus too. He loved this man and wanted to save him; it is so sad when people who seem so close choose to turn away. Even so, it became an opportunity for Him and:

5. Jesus taught his disciples a lesson concerning rich people that they really needed to learn in **(23-26)**. First, He told them that:

a. it is extremely difficult for them to be saved (23-24) The camel was the largest animal commonly seen by the Jews; there were no elephants in Israel. The eye of a sewing needle was the smallest opening they could think of. To get the camel through the eye of the needle is an absurd impossibility. Jesus is warning us that rich people tend to love their riches and it is extremely difficult for them to love God and other people first. As Paul noted, not many wealthy people come to Christ and are among us. However, please don't think of this saying only in terms of what you view as the wealthy elite who make millions of dollars. Most of us here in the US are actually very rich compared to much of the rest of the world. Just look at how fast people are coming to Christ in Latin America and Africa or among the Yenadi in India, in the poorest areas of the world. Then think how tough it is to get your nice, satisfied, suburban neighbors to come to Christ. Who comes to Jesus? People that have a genuine sense of their own need! Reaching people that have possessions and are satisfied in life is tough; it happens only with great difficulty, Jesus said! Yet that is where God has placed us! And thankfully, He also said:

b. it is absolutely possible for them to be saved (25-26) You see, the disciples have absorbed that common Jewish thinking that the rich are those who are blessed of God. Being poor is a curse, a sign of His disfavor. So they think, "If the rich can't be saved, who can?" But God can save anybody, whether rich or poor. There's great hope in that verse for you and for me. Nobody is beyond God's reach; He can save even the most difficult people, from the violent terrorist to the wealthy tycoon!

Now connected to this, Jesus teaches another lesson about the reward for His own:

II. The Reward For Christ's Disciples (19:27-30) Here you see:

1. the sincere concern of the disciples (27) This incident set Peter to thinking, "We have done exactly that; we have left everything behind to follow You. We DO love you more than anything. But YOU mentioned treasure in heaven, so what will our reward actually be?" I don't think he's asking out of a greedy, impure motive; he simply wants to know, so Jesus spells out:

2. the specific reward of the twelve apostles in verse (28). He has a **specific millennial assignment** for them. In the Kingdom, after Jesus returns to earth and rules and Israel is reestablished, they will rule with Him as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel. He has a specific task and position for them, but He goes on to add that:

3. all true followers receive abundant reward, both now and eternally (29) Yes, there are lots of possible sacrifices we may be called on to make in serving the Lord, but God always makes them up to us a hundred times over, even in this present life (Mark and Luke add). We may have to leave family, but He always gives us a "spiritual family" to be close to us; we may leave home but God always gives us another. Plus, He continually gives us all of the spiritual riches and abiding joys that the world can never know. Plus, we have the assurance of eternal life, which we will enjoy with Him forever after our time here is done! As Paul put it, *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* - Rom. 8:18.

4. however, Jesus warned, it is not be based on our criterion of performance (30) Don't be fooled by appearances. Many look like they are last of all now in useful service of the Lord, but one day, they'll be first! And many who appear to be worthy of tremendous reward right now will be last! God's valuation of things is not the same as ours. Yes, Peter, the reward is great, but don't ever fall into the trap of serving to gain a reward! Now I want you to notice how Jesus repeats this same statement again, but with the two halves reversed, in **20:16**. Then in between the two, He tells us:

III. A Parable Illustrating God's Reward Of His Laborers (20:1-16), the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. Let's read it **(1-7)**. Notice that:

1. the laborers were hired at various hours and worked varying amounts The owner of the vineyard went out early in the morning to the marketplace to hire day laborers to pick his grapes, and he made a deal to pay them one denarius, the normal day's wage for a common laborer. Then he went out again at 9 AM and again at noon and at 3 PM and finally, a last time, at 5 PM. Each time, he hired other laborers that he found and promised only to give them what is fair, which they would obviously assume to be something less than a normal day's wage. But that's not how it turned out. Let's continue **(8-14)**. At 6 PM, the end of the normal 12 hour work day, (aren't you glad you live now?):

2. the laborers were paid equally He started with the last men hired and paid everyone a denarius, a full day's wage. For everyone hired from 9 AM on that means they were paid generously! Of course, the first men hired saw how generous this owner was and by the time their turn came they expected to be paid MORE than was promised, only they didn't get it. They only got what they had agreed on, which means they were paid justly or fairly. And by their complaining, envious attitude, it's clear that's all they really deserved. Now the real point of this story is NOT that God gives everyone the exact same reward. Jesus' point is in **(15-16)**:

3. God has the right to reward as He wills and to be generous He is a generous God, a God who loves to give us what we do not deserve! Eph. 1 says, He *lavished the riches of His grace upon us!* He poured them out abundantly and that is exactly how He will reward us. He will do it as HE chooses, and not as we think He ought to; His reward system won't look the way we would set it up and He has the right to things the way He wants! After all, all things are HIS! Therefore, in thinking about rewards, we should always simply be thankful that we are rewarded AT ALL. Look again at **(11-12)**. That's the warning; we must be careful not to become like them:

4. we should neither serve God simply to obtain a reward nor envy others for His treatment of them. We should serve Him because we love Him and marvel at His generosity toward us and toward everyone else!

Thomas A Kempis, a clergyman who lived about 1400 AD, wrote what has probably become the most often published and read devotional book in history, *The Imitation Of Christ*. It was this book that opened John Newton's spiritual eyes to Christ and ultimately gave us "Amazing Grace." In one chapter Thomas wrote these words speaking, as it were, with the Voice of Christ. I'd like you to simply close your eyes and just listen as though Jesus were talking straight to you:

MY CHILD, do not let the labors which you have taken up for My sake break you, and do not let troubles, from whatever source, cast you down; but in everything let My promise strengthen and console you. I am able to reward you beyond all means and measure.

You will not labor here long, nor will you always be oppressed by sorrows. Wait a little while and you will see a speedy end of evils. The hour will come when all labor and trouble shall be no more. All that passes away with time is trivial.

What you do, do well. Work faithfully in My vineyard. I will be your reward. Write, read, sing, mourn, keep silence, pray, and bear hardships like a man. Eternal life is worth all these and greater battles. Peace will come on a day which is known to the Lord, and then there shall be no day or night as at present but perpetual light, infinite brightness, lasting peace, and safe repose. Then you will not say: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" nor will you cry: "Woe is me, because my sojourn is prolonged." For then death will be banished, and there will be health unfailing. There will be no anxiety then, but blessed joy and sweet, noble companionship.

If you could see the everlasting crowns of the saints in heaven, and the great glory wherein they now rejoice—they who were once considered contemptible in this world and, as it were, unworthy of life itself—you would certainly humble yourself at once to the very earth, and seek to be subject to all rather than to command even one. Nor would you desire the pleasant days of this life, but rather be glad to suffer for God, considering it your greatest gain to be counted as nothing among men.

Oh, if these things appealed to you and penetrated deeply into your heart, how could you dare to complain even once? Ought not all trials be borne for the sake of everlasting life? In truth, the loss or gain of God's kingdom is no small matter.

Lift up your countenance to heaven, then. Behold Me, and with Me all My saints. They had great trials in this life, but now they rejoice. They are consoled. Now they are safe and at rest. And they shall abide with Me for all eternity in the kingdom of My Father. [The Imitation Of Christ - Book III, Ch. 47]

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Preparation Of The King - Mt. 16:13-20:34

The King's Instruction Concerning His Passion - 20:17-34

As we finish chapter 20 today, Jesus is still on his way up to the Holy City and is now down in the valley by the Jordan River, in the vicinity of the city of Jericho, a day's journey away. The main road there is already crowded with a steady flow of pilgrims coming from Galilee and points north to celebrate the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread and Jesus and His disciples now become part of that stream of humanity. But before things got too crowded, He took His disciples aside privately one last time, to try to prepare them for what lay ahead **(17-19)**. This is now the third time in the last few months that Jesus has tried to impress on them that He is going to suffer and die and be raised. The first time was at Caesarea Philippi, just after His "I will build My church" speech in chapter 16. He reiterated it again after the Mount of Transfiguration on the way back home to Capernaum in chapter 17. But I want you to notice here how:

I. Jesus Specifically Predicted The Events Of His Passion It should strike us as an incredible thing that:

1. He explained every detail of His suffering to His disciples beforehand First, He predicts:

a. His betrayal to the chief priests, resulting in arrest It is no secret that it is not merely that He would be arrested, but that he would be betrayed, that one of His own followers would deliver Him over, to whom? To the chief priests, to Annas, to Caiaphas and to their followers, the teachers of the law, the scribes and Pharisees. And Judas did exactly that; he made an agreement with those priests to betray Him and carried it out by leading them to the Garden of Gethsemane. Next Jesus predicted:

b. His Jewish trial and its verdict He warns that he will have a trial before them and will be condemned to death by them. That implies that He would be tried before the official body, the Sanhedrin, and He was, because only they could pronounce such a sentence, yet they had no authority to carry it out. So, He predicts:

c. His deliverance to the Roman authorities *Gentiles* is an obvious reference which means that the Jewish leaders would bring Him to the Romans to ask for His death. Thus, He would have to face the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and be tried all over again, and He was. Then, He said, would come:

d. His abusive mistreatment Notice how specific Jesus is. He says they would do two things. First, they would mock Him. Remember how it was the Roman soldiers who put on Him the purple robe and the crown of thorns and bowed down to Him in mockery. And then, He said, they would flog or scourge Him. This is a specific term for the severe whipping of a prisoner condemned to death. They would beat Him repeatedly with a 9-thonged leather whip with bits of bone or metal on each thong, until His flesh was torn and He was almost dead. And **Mk. 10:34** says Jesus also mentioned they would spit upon him, which Matthew later says the soldiers did as they were mocking Him. All three things were fulfilled; Jesus knew exactly what was coming. Then He predicts:

e. His crucifixion He makes it clear that He would not be stoned or hanged as the Jews would execute a man, or even jailed as John was. He would be nailed to a cross to die slowly, as the Romans did with the very worst of criminals. All these things they did to Him, but then He predicts what no one could expect or believe:

f. His resurrection on the third day Not the first day, nor the next day, but the THIRD day, Jesus says, He would come to life again. His body would be raised from the dead as literally as He had raised Lazarus only a short time before. And that's exactly how it happened.

Isn't it amazing that here are all these events laid out so precisely and in the exact order in which they occurred and with nothing left out! Nobody could possibly have known all this ahead of time from a human standpoint. Nobody could possibly have orchestrated this series of events on purpose from a human standpoint. Yet here they are, predicted by Jesus with complete accuracy a week before they occurred, which makes it absolutely clear that:

2. God exercised precise control over His Passion This was not something carried out by wicked men inflicting their will upon Jesus; this was something laid out by Jesus imposing His sovereign design and purpose upon men! **Lk. 18:31** tells us that Jesus actually stated this fact even as He was making these predictions, *See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished...* and THEN He spelled out the list we looked at as a summary of ALL the things God had already predicted hundreds of years beforehand through Isaiah and David and the other prophets! The price of His betrayal, that it would be by a close friend, that He would be pierced, that they would gamble for His clothing, that they would give him vinegar to drink, that not a bone would be broken, all these things God put down in writing ahead of time! One source says that 28 specific prophecies were fulfilled on Good Friday alone! The apostles afterward saw this so clearly; look with me at their prayer in **Acts 4:25-28**. God determined ahead of time exactly what these evil men would do and they did it! He was in absolute control! Oh listen, dear friend, when suffering and pain and difficulty come into your life, when it looks for all the world like Satan is having a heyday and evil is running the world and God is on vacation somewhere, think back on the Passion of Christ and realize that God is in control! Twila Paris sings it like this:

This is no time for fear, This is the time for faith and determination. Don't lose the vision here carried away by emotion. Hold on to all that you hide in your heart. There is one thing that has always been true. It holds the world together: Then comes the chorus: God is in control! We believe that His children will not be forsaken; God is in control! We will choose to remember and never be shaken! There is no power above or beside Him, we know, Oh, God is in control, oh God is in control!

What a powerful encouragement this is to us! God is on the throne of the universe and in control of everything, even when it seems that the very foundations are being shaken! Later on, this was a great comfort to the disciples looking back, but sadly, at that moment, Luke reports that:

3. the disciples did not comprehend any of what He shared *But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. - Lk. 18:34* In spite of three separate tries, it just never sank in. They did not understand it or did not believe it and finally the angel who met the women at the tomb had to say, "Don't you remember what He said to you back in Galilee?" and then repeat the whole speech again - Lk. 24:8. And Luke adds, *THEN they remembered His words!* They were oblivious to all the warnings He gave them until long afterward; but oh, how much peace they could have had, even during these things, if they had but grasped and be-

lieved Jesus here! Please don't wait until after the suffering is over to look back and see God's hand; see it now! See it in the midst of the pain and difficulty! He is on the Throne and in control of it all! What comfort that will bring you! So, they resume walking toward Jericho with the others and it is not long before something else happens in verses (20-28) where we see that:

II. Jesus Put Forth His Passion As An Example To His Disciples It is really hard to believe how the disciples responded to this serious talk Jesus tried to have with them (20-23). Can you believe:

1. the selfish ambition of James and John? Remember that a little while before this in 19:28, Jesus told them all that they were going to sit on thrones in the Kingdom. Of course, He had also warned them months earlier in chapter 18 against wanting to be the greatest, but this promise of future reward must have rekindled in James and John that ambition to be above the rest. Now, they were actually Jesus' cousins, if you remember, so they got their mother to help them. She was one of the many women whom Matthew later tells us followed Jesus to Jerusalem from Galilee. Her name was Salome and she was Jesus' aunt, Mary's sister, so they got her to come and implore her nephew that they might be #1 and #2 in the Kingdom, seated at Jesus' right and left hands. Can you believe these two? Jesus is sharing with them the horrible ordeal that he's about to go through and all they can think about is plotting to get the highest places of honor in His Kingdom! But the rest were no better (24-25). Look at:

2. the selfish indignance of the other ten They reacted with disdain and resentment toward James and John; they turned up their noses and thought, "What makes you think you're better than us, that you deserve that!" They were no better than the other two, because they were still only concerned about themselves, and Jesus explains to them where that comes from. In the secular world, and particularly in the world ruled by Rome that they knew, those who were in power and authority used it to their own ends. Everyone saw it as the opportunity to grease their own palms and to get others to serve them and do what they wanted. That is pretty true in our world today and certainly in many third world countries. So few of those at the top in our society, or in any other, really see themselves as being there for the good of those underneath them. And we absorb this self-serving attitude right into the church so easily, the same way that the disciples did then. But look at:

3. the principles of greatness as Jesus defines it First of all, in God's view of things greatness:

a. it is achieved through great suffering Look at the first question He asks James and John back in verse (22). Jesus knew the path to the throne of the universe for Him lay through the unbelievable suffering He had just laid out for them. And the path to the #2 and #3 slots lay in the same direction! In God's way of doing things, it always does! The sufferings of this present time produce an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all, Paul said! It is those who suffer the most and endure, who are the greatest. When we were in India, we met with all the evangelists from Hebron Believers Assembly. A number of them can't read; they are poor, barely have enough to eat, have no education, get almost no medical care, are despised by many for leaving the Hindu religion and yet they passionately go from village to village, day after day, preaching and sharing the Good News of Jesus, diligently praying hours on end for simple things I could go out and buy with what's in my pocket. And they look at people like our team and think that they themselves are nothing, that we have honored them by stepping into their world for a few days. But when we met with them privately, I told them plainly, "YOU are OUR heroes! You are the ones who are great in God's eyes; we want to learn from YOU!" The writer of Hebrews talked about people like these, *Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.* But in the midst of describing their suffering he adds, — *of whom the world was not worthy.* - Heb. 11:35-38. Or, as the ERV puts it, *The world was not good enough for these great people.* The world didn't deserve them! With God, greatness is not attained by striving and pushing and climbing; greatness is achieved through enduring great suffering, which Jesus said James and John would come to experience later, and of course, they did. But moreover, He said greatness:

b. it contains no self-serving interest (25-26a) "That principle you see at work everywhere around you will not apply in the church! You will live in an entirely different way. Among you, those who are the greatest will not use their leadership or authority or position for selfish ends to benefit themselves. In fact, those who are the greatest will be those who think about themselves the least," because greatness:

c. it is evidenced by deep devotion to serving others (26b-27) "The greatest leader among you is a servant who always cares for the welfare of those under his charge, with no thought for himself. The most important person among you is a slave who carries out the most menial tasks for your benefit, without complaint or thought for herself. The one who loves most and sacrifices most is the greatest and the foremost in My eyes."

Then Jesus turned the discussion back to the subject that was really on His mind, that is, His Passion. You see:

4. Jesus epitomizes greatness through His own self-sacrifice (28) He said "You've got to be like Me. I didn't come to be served. I came to give my life for others. That's what I'm trying to tell you!" His passion is our example, but the

concept is even deeper than that. He *CAME* to serve. I think Paul explained that best: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* - **Phil. 2:5-8**. THAT is the epitome of greatness, God, the ruler of all, becoming man for our sake and serving us by giving His very life as a ransom, as the price of payment for the guilt of our sins. He left heaven to become our Substitute and take our eternal punishment, with no thought for Himself. That is greatness! That is why God highly exalted Him and gave Him the Name above every name! And that which is truly valuable in God's eyes, is doing the very same, giving your life for others in sacrificial service.

But even Jesus spelling that out for them did not have the intended effect, so immediately after that:

III. Jesus Demonstrated His Greatness To His Disciples In Compassion (29-34) They went through Jericho where He met Zacchaeus up in a tree and stayed in his house overnight and, probably on Friday morning, they started up the mountain toward Bethany. However, as they were leaving the city with a great crowd, they passed by two blind beggars (**29-30**). Mark and Luke only mention one of them, probably the one who spoke for both, and Mark gives us his name, Bartimaeus. But think about:

1. the desperate condition of the two blind men They cried for mercy because they needed it. Blindness had destroyed their lives; they couldn't work in any normal way and evidently had no relatives to care for them. Their days were spent in begging for coins and scraps of food from strangers they couldn't see. But they have heard of Jesus and of how He has made the blind to see and now, when they hear He is actually passing by them, they realize this is their one chance, that they might never be this close to Him again, so they begin to scream for His attention at the top of their lungs. But look at:

2. the attitude of the crowd that was following Jesus (31) Now the crowd included Jesus' own disciples, as well as a retinue of people like Salome who believed in Him and were following after Him, plus a whole host of people who were excited to be with Him and would likely on Sunday become part of the crowd cheering, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" as they went down from the Mt. of Olives into Jerusalem. Yet all of them:

a. they were totally indifferent to the need of the men Two blind beggars by the side of the road were not even worthy of notice. They were a nuisance, an annoyance, not worthy of interrupting the Master for. But what's worse:

b. they actually tried to prevent them from coming to Jesus People yelled back at them, "Shut up and go away! Jesus shouldn't be bothered with you!" They had no mercy, no compassion. They were happy to leave these men in their darkness, yet it only made Bartimaeus and his friend scream Jesus' Name louder.

I can't help but wonder how many people we pass by with indifference, even with rudeness, how many people we keep from coming to Jesus with our lack of compassion. Of course, you think immediately of the homeless people you see on the streets of Philadelphia. I think of the beggars who would knock on our car windows in India and hold up their stump of an arm with the hand missing or show us their dirty baby, hungry and covered with sores, and motion to convey their need for milk to feed them. And most times we would drive on. What a contrast to:

3. the tremendous compassion of Jesus (32-34) Jesus stopped and took time to listen to them. His "gut" was literally moved with compassion toward them; it was not a detached pity. He saw and felt the despair of their lives. And He did something about it. He changed it with a touch of His hand and they became His grateful followers.

That's how Jesus saw us, *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*, and He was moved with compassion on us; He came from heaven to earth and sacrificed His life to save us. And that's the very compassion He wants to create in us. *Joni Eareckson Tada tells about going to church one Sunday back in 1979 when her ministry "Joni and Friends" was just beginning. The preacher that morning used a verse from the gospel of John, "And the Lord cried out from the cross, 'I thirst.'" He made his point and moved on, but Joni kept thinking about that verse. She closed her eyes and pictured Jesus on the cross. She imagined herself standing in that crowd and wondered what she would have done if she had heard Jesus say He was thirsty. She thought to herself, "Well, I wouldn't have stood there like a nincompoop, as my mother would say. I think--I hope I would have run, not walked, to the nearest well. Forget the sponge and the vinegar. I would have brought Him the real thing--a cool cup of water." Then she thought about the verse in Matthew 25 where Jesus is having a conversation with His disciples and says, "I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink.... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me." Joni continues, "I am struck with the obvious. This is what Jesus wants me to do. To do for others with the same sense of urgency and concern what I would do for Him. Not just talk. Not just give advice. Jesus wants me to DO something. For others. For Him. I imagine something else. I picture Jesus being moved with compassion when He encountered the blind or the hungry or the widow who had lost her son. He was not overwhelmed by needy crowds. It was just part of His nature to roll up His sleeves and help one person at a time. I try to place myself in that picture, and squirm, knowing that so often what I feel edges close to pity. Pity, I decide, sees a need at arm's length. Compassion reaches out to touch. Pity never becomes more than a feeling. Compassion compels us to act."* [Choices & Changes by Joni Eareckson Tada, Zondervan, 1986. Pages 140-141.] If you truly want to be great, let Jesus' Passion create in you His compassion toward people.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Presentation Of The King - Mt. 21-25

The King Declares Himself Publicly - 21:1-22

Today we look at the first half of chapter 21, where we find that at last, after 3 ½ years of ministry, there finally comes the day when Jesus publicly declares Himself King. We commonly call this the story of His Triumphal Entry and every Sunday School child can tell you how Jesus rode into town on a donkey that day, with crowds shouting and throwing palm branches before Him. But there was something far deeper than that going on:

I. Jesus Declared Himself King As He Entered Jerusalem (1-11) Every other time Jesus had come up to the city in His life, even during His ministry, He had come privately and quietly. In fact, the last time He had come in the fall for the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7, His own brothers had urged Him to go up to Jerusalem and display His miracles and show Himself openly to the world. Yet He refused, and waited and went up privately later. He didn't show Himself in public until the middle of the week-long feast so as not to create controversy because, as He said, His time was not yet come. But THIS time, Jesus did exactly what they had wanted Him to; He was showing Himself publicly to the world, deliberately making a public declaration that He was God's true King. Even in preparing for this glorious day:

1. He demonstrated His omniscience (1-3) Jesus has been coming up the Roman road from Jericho. He had not been to the little village that lay before them, and yet He knew that there was a donkey standing tied in the middle of it and sent the disciples to fetch it, and not just a donkey, but a donkey and her colt. And **Lk. 19:32** tells us that *...those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them*. How did He know that? Jesus saw that donkey and its colt standing there. He saw the owners nearby who would question them when they untied it and they did. Only omniscience could have known this. Only one with the knowledge of God Himself could see what was not visible. Then, in 19:30, Luke mentions that it was an unriden or unbroken colt, and yet it is the colt that Jesus sat on and rode with no problem! I haven't been around donkeys, but we raised ponies when I was a kid and I can tell you from personal experience that you don't just hop on a yearling colt and ride it! It has to be broken and accustomed to bearing weight. But even this donkey colt obeyed calmly under Jesus' authority! Now always before, Jesus had walked into Jerusalem, but this time He says that He *needed* the donkey. What for? Was He tired from the long walk? No, He needed it because in entering Jerusalem this way:

2. He deliberately fulfilled the Scriptures (4-5) Years later as he's writing this Gospel, Matthew can see how Christ carefully fulfilled everything God had predicted hundreds of years earlier. He runs together two verses, the first a portion from **Is. 62:11** which says, *Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him."* And he combines that with **Zech. 9:9**, *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*. Notice how carefully the prophecy was fulfilled, He rode, not merely on a donkey, but on a colt, the foal of a donkey. They led the mother and Jesus rode the colt. But the point is that God said Israel's King would come to them mounted on a donkey colt, so in doing this:

a. He publicly identified Himself as Israel's King He deliberately made claim to be the prophesied King. **Zech. 7:10** goes on to say that the King who rides on the donkey is going to rule the world, the nations, all the ends of the earth. Jesus rode the donkey so that any devout Jew who saw Him enter Jerusalem amid the rejoicing crowd would know, "This is the KING, the promised Messiah who is to come, the One who will rule the nations with a rod of iron!". He is shouting out loudly in no uncertain terms, "I am the One you've been waiting for. I am the Messiah, the Promised One, the Son of David, the King, God Himself come down in the flesh to save you!" Jesus could not have made His identity plainer if He'd written it in the sky! Yet at the same time, by coming this way:

b. He displayed the humble nature of His Kingship Kings don't come riding in on donkeys; they come on prancing white horses or in war chariots. A donkey is an animal of peace. He was saying to them, "I am coming to be your King, but I'm not coming to fight the Romans as you'd like; I'm not coming to lead a rebellion and bring war; I'm coming in peace." Notice that the next time Jesus comes, He rides a white horse in **Rev. 19**. Then, He will come as a conqueror, but this time, He told Pilate, *Now my kingdom is not of this world*. For now, it wasn't, but one day it will be and on that day things will be different. This time He came to rule over the hearts of men and to call them to personal allegiance to Him.

Well, as He began to ride toward Jerusalem:

3. He was joyfully acclaimed by a huge double crowd (6-9a) One crowd of people heard He was coming and had come out to meet Him from the city and a second crowd had gathered and was following Him as He passed through the countryside, so people were everywhere, front and back, lining the road before and thronging after. And they were honoring Him by throwing down their garments in His path and palm branches cut from the trees for Him to ride over. And as He passed, they were shouting with joy. Zechariah had said that when their King came to them riding on a

donkey they should shout and rejoice, and that's exactly what they did; they fulfilled the prophecy themselves without even realizing it. Now why did they honor Him so? Luke tells us:

a. they honored Him because of His miracles ...*the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen - Lk. 19:37* And John adds, *The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. - Jn. 12:17-18.* They were acclaiming the Miracle-worker, the One who could drive out demons and heal the sick and even raise the dead! And:

b. their words declared Him Israel's Messiah (9b) They were all shouting **Ps. 118:25-26.** The word *hosanna* is the Hebrew for "save us!" It was originally a prayer, a request, but it became part of the liturgy used at Passover and eventually became an expression of praise. Note that in the Psalm, the petition is directed at Jehovah, but here the same petition is directed personally at Jesus. They are acknowledging Him as the One who comes in the Name of the Lord, the Messiah. They call Him Son of David, the promised King. In their words they get His message and are shouting the truth, but:

c. their understanding was woefully incomplete (10-11) Oh, how far short this falls! *The prophet Jesus...* They're shouting and calling Him Messiah and fulfilling the Scriptures with every step, and yet they see Him only as a prophet. Perhaps the first real prophet in a very long time, perhaps a very powerful prophet, but only a prophet, nevertheless, not God their King.

In 2011 Public Policy Polling took a survey of 800 Americans to find out who is the most popular person in America, past and present. They found that Jesus is number 2, right behind Abraham Lincoln. Still 91% of Americans viewed Jesus favorably; they'd probably join the crowd shouting "Woohoo! Yay Jesus!" if He rode into their town. But so few of us actually grasp that He really is God come to us in the flesh and bow down before Him and worship Him and acknowledge Him as King of our lives. That's why the same crowd could change their mind and shout "Crucify Him!" on Friday. That's why so many now can say, "I believe in Jesus," but live without any regard for His instructions. They don't really know Him. Well in the next section of our text:

II. Jesus Publicly Cleansed The Temple (12-17) Matthew seems to imply that Jesus did this immediately after entering the city but Mark clearly states that Jesus went into the Temple and looked around and, as it was evening, went back out to Bethany with the Twelve. He came back the following morning, Monday, and:

1. He drove out the merchants (12-13) The outer courtyard of the Temple had become a place for commercial venture. The Pharisees had long ago come up with the idea that common money could not be used in the Temple, but had to be changed for "clean money" or "Temple money", thus the tables of moneychangers. Also, many Israelites who came long distances could not bring animals with them for sacrifice, so what could be more convenient than selling them right there in the Temple. So, the outer court of the Temple had become a place of traffic and commerce and noisy animals. But on this day, Jesus entered and drove them all out. Why? Because:

a. they were preventing it from being a house of prayer for all peoples He quoted pieces of two verses of Scripture; the first was **Is. 56:6-7** where God says, *I will bring foreigners to my holy mountain and their sacrifices shall be accepted and My house shall be a house of prayer for ALL peoples.* Mark's account emphasizes this - **11:17.** The portion Jesus cleansed was the outer court which was called the court of the Gentiles. They could not go in further to the court of Israel, but God's design was for Gentiles, foreigners from all peoples, to come up to worship Him and offer sacrifice and this was to have been their place of prayer. His heart has always been for all peoples to know Him. But the Jews:

b. they made it instead a den of dishonest gain They didn't want Gentiles there anyway, so they conveniently turned it into a market. Jesus quotes **Jer. 7:11**, *Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD.* The moneychangers charged 10% for the convenience of their services. The animal vendors hawked their wares and charged top dollar instead of fair market price. But God HAD been watching. And God did something about it! He walked in bodily and threw them all out! When Jesus said "My house", in effect He's claiming God's Temple is His house! So just like His entry to the city:

c. this was a public display of authority; it was not an angry reaction Jesus did not lose His cool and fly into a rage. It was a calm, calculated act on His part, one He had mapped out in His mind and planned the day before as He looked around. It was Him saying again, "I am God's appointed King!" Then, as the last of the merchants was fleeing, immediately:

2. He displayed His power by healing the infirm (14) Blind and lame folks could not go further into the Temple either. They typically gathered near the entrance to beg for alms from those who entered to worship God. But Jesus invited them into the now-empty court and they gathered round Him and He did what no person on earth could do. He healed them and set them free to fully enter in and worship God. Once again, He displayed His Divine power and the Temple rang with shouts of praise and joy. In fact, there were a number of children present watching all these things and they took the lead:

3. He was praised by the children as Messiah (15b) The kids knew what to do! They remembered the chant from yesterday! They saw the connection and shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" They reacted rightly and called Him Messiah! But not everybody was so happy:

4. He was challenged by the Jewish leaders (15-17) The Pharisees knew what the phrase meant, even if the kids didn't. They say, "Don't you hear? The kids are calling you Messiah! You should put a stop to this now!" But Jesus turned the tables and:

a. He defended their praise with Scripture He says, "Haven't YOU ever read **Ps. 8:2**" which clearly says that JEHOVAH would get praise from the lips of children and that their praise would silence His enemies. But in claiming this:

b. He asserted His personal right to their praise They were not praising Jehovah; they were praising HIM and He accepted their praise. He was declaring to His enemies, "I am Jehovah; I am Messiah; they are praising Me as I have ordained!" How could they argue with that in light of the mighty miracles He had just done? So, you know what? It did silence His enemies; they quit and left Him alone for the day!

Now Matthew goes back to relate something that Mark tells us had actually happened on the way into Jerusalem earlier that morning.

III. He Privately Cursed A Fig Tree (18-22) It was a simple incident. On the way into town, He saw a fig tree with leaves on it, so He went up to it expecting to pick a fig or two for breakfast, but found none, so He pronounced a curse on it. Why? Jesus didn't just go around getting mad at trees and cursing them randomly; He did this deliberately to make a point, to teach His disciples a lesson. He did not curse it because it had no fruit:

1. He cursed it because it gave a show of fruit when it had none (18-19) Now you have to understand something about fig trees. Unlike other trees which get their leaves first in the spring and produce fruit later, fig trees either produce fruit first, then leaves, or else produce both at the same time. So, a fig tree with leaves is essentially advertising, "I have fruit!". Mark adds that it was not yet the season for figs; it was too early in the spring; none of the fig trees along the way had any leaves on them but there stood this one aberrant tree full of leaves with the appearance of fruitfulness, yet it was barren. It had not borne any figs at all. So, Jesus put a curse on the tree and it immediately began to wither up, so much so that the next day when they passed by (Mark's account makes it clear that Matthew has condensed the incident onto the same day for easier telling) it was totally withered up from the root. The disciples were amazed and wondered out loud, "How did it wither up so quickly? Just yesterday it was alive and vital!" What a silly question coming from those who had seen the wind and the waves stop when Jesus said, "Peace be still!" No ordinary human could speak to a fig tree and have it wither by morning. He's reminding them again that He's God, Lord over all creation. But there's more going on here. Many Bible scholars believe this:

2. it was a symbolic condemnation of the religious hypocrisy of His enemies Many feel that the fig tree is a symbol for the nation of Israel. Indeed, Jesus had only a few days before told a parable about a barren fig tree (Lk. 13), the punch line of which was, *Cut it down! Why should it use up the ground!*, clearly predicting the coming destruction of Israel. The generation of Israel in Jesus' day was exactly like that fig tree, full of leaves, full of the appearance of spirituality and proclaiming love for God, but bearing no real fruit, no obedience to Him, no works befitting the love she professed. She was barren! And what Jesus was doing this very last week of His life as He offered Himself as her King was pronouncing God's curse on her as a nation, that she would wither and die quickly. Luke records how, as He was riding down the slope the day before, at one point Jesus stopped and looked at the city and wept and said, saying, *Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.* And how soon that came to pass! Not 40 years later, the entire city of Jerusalem was put under siege and finally levelled by the Roman legions. Thousands were killed or enslaved and Israel was reduced to a dry root waiting thousands of years to be watered and spring up again in the last days. But Jesus was not trying to dishearten His disciples; rather through this fig tree:

3. He exhorted them and us to trust God's ability to do the impossible (20-22) Here is a marvelous thought. The same ability, the same power, the same "command and it will be done" authority, is available to us. We can do likewise, whether it is withering a fig tree or moving a mountain. Jesus is telling us to pray believing, trusting that He is able to do whatever it is that needs to happen! With God nothing shall be impossible! To us the lesson of the fig tree is a great encouragement!

But to people who bear leaves with no fruit, it is a solemn warning. To people who shout "Yay Jesus!" with their lips, while their hearts are far from Him, it is a graphic picture of the fact that judgment is coming and more swiftly than they can imagine. *Around 1900, the French island of Martinique was a prosperous colony in the Caribbean and was known as the Paris of the West Indies. The capital, St. Pierre, lay at the foot of Mount Pelée, an old dormant volcano. During 1902, boil-*

ing water and steam were seen erupting from the crater and on April 25th, a scientific expedition was sent up to investigate. The island's newspaper, *Les Colonies*, published the findings and told the inhabitants that there was no reason to be afraid. Day by day, life became unbearable on the island. A hideous odor of sulphur filled the air and birds dropped out of the air asphyxiated by the ash and sulphur. By May 3rd, businessmen and prudent individuals moved to the southern part of the Island. However, the newspaper continued to mock, and on May 7th it published an interview with Professor M. Landes which read, "Mont Pelee presents no more danger to the inhabitants of St. Pierre than does Vesuvius to those of Naples." The Newspaper added, "We confess we cannot understand this panic. Where could one be better off than in St. Pierre?" On the morning of May 8th, at 7:52 AM exactly, the Volcano erupted and exploded. There was no warning as the side of the mountain ripped out. Super-heated steam at a temperature of 1000 degrees Centigrade blasted out at hurricane speed, obliterating the whole town and incinerating 30,000 people. Only two men survived the destruction, a prisoner, who was in the town dungeon and a cobbler who hid in his cellar. [<http://tim-shey.blogspot.com/2011/12/eruption-of-mount-pelee-st-pierre.html>] Israel ignored the warning signs and perished just like the residents of St. Pierre did. Judgment will come on all those who refuse to make Jesus King in their lives, no matter how much He loves them. It's only ever one breath away and will be here quicker than they think. Let's pray and believe God to do the seemingly impossible and reach many of them while there is still time.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Presentation Of The King - Mt. 21-25

The King Warns His Opponents - 21:23-22:14

It is now Tuesday of Passion Week. On Sunday, Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem in the midst of a huge crowd publicly declaring Himself to be the Messiah. On Monday He cleansed the Temple by driving all the merchants out of the outer court, then healing many blind and lame people and being praised by a group of children. Each night Jesus went back out to the village of Bethany on the Mt. of Olives to stay. But when He returned to the Temple on Tuesday morning and was teaching the people:

I. Jesus' Enemies Challenged His Authority (21:23-27) Now let's think for a moment about this:

1. the issue of authority (23) Authority was very important to the Jews and to them it had a very specific meaning. Nobody would presume to teach in the Temple or to order the Temple courts cleared without authority from the Sanhedrin. All Rabbis were ordained. They were personally trained by other Rabbis and no one would dare to oppose what had been said and taught by the Rabbis of the past. In other words, the question of the chief priests and elders is really an accusation, "You didn't get this authority from us; we didn't give it to you; you are doing these things without authority or under your own authority. After all, God's authority flows through us!" However, since they posed it as a question, Jesus answered them with a question which made them focus on:

2. the sources of authority (24-25a) Jesus knows that if He tells them the truth that His authority came directly from God, they wouldn't believe it and would call it blasphemy, so He poses a question to them. He's actually saying "Where do you think John the Baptist got his authority? Did he get it from you, from men, through formal education and ordination? No! So did it come directly from heaven, from God? That is, was he sent by God or was it simply his own human idea?" Obviously, John had no authority given by them, so if he had any authority at all to preach and baptize, it had to have come from a higher authority, from God Himself! Or else it was simply his own idea and he was a false prophet. Well, as you would expect:

3. they refused to recognize God's authority (25b-27) They were in a quandary. God's authority is obviously the highest authority, so if they admitted John was preaching by God's authority, Jesus could condemn them for rebelling against God by not listening to him. Yet if they said it was merely his own idea, they were afraid of being stoned, Luke says, because the hundreds of Passover pilgrims thronging the Temple all knew John was sent from God! They were stuck, so to get out of their dilemma, they evaded the question with a "We don't know," rather than tell the truth about what they thought. John did not preach by their authority, which is why they had disregarded him. So, Jesus said in essence, "Well, I do these things by the same authority John obeyed and since you don't regard it anyway, I won't answer your question! You know very well Whose authority I am claiming!"

Now as you shake your head at the blindness and obstinacy of the Jewish leaders, be careful not to miss the fact that there's a lesson here for us too. When we know something comes from the authority of God, we are obligated to listen, whether we like it or not. His authority should control our lives. When God says, "Do this", it is NOT optional; we must obey it! When He says, "Don't do this", it is not a suggestion; we must not do it! Authority demands obedience, so when we know what God says, but disregard it anyway, we are doing exactly what these Jewish leaders were doing, disdaining and refusing the very authority and Lordship of Christ! And that could not be a more serious thing! In fact, Jesus goes on to warn them just how serious a thing it was to reject His authority and here's how He did it:

II. Jesus Warned His Enemies With a series of Three Parables which are linked together. In the first one, a story about two sons, Jesus EXPOSED His enemies, the leaders of the Jewish nation, who weren't at all what they appeared to be.

Then He told a story about a landowner and some tenants, the point of which is the coming DESTRUCTION of His enemies. But He didn't stop there. He went on to tell a story about a King giving a wedding banquet, in order to declare the REPLACEMENT of His enemies. Taken all together, Jesus warned the Jewish leaders that because of their rejection of what God was doing in Him, that their nation would soon be destroyed and would be replaced in their position of favor before God with another people, the Church! That's the fly-by overview; now let's zoom in close and look at the first story:

1. the parable of the two sons (21:28-32) This man has two boys and owns a vineyard, the family business. There is work he needs to get done so he tells each of them individually to go and work in the vineyard that day. The first son seems outwardly rebellious and says, "NO," but he is soft-hearted and later feels bad about it and goes. The second son seems to be the model child outwardly. He says, "Yes sir, I'll go!", but as soon as Dad's out of sight he heads for the golf course instead. Jesus makes them draw the conclusion on their own by asking the vital question, "Which one did the will of his father?" You see, that's:

a. the point: Note that He did not ask, "Which one was polite or answered properly?" He asked, "Which one DID..." It is the DOING that is important. It is not the one who bows down to the King while shirking his responsibility who is truly his servant. It is the one who DOES what he commands! **The true son is known not by words but actions!** And Jesus':

b. application is obvious (31b-32). **These Jewish leaders were refusing to do the will of the Father.** This was the most shocking and offensive thing Jesus could ever have said to these most religious of all the people, that despised tax collectors and immoral prostitutes would enter God's Kingdom because they believed John the Baptist's preaching, repented of their former rebellion and began to live the life that God desired, yet they themselves, chief priests and elders, would not enter it, because they pretended to obey God, yet refused to believe John and would not repent! For centuries, God had been saying to them, "Go work in My vineyard; serve Me." And for centuries the leaders of the nation had been saying, "Yes Father", but had, in reality, been serving their own interests, not God's! Jesus was exposing them for what they truly were!

Oh, but let's look in the mirror. How many times have we ourselves been that second son? We hear God speaking to us, instructing us from His Word, telling us what to do. So we say, "Yes Lord", but we don't do what He said or we do it once or twice and quit, or maybe we try a few times and then forget about it. We would be put to shame by many new converts all over the world who are coming to Jesus straight out of a terrible life filled with idolatry or immorality or drunken debauchery, who are now willing to immediately do anything and everything God says because of who Jesus has become to them! One day God gave King Saul a direct order, "Go and slay the Amalekites; destroy every person and everything they have." Well, Saul won the battle, but didn't want to obey the command. He saved their king alive and brought back all the best of their livestock and, because of that, God rejected Saul as King of Israel. Samuel explained it like this: *Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.* All the religious ritual in the world does not impress God, if it comes from an insincere heart that wants its own way. To obey is better than any act of worship, than any flowery prayer, than any sacrificial gift. May it be the desire of our hearts. Now before his enemies can react, Jesus immediately launches into a second story:

2. the parable of the landowner (21:33-46) I know that it's familiar, but let's look at:

a. the story in detail (33-34)

(1) the landowner leased his vineyard to some tenants, however, notice all the effort he put into it. First, he prepared his vineyard for the tenants. He planted all the grapevines and made a wall around the vineyard to keep out wild animals. He dug a winepress for the grapes and built a tower for the tenants to stay in and keep watch. He made everything ready and then the tenant farmers moved in. Of course, the landowner represents God and the vineyard is God's kingdom or rule, according to verse 43. The tenants are the people of Israel and specifically their leaders. Jesus' point is how well God provided for them so that they might have everything they needed to walk with Him and be His people and to become His Kingdom on earth. Israel was a privileged people beyond all others! But in the course of time, the owner sent his servants to the tenants. He, of course, had an agreement with them that at harvest time a share of the profits would belong to him. So, having withdrawn to a faraway region, he sent his servants one after the other to receive his share. Jesus is saying that God had an agreement with Israel. He would be their God but they would have to obey His Law, so that through them He could reach all the nations of the earth. That was the deal. The fruit He desired was heartfelt obedience. They would have to live by His rules. And you know, it seems that after He made that covenant with them in that very first generation, He withdrew. At first Israel saw His visible miracles one after the other until they settled in the land, but in the generations that followed, there was no longer a pillar of fire and a glory cloud. Instead, God sent them prophets, one after the other, to speak His word and command His due obedience. But look at the actions of:

(2) the tenants (35-39) They mistreated the owner's servants. Instead of receiving them and paying their due; they beat them and stoned them and even killed them. So, the owner sent more servants and they did the same. That's what Israel did to the prophets. Some, she simply ignored, but Queen Jezebel killed every prophet of the Lord she could find. Zechariah was slain in the reign of King Joash by stoning, Jeremiah was abused and

thrown into a cistern to starve. Isaiah was sawn in half by King Manasseh. Even John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod. Yet, as if that was not bad enough, at length these tenants did something still worse: **they murdered the owner's son**. As a last resort he sent his son, but him they treated even worse. They killed him and threw his body out of the vineyard. Listen, in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son! He came unto His own people and what did they do? They hung Him on a cross outside the city and crucified Him! Jesus is predicting what these very leaders were about to do to him on Friday! But He cleverly lets His enemies write their own:

b. the punchline to the story: the owner will destroy the murderers (40-41) Even these blind leaders can see that those murderers have to be brought to justice. They must be destroyed! And the vineyard must be given to somebody else who will do what they're supposed to! Wow, they're so caught up in the story that they don't yet catch the meaning, and Jesus let them pronounce sentence on themselves! But in a moment, He masterfully makes His:

c. application (42-44) He quotes **Ps. 118:22-23**. He says, "YOU are the builders and I am the stone you are rejecting and refusing. Yet I am the chief Cornerstone of God's building; I am the One on whom all the rest of the Kingdom that God is going to build in the world hinges and God is going to put me in that place. But as for you wicked tenants, you unwise builders, God is going to judge you; He's going to crush you like a dropped stone would. **God will take His Kingdom away** from you; He's going to take all your privileges away and destroy your precious city and your Temple and you yourselves, just as you said ought to be done!" And as I mentioned last week, within 40 years the Romans did destroy both the city and the nation in AD 70! But don't think this story is only for them! Those who do what they did today, those reject God's Son, face the same fate. God may have sent His servants to them in various ways time and time again, but if they end up crucifying the Son of God afresh by rejecting Him all their lives, even though they get to enjoy the fruits of God's blessing and grace while they live, eventually they'll die and the Stone they rejected will be the very Stone that destroys them, by sending them off to an eternity in hell! It is an absolutely ungrateful and dangerous thing to reject Christ, then or now! Well, now they understood what He meant and look at:

d. their angry reaction (45-46) They knew He was talking about them, but instead of repenting, they became angry and looked for a way to arrest Him. They set about fulfilling the very prediction He'd just made. But still Jesus didn't stop. He told them a third parable:

3. the parable of the wedding banquet (22:1-14) This King was giving a wedding feast for His Son. It was a grand occasion, an important occasion, one which anyone in the whole kingdom would be privileged to be part of. But the odd thing in Jesus' story is:

a. the refusal of the original guests (1-4) The original guests, as you can easily guess, are Israel with her leaders. Notice they get a:

(1) their double invitation Naturally, the guests had been previously invited and been given notice of the day of the wedding. And then, on the actual day when the son was to be married, the King sent his servants to bring them. Not once but twice! He sent the first set of servants and they refused, so he sent a second set. Israel's prior invitation to prepare for the Son's special day had come through the Old Testament prophets who had told her beforehand to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom through God's Son. Then the day arrived and God sent John the Baptist to say, "The Kingdom is at hand", "Today is the wedding day!", "Behold the Lamb of God!" Jesus Himself echoed the same message. "Today is the day; the Kingdom is here!" But Israel refused to respond, and yet God was not done. He sent His servants back a second time. He sent the apostles back to the Jews and their leaders once again. When Peter stood up on Pentecost he said, "Ye men of Israel!" In the first 10 chapters of the Book of Acts, the ministry and the message of the apostles are given almost exclusively to the Jews! But notice in the story:

(2) their diabolical reaction and destruction (5-7) Some simply ignored them, but again as a whole the Jewish people and their leaders mistreated and even killed the King's messengers. James was slain by Herod with the sword. Others were imprisoned. Stephen was stoned to death. So, as in the story, the King sent an army to destroy those murderers and burn their city, in reality the Roman army which did exactly that in AD 70, as I mentioned earlier. The nation was finished for 2000 years, but God was not finished! The real point of this story is:

b. their replacement with other guests (8-10) You see:

(1) the King has a need for guests The King can't have a wedding banquet without guests. His Son will not be duly honored without guests to celebrate! God is absolutely determined that He WILL have some from every people on earth present to celebrate with His Son! So, the King changed His plan. He set about finding a whole new set of guests and here's how He is doing it:

(2) He commands us, His servants, **to invite all and fill His hall** He tells us, "Go out in the streets and invite anyone you can find!" That's the mission of the church, to go to all the nations and shout the invitation, "Whoso-

ever will may come to the banquet!" Ever since Acts 8, we servants have been preaching to everyone, to every race in every language in every place on earth. We say, "The King wants you to come celebrate His Son! You don't have to be dressed and ready and prepared. You don't have to have a fine education and religious knowledge or a perfect life before you can come. Come just as you are. Just come! Anybody can come! Jesus wants you! But here's WHY you can come." Look at:

c. the clothing of the new guests (11-14) Now this sounds really weird to us. How could you expect some person you meet on a street corner to be dressed for a wedding? Well, there's an obvious answer:

(1) the garment was provided by the King Himself That's why anybody could come. The King provided the garments for them at the door so that they would be dressed in all His royal finest to celebrate the wedding of His Son! And that's why anybody can come into His Kingdom today. We don't have to bring our own nice pure garments; when we come to Christ, He clothes us in His perfect righteousness! So, you really can't come in without the right garment, but evidently in the story:

(2) the guest refused the garment the King provided for him He must have thought he was well-dressed enough on his own. It was the height of ingratitude. The King invites you to a free feast and hands you a beautiful wedding garment to put on, and you'd rather stay in your rags! How insolent!

But that's exactly what so many people are doing all around us today. They want to come to God's banquet. They want to celebrate Jesus and be in heaven, but they absolutely refuse to trust in Christ as the only way of salvation; they refuse to lay aside the filthy rags of their own righteousness and be given the righteousness of God in Him, but rather insist that they are already good enough, that their own good works will make them acceptable to the King! So their end will be fitting, thrown outside the kingdom, in hell where there is darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth forever. And verse 14 contains the punchline for this age: "Many are invited but few are chosen." The invitation is for all. Everyone and anyone may come! God has a banquet hall in heaven big enough for all. But only those few who will come His way, who will put on His wedding garment by trusting in Christ as their Savior, may join the eternal feast. *The story is told of a dirty, poorly clothed boy who walked into a London orphanage many years ago. The superintendent saw him and asked, "What are you doing here, young man?" "Why I'd like to live here," he answered. The man replied, "But I don't know you. What do you have as a recommendation?" The youngster held up his torn coat--nothing more than rags--and said, "If you please, sir, I thought this would be all the recommendation I would need." Immediately the superintendent swept him into his arms and into the orphanage, where he was fed and clothed and warmly accepted and in place of his old rags the boy received new garments.* That's the Gospel! Our God and King says, "Give up the filthy rags of all your attempts to approach Me through your own good deeds. Just come celebrate My Son for what He did on the cross for you and I will clothe you in His perfect righteousness and receive you into My hall forever!" We are among multiplied millions who have accepted the King's gracious invitation and have come into His house to enjoy His feast forever. Hallelujah!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Presentation Of The King - Mt. 21-25

The King Silences His Opponents - 22:15-46

It is still Tuesday of Passion week. Last time we saw that as Jesus entered the Temple and was teaching on this morning, He was challenged by the Jewish leaders and proceeded to warn them of their coming destruction and replacement as a nation through a series of three parables. We need to realize that by this point the religious leaders of the nation of Israel are all boiling with anger. After Jesus raised Lazarus, the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, got together and some said, *If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place [the Temple] and our nation.* - Jn. 11:48. Then, after His triumphant ride into Jerusalem amid the crowds, the Pharisees expressed their frustration to one another, *You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.* - Jn. 12:19. Now they have been publicly humiliated and condemned by Him and they are desperate to find a way to stop Him. Look at verse **(15)**. That word *entangle* doesn't mean simply to embarrass Him or make Him appear foolish. It means to "snare" or "trap" Him using His words. Luke explains it more fully, *So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor* - 20:20. We also need to understand that the Jewish leaders at this time were very divided. Some were Pharisees and others were Sadducees and they hated each other's beliefs and constantly fought. Still others belonged to the political party of the Herodians who supported the rule of Herod and Rome and they were avidly hated by the intensely nationalistic Pharisees. Yet adversity makes strange bedfellows! All of these are desperate to get rid of Jesus for their own reasons, so on this day they join ranks to try trap Him in whatever way they can, hopefully to discredit Him before the multitudes, but, more importantly, to find some viable charge for which He can be arrested. Three times they come at Him with their carefully loaded questions and, one by one, Jesus silences all His opponents. First, we see:

I. The Herodians Silenced On The Subject Of Government (16-22) [Read 16] The Pharisees went to the Herodians for help. Now the Herodians were not a religious sect, but rather they were a political party among the Jews, a party that had

supported the rule of Herod as King. Herod was an Edomite by race, but he adopted and practiced the Jewish faith, even though his position as King was given him by Roman authority. I guess the Herodian party felt that Herod and his sons would be better and more sympathetic rulers than Roman proconsuls sent from abroad. At any rate, hearing crowds shout about a "King of the Jews" or teaching about the "Kingdom of God" would worry and anger them. They feared the mighty hand of Rome which tolerated no insurrection and rebellion, so, though they hated the Pharisees, they were willing to co-operate with them to trap Jesus, because they both hated Him. After trying to butter Him up with a bunch of things they didn't really believe about Him but which were really true anyway, they tried to set Him up and notice:

1. the shrewdness of their trap (17) Let me re-state their question:

a. the question: "Should we Jews pay Rome the annual poll tax?" Rome required every person in their conquered territories from ages 14 to 65, including women and slaves, to pay an annual tax. The amount was a didrachma, which is two denarii or approximately two days wages. Let's call it \$200 today. How would you like it if Iran conquered American and you had to pay them \$200 for every family member each year to make your life miserable? I'm guessing you'd hate it, and so did many Jews. The question is, "Should we as Jews living under our Law in good conscience pay this?" But do you see His:

b. the dilemma in answering the question?

(1) if Jesus says "Yes", the Pharisees can accuse Him to the public as a traitor. The Jewish public hates Rome, hates the tax. If He agrees with it, they can paint Him as not only betraying His nation like the despised publicans, but betraying His own teaching and all the prophets concerning the Kingdom of God which was going to come, when God the rightful ruler would rule the world and all other powers would be crushed. Yet:

(2) if Jesus says "No", the Herodians can accuse Him to the governor as a traitor. They would have a concrete charge heard by many witnesses that Jesus was inciting the people to rebel against Roman authority. So, they think they have Him over a barrel, but see:

2. the genius of His answer (18-21) He knows what they're up to and tells them straight up that they're hypocrites. Then He says, "Let me see the money you pay the tax with." So they hand Him a denarius, and he says, "Whose picture is this on the coin? Whose writing?" "Caesar's!", they replied. So He said, "It has his picture and writing on it; he obviously made it; it obviously belongs to him and you are using it by his permission; therefore, he has a right to demand that you give it to him! So give him what belongs to him but also be careful to give God what belongs to God!" Now, this reply is so important because in saying those words, Jesus:

a. He affirmed the right of governments to tax their citizens and the obligation of citizens to pay taxes Look with me at **Rom. 13:1-2, 5-7** where Paul spells this out clearly. God put the governing authorities in place, whoever they are. When we obey them, we are really obeying Him by acknowledging His order. We should obey the government not simply because of the punishment we could get, but because our ultimate allegiance belongs to God. Taxes belong to earthly governors. They coin the money, secure the peace, pave the roads, and provide public services. They have a right to tax. The only time we should NOT obey is when the government demands that we deny our ultimate allegiance to God and His commands, and in that case, we must obey God rather than men! So, Jews could pay taxes to Rome and do it as an act of obedience to their God because in God's order, Caesar has the right to what belongs to him. Yet what we never recognize in this story is that even as He said that, Jesus:

b. He asserted His own claims through the device of the coin We have Roman coins from that time period. The front has an image of the Emperor, Tiberius Caesar, along with this abbreviated inscription: *Tiberius CAESAR DIVINI AUGUSTI Filius AUGUSTUS* which means, *Tiberius, Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, Augustus [meaning "majestic", the title taken by all Roman Emperors]*. On the back is a picture of his mother, Livia, with the inscription referring to himself as, *PONTIFEX MAXIMUS*, that is, *High Priest*. Octavian, the father of Tiberius, had officially been declared a god and divine by the Roman Senate and therefore to be worshipped, so Tiberius literally claimed by his physical birth to be both the Son of God and the High Priest! [<http://ejc-nexus.net/AMBS-Handouts/Jn1.1-18-SonofGodandAncientCoins.pdf>] When Jesus held up the coin and said, "Give to God what belongs to Him", He was in essence claiming that inscription for Himself! He was quietly saying, without actually saying it, "Tiberius is not the Son of God and High Priest who deserves your worship; I AM! Yes, give Caesar his coin, but give God the worship and obedience that belongs to Him by acknowledging ME as His Son and High Priest, not Tiberius!" No wonder:

3. His answer amazed his opponents and silenced them (22) Luke says, *Thus they were unable in the presence of the people to trap him with his own words. And stunned by his answer, they fell silent.* - 20:26 NET. He had told the truth, answered the question and evaded the trap. The Herodians went away with their mouths gaping open but next we see:

II. The Sadducees Silenced On The Subject Of Resurrection (23-33) [Read 23] The Sadducees were a religious sect of the Jews who would fit in quite well in much of our modern thinking today because:

1. the Sadducees did not believe in a spiritual realm They were rationalists who only believed in what our eyes can see and prove. They denied that human beings have any existence at all after death; when you're dead, you simply

stop existing like any other animal. In **Acts 23:8** Luke explains that clearly and adds that they denied the existence of angels and demons and they especially despised the thought that man will experience a resurrection from the dead. Strangely enough, many of the priests who served at the Temple were Sadducees! As an aside, they also despised the Scripture-loving Pharisees who firmly believed in all those things, but they despised Jesus even more so:

a. they posed a deliberately absurd situation (24-28) This involves the so-called Levirate law found in **Deut. 25:5** which says that if a man dies with no children, his brother must marry his widow and have a son to carry on his name. So, they invent the case of a woman who was married 7 times to 7 brothers and ask who she'll be married to in the resurrection. Now if they had said she was married twice, it might have been a legitimate question, but by making the situation seem so ludicrous, it's obvious that:

b. their purpose was to humiliate Jesus for teaching life after death They're mocking, poking fun. They're saying, not just to Jesus but to everyone, "Look how ridiculous it is to believe in a resurrection! This is what you'd have to deal with, who is married to whom now??" It's just like liberals today who sneer and say, "How ridiculous to believe in a literal heaven! Can you honestly believe in streets paved with gold and gates of pearl and all that stuff?" They want Jesus to look stupid, but it didn't faze Him one bit:

2. He declared them ignorant of both the Scriptures and God's power (29) Their very question showed that they didn't really understand what the Scriptures taught. They assumed that resurrection simply meant just another life like this one, only under better circumstances. They set up a straw man, a caricature of a belief, that was easy for them to knock down, which is what our unbelieving opponents so often do. So, first Jesus:

a. He explained the resurrection state (30) Matthew only records a piece of His reply. Luke gives the full thing: *...The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.* - **Lk. 20:34-36.**

(1) He denied that our future state simply mirrors our earthly existence The resurrection life is not a repeat of what occurs here; the old things pass away and all things are new. There will not be marriage in heaven in the sense there was on earth. "Whoa! Wait a minute! Won't I know my beloved spouse in heaven? Won't we be together? Will all of the good things we shared be lost and forgotten?" Yes, certainly we'll know each other and love each other there, but it will be different; it will be new. Our primary focus will have changed. It will not be on each other but on God. We will be like the angels; like them we will serve Him together and support one other, and whether on earth we were married to one person or three or seven, we'll not be bound there to any one person in the same exclusive sense, but will know and love and serve together with them all and millions more. And notice that in His answer, in one fell swoop, Jesus:

(2) He affirmed the spiritual realm, angels and immortality He affirmed that people WILL live after they're dead, that they will be with and like the angels (who DO exist) and that they will not die again, that they will live on forever! The Sadducees were wrong on all counts! But oh, how blessed to know that we are right, to have Jesus affirm that all of these things are true for us!

Then Jesus took them back and showed them something else that Moses wrote that proved resurrection!

b. He proved life after death scripturally (31-32) This is ingenious. Look at how Jesus relies on the very words of Scripture that God spoke to Moses in **Ex. 3:6**, hundreds of years after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead. God told Moses, *I AM the God of Abraham...*, present tense. If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had ceased to exist at death, God would have had to say "I WAS the God of Abraham..., I USED TO BE..." But He didn't. He purposely said "I AM RIGHT NOW..." He is not the God of dead people but the God of living people. **Lk. 20:38** records His punchline to the whole thing, *...for all live to Him.* Abraham, Isaac and Jacob live! All those that have died, they live; they are alive right now while their bodies wait for resurrection, but they live with Him! All our believing loved ones, all those who have meant so much to us in our faith, all those who passed the faith on to us, they're alive! Hallelujah! He IS their God right now! How do you argue with that? Again:

3. His answer amazed the crowd but it silenced the Sadducees (33-34a) The whole crowd was literally struck with astonishment. With one phrase Jesus had proved eternal life and silenced their most learned leaders. In fact, Luke tells us in 20:39 that even some of His enemies, the scribes, blurted out "Well said!" in response! But lastly, we see:

III. The Pharisees Silenced On The Subject Of The Law (34-46) [Read 34] Now the Pharisees were desperate. The Herodians had failed and the Sadducees looked like pure fools but they were determined to do something to discredit Jesus so they put their heads together and one of them, an expert in the law, somebody they hoped knew the Scriptures better than He did:

1. they tested Him concerning the greatest commandment (35-36) There was a lot of debate on that issue in Jesus' day. Picture it like this: suppose two commands conflict, like not working on the Sabbath day and then your ox falls into a pit. Do you leave it lay? Or that since there are 614 commandments in the Law, no one can possibly remember and pay total attention to each one, so what is the priority. Certainly, remembering not to muzzle your ox while

threshing grain is less important than not worshipping idols. In reality it is about grading sins, deciding which one is worse than the other, something people still delight in doing because it makes them feel good! So they ask Jesus which is the most important of all and:

a. He gave them a most profound answer (37-40) He lifts the question above their petty level of understanding and answers it in terms of truth. It is not a question of "which one should I do and which one should I neglect?" He said that two commandments were the greatest because all the others spring from the keeping of these two and explain how to apply them. **Deut. 6:5**, which the Israelites quoted every day in their prayers and calls to worship, commands us to love God completely. That summed up the first 4 of Moses 10 commandments, as well as all of man's responsibility toward God. Then, **Lev. 19:18**, which commands us to love our neighbor, sums up all the rest. Every command in the Scripture is merely an outgrowth or applying of those two in a specific situation. It's an amazing, brilliant summary of the Old Testament Law. If you love God and you love others with everything you've got, you will ALWAYS please God! Who could argue with that? (Though one guy tried to when Jesus used it on an earlier occasion by asking, "Who is my neighbor!") But this time:

b. it had a pronounced effect - Mk. 12:32-34 tells us that the man who asked the question openly agreed with Jesus completely, and Jesus told him he was not far from the Kingdom!

However, now, instead of waiting for some next question from the Pharisees, Jesus:

2. He tested them concerning the greatness of the Son (41-45) Jesus baited them with a quick answer question. Everybody knew that the Messiah would come from the line of David, and so would be David's descendant, his son. So Jesus poses this. In **Ps. 110:1** David was speaking about the Messiah and says, "The LORD (referring to Jehovah God) said to MY lord (referring to the Christ), sit here until I put your enemies under your feet." David wrote under inspiration of the Spirit so there can be no mistake. David, as a father, would never call his own son, his own descendant, Lord! How can the Christ be both the son of David and the Master of David at the same time?" They had no answer nor could they have had one. But, of course, **we know the unstated answer**. Paul gives it in **Rom. 1:3-4** where he says that Christ was descended from David according to the flesh, the physical body. He was of David's line. But He was really the Son of God who came into the world and took on that human body and nature, and He declared that once and for all by His Resurrection from the dead. So, He is David's (and our) Lord, even while He is David's son in the human sense! But no one really knew that except Jesus at that moment so:

3. His question stymied everyone and silenced all further questioning (46) All His enemies were silenced and gave up, but you know, that's not a bad place to be.

Only a fool tries to argue with God; only a moron presumes to know more than Jesus, who is Himself the very wisdom of God. Yet don't even we ourselves do that very thing sometimes? We try to tell Him what we want and what He should do and why it has to be that way. Like His enemies, we are sometimes so full of our own ideas that He has to silence us before we can learn. *In the 1800s in Japan there lived a Zen master by the name Nan-In. One day he invited one of his students to his home for tea. After they had chatted for a while, the old man asked, "May I serve you some tea?" "Yes, thank you," replied the disciple, and they both sat down on the floor at a low table. Ceremoniously, Nan-In set a teacup in front of the student and began pouring tea. He talked while he poured the tea, all the while looking intently into the student's face. The young man was so involved in what the master was saying that at first, he didn't notice that the cup was overflowing. Nan-In just kept pouring. Finally, he interrupted Nan-In, practically shouting, "Stop! You have overfilled the cup!" Nan-In stopped and smiled. Then he said, "Yes, the cup is overfull, and you, my friend, are like this cup--so full of your own thoughts and ideas that I can't teach you any wisdom. You must first empty the cup."* [A Whack on the Side of the Head by Roger Van Oech. Warren Books, 1983. Page 10.] Jesus has that same problem with us; we are so full of ourselves. So, when you come to Him, first empty the cup; then you, like Paul, will marvel and say, *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* - Rom. 11:33-36.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Presentation Of The King - Mt. 21-25

The King Condemns His Opponents - Ch. 23

Matthew 23 is a sermon that Jesus preached to the crowd on that Tuesday of Passion Week. After all the attempts by the Pharisees, the Herodians and the Sadducees to trap Him in public had failed and their mouths were all silenced and no one would dare to try to oppose Him verbally again, He turned to the gathered crowd and preached a lengthy and scathing sermon directed specifically against the Pharisees. It was not an outburst of anger; it is obviously well-organized and thought out. Rather, it was a Divine pronouncement of doom upon these false religious leaders and, at the end, upon the nation which followed them. It stands through the ages as a stern condemnation of the false religious leaders that have sprung up everywhere down through history, even within the church itself. There have always been religious leaders who

have a splendid appearance outwardly, but absolutely no relationship to God. The New Testament mentions them frequently. Some were teachers of false doctrine like the Judaizers in Galatians; others led people astray into immoral behavior like the Nicolaitans in Revelation. They captivated Israel, they plagued the early church, and, sad to say, they are found throughout the church worldwide today. So, we need to listen for ourselves as:

I. Jesus Warned His Followers About False Religious Leaders (1-12) [Read (1-3a)] The Scribes were professional students and teachers of the Scriptures and they belonged to the party of the Pharisees who had the highest respect for the Law and its commands. They *sat in Moses' seat*; literally, each synagogue had a stone seat in the front where the authoritative teacher would sit to teach the people the Law. At the same time, many of them also held positions of ruling authority as part of the Sanhedrin, and Jesus implied that as such:

1. we may have to respect their position of authority Whenever religious leaders teach accurately from the Scriptures, we have to listen and follow that teaching, no matter what their personal motives may be. While He was in prison in Rome, Paul wrote about some of his own opponents: *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, ...out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.* - Phil. 1:15-18. Whenever religious leaders teach truth God will use that truth and, if they hold a position of authority, we may have to respect it, just as in Acts 23 Paul apologized for calling the High Priest a *whitewashed wall* because he didn't realize he was the High Priest. We may have to respect the office, even if the person who holds it is not worthy of that respect. However, Jesus warned that:

2. we dare not imitate the things that they do (3b-4) The Pharisees added a myriad of rules TO the Word of God. Mark comments that *the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.* These are the heavy burdens they laid on the people, rules that said, "To please God you must do this and this and this, on and on," none of which was really scriptural. Some leaders do that today; they heap up regulations about dress or jewelry or makeup or hair, or forbid ever touching alcohol and so on. We must be careful to recognize when people are *adding* to the Word of God things that it doesn't teach. But Jesus warned that these Pharisees:

a. they do not practice the things they teach They do not obey in their lives the very Word of God they claim to honor. These Pharisees who clearly taught the command, *You shall not murder*, were plotting murder against Jesus all week long! We'll see several more examples of that sort of hypocrisy in the verses to come. When you want to evaluate any religious leader, first you test what they teach against God's Word. If that doesn't line up, they are false to start with. But then if they're teaching correct things, you test their life against what they teach! If they tell you one thing, but live another, they are false leaders. And what you'll find about false leaders is that, like the Pharisees:

b. they continually strive to exalt themselves (5-7) Everything they do is done, not to please God, but to be seen by people in order to exalt their own status and boost their own ego. The Pharisees tied pouches with Bible verses in them on their arms and foreheads, not so they could remember them, but so that people would think them extremely pious! And they enlarged fringes or tassels on the corners of their garments to show how well they kept the law. They loved to sit in places of honor wherever they were and they loved when people would call them Rabbi, which literally means "my Master", because their whole goal was to be somebody, to receive recognition and prestige from others. By the way, that is a trap that any of us can fall into. When praise comes our way, it is easy for that kind of pride to grow in us. That's why Jesus warned us clearly that we are never to be like that. Rather:

3. we are always to practice humble servanthood (8-12) Now Jesus didn't mean that you can't call your actual dad, "Father" or that a child can't call their teacher, "Teacher". Those are natural uses of those words. I don't even think there's anything wrong with addressing a Catholic priest as *Father* or a Protestant minister as *Reverend*, because those are respectful forms of address in our society, like "Dr." or "Your Honor" to a judge. His point is that we're not to try to get people to call us by exalted names and love to be held in higher regard than others, because we all are brothers and we have only one true Master or guide or instructor. We are to regard Christ as our true spiritual Guide and see ourselves as servants. We're to regard God as our true Heavenly Father and the real source of all that we are and have and see ourselves as dependent on Him. We're to regard Christ as the real true teacher and ourselves, no matter how educated we are, as learners! Our operating principle is to be servanthood, seeing ourselves here, not to be exalted over others, but to humbly serve them. When we lose that humility, we've become false; we've fallen into sin and hypocrisy, just as the Pharisees had done.

Now Christ turns from addressing the crowd and his own disciples and speaks directly to the false leaders themselves, so in this next section of the chapter we listen with the crowd as:

II. Jesus Condemned The False Religious Leaders In Israel (13-36) He pronounced a series of either 7 or 8 "Woe"s upon them, depending on how you count them. The word *Woe* is simply an expression of grief that has no literal meaning. Jesus used it to mean something of a cross between "Shame on you!" and "Look out!". In these woes Jesus lists the spe-

cific charges for which He is condemning these false leaders; He details their crimes before the Lord and why they can expect God's judgment to fall on them. First of all:

1. they prevented others from receiving salvation (13) By rejecting Jesus as Israel's King and Messiah, they slammed the door of salvation shut for themselves, but worse, they were intentionally keeping others who might have believed from following Him. They threatened to put people out of the synagogue if anyone should confess Jesus as the Christ. They openly dissuaded people from believing, others who had sincere hearts and were drawn to the truth, but were frightened away by them, all in the guise of being religious and sincere. That's the really diabolical thing about false religious leaders. They not only don't genuinely believe in Jesus themselves, but they dissuade others from it and essentially send people to hell without even realizing they're doing it! I've told you many times that both the college and the seminary I attended were filled with professors who taught religion, nice people, religious people, but they did not believe that Jesus was God and the only way of salvation. By refusing to believe, they shut the door of true faith for themselves, but worse, they dedicated their lives to "enlightening people," which is essentially dissuading them from the simple faith Jesus demands. Students came in with a background of faith from their local churches and they were taught that the Bible cannot be taken literally, that Moses did not part the Red Sea, that miracles did not literally happen and that Jesus did not bodily rise from the dead. By the time they graduated, these poor students had no desire to follow the "humanized" version of Jesus they "learned" about! And, sadly, there are pastors in pulpits of churches across our land who do the very same thing Sunday after Sunday. To use Paul's phrase, *Their condemnation is just*. Secondly, Jesus condemned these leaders because:

2. they concealed evil deeds with the appearance of religion (14) [Margin] This verse is in the margin of most modern translations because it is not found in some of the oldest Greek manuscripts, however both Mark and Luke record it verbatim, so we know Jesus did say it on this occasion. In order to make a profit, the Pharisees, being rich, would foreclose mortgages on poor widows whose husbands had died and who couldn't make enough on their own in that society to keep their homes. And then instead of helping them out of their own abundance, they would stand there and pray for them as a show, literally as a disguise, "God, now please shelter and feed this poor family." It was sheer hypocrisy. God absolutely hates it when someone feigns love for Him as a disguise and a cover up to hide their own greed! Years ago, when we had our local radio broadcast, our agent who was a friend used to tell me about one of the religious broadcasters who followed us, about the rolls of money he would flash around at the station and how he was bilking people continually while supposedly giving them spiritual solace. Sadly, he was not the first nor the only religious leader to be motivated by greed! Throughout history there have been many and Jesus says their condemnation will be the greater because of it. Then Jesus condemns the Pharisees because:

3. they led others to become just like themselves (15) It was not bad enough they were trying to prevent people from believing in Jesus; they were actively doing everything in their power to recruit people and train them to become just like they were. They were reproducing themselves, leading others to follow in their footsteps. So are false leaders today; my professors were reproducing students just like themselves and sending them out into pulpits and leadership positions throughout the land and they're still doing it. Next, He says:

4. they were dishonest and untrustworthy (16-22) In that day, oaths were a significant means of sealing transactions and amounted to a binding contract. Yet they had invented devious ways to get out of oaths they had taken, if it was to their own benefit. They would say, "Well, I didn't swear by the gold of the Temple, just by the Temple itself". Or "I didn't swear by the sacrifice; I only swore by the altar itself, so I don't have to keep my promise." They sound almost like little kids saying, "I didn't say, 'I promise', or 'I had my fingers crossed!'" The point is that they were intentionally dishonest and untrustworthy and they designed their hierarchy of oaths to get out of honest obligations! And what's worse is that three times in these verses Jesus calls them BLIND! They actually couldn't see anything wrong with what they were doing! They couldn't see that the Temple was God's house and an oath by it or by the altar in it was made before Him and He was the keeper and guardian of the oath. False religious leaders are blind; they can't see the true nature of what they're doing. Then Jesus says:

5. they emphasized unimportant matters but neglected important ones (23-24) These guys were extraordinary tithers, and that's good. They gave a tenth of everything to God, meticulously, right down to the herbs that grew in their gardens. But in the process, they neglected the really important matters like justice and mercy for that poor widow. The Pharisees were very careful to strain every gnat out of their wine before they drank it, lest they should violate the dietary law by eating an unclean "creeping thing". The image is that they were so focused on removing the gnat that they gulped down a whole camel, another unclean animal, in the process without noticing! It's an absurd comparison intended to show the reversed priorities they had. It didn't matter that the poor widow and her children had no food, but every leaf on every mint plant in their garden was carefully accounted for! False teachers often major on minors, often miss the big issues while making a mountain out of little ones. Next Jesus says:

6. they were concerned only with external appearance, not the heart (25-28) Now here I lumped two woes together into one because they are simply two word pictures that say the same thing. Jesus said the Pharisees:

a. they were like outwardly-wiped dishes (25-26) Do you like to eat out of dishes that have only been wiped clean on the outside? I doubt it! The inside is the important part, isn't it? The Pharisees looked clean on the outside, but their insides had never been touched. They were full of greed and self-indulgence. In fact, Jesus says:

b. they were like whitewashed tombs (27-28) Tombs were above-ground structures and the custom in that day was to keep them whitewashed on the outside so they would appear beautiful. But inside each one was rotten flesh and dead bones and every kind of uncleanness. That's how these leaders were. They had a nice external appearance that made them appeal to the people, but inside they were full of greed, self-indulgence, hypocrisy and lawlessness! And lastly:

7. they persecuted God's servants (29-36) Being a prophet in Israel was a dangerous calling. Too many times God's messengers were persecuted and slain by the false leaders of their day. And so has it ever been done down through the centuries over and over. False religious leaders within the church itself put to death, one after the other, the very people who passed our precious faith on to us, people like John Huss, John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, and literally thousands of others. False leaders will do anything to keep themselves in power. Now the Pharisees:

a. they feigned regret for the past (29-30) They venerated Zechariah's tomb and Isaiah's tomb and those of other prophets who had been slain by previous generations. They decorated their monuments and said, "Man, if we had lived back then, we'd never have done what they did! We'd never have slain any of God's messengers!" But that didn't fool Jesus. He knew that at that very moment they were already plotting His own death! And He knew it wouldn't stop with Him:

b. Jesus knew they would persecute His followers (31-34) He sent His followers FIRST to Israel, to the Jews. And what did they do? They arrested and threatened the apostles. James, they killed with the sword right away and they tried to do the same to Peter. Stephen, they stoned to death. Paul dragged men and women off to prison for their faith in Christ and later, when he was converted, the Jewish leaders sought his life! Zealous Jewish leaders became the enemies of the Gospel wherever it spread throughout the Roman Empire. Jesus knew all of this beforehand and so at the end of His sermon:

c. He pronounced final judgment upon that generation of Israel (35-36) Other generations had obviously been extremely guilty, but on this generation, the one which rejected God's own Son, the punishment would finally fall at long last. Israel as a nation would be destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans, the city of Jerusalem would be leveled and these leaders and their followers would perish, along with the nation itself.

What a sad pronouncement! But again, this pronouncement of condemnation was not an angry reaction. Jesus took no pleasure in saying it; in fact:

III. Jesus Grieved Over The Nation Of Israel (37-39) By the way, this is not the first time Jesus said this. He said these exact same words in **Lk. 13:34** some time earlier across the Jordan in Perea, before He came up to Jerusalem. Yet it bore repeating. This is one of the saddest pronouncements of doom in all the Word of God. It is poignant, moving. First of all, notice how:

1. He spoke to them as their Eternal God *How often would I have gathered your children together...* "I was there! I saw you kill the prophets and stone those I sent you! It was ME who sent them. I am the Eternal God, the Rock who followed you about in the wilderness, the Lord of Hosts who fought for you over and again against your enemies, God Almighty who rescued you time and again when you called to Me. I and the Father are One!" That's how Jesus speaks to them and now He says:

2. His Presence will leave them until the time of His return He would soon withdraw His presence completely, from the city and from the Temple. It would be left empty; God would no longer dwell there. As a nation, once they crucified their King, they would not see Him again until that day at the end of the Tribulation period when they will see Him coming in the clouds of heaven and will look on Him whom they had pierced and mourn for Him and will shout at last with genuine meaning the words they had so emptily cried the Sunday before, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!" But what I really want you to see is that Jesus:

3. He perpetually longed for them to truly belong to Him For all they had done, He didn't hate them; He loved them. He had longed for them, not just for 33 years while He walked the earth, but for centuries upon centuries as the Son of God in heaven; He had yearned to really gather Israel as a nation to Himself like a mother hen lovingly gathering her chicks under her wings and folding them to her breast. He longed to have their hearts truly and fully love Him. But they would not! They didn't want Him! I can almost see the tears, the tears of a Loving God who now has to literally put to death his own beloved people, Israel, because they just will not stop their heinous crimes against Him. And, there is the attitude we should have toward false religious leaders and enemies of all sorts who seek our harm. We ought not to hate them; despite all their hypocrisy, Jesus never hated the leaders of Israel; He longed for them even while He was condemning them! He longs for sinners of all types, hypocrites and enemies, terrorists and murderers, to

be saved, so, like Him, we ought to long for and pray for their salvation even though we have to condemn their actions and warn them of impending doom!

*During the American Revolution a Baptist pastor by the name of Peter Miller, lived and served in the town of Ephrata, Pennsylvania. He was also a personal friend of George Washington, General of the Continental Army. In Ephrata there also lived a man named Michael Wittman, an evil-minded fellow who did everything he could to oppose Peter's ministry and humiliate him. But as it turns out, Michael Wittman favored the British and helped them, so at length he was arrested for treason, taken to Philadelphia and sentenced to die. When Peter Miller learned of this, he traveled seventy miles on foot to Philadelphia, not to watch his enemy hang, but to appear before Washington to plead for the life of the traitor. General Washington responded, "No, Peter, I cannot grant you the life of your friend." "My friend!" exclaimed the preacher. "He's the bitterest enemy I have." "What?" cried Washington. "You've walked seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts the matter in different light. I'll grant the pardon." And he did. So, Peter Miller took Michael Wittman back home to Ephrata--no longer an enemy but a friend. [from *The Grace of Giving*, Stephen Olford] That's the heart Jesus had toward His opponents; He longed for their salvation; in fact, He died to provide it and as He did, He prayed, *Father forgive them, they don't know what they're doing*. That's the heart He wants in us.*

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Presentation Of The King - Mt. 21-25

The King Declares His Return - 24:1-44

Chapters 24-25 of Matthew have become known as The Olivet Discourse because they are an extended block of teaching that Jesus gave to His disciples as He sat on the Mount of Olives looking across the Kidron Valley at Jerusalem and the Temple. It was still Tuesday of Passion Week and the end of a long day of conflict with the Jewish leaders when His disciples asked him a question:

I. The Disciples' Question About Christ's Return (1-3) Jesus was leaving the Temple to go out to the Mount of Olives and Bethany after His scathing sermon against the Pharisees. The last thing He had said was, *your house is left to you desolate*. Of course, the disciples had heard this and approached Him to point out the magnificence of the great Temple buildings beside them. King Herod had built a magnificent Temple complex that was some 300 by 500 yards in size. The outer wall was three layers of blocks of hand-quarried white marble, some being as much as 60 feet long and 9 feet high, weighing several hundred tons each. It was one of the most magnificent buildings anywhere in the ancient world and the disciples were implying, "How can all this be left desolate? What do you mean?" You can easily understand how shocked they were when Jesus made it clear that all these massive stones would be knocked down, not one left upon another! So later on, out on the mount, they approached Him to ask a two part question, first, when would these things be, meaning the destruction of the city and the temple? Matthew didn't record Jesus' answer to that part of the question, but Luke did in 21:20-24, basically saying that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies, its inhabitants would fall by the sword and be led captive into all nations and Jerusalem would be trodden underfoot by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled. But the second half of their question was, what would be the sign of His *parousia*, His coming, and of the end of this age, when He would visibly set up the Kingdom of God on earth. That's what Jesus is explaining in Mt. 24, the time and nature of what we call His Return to earth. Of course, this is a relevant question for us too. Peter warned us that we will always have to deal with scoffers who will mock and say, "Where is this coming He promised?" [2 Pet. 3:3-4]. People today mock us for believing in Christ's return. Then, on the other hand, various supposedly Christian groups through the centuries have set and announced times for His coming and been proved wrong. Well, contained here is what Jesus Himself taught about His coming and the very first thing we read is that:

II. Jesus Warned Us NOT To Look For "Signs" In World Circumstances (4-14) Ever since I was young, I've heard evangelists use these verses and talk about wars and earthquakes and famines and how they are increasing as Jesus said and declare that these things are signs that His coming must be very, very soon. If you take time to actually read them, Jesus said exactly the opposite of that! He was saying that NONE of these things are signs of His coming! He was warning us that all of these things are a normal part of this evil world and we should expect them to happen. For instance:

1. He warned us to expect false messiahs (4-5) And from that day to this, there have been such. Wikipedia has a list of some 32 religious leaders who have claimed to be, or whose followers have claimed them to be, the reincarnation of Jesus Christ since 1800, including names like Sun Myung Moon, Jim Jones, and David Koresh! How many more must there have been in the 18 centuries before that! And each has indeed led many astray, but Jesus said, "This doesn't mean I'm coming; expect this to happen! Just don't believe any of them! I'm not coming back that way. My return will NOT be in the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg as The New Church over in Bryn Athyn teaches!" Then:

2. He warned us to expect many wars (6-7a) Every time a major war comes along and people's worlds fall apart, they want to see it as a sign of the end. But one source says there have been some 14,000 wars in recorded history. 66 million people died in World War II alone and since that war, there have been an average of 30 armed conflicts going every year. Jesus said, "Don't be alarmed; expect them; none of those are signs of the end!" Then:

3. He warned us to expect natural disasters (7b-8) When a volcano erupts and destroys a city or a tidal wave hits and wipes out thousands or an earthquake devastates a country, it seems natural for people to think, "This is it; this is the end of the world!" But the annual number of natural disasters recorded has averaged 384 per year over the last decade! Think how many thousands of them there have been since Jesus said this! Jesus said, "Expect them! They are not the 'sign'! They're just early labor pains compared to what will come upon the world later!" Then:

4. He warned us to expect much persecution (9-10) Persecution began with the Jews, but soon spread to the entire Roman Empire and lasted more than two hundred and fifty years! Surely some believers thought the end was coming! But it happened through the Middle Ages; it happened during Reformation times throughout Europe; it happened in China, Japan, the Soviet Union, India, the Ottoman Empire, and it is happening today. The number of believers who died for their faith in the last century is greater than the previous 19 combined! Of course, because of it many have fallen away into apostasy and betrayed and hated each other! But that is not the "sign" of His coming.

5. He warned us to expect wicked human behavior to increase (11-13) The cruelty of humankind is unbelievable. But the atrocities of Stalin and Hitler were nothing new. The genocides of Rwanda and Liberia are par for the course of history. Mankind is not growing infinitely worse; he's always been this bad! People look at the wickedness of their society and say, "How can it get any worse? Jesus HAS to come!" But this is not "the sign". In fact, Jesus was telling us NOT to look at any of the circumstances in the world that surrounds us as the sign of His coming! Rather, He was assuring us that, in spite of all these things, His purpose will be accomplished!

6. the Gospel WILL be proclaimed to ALL peoples before He returns (14) His instructions will be carried out and His purpose to make disciples of some from every people group on earth WILL happen before the end comes, so if you want to focus on something, focus on getting that job done; hasten His coming, as Peter put it, because Jesus said plainly that the end of this age will not come until every people in the whole world hears! But even that is not the "sign". He's just assuring us that He has a plan for human history and He will complete it before He intervenes and sets up His Kingdom, no matter WHAT happens in the world and actually, THROUGH what happens in the world! You see, many of us have been taught an imbalanced version of the doctrine of imminence, that is, the idea that Jesus could return at any moment and that this has always been true from the time He left. It sounds right, doesn't it? But think about it. Jesus told Peter in John 21 that Peter was going to grow old and die. So could Jesus have returned before Peter died? He told His disciples that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed by Gentile armies; that happened in AD 70. So, could Jesus have returned before AD 70? He told them of all the persecutions they would face in many nations, so could He have come before those persecutions happened? Or could he have come before all the wars, famines and earthquakes that He just said were going to happen? No. Then in Acts 1:8 He said *You WILL be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*. So, could He have returned before His disciples got to the ends of the earth?? No! Now here we read that the Gospel will be preached in the entire world to every people, so could He return until that's done? No! The Bible tells us to expect and wait for and watch for and prepare for His coming because we don't know WHEN it will be, but it also tells us that Jesus has a plan and a purpose for us, His church, that He's going to carry out and get done before He comes! Both are true! Then Jesus went on:

III. Jesus Detailed The Events That Immediately Precede His Return (15-28) He tells the disciples that when the time of His coming draws near, indeed:

1. there will be an identifiable "sign", an unmistakable sign (15). An abomination will stand in the Holy of Holies in God's temple. As Jesus hinted, **Dan. 9:27** gives us the key to understanding this sign; it says that at some time after Messiah has been cut off and the city of Jerusalem and the Temple have been destroyed, that a prince who shall come will desecrate the Temple (which will obviously have to be rebuilt in the future) by setting up an abomination in it. Paul explained this more clearly in **2 Thess. 2:3-4**, where he says that a man of lawlessness, a great leader who opposes God will sit in that Temple and declare himself to be God and demand worship! Then we move on to **Rev. 13:14-15** where John says that the **Antichrist, the end-time world leader, will desecrate God's temple** by setting up his own statue in it and giving the command to worship it, forcing that worship upon the people of Israel and the entire world. Jesus said, "Watch for that! It is clear and unmistakable! When you see a world leader in the Temple in Jerusalem proclaim himself God, don't hesitate for a moment; that's the first identifiable sign that My coming is actually close! And here's what to do when it happens":

2. the people of Israel will flee to the desert (16-20) The Israelites who, up until this time, had been experiencing freedom of worship by agreement with this man according to Daniel 9, will now realize who he is and they will run; they will flee from the city of Jerusalem to the hills, to the desert, where God will protect and hide many of them through the horrible time that is just beginning. We also read about this very event in **Rev. 12:13-14**, how God will help this remnant of Israel who will now believe and will protect them from the wrath of this world leader. Then, Jesus said:

3. there will be a time of "great" tribulation (21-22) It will be worldwide and horrible beyond anything that history has ever seen. And from Dan. 9:27 and Rev. 12:14 we know specifically that it will last 3 ½ years. Revelation tells us that

more than 1/3 of earth's population will die (imagine that - 2+ billion today!) and Jesus said if that period hadn't been limited to a short time that the human race wouldn't survive! Jesus also said that during that period:

4. there will be great danger of deception (23-26) - Rev. 13:13-14 tells us about a religious leader called THE false prophet and the great miracle-working powers he has, and the power of the strong delusion he will practice on the world. And he will not be the only one. Yet in that day, Christ's people do not have to be fooled. If they listen to what He has said, they will know that all of these rumors about His coming here or there are unfounded lies because:

IV. Jesus Described The Glorious Nature Of His Return (27-31) It will not be private or localized; His coming:

1. it will be accompanied by great heavenly signs (27, 29) Suddenly great signs will appear in the sky; the sun, the moon and the stars will all be affected. The universe will appear to be falling apart. It will be like a flash of lightning that appears to go from horizon to horizon; the whole world will see it and then will appear the real sign that His people have been waiting for:

2. Christ Himself will appear gloriously in the heavens (30) HE's the sign! When He shows up in the sky, coming on the clouds of heaven with the hosts of heaven following Him, there will be no mistake! The whole world will know who it is, because they've been told ahead of time and when they see Him coming in all His glory, they will mourn and wail because they know their doom is at hand. And when He comes:

3. all His enemies will be slain That's what verse (28) is about. **Rev. 19:17-18** describes how the vultures will gather to feast on the bodies of all the armies of earth that Christ will slay by the word of His mouth. And as all those who have rejected Him are being gathered to meet their doom:

4. all His remaining people will be gathered to Him (31) Those who have become believers during this awful time and have managed by the grace of God to somehow survive to this moment will be gathered together from all over the world into His presence to be commended and ushered into His Kingdom.

Now there is one thing I need to point out here. I'm sure some of you are asking, "But what about the Rapture of the Church? Isn't Jesus going to catch His church out of this world in an instant and take us all to heaven?" Yes, I believe He is! But Jesus Himself never taught about that particular truth. You won't find it in Matthew 24-25. God revealed that blessed truth later on through Paul in his letters. When His Church is complete, at the very beginning of the final seven years of human history, in my view, Jesus will Rapture His church out and spare her from the horrors of the Tribulation, but knowing that now, as we do, only serves to intensify what Jesus went on to say next.

V. Jesus Exhorted Us To Live Expecting His Return (32-44) That's the whole point. He didn't tell us all this just so we'd know the information. He told us so that we'd live in anticipation of His coming. Now notice that there is a distinction here:

1. the generation that sees the specific "sign" of verse 15 CAN anticipate His return (32-35) When the fig tree grows leaves in Palestine, it is an indicator that summer is near. We get that. When certain plants begin to grow or trees begin to bud, we know that spring is coming. The things that Jesus spelled out will be signs just like that. Those believers who are alive at the time when the world leader defiles and desecrates the Temple with his statue and demands that everyone worship him, will be able to anticipate the time of His return. That will be a concrete marker that will tell them His return is literally drawing near. In fact, if they are real students of the Scriptures, they would even be able to know that there are 3 ½ years left until His coming. And Jesus gave them further assurance in verse 34. That future generation of believers, the one that sees these events will not die out or be destroyed before He comes, no matter how awful their circumstances! They have His Word on it, which is the surest thing in all the universe, more permanent than heaven and earth! So, in that day they will be able to know with certainty that He's coming very soon and these words will be their greatest encouragement. Yet even as He said that, Jesus was adamant that:

2. we absolutely CANNOT know the time of His return (36) And yet, ever since Jesus' time, people have claimed to know it. One website lists some 250 individual years in which some group or other predicted Christ's return, the most popular being the years 1,000 AD and 2,000 AD. One group alone, Jehovah's Witnesses, predicted Christ's return nine times, in 1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975, and 1984. Harold Camping of Family Radio predicted it three separate times, most recently May 21, 2011 and Oct. 21, 2011. When are we going to learn to simply believe what Jesus said: NOBODY KNOWS! No human being, not even the angels, not even Jesus Himself at that moment in His human self-limitation. The Father has reserved that for Himself alone. We cannot know the time of Christ's coming, but you see, that's the whole point! First of all:

a. His arrival will be unexpected by the world (37-41) People in Noah's day didn't believe him that a great flood was coming. So, they went on with life as normal, doing all the things they normally did until it began to rain and it was too late. The flood came as an unexpected surprise to them and that's how it will be at Jesus' coming. Despite the fact that the world has been warned, they won't believe it either and will go on with life, ignoring it, until they see Him coming and then it will be too late. By the way, verses 40 and 41 are not about believers being raptured out; they are about non-believers being swept away to judgment suddenly at His coming. The world will not expect Him to come! But Jesus said:

b. we must be perpetually ready because we do not know the time (42-44) I think most of us have faced either the reality or the possibility of someone breaking into our home. If you knew WHEN the thief was coming, you'd have the police there waiting. You'd wait till that specific time and prepare. But suppose you only knew THAT the thief was coming, but not WHEN. What would you do? You'd watch the whole night, every night, wouldn't you? That's our situation. Because we do not know when the time is, we can't say, "I'll wait and prepare later because I know when it's going to happen." God purposely withheld that information from us, so that we would not put off getting our lives in order until the last minute, but would instead live in a constant state of readiness. The only logical thing for us to do is to be ready every moment, watching, waiting for, expecting His coming! And this is especially true for us, because we know we'll be raptured out *before* the identifiable sign, the desecration of the Temple even happens!

May 19 of the year 1780 is known as New England's Dark Day. An abnormal darkening of the daytime sky was observed over the New England states and parts of Canada. Samuel Williams wrote, *In some places, the darkness was so great, that persons could not see to read common print in the open air, for several hours together.* An eyewitness, Samuel Tenney, wrote, *The darkness of the following evening was probably as gross as ever has been observed since the Almighty gave birth to light. It wanted only palpability to render it as extraordinary, as that which overspread the land of Egypt in the days of Moses if every luminous body in the universe had been shrouded in impenetrable shades, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper held within a few inches of the eyes was equally invisible with the blackest velvet.* Timothy Dwight wrote: *Candles were lighted in many houses; the birds were silent and disappeared, and the fowls retired to roost. The legislature of Connecticut was then in session at Hartford. A very general opinion prevailed, that the day of judgment was at hand.* The hearts of many were filled with fear and expected the coming of Christ in judgment at any moment. The house of Representatives, being unable to transact their business, adjourned. A proposal to adjourn the Governor's Council was under consideration. Among the members was Col. Abraham Davenport, who has become famous for his devout response, as he rose and said, *I am against an adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause of an adjournment: if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty.* John Greenleaf Whittier later paraphrased Abraham Davenport's response in his famous poem, *This well may be The Day of Judgment which the world awaits; But be it so or not, I only know my present duty, and my Lord's command to occupy till He come. So at the post where He hath set me in His providence, I choose, for one, to meet Him face to face, no faithless servant frightened from my task, but ready when the Lord of the harvest calls; and therefore, with all reverence, I would say, let God do His work, we will see to ours. Bring in the candles.* And they did. Dear friends, let us not look for useless signs and live in fear of His coming; rather let us live every day, as Paul put it, *...self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ - Titus 2:12-13.*

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Presentation Of The King - Mt. 21-25

The King Warns Of His Return - 24:45-25:30

Just a reminder as we begin that it is still Tuesday evening of Passion Week and as the sun goes down at the end of a long day for Jesus, He is sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking across the Kidron Valley at Jerusalem and the Temple, glowing in the setting sun, and giving his disciples a long block of teaching about His return that we call The Olivet Discourse. His disciples had asked Him what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age and Jesus had warned them not to look for signs in the circumstances of the world around them, described the nature of His coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and then made the blunt declaration in verse 36 that NO ONE knows the day or the hour! No one! Then, He moved on to His real point in verse 44, *Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.* We, His followers, must live in perpetual readiness for His return, and Jesus went on to emphasize that three more times by telling them three stories, the parables of the Faithful Manager, the Ten Virgins and the Talents. These three familiar parables warn us how we should live in light of the fact that Jesus will return and we don't know when that will be. In the first story, Jesus tells us that:

I. Faithful Managers Fulfill Their Responsibilities Until He Comes (45-51) It's a hypothetical story about a man who is evidently well-to-do and has a sizeable property which is operated by an extended household staff of servants who work the fields, care for the animals and attend the house. Because he is going away, he chooses one of them and puts him in charge of managing the whole operation until he returns, without specifying when that will be. Then Jesus paints two possible scenarios. One person might be a:

1. the faithful and wise servant (45-47) When his master left, he gave the servant certain responsibilities. He was to feed and care for the other servants and manage the household. And because he is faithful and also wise, he does what we are supposed to do as followers Jesus. He knows his master is coming back and that he will be required to give account so:

a. he carries out his responsibilities in his Master's absence The time drags on and the Master doesn't come back; the days turn into months and then into years, but that doesn't matter. He simply keeps on doing every day the things he was told to do, so it actually doesn't matter what day the master returns; he'll find the manager faithfully carrying out his assigned duties. But Jesus says that in the end:

b. he will be rewarded with great responsibility at the Master's return When the Master does come, he will be very pleased. Because He has found that the servant can be trusted, He will put him in charge of everything He has, just as Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything in his house there in Egypt because he had been found faithful. And the servant will be truly happy together with his Master from then on. That's one scenario; but what if the person left in charge is actually a:

2. the wicked servant (48-51) Notice that Jesus says this servant is a wicked servant to start with. He pretends to serve his Master but is actually not a true servant in his heart; he doesn't love or care about his Master or his Master's affairs. Jesus calls him a hypocrite, an actor, one who is pretending to be something he is not; it's the exact charge He made against the Pharisees. So, while the Master is gone:

a. he lives a wicked life as though the Master will not return He may behave well for a little while out of fear, but he trusts his eyes more than the Master's word, and after while, he comes to actually believe the Master isn't coming back. He is a false servant who in reality is only serving himself. So he takes license and abuses the other servants and lives any way he feels like, drinking and carousing, living a life of sin, because he has forgotten the Master is coming. And yet one day it happens; unexpectedly the Master comes and Jesus says:

b. he will be destroyed and lost eternally when the Master returns He'll be cut in pieces, that is, killed, when the Lord returns, and then cast into hell with the other hypocrites where he belongs! What a strong warning!

But please understand what Jesus is saying here. Real believers are wise managers who faithfully keep on carrying out their responsibilities for Christ until He comes. Those who claim to be Christ's servants but live like the devil are, in reality, wicked hypocrites headed for judgment and had better wake up before He comes or they die! *A woman once asked John Wesley, the itinerant Methodist preacher, "What if you knew you were to die at 12 o'clock tomorrow night? How would you spend the intervening time?" "How, Madam?" he replied. "Why, just as I intend to spend it now. I'd preach tonight at Gloucester, and again tomorrow morning. After that I would ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the societies in the evening. I would then go to the home of my friend Martin who expects to entertain me, converse and pray with his family as usual, retire to my room at 10 o'clock, commend myself to my Heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in Glory!"* John Wesley was a faithful and wise manager; he lived in a prepared fashion. It didn't matter whether or not he knew when he was going to die or when the Lord was going to return. He was about his Master's business day after day, continually carrying out the responsibilities the Lord had given him, even in His absence. That's what true servants, faithful servants do. Are you one of those? Now in the second story, Jesus teaches us that:

II. Wise Attendants Prepare Their Hearts Now Before He Comes (1-13) However, in order to understand the Parable of the Ten Virgins, it helps to know a bit about:

1. the background of the story (1) There is a wedding about to happen, but it is nothing like our weddings. The groom has traveled to the bride's home to get her and to bring her back with him to his house to celebrate the wedding feast. As he arrives, there is to be a festive procession and it is at night, so lamps are needed to light the street. They were probably simple small clay vessels with a rounded lip and a wick going down into a reservoir where the oil was. The whole thing was attached to a pole to be held up and carried to shed light on the way. The ten virgins are probably young acquaintances of the bride who have been specially invited to serve as attendants to carry the lamps. Now the bridegroom, of course, represents Christ and He is talking about His coming, His return. But beyond that, it's best to realize, when trying to understand parables, that they are constructed to make one particular point and not to try to assign meaning to every detail, such as why there were 10 or the fact that they are called virgins. These details are simply part of the setting of the story and probably represent something normal in that day. The detail we ARE to pay attention to is in (2-4). Some of them were wise attendants and some were not. Why? What's the difference? Look carefully at verse 3:

2. the foolish ones made NO personal preparation for the Groom's coming *They took NO oil with them!* It doesn't say that they didn't take extra oil with them or enough oil with them; they brought their lamps and went to the groom's house but took NO oil. Why not? Evidently, they either figured it would be supplied for them out of some common store at the house or they simply didn't care enough to even think about it! They took no personal responsibility to make sure they were prepared and ready to do their part when the groom showed up and needed them. But the wise attendants cared enough to make sure of it; they took their own oil. They made sure their lamps would work; they prepared for it personally. Now in the story:

3. the Groom's coming was delayed a long time (5) The distance that He had to travel must have been very far, so far that the time of His arrival can't be known and as the hours drag on and it is dark and the rest of the world goes off to bed, the girls naturally get sleepy and actually doze off. He doesn't show up until midnight! Notice that in all three of

these stories, Jesus was pretty openly implying that His coming, His return, was going to be long delayed! It was not going to be immediate, right away; in fact, it was going to be so long delayed that people would naturally give up looking for it, that they would grow tired and fall asleep, as it were. However, at last:

4. the Groom arrived suddenly and unexpectedly (6-9) A messenger was sent ahead to the Groom's house at midnight to call the attendants. They were to rush out and down the street to meet the procession and light the way. So, they all woke up and hastily lit their lamps but the foolish attendants discovered that their lamps lit from the oil residue in the wicks but wouldn't stay lit. They had no oil and in that moment:

a. there was no time to prepare There was no time to go buy some, which they should have done in the first place. Their opportunity to get truly ready was past, so in desperation, they begged the wise attendants to share theirs, but found that:

b. they could not be supplied by those who HAD prepared Each had only enough for themselves to do what the Bridegroom required, not enough for two! So off they ran trying desperately to find someone who was still awake to sell them some oil. But in the meantime, the procession arrived and:

5. they were shut out from the wedding feast (10-12) We don't know whether they found oil or not, but it was too late. The whole point of their being attendants was over anyway; the procession was done. Yet they pound on the door and say, "Lord, Lord, open up for us too!" But He says, "Depart from me, I never knew you!" Does that phrase sound familiar? Jesus had used it before in another famous sermon. Look back with me to **7:21-23**. There will be many people who look like attendants, who seem to have lamps. They go to church. They do this or that thing that looks like Christian service. But they have no oil! So many times in Scripture, oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit and I think that must be the case here, because Jesus is saying, "I don't know you; I never had a relationship with you! You gave the appearance of religiosity, but My Holy Spirit doesn't live in you! You're an empty sputtering lamp, not a lamp set on a lampstand giving My light to the world. You haven't prepared your heart by inviting Me in and when I come it will be too late! There will be no time then to prepare and you can't get into My Kingdom on somebody else's coattails! It doesn't matter if your parents were real believers; it doesn't matter if your children or your siblings or your friends are real believers who know Me. You can't get into My House and be part of the great Kingdom feast I am planning unless I know YOU! You'll be shut outside in the darkness!" And then Jesus gave the punchline for us (**13**). Here's:

6. the point: What does *watch* mean? Well, in this story it can't simply mean, "Stay awake." It must mean, "Be prepared; be ready to go into the feast! Put oil in your lamp; genuinely know Him so that you're ready whenever He comes and don't put it off, because you don't know when your time will be up!" **We must be personally and individually prepared for Christ's coming** by having a real, genuine relationship with Him.

C.S. Lewis put it like this: When the author walks onto the stage, the play is over. God is going to invade, all right; but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else comes crashing in? This time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. Get the oil. Choose to know Him! Now on to the third story where Jesus teaches us that:

III. Faithful Stewards Advance His Cause Until He Comes (14-30) (*read 14-15*) Now we're back almost to the scenario of the first parable, a wealthy man going away for a while on business and leaving His servants. But what we don't recognize at first glance is that in this story:

1. the Master entrusted an immense amount to His servants Please understand that the English word *talent*, meaning a skill or ability, is not at all meant here. A talent is a unit of monetary value in silver or gold that is roughly equivalent to 6,000 Roman denarii, that is, 6,000 days wages for a common laborer. So, to find its equivalent, let's use an average wage today of \$100 a day. At that rate the first servant was entrusted with 5 talents, or the equivalent of about 3 million dollars! The second, with 2 talents, was entrusted with 1.2 million and the third with a mere \$600,000. Jesus deliberately painted this Master as being exorbitantly rich! But he was not simply giving each of them a quantity of his wealth to keep safe and watch over:

a. He expected them to use it to advance His purposes He expected them to act in His place with it, as He would act with it, in order to earn more for him, to invest in things that produced income, to buy property and sell it at a profit, to buy crops at harvest and sell them later in winter for an increase. In short, this was the business opportunity of a lifetime to serve their master; of course, all the profits would belong to him as the owner. Then notice that, as he entrusted his wealth to them:

b. He distributed it according to their capacity to serve He gave one five talents because in his estimation that fellow had the ability and the drive to use it all and multiply it and make him money. The second guy didn't have the same ability so he didn't give him more than he could handle and the third, even less. The point is that he really knew his servants and outfitted them accordingly with as much as they needed to serve his cause well. But:

2. the behavior of the servants displayed what was in their hearts What they did with what they were given showed their true nature:

a. the good and faithful ones eagerly pursued their Master's gain (16-17) The first two set right to work. They loved their Master and recognized what a huge amount of trust He had placed in them and set out to do their best to please him and increase his wealth. But the third guy:

b. the wicked and lazy servant pursued his own purposes completely (18) He didn't do anything for his master while he was gone. He dug a hole and buried the money to make sure he wouldn't get blamed for losing it, but then he went off and did whatever he felt like doing instead of what the Master expected him to do. He probably thought, "Why should I go to all that work and invest all that effort when in the end it won't belong to me anyway! He not only didn't love the Master and care about his well-being; he was too lazy to do even the least little bit. Well:

3. the Master delayed coming for a long time (just as in the two previous parables) **but then settled accounts (19)** His coming was a day of reckoning, a day of accounting for what each of his servants had done with what he had entrusted to them. And on that day:

a. the faithful servants were rewarded equally (20-23) He praised both of them the same. The one had gained more, but only because he had been given more. Both had been equally diligent and faithful in using what they'd been given, so they were rewarded:

(1) by being entrusted with even greater future responsibilities He said, "You've been faithful over A LITTLE; all of these millions, as great as they seem to you, are but a drop in the bucket of my resources. I will entrust to you much more than this now!" But that's not all! They were rewarded:

(2) by entering fully into the Master's joy In the end, all that labor was not only to benefit the Master; it would benefit and bless them both! Together they would enjoy and share **all He has!** They would be together, partners in the Master's enterprises forever!

Oh, do you see what the Lord is telling you here? You, His servant, have been entrusted with immeasurably much in life to serve Him for His glory. Yes, for some it may be money, but it includes everything, your time, your abilities, your situation, your personality, your possessions. And while He is away from you, He desires you to use it all to advance His glory, to bring souls to faith, to send the Gospel to the ends of the earth, to gather as many worshippers into His Kingdom as you possibly can, because that is HIS purpose. And if you love Him and are faithful to put what He has given you to His intended use, when He comes, He will reward you wonderfully! Who can comprehend the eternal enterprises over which He has determined to place you as you reign with Him?! You will share forever in the joy which the Lord Jesus Himself has as a full partner, as one with Him forever! Hallelujah! But for the last guy it is not so. Skip to the end and you'll see that:

b. the wicked servant was destroyed eternally (30) Just like in the first two parables, he is shut out from his Master's presence to suffer forever. Why? Not because he didn't make enough money, but because of his wicked heart! We read here that:

(1) he was without excuse before his Master (24-27) He had the nerve to blame the Master, to accuse the Master who had given him all those resources of being mean and hard hearted and greedy, of wanting it all for himself! But the Master says, "If you really believed that, you would have at least loaned it out at interest because you were scared of Me, but you didn't even do that much! You don't love Me! You're simply wicked and lazy and have to be destroyed!" And so:

(2) he forfeited the opportunity that grace had given him (28-29) What he could have shared in forever was taken away and given to someone else, to one who had proved faithful. He passed up and wasted the gracious opportunity that had been given to him in life.

And so, there are people that go through this life, having been immeasurably blessed by the Lord with all that He knows they could use for His glory, but they choose not to do anything for Him with it and either expect Him to be satisfied with that or simply don't care. They spend their life living for themselves. Yet, at His coming they will be without excuse and suffer eternally. Real believers, true sons and servants of the Lord, advance His cause with everything they've got. *David Livingstone is probably one of the most well-known missionary figures of all time. He was a missionary doctor who gave 37 years of his life to service in the heart of Africa, which in 1840 was an unexplored and deadly place. His accomplishments are legend and so were his awful sufferings. He died in 1873 on his knees beside his rough bed with his head buried in his hands upon his pillow in the act of prayer. His faithful followers removed his heart and buried it in Africa as a symbolic gesture before sending his body back to England. David Livingstone was a tremendous example of one who used all he had been given for the glory of God. He wrote this: "I place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of God. If anything will advance the interests of the kingdom, it shall be given away or kept, only as by giving or keeping it I shall most promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time or eternity."* That

is the heart that Christ wants in all His servants and if we have that kind of heart in life, He will one day say, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into My joy!*

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Presentation Of The King - Mt. 21-25

The King Describes His Return - 25:31-46

There are three core articles of our faith that we should express over and over again. On Good Friday we remember with solemnity the truth that Christ died for our sins. On Easter Sunday we confess with joy the truth that Christ is risen from the dead! But because we have no holiday to remind us of the third truth, we often forget it. Yet for many years our Catholic friends have repeated this "memorial acclamation" in every service: *Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.* Say it with me: *Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.* That's what we celebrate today. Those three items summarize the fullness of God's plan of redemption for the world. The Resurrection was not the end of the story; it is immediately and directly tied to the third event. Our friends go on to confess: *Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory!* That is what the resurrection of Jesus Christ points to! Because He is alive, He will return! And that is what the 25th chapter of Matthew so clearly declares:

I. Jesus Will Return In Glory To Set Up His Kingdom On Earth (31) What kind of person sits on a throne? A King! Jesus is King! That is theme of Matthew's whole Gospel and one day He is going to return to this earth in great glory. He will come on the clouds of heaven for every eye to see; He will come with all the myriads of angels at heels. And He will set up His Kingdom on this very earth and reign as King of the world! A throne will be placed, a glorious throne. Zechariah said, *On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east... the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.... On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light. On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem.... And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.* - 14:5-9. And today we know His name will be JESUS! He will rule the world! Hallelujah! Now I'd like us to look together at:

II. The Promise Jesus Will Fulfill As He Sets Up His Kingdom Turn with me to **Is. 25:6-9**. God impressed these verses on me several months ago to share with you today; I never really focused on them before, but Isaiah says:

1. death is like a shroud which blankets all the peoples of the earth All human beings die, no matter their race, no matter the language they speak, no matter where they live on the planet. Death enfolds them all. But on that mountain where Jerusalem sits, Jesus did what God had promised:

a. at Calvary He destroyed death - 2 Tim. 1:10 says *...our Savior Christ Jesus, ...abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* By His death for our sins, Jesus **de-activated** death; He made it powerless, ineffective. He put death out of business. How? Because the sting of death is sin! And without that stinger to fill us with its awful poison and kill us eternally, death is just a de-fanged snake, a toothless lion. Because we believe in Jesus, we live even though we die! He said we will never die in eternity (Jn. 11:25-26). Our body may perish, but we live forever with Him. Yet that is not the full promise. Isaiah said that on that same mountain:

b. at His coming Jesus will swallow up death forever Paul told us that the last enemy that God plans to destroy is death itself in **1 Cor. 15:26**. When does that happen? Well for today, let's not worry about the prophetic details like the timing of the Rapture and so on. Let's simply say it happens at the end of the age when Jesus comes and in the twinkling of an eye raises our dead bodies so that they are imperishable. *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written [here by Isaiah]: "Death is swallowed up in victory."* - **1 Cor. 15:54**. Death will be swallowed up forever! It will be gone! There will be no more death, John said; it will no longer rule over the human race. But Isaiah also said in verse 6 that on that very mountain:

2. Jesus is preparing a Kingdom feast He is preparing a royal celebration, the likes of which has never been seen, with only the best of food and drink. When He comes, all of His people will sit down with Him at the feast in the Kingdom of God to celebrate His Reign and their union with Him. It's a feast **for those who worship Him from all peoples to enjoy**. Jesus described it this way, *I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven...people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.* - **Mt. 8:11, Luke 13:29**. Because the Good News of the Kingdom, that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ is coming again, has been preached in all the world as a witness to every people, believing worshippers from every people on earth will be there at the great feast to celebrate and what a grand day that will be! The great Old Testament figures will be there; the apostles and the heroes of the New Testament will be there; saints from every age, from every place on earth, from every people will gather round, and best of all, WE'LL be there in the midst of it with our beloved Jesus! Do you see, that is the point of God's whole plan? *Dying He destroyed our*

death, rising He restored our life. So we eagerly shout: Lord Jesus, come in glory! Fulfill your promise! Give yourself the desire of your heart; gather all of us, your worshippers to you to celebrate in Your Kingdom! But now let's go back to our text in Matthew 25 and look at how this all begins. **(31-32a)**. Of course, those of us who die before He comes will either be instantly with Him in heaven or apart from Him in hell. At death there is no delay, no waiting, but here Jesus is describing what will happen to that generation of people who are still alive when He comes to earth, those who have survived through that awful period of tribulation He described in 24:21-22, to see Him coming on the clouds of heaven and be enthroned. At that time:

III. Every Living Person Will Be Gathered Before Jesus Paul told the Athenians that God *...has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.* - **Acts 17:31**. This is that day! And the Man appointed to judge the world is sitting on the throne of the world and all the living people in the world will be immediately brought before Him for judgment. People can believe whatever they want, but JESUS is the One before whom they will stand! God declared it to all the world for all time by raising Him from the dead! Now remember that by the time of His coming:

1. all the peoples of the earth will have heard the Gospel, according to what Jesus said earlier in this Discourse in **24:14**. As I mentioned, the Gospel WILL be preached to all peoples on earth. They will all hear that He died, that He rose and that He is coming again to set up His Kingdom and reign. There will be no question of ignorance; that generation will KNOW and will have the choice to either follow Him or reject the message. So therefore:

2. all the peoples of the earth will be judged by their response to Jesus When He addresses them in a moment, you'll hear Him say, "Here is what you did to ME!" Or "Here is what you didn't do to ME!" The popular misconception is that when a person stands before God, He will evaluate the nature of all the things they have done, whether they are good or bad, and on that basis the person will be judged. In reality, God judges all human beings on the basis of one issue alone: what they have done with JESUS! When you die or when Jesus comes, the question will not be that of Santa Claus, "Were you a good boy or girl?" Jesus' question is, "What did you do with ME?" And on that basis:

IV. Jesus Will Separate All The People Into Two Categories (32b-33) In the countryside sheep and goats graze all commingled together over the pasture during the day, but at night the shepherd often separates them one from the other. He stands at the opening of the fold with his staff as they come in and one by one pushes the sheep to one side and the goats to the other, into the flocks where they truly belong. Just so, when He comes, Jesus will separate all the people of the world gathered before Him into two groups and:

1. He will sentence them to their respective destinies

a. those who truly belong to Him will enter His Kingdom (34) He will say to the sheep, the ones who heard the message and became His true followers, "Come to the feast! Come to the banquet I've prepared! Come with Me and live in My Kingdom; live in My transformed world where the lion will lie down with the lamb and the little child will play near the serpent's den, where justice rolls down like waters and the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea! My Father has planned this before He even created the world and now, He will make it the way He really intended it to be. He has planned for you to be part of it. Come enter into My joy with Me!" But now skip ahead to **(41)**. Sadly:

b. those who do not belong to Him will be banished to hell, to a place of everlasting fire. It was never even meant for human beings. It was prepared as a place of eternal punishment for Satan himself and for the demons who followed him at his fall. Yet those who have chosen to reject the King and not follow him, fall under the same curse and share the same awful destiny. They are separated from His presence forever in that place where He Himself warned that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm does not die and the fire is never quenched.

Now the surprising thing as Jesus explains all this to His disciples is how strongly He emphasizes the basis on which He does the separating, on how He tells a sheep from a goat. He declares that:

2. their response to His "brothers" proves the condition of their hearts To the sheep He says... **(35-40)** and to the goats He says the reverse **(42-45)**. Both groups are surprised by His words and we too would have to admit that they're not exactly what we would expect Him to say on that day. So, let's take a moment to examine them carefully. The first question is, "Who's He talking about when He says *the least of these, My brothers?*" Well, it seems to me that:

a. His "brothers" are His followers, whom He said would suffer persecution back in **24:9**, *Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.* We know from other Scriptures that the awful period just before Christ comes will be a time of terrible persecution for His followers. So here we find them described as hungry and thirsty, as forced from their homes to flee as strangers who need shelter, without clothing, some who are sick and even some who've been captured and held in prison. Many of His followers suffer greatly because of their faith even today. Just on Friday I read this plea for prayer from India: *Last night, a family of new believers sat down to eat dinner when a religious fanatic group suddenly entered their home and attacked the father, mother and three children. One daughter's hand was broken; their son fell unconscious; and the mother lost her hand completely. The father and another daughter were also badly beaten. All five*

have been admitted to the hospital for treatment. The persecutors are ...now searching for the family's pastor, but having heard the group's plans, Pastor Chaarudatt has left the village. Oh, pray for this dear family, for their pastor and the other believers in that village! They are our brothers and sisters; they are "the least of these". But as badly as Jesus' followers suffer today, it will be far worse and spread worldwide during that end time. And how others respond to His followers who suffer, will display what's truly in their hearts. Now please understand that:

b. people are NOT saved or lost simply because of their treatment of sufferers Jesus is not generically saying, "You can enter My kingdom merely on the basis that you were nice to people who suffer." Lots of people help other people who suffer, but want nothing to do with Jesus. Millions, even billions, of dollars are given every year by people to charities which feed the poor or care for orphans or help victims of natural disaster, and a tremendous amount of it is given by people with no belief at all in Jesus. People with no knowledge of Christ at all even give their lives to rescue others as soldiers or police or firefighters. But the Scripture is adamant everywhere that salvation is not by our works; Jesus Himself said clearly that no one comes to the Father except through Him, so He can't be saying here, "Just be good to others and you'll get in!" What He's declaring is that:

c. people who truly know Jesus compassionately care for suffering believers, who are their own brothers The writer of Hebrews speaks about this. He writes: *Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.* - **Heb. 10:32-34 NLT**. True believers have always stood staunchly alongside their brothers who were suffering, risking ridicule and jail and even their own lives because they loved their brethren so dearly. And those who were not genuine fall away, turn their backs and dissociate themselves to save their own hides. Those counted as sheep at Christ's return are those who have proved their faith real by being willing to identify themselves with and aid their despised, persecuted brothers regardless of the great personal risk it entailed. Those counted as goats stood by, watched the followers of Christ suffer greatly and either were themselves part of doing the persecuting, or cheered it on or simply did nothing because their hearts were far from Him. In both cases their actions proved unmistakably what was in their hearts. But notice that the response of both groups is exactly the same: *Lord, when did we see YOU hungry or thirsty or sick or in prison?* "We saw PEOPLE like that; we saw Your followers like that, but when did we see YOU?" And His punchline is the same to both: "That WAS ME! I was IN THEM. When you reacted to them, you reacted to ME!"

d. the surprise is over how personally He identifies Himself with His people in their suffering In the early days of the church, Saul was hotly persecuting followers of Christ, dragging them off to prison and death. But when Jesus appeared and brought him to his knees on the road to Damascus, He said, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME?* - **Acts 9:4**. "What you're doing to them, you're doing to ME!" And that's exactly what He will say on that last day, "What you did to them, you did to ME! They are My body; I am IN them. When you stood with them, you stood with ME; when you rejected them, you rejected ME!"

O dear brother or sister, are you suffering today as you follow Him? So is HE! He is with you; He is in you. You and He are ONE. So, in all your affliction, HE is afflicted too! He is truly touched with the feeling of your infirmities, not because He is sympathetic, but because He actually FEELS them too! What happens to you happens to Him and He who touches you, touches the pupil of HIS eye! Jesus could have left that whole part out about seeing Him. He could have skipped right from verse 34 to verse (46). But He didn't; He put those words in there for you! He put them there so that you would know that when you suffer for His sake, that you are sharing in the very sufferings of Christ. And your great hope is this: the King is coming again and when He does, He is going to hold the whole world accountable for it! Then, lastly, as we just read:

V. Jesus' Pronouncement Will Be Eternal As the righteous who know Him go into the great feast in His Kingdom, they'll be singing the words of Is. 25:9, *It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."* For 2000 years the followers of Jesus have been waiting patiently, suffering awful things, but all the while continuing to confess their faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ is coming again! On that day the long wait will be over at last and their joy in the life in His Kingdom will be eternal. Nothing will ever change it. But sadly, the lost will go away into everlasting punishment, which nothing can change. On that day it will be forever too late for them, which is why we have to plead with them to believe now!

I know it is not very popular any more to believe that there is a hell. And I know it's also not very popular to believe that Jesus is literally going to come again and rule the world, either. Our culture dismisses both of those things as ancient myths or tries to symbolize them away. But these are the words of Jesus Himself and He said in this very discourse, *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* - 24:35. Every one of us has to choose, "Do I believe the words of Jesus or don't I?" Is He an outright liar? Or is He a self-deluded lunatic who predicted ridiculous things about

Himself? Or is He really the King who is coming again? As for me, I believe the Scriptures: Christ HAS died, Christ IS risen and, absolutely, Christ IS coming again!

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The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Passion Of The King - Mt. 26-28

The King Is Betrayed - 26:1-35

Now we are going to focus on the last three chapters where Matthew shares with us his record of The Passion Of The King, the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. In the first half of Chapter 26 the focus that Matthew obviously wants to highlight for us is how Jesus was betrayed by Judas. That has always been one of the great enigmas of Jesus' life. How is possible that one of His own chosen Twelve would deliberately sell him out and betray Him to His enemies after having walked with Him so closely for three years? We can hardly fathom such a thing and we quickly assign Judas the lowest place in hell in our minds, as Dante did in his *Inferno*. It never crosses our minds that we might have done the same. We pick up the story on Tuesday evening of that last week of Jesus' life where Matthew tells us of:

I. The Preparation For His Betrayal After a long day of intense opposition and interaction with the Jewish leaders, Jesus is just about to leave the city as He did each night when He makes a very specific:

1. His prediction to the disciples (1-2) This was not the first time Jesus had told them about being handed over or betrayed to His enemies. He had said it to them back in Galilee months earlier in 17:22 and then again as they were on the way up to Jerusalem for the Triumphal Entry the previous Sunday in 20:18. But now He sets the time; this betrayal will happen in just two days, during the celebration of the Passover. Jesus obviously knew *that* it would happen, *when* it would happen and *who* would do it. Having just left His enemies' presence, He is somberly saying to His disciples, "In two days I'm going to be betrayed into their hands. Get ready. Expect it." But at the same time, as Jesus was preparing His disciples for it, Matthew tells us of:

2. the plotting by His enemies (3-5) After His scathing sermon against them recorded in chapter 23 earlier that day, the Jewish leaders were really hot. As the day was ending, they met together and were literally plotting a way to arrest Jesus and have Him killed. But they would not do it openly; they were afraid of the people. So, they were planning to do it secretly, privately, but AFTER the 7-day feast of Passover was complete and Jerusalem would be emptied of all its pilgrims, so that the popular support for Jesus displayed at His Triumphal Entry would be gone. Little did they dream that God would move their time frame closer for them momentarily, when an inside accomplice from among Jesus' own disciples would show up to help them!

But to set the stage for that encounter, Matthew now flashes back to an event that John 12 tells us actually happened on the Saturday night previous. Verse (6). Jesus *HAD BEEN* a dinner guest at this man Simon's house. John tells us that His good friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus were there too. Martha, as always, was busy helping serve and Lazarus was enjoying the meal with him around the table when an unexpected incident occurred:

II. The Incident That Alienated Judas from Jesus. As they were eating, we read of:

1. Mary's lavish anointing of Jesus (6-7) John's detailed version tells us that the woman was Mary and she had an *alabastron*, an alabaster box, a stone flask, and in it was sealed a pound of very precious ointment made from pure nard. This fragrant perfume was probably imported by traders from India and was extremely expensive, worth a year's wages. What's that? Maybe \$30,000 or \$40,000 in our money? We don't know how she came by it or how long she'd had it, but it was evidently something Mary treasured and had saved for a very special occasion. And for her, this night was that occasion. She broke the flask open and poured its precious content, first on Jesus' head and then on His feet as He lay reclining at the table. Then she bowed her head and wiped His feet dry with her own hair. The fragrance welled up and filled the whole house. What a touching act born out of love and devotion! It was as though she is saying with the songwriter, *All I once held dear, built my life upon, All this world reveres and wars to own, All I once thought gain, I have counted loss, spent and worthless now, compared to this.... Knowing YOU, Jesus, knowing You; there is no greater thing!* What a way of saying, "I love you, Lord!" The room was filled with Jesus' disciples. You would think someone would have applauded. You would think someone would have said, "Oh how sweet, how lovely! How generous! See how she loves Him!" But not one did. Many of them began to murmur against her and the next voice we hear is:

2. Judas' indignant objection [with the other disciples] (8-9) Let's read the whole story in **John 12:4-6**. Judas is the one who spoke up to criticize her. He called it a waste. He said it could have been sold and just think how many poor people it would have fed, just think what better use we could have made of that! But he said it, not because he cared about poor people, but because he was a thief! He kept the money bag for Jesus and the disciples and throughout their journeys he repeatedly found ways to help himself to what was in it. This was big money being poured on the ground before his eyes; it was the opportunity of a lifetime for a man like him. So he cried out, he raised an objection, not for the poor, but for the satisfaction of his own greed. And the rest joined in, but not Jesus. Listen to:

3. Jesus' strong rebuke (10-13) Mark and John say that Jesus' first words were *Leave her alone!* Then He said literally, *Why are you beating on her, why are you cutting on her...* His words were sharp and strong. "Stop it! Stop hurting her! She is right to do this!" Mary was the only one who really listened. For months He had been telling His disciples that He was going up to Jerusalem to die. They still didn't get it. But she understood; she believed His Word. She couldn't save Him or spare Him from death, but she did what she could. She poured out this precious perfume to anoint His body ahead of time for His burial, just as though He were already lying there dead. Freely and out of love for Him, she poured out everything she had in this world for His purpose, because she believed His Word. And we're still talking about it 2000 years later on the other side of the world, just as Jesus promised! The other disciples came to appreciate that in time, but in Judas, anger began to burn and when Jesus so hotly angered the Pharisees that Tuesday and then told the disciples that in two days He would be handed over and crucified, Judas' unregenerate heart saw the handwriting on the wall and knew it was time for him to get out of the group and switch to the winning side **(14-16)**. What an evil thing was:

4. Judas' resolve to betray Jesus. Lk. 22:3 rightly tells us its source, *Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, and he went...* For days he had been fuming and pondering and debating, his mind flirting with the dastardly idea of selling Jesus out for a final profit. And when he finally yielded to the temptation and said, "Yes, I will!", Satan was right there to fill him and guide his every move. So, he went to the Jewish leaders and answered their prayers by offering to betray Jesus into their hands, that is, to inform them of an opportunity when Jesus would be alone and undefended so that He could be arrested in secret. But he wanted money and they offered him 30 pieces of silver in fulfillment of **Zech. 11:12-13**. In that text God calls it, mockingly, *a handsome price at which they priced ME!* These were probably 4-drachma coins, let's say \$400 coins, and so were worth 120 days wages, or maybe \$12,000 today. It seems Judas got nearly half of the money he'd wished for from Mary, anyway! Yet by comparison this was the legal price of a slave! How interesting that they took money from the Temple treasury which was to be for the purchase of sacrifices and paid for the life of the Son of God, valuing Him merely as a common slave! So, with the money already heavy in his bag, Judas returned to the group and waited for the right moment to carry out his treachery. Wednesday passed without opportunity, but true to the prediction, Thursday became:

III. The Occasion Of Jesus' Betrayal That morning Jesus made sure that:

1. His disciples prepared for their Passover celebration in the evening **(17-19)** Matthew doesn't mention the supernatural means by which Jesus directed them to the right house in Jerusalem. Both Mark and Luke tell that they were to look for a man carrying a pitcher of water on his head, which was unusual since that was women's work, and follow him home. Anyway, they did, and the owner of this house was evidently a follower of Jesus and had a large upper room furnished and available for their use. So, they bought the Lamb and the necessary items and prepared for the evening meal. Now lots happened this evening. Jesus washed the disciples' feet. There were hours of deep serious conversation that John records some of. But the thing Matthew chooses to give the most space to in his account is the fact that at this meal:

2. Jesus clearly identified and warned Judas (20-25) As they were eating, Jesus told His disciples very clearly that one of them is a traitor, that one of them would betray Him to His enemies. But though the other disciples evidently didn't quite understand or perhaps hear it, Jesus clearly identified Judas in a way he could not miss, not only by giving him a sop of bread dipped in the dish, but also by answering his question verbally with an expression that clearly indicates, "you are the one". In that moment Judas knew his jig was up. Now why did Jesus do this? I think it was a final warning, a final plea. Judas had not yet done the awful deed itself; he could have stopped and confessed and taken the money back. So, Jesus exhorted him that there were eternal consequences to pay and it would be better not to have been born than to do this! True to His own nature, Jesus loved even His own betrayer to the very end, but it was to no avail. Matthew does not record it but:

3. Judas left, determined to carry out his betrayal Read it with me in **John 13:27-30**. For the second time Judas hardened his heart and Satan took control. He got up and rushed out. The disciples did not grasp why; they simply thought Jesus sent him on some errand. In essence, He actually did! He sent Judas on the errand of getting the soldiers to make sure He would be crucified right on time! However, while Judas carried out his betrayal, Jesus now proceeded speak His very heart to the 11 for several hours and during the course of their meal:

4. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper for His followers They were eating the normal Jewish Passover Meal but Jesus took two specific parts from it, invested them with new meaning and gave them to the disciples as an ordinance that they would continue to celebrate for:

a. its symbolic meaning (26-28) He took a piece of unleavened bread from the meal and said that it symbolized His body, which, like the bread without leaven, was without sin, and yet was broken on the cross. Later He took the last cup of wine of the meal and said that it symbolized His blood, which He was about to shed to provide the forgiveness of sins for many, that is, for all who will believe. It represented a new covenant between God and man. This blood of His poured out procured forgiveness. HE WAS God's lamb. There would be no more animal sacrific-

es. His sacrifice would be a once-for-all atonement. And in his account Luke adds that Jesus said to do this specific thing that He did *in remembrance of Him*. So, from the very first times of worshipping together after the Resurrection, believers began to break bread and take the cup together to remember the sacrifice of their Lord who had ascended to heaven. We've been doing it ever since. Of course, through the centuries this simple ritual has been by various factions invested with saving value and turned into an elaborate liturgy to be carried out only by priests or clergy and misinterpreted as though somehow Jesus meant that in eating and drinking, we are literally eating His flesh and drinking His blood. I think it is important to remember that Jesus chose two of the most common everyday substances to remember Him by, things His followers would eat and drink every day at every meal, so His death would be continually on their minds. The early believers remembered Him daily in this fashion as they broke bread together from house to house. I think Jesus wants us to remember His death for us, not only once a month when we specifically celebrate the Lord's table, but every day, as often as we eat food (which for some of us is quite often!). Just as food and drink sustain life, His death truly IS our life! And this new symbolic action comes with:

b. its special promise (29) It is given to us for the time while He is absent. From that night He would never drink it again until the time comes for His return and the setting up of the Kingdom and the celebrating of our Marriage Feast. So, Paul says in 1 Cor. 11 that as often as we do it, we do show or proclaim the Lord's death over and over again until He comes. Each time we do it, we remember that He's coming and when He does, it won't be a memory any more. We'll be able to see with our eyes and behold the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world face to face! One day He will come but until then we keep on celebrating His death; we keep on remembering and keep on waiting.

Verse 30 tells us that when the supper was ended, they sang a hymn together and went out, heading to the Mount of Olives. But, on the way out of the city, we read **(31-35)**. What we see here is:

IV. The Blindness Of His Disciples Remember, they had just during supper heard Jesus say, *ONE of you will betray me...* And each questioned Him in turn, *Is it I?* But now He spoke to them all and:

1. He predicted that ALL of them would fall away from Him that very night, that they would all deny their faith in Him by fleeing for their lives. Zechariah had prophesied it long before [13:7] that they would all scatter from their Good Shepherd as He laid down His life for them. But, He says, *Don't worry, later we will be together again and meet in Galilee*. This statement really bothered them but:

2. they were unwilling to see or admit their own vulnerability Peter spoke for the group, but they all said the same thing, "We'll never fall away from you; we'll die with you rather than deny you!" Big words, easily spoken. But one hour later their test came, and the result is in verse 56, *they left Him and fled* at His arrest. Not one of them allowed themselves to be arrested with Him and said, "Take me too; I am His follower!"

It is so easy to think more of ourselves than we ought, especially when our lives have never been in danger for our faith. And it's even easier to look at others when they fall, to look at Judas who betrayed him or the rest who forsook Him in His darkest hour and say, "I'd never do that". The truth is that without the sustaining power of Christ for one minute, you and I most certainly would! Don't ever say, "I would never...", and fill in the blank with any vile thing you care to name. Yes, we would! *The phrase that comes to mind is "There, but for the grace of God, go I." For centuries that saying has been attributed to Rev. John Bradford who was an English Protestant clergyman and bold reformer with a deep faith. He was immediately arrested and tried for heresy along with several other well-known reformers by Catholic Queen Mary, known as "Bloody Mary", when she took the throne. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London and it is from the window of his cell that he is said to have seen a group of criminals one day, being led away to execution and remarked, "There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford."* The phrase has come to mean that if God had not worked in my life in ways that I do not deserve and cannot take any credit for, I would be just like that other person, having done the same thing they did and being the same sad state of affairs. It's a reminder not to look down on people who fall, because we fall. The betrayal of Judas is a stark reminder to us that we are all traitors. We all betray the Lord; every single time we deliberately choose to sin, we treat His precious blood which saved us as an unholy thing. We trample Him underfoot in the rush to satisfy our own desires for money or power or sex or something else. We all deny the Lord, sometimes loudly as Peter did and sometimes by quietly by saying nothing or being nowhere to be found, when we should be there for Him. *John Bradford's personal walk with Christ was of a deep devotional nature. He was in the habit of writing down his faults, because he wanted to feel a "chest-beating" regret for sin, and to groan with true brokenness of heart when he came to private prayer. At the same time, he would seek a fresh assurance of salvation in Christ through faith. Bradford also made a note of the virtues he saw in others that he might lament the lack of them in himself. In short, his life was one of daily repentance and heartfelt prayer - something very different to the "saying of prayers" which was so common in those days, and seems, somehow, never to have gone out of fashion.* May our hearts be thus humble like Mary's; may we wash His feet with our tears when we see what He has done for us on the cross and may we pour out our lives, everything that we have, in His service.

On the morning of July 12th, 1555 at 9 AM, John Bradford was led to his execution at London's Smithfield. When Bradford and his fellow martyr, John Leaf, arrived at the stake they prostrated themselves in prayer. Annoyed by the press of the large crowd the Sheriff ordered Bradford to conclude his prayer. Standing at the stake, Bradford looked towards

heaven and said "O England, England, repent thee of thy sins, repent thee of thy sins. Beware of idolatry, beware of false antichrists." With these, and other words Bradford preached to the crowd. Turning to the young man who was to suffer with him he said, "Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a happy supper with the Lord tonight". Then, embracing the wood of his execution, he repeated our Saviour's words, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads to life and few there be that find it". Foxe says in his *Book of Martyrs*, "They both ended this mortal life...like two lambs, without any alteration of their countenances, hoping to obtain that prize they had long run for; to which may Almighty God conduct us all, through the merits of Christ our Savior!". Amen. [\[www.graceandtruth.org.uk/Articles/john_bradford.htm\]](http://www.graceandtruth.org.uk/Articles/john_bradford.htm)

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Passion Of The King - Mt. 26-28

The King Is Arrested - 26:36-75

In our study of Jesus' passion as Matthew has recorded it, we now leave the Upper Room with Him and His disciples that Thursday night after the Passover, and head out of the city of Jerusalem, across the brook Kidron and into a small walled grove of olive trees. It was called Gethsemane, the "oil press", for there the plentiful fruit of the Mount of Olives was pressed out to yield its precious oil. For us, it is a holy place, because it was there the very soul of our dear Savior was pressed beyond all measure that night and out of it came the precious oil of true surrender which resulted in our salvation. Like Moses, we should take off our shoes and kneel in reverence in our hearts as we read Matthew's account of:

I. Jesus' Agony In The Garden (36-38) Eight of His disciples Jesus left by the gate to sit and wait for Him while He prayed. But three of them, the three who were closest to Him and who had shared some of the deepest experiences of the last three years with Him, Peter, James, and John, these He took with Him further into the garden and, before He went off to be alone, He made a request of them.

1. His request of the disciples to share in His agony *Watch with Me.* He explained to them that He was in extreme sorrow, sorrow so deep it was killing Him, and He needed them to understand that and to stay awake and pray with Him. Not only did He want them to be witnesses of His agony so they could later share it with us, but, at the risk of sounding irreverent, I would dare to suggest that He wanted them to pray FOR Him as He was going through it. What a humbling thought, the Son of God wanting human beings to stand together with Him as He prayed, to pray with Him and for Him, to not go through this awful agony alone, but with their support. They clearly knew how much they needed Him, but they could not grasp just how much HE needed THEM in this hour. Dear friends, if the Son of God was not too proud to ask His closest friends to pray with and for Him in His darkest hour, shouldn't that be an example to us not to stubbornly go through our trials alone, but to realize how much we need fellow believers to share in our agony and pray for us and open our hearts to them? Verse (39). Here we get a glimpse of:

2. the depth of His agony Three times Jesus goes off to pray and returns to check on His disciples (42, 44). To get a sense of just how deep the agony of His soul was, listen to **Lk. 22:43-44**, *And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* The agony of His soul was so strong, so deep, that it alone could have killed Him. It was so weakening that the Father sent an angel to minister strength to His human body so He could endure it. The pressure was so great that blood seeped from the capillaries in His skin and mingled with His profuse sweating, dripping red on the ground. **Heb. 5:7** adds, *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death...* Jesus was weeping and sobbing and crying out loudly to the Father. Please don't read what Jesus' prayed that night as quiet academic statements; they were made in the midst of an agonizing emotional melt-down. And the source of that agony was:

a. the intense conflict of His two wills We see it clearly in verse 39. There is in Jesus' mind both *my will* and *Thy will*. There is the Divine will of the Father, which is to go to the cross, to drink the cup of suffering to the very bottom, to take the sin of the world upon Himself and experience the full weight of the wrath of God, to endure the eternal agony of separation from the Father condensed into the hours of the crucifixion. But there is also the nature of Christ as a genuine human being, which cries out to *let this cup pass* from Him, to be saved from this awful death, not simply from the dying of the body, painful as that would be, but from the eternal death, the spiritual death, He does not want to have to endure. In His mind, in His very soul, the two are wrestling. He knows the Father's will but, like us, He must bring Himself to CHOOSE it, to DO it. It was a fierce battle that raged and subsided in three waves in Him that night, but through it all we can see:

b. His absolute submission to the Father's will *...nevertheless, not as I will but as You will.... if this cannot pass, Your will be done...* In the end, that was His one true will and He never wavered from it. He ALWAYS wanted to do the Father's will, but that does not discount the fact that this night it was HARD beyond comprehension! Surrender to our Father's will is sometimes like that. Sometimes the price, the cost, of doing what we know God wants us to do, is absolutely gut-wrenching. Our flesh wars against it with all that is in us, yet as true sons and daughters, we struggle until we come to that place of absolute surrender, "Father, your will be done." Now what made it even harder for Jesus was:

3. the sleeping of the disciples After asking them to watch with Him and agonizing so intensely for an hour, they slept **(40-41)**. They kept falling asleep instead of praying. Again, after the second round... **(43)**. They just could not stay awake, but the cause was not merely natural fatigue. **Luke 22:45** says *...He found them sleeping FOR SORROW*. Their own sorrow at seeing Him like this as they never had before, so distressed, and hearing His cries and weeping, made their own hearts so heavy that they allowed themselves to succumb to their fatigue and drift off to sleep as a relief. It is a powerful reminder of our own insensitivity to Christ's heart. Are we really any better than they? Very often we are like the disciples, asleep, oblivious to the very things that God cares about, that He is trying to accomplish. His heart is agonizing over a lost world in need and we can't even bring ourselves to pray with Him about it, much less to work at reaching others. Instead of sleeping, we're too busy or too occupied with something else that concerns US. He invites us to watch with Him, to join Him through prayer, but there is no room in our lives somehow. Those words come back to us, "Couldn't you even give me an hour?" Sometimes it's, "Couldn't you even give me 15 minutes?" How insensitive we can be to the very Savior who agonized for us and surrendered Himself for us that night! But after His third season of prayer... **(45-46)**. Now we move to consider:

II. Jesus' Arrest By The Soldiers (47-50) John tells us that when Judas came to them, the Jewish leaders had somehow gotten themselves a good-sized band of soldiers including some officers to join them as they set out that night to arrest Jesus. He might have led them right back to the Upper Room, but upon finding Jesus gone, he knew from habit where Jesus would go next. He led this mob out of the city toward the garden, all of them carrying torches and swords and clubs. Jesus couldn't help but see lights and hear the sound of their approach, but in the dark of the garden they needed a sign to recognize Jesus. Indeed, most of the soldiers would never have seen Him before. So we have:

1. the counterfeit greeting of Judas which he had prearranged with them. As he greeted Jesus, you can be sure He said "Hail Rabbi!" loud enough to draw their attention and then he greeted him, not just with A kiss, but the Greek text says he *kissed him fervently*. It is the same word used of the sinful woman in Luke 7 who wet Jesus' feet with her tears and kissed them, that is, kissed them repeatedly. She smothered them with kisses. Judas kissed Jesus, not just politely on either side, but over and again, no doubt not sincerely, but so the soldiers would not miss the signal in the dark! But Jesus cuts him short, not using the real word for friend, but a more impersonal term that would come across more to us like, "Dude, do what you came for; I know what this is about." Yet what is most striking about this scene is:

2. the complete submission of Jesus (51-53) The lead soldiers grabbed Jesus by the arms, but daring Peter quickly whipped out his sword and swung at the nearest man, a servant named Malchus, who ducked and merely got his ear lopped off. Yet in that split second before the soldiers respond and cut Peter to ribbons, Jesus stops them all in their tracks with a word, tells Peter to put away his sword and heals Malchus' ear! He's plainly in charge. In verse 53 He even refers to:

a. His overwhelming ability to protect Himself Had He wanted to, He could have called out to the Father who would immediately have put more than twelve legions of angels at His command. The typical Roman legion was 5,000 - 6,000 men so we're talking not about "ten thousand angels" like the old song says He could have called, but more than 70,000, twelve times more than the entire 12th Fulminata legion that occupied Judea at that time. Jesus was in charge! In fact, Matthew skips what **Jn. 18:4-6** tells us, that at the very first, *Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.* They couldn't even stand in His presence until He allowed it! He was in absolute control! This shows clearly:

b. His voluntary surrender to the plan of God (54) His concern was not to protect Himself, but to fulfill God's plan, to carry out the predictions of Scripture. What God wants be done is more important than what I want. Jesus didn't just say that in prayer; when the moment came, He lived it in action. He literally turned Himself over to their custody, but not without:

c. His bold witness to the mob (55-56) He pointed even His enemies, the mob and the soldiers, to the Scriptures. He's saying to them, "Look at what you're doing; you're fulfilling the Scriptures! Search them and you'll see Me; I am the Messiah, the Christ!" He wants them to know Him too! His very submission to their hands was to be a witness to them.

Let me just point out that so many times we pray bravely, "Lord, I want your will; whatever you want, Lord!" But then when trouble or problems or danger enter our lives, rather than acting like Jesus, we act like Peter and try to hack and slash at them desperately in our own strength to rid ourselves of them because we don't want to accept this part of his plan for us. *Amy Carmichael lived from 1867 -1951 and spent 56 years as a missionary in Dohnavur, India. She worked with young girls who were dedicated by their families as temple prostitutes and during her life gave over 1,000 young women a new and different start in life. Along the way she wrote this poem which has blessed many called "In Acceptance Lieth Peace":*

He said, 'I will forget the dying faces; The empty places, They shall be filled again. O voices moaning deep within me, cease.' But vain the word; vain, vain: Not in forgetting lieth peace.

He said, 'I will crowd action upon action, The strife of action Shall stir me and sustain; O tears that drown the fire of manhood cease.' But vain the word; vain, vain: Not in endeavor lieth peace.

He said, 'I will withdraw me and be quiet, Why meddle in life's riot? Shut be my door to pain. Desire, thou dost befool me, thou shalt cease.' But vain the word; vain, vain: Not in aloofness lieth peace.

He said, 'I will submit; I am defeated. God hath depleted My life of its rich gain. O futile murmurings, why will ye not cease?' But vain the word; vain, vain: Not in submission lieth peace.

He said, 'I will accept the breaking sorrow Which God tomorrow Will to His son explain.' Then did the turmoil deep within me cease. Not vain the word, not vain; For in Acceptance lieth peace.

Whenever trial or struggle or suffering comes, we must say "OK Lord, this thing is from you; I have prayed for your will to be done, so I accept this as part of it. Please give me the grace to endure it and to serve you in the process so that I may be a witness to somebody else through it somehow." Well, verse (57). Now comes:

III. Jesus' Trial Before The Jewish Leaders (59-63a) They had no real crime of which to accuse Him, so they actually sought out people to lie, to break the ninth commandment and bear false witness against Him.

1. the false accusations brought against Jesus were absurd, outlandish. No two of them could agree, which was necessary for conviction. They twisted His own words, *Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up*, spoken about His own body, to accuse Him of plotting to destroy the Temple itself. Jesus said nothing and let them make fools of themselves, but finally Caiaphas had enough, (63b-65). Blasphemy is:

2. the true "crime" of which Jesus was convicted, claiming to be the Christ, the Son of God. But this is only blasphemy if it is not true. Yet instead of testing the evidence as to whether His answer was true, they simply condemned Him for the statement! Ironically, He was crucified for telling the truth about who He was, God the Son, the Christ, the Messiah of Israel. And that led to:

3. the cruel condemnation of Jesus (66-68) The penalty for blasphemy, of course, was death, so instantly they declared Him guilty, pronounced the sentence and proceeded to illegally begin to punish the defendant. But Jesus again took all of this ill treatment in silence. However, while all the while this farce of a trial was going on, something else was happening in that same building. We have the story of:

IV. Jesus' Denial By Peter We intentionally skipped verse (58). Peter did not fall easily. Look at:

1. his brave intent to follow Jesus Yes, after the sword incident in Gethsemane, he did leave Jesus, but he did not run away. He followed the mob at a distance back into Jerusalem and was actually brazen enough to enter Caiaphas' very courtyard and sit with the guards there. Why? Matthew says, to see the outcome, the end, to see what would happen to His beloved Master. But it seems Jesus was not the only one being tried in that building. As you well know, Peter himself was tested three times and in the end, we read of:

2. his vehement denial of Jesus (69-74a) Three times he was accused and three times he denied ever knowing Jesus or having been associated with Him, each time more fervently than the last. Finally, when a group of people accused him, he became so desperate to remain undiscovered, that he called down curses on himself. For instance, he may have said something like, "If I am a follower of Jesus, may God Almighty strike me dead!" Heb. 6:16 says, *Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.* In the ancient world such an oath and curse was a legal way of declaring innocence; people believed that God would do what the curse said and no one would ever think of endangering his life for a lie. That's why they let Peter go and didn't arrest him. But how could it have come to this? How, an hour before, could he have bravely faced a mob of soldiers with his sword to defend Jesus and now take an oath before God to deny knowing Him? It's like the growing fear inside him transformed him, changed him into somebody else. It's like he didn't even realize what he was doing but was simply running on the impulse to survive somehow. That is, until this moment... (74b-75). As he finished his last denial a rooster crowed somewhere. And at the same moment, Luke tells us that from where Jesus was standing, He turned and looked directly at Peter. And it all came crashing home; Jesus had told him just hours before that he would deny knowing Him three times this very night and he had spoken so proudly, "Not me; I'll die for you!" Feel:

3. his bitter remorse He fled out into the darkness and wept intensely, realizing what an utter hypocrite he had been. In a reference that I have been unable to locate personally, Clement of Alexandria who wrote a century later, makes the claim that for the rest of his life every time Peter heard a cock crow, he would weep. Of course, we can't know whether that's true, but knowing the tremendous power of past emotional events in our lives, I'd guess that the sound of a rooster often triggered his mind to remember that awful night. And that brings us to ask...

Can such a thing be forgiven? Can one who has fallen so far as to deny the very Lord who bought him be absolved and restored to God and used by Him? *Steve Brown writes, "After the resurrection, Jesus is concerned about Peter. Jesus knew Peter. He knew how devastated Peter was. He loved Peter. And He wanted Peter to know it, so He singled Peter out. [The angel said, Go, tell His disciples AND PETER... - Mk. 16:7] The three women come to the tomb to find it empty. They meet an angel -- a messenger from Jesus. In my mind's eye, I can see the resurrected Christ, leaving the tomb and*

giving instructions to the angel: 'I've got to go, but tell the women to tell the disciples that I'll meet them in Galilee and then we'll have a party.' Jesus starts to leave but then turns back to the angel and says, 'Oh, and make sure that you tell Peter I'll meet him too. If you don't specifically mention beloved Peter, he won't show.'... And in Galilee on the shore, three times Jesus tells Peter, "YOU feed My sheep! I've chosen YOU. And you're going to be faithful all the way until death; in your death you won't deny Me; you'll glorify Me." And he did; in the end he was crucified in Rome, upside down. Steve continues, *Jesus still does for us what He did for Peter. That is what Easter is all about. 'Go tell Peter -- and Jack, Donna, Beth, Darryl, Maria and Steve -- that I'll meet them and we'll have dinner together at Home.'* [Key Life magazine, Spring 2009]. Peter is our proof positive that no matter how far we have fallen, Jesus loves us, Jesus will take us back, and Jesus will still use us for His glory!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Passion Of The King - Mt. 26-28

The King Is Sentenced - 27:1-26

As we continue in Matthew's recording of Christ's Passion today, in chapter 27 it is early Friday morning just before sunrise. After Jesus' arrest in the garden late at night, He was taken to the palace of the High Priest and interrogated by those of the Jewish leaders who had been in on His arrest. When they could not find a valid charge to convict him of, they asked him directly whether he was the Christ, the Son of God, and when He told them the truth, they shouted "blasphemy" and pronounced Him worthy of death. But such an action carried out under the cover of darkness could not be carried forward without the confirmation of the whole ruling council of 70, the Sanhedrin. So verse **(1)**. Luke says, *as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council...* You can see:

I. The Leaders' Determination To Kill Jesus They must have sent out messengers to gather as many members of the council as they could find for an immediate meeting and:

1. the entire Sanhedrin gathered at dawn to decide how to proceed They already knew they wanted to kill Jesus, but their problem was that they had no authority to do it. Under Roman rule, they could not put anyone to death. The problem was how to formulate a charge that wasn't purely religious, like blasphemy, one that the state would consider a noteworthy crime. So, after consulting together:

2. they sent Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor, asking the death penalty (2) Pontius Pilate was appointed procurator of Judea about 26 AD by the Emperor. He was no friend of the Jews; in fact, he hated them and deliberately antagonized them by his actions, it seems, on multiple occasions. The Jewish leaders were faced with trying to get their enemy to cooperate with them and do their bidding. So Luke says, *...they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."* - 23:2. They figured those charges ought to constitute treason against the Empire and should convince Pilate to sentence Him to death. But Pilate was not so easily convinced, as we shall see in a few moments. Meanwhile, Matthew interrupts the story to tell us what happened to Judas. Of all things, he shows us:

II. Jesus' Innocence Declared By Judas (3-4) Judas must have hung around also, like Peter, to see the outcome. Maybe he even went along as they marched Jesus to Pilate to see what would happen, but somewhere in that process we see:

1. his awful realization of what he had done Perhaps he had not actually planned for Jesus to die, just to be arrested and imprisoned. Or perhaps as he listened to the words Jesus spoke declaring Himself God, he realized He was right. In any event, when the Jews demanded the death sentence and he saw the governor would likely do it, it all came crashing home to Judas, just like it did to Peter, and he was flooded with guilt and remorse. So he tried to undo it. He ran back to the Temple and tried to give back the money. He confessed his sin to the priests and look what he says, *I have sinned by betraying innocent blood*. He, of all people, knows Jesus has done nothing worthy of death; he says in essence, "He's innocent and they're going to kill him; it's not right and it's all my fault!" But the priests don't care! They callously say, "That's YOUR problem, not ours!" In:

2. his absolute desperation to find relief he begins to act irrationally **(5)**. He threw the heavy pieces of silver down on the floor of the Temple court and ran out, out of the Temple, out of the city, out into the valley to get away and escape the horror of it all. He came somewhere to a field known as the "potter's field". But his mind could not escape its torment. Death seemed to be the only way out. Somewhere on the edge of that field was a tree with an overhanging branch and in his desperation, he probably took the sash from his waist, climbed up and tied one end to the limb and the other around his neck and cast himself off. Acts 1:18-19 describes the horribleness of his end for us, how his body burst open, perhaps after several days of hanging there, and his bowels came out. His blood stained the ground and the place became known as *Akeldama*, the field of blood. Oh, if Judas had only waited a few hours and run out to Calvary to hear the words "Father, forgive them," which the soldiers heard as they crucified Him! If he'd only sought forgiveness from the Savior, and not from the priests! But alas, he perished in his grief and in his guilt! There are still a lot of desperate folks out there today who make the same mistake Judas did. Perhaps crying under a load of guilt, know-

ing they have done horrible things, or simply desperate to find relief from the life situation which torments them, they resort to suicide as a way out. Those they come to fail to comfort them, so they become really desperate and take their own lives. *The international evangelist Luis Palau wrote some years ago: "Even when you and I are aware that someone is going through tough times, it's still easy to do nothing. I've been guilty of this. My next-door neighbor several years ago was a young television personality. We would chat from time to time, but I didn't talk to him about the gospel. 'After all,' I thought, 'he seems completely immune to the problems of life.' My neighbor's situation, however, abruptly changed. Joy was no longer evident in his face. He and his wife started driving separate cars to work. I could tell that their marriage was souring and felt the need to talk with him, but hesitated because I didn't want to meddle in his life. I went about my business and left for an evangelistic crusade overseas. After all, that was the polite thing to do. When I returned home, I learned that my neighbor had killed himself. I was heartbroken. I knew I should have gone to him, asked how things were going, and tried to persuade him to repent and follow Christ, but because of false courtesy-- because I followed a social norm--I didn't do it."* [What Makes a Man by Bill McCartney, 1992. Pages 194-195.] May God use us to pull people back from the brink! But Luis' polite ignoring pales in comparison to:

3. the callous hypocrisy of the priests (6-8) They could have cared less about the innocence of Jesus and even less about the guilt of Judas; they could only debate how to keep the blood money, which had now come into their possession, from defiling the sacred treasury of the Temple! So, they later went out and bought the potter's field where Judas hanged himself and made it a burial place to bury foreigners, so no Israelite could be defiled by being buried in it. We marvel at their hardened hearts, at how they could take money out of the holy treasury to pay for a murder, but then worry about putting it back, at how they could go through all the religious motions of serving God, but inwardly be so brutally uncaring! Martin Luther marveled in his day at how John Tetzel could extort money from the poor with sermons on the fire of purgatory with the approval of the church! Dietrich Bonhoeffer marveled in his day that the German Church could stand by and nod while Hitler exterminated the Jews and he paid for it with his life! But Paul warned Timothy, and us through him, to expect that times would come when people had a form of religion that was completely devoid of connection to God! Yet even in this awful scene we find:

4. the direct fulfillment of the Scriptures (9-10) Jeremiah had stood in this very field in chapter 19 to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem for the shedding of innocent blood, but it was actually Zechariah **(11:12-13)** whose words Matthew quotes here. We won't take time for a deeper explanation this morning; just don't miss what Matthew is trying to tell us: all this happened as exactly as God said it would hundreds of years earlier. God's plan is still absolutely on track in every detail of this gruesome scene!

Now Matthew takes us back to the Praetorium where we hear:

III. Jesus' Innocence Declared By Pontius Pilate (11-14) Notice how Pilate:

1. he was amazed at Jesus' silent demeanor When Pilate asked Him if He was indeed King of the Jews, He quietly answered, "Yes". But to all these voices accusing him of sedition and treason He made no answer at all. Pilate did not simply take notice; he was greatly amazed! He had never seen a man like this, one who would bear so many accusations without being shaken at all or defending himself. Luke tells us that he even said to the Jews, *I find no fault in this man.* - 23:4. But when they kept clamoring for his death and Pilate heard them say that Jesus was from Galilee:

2. he tried to shift responsibility for His case to Herod Matthew doesn't record this, but **Lk. 23:6-12** tells us that Herod Antipas was in town for the feast and Pilate sent him quickly off to Herod in his palace, however, Herod also found Him innocent and sent him right back to Pilate. That must have taken an hour or so and it is probably during this interval that Judas went to the Temple to return the money. But when shifting responsibility didn't work, Pilate thought of another plan:

3. he tried to free Jesus by setting Him against Barabbas (15-17) Surely, He knew how popular Jesus was; the crowds hailing Him on Palm Sunday couldn't have escaped Pilate's attention. So he thought he would appeal to the crowd and let them make the decision. For some reason it was customary for the governor to release a prisoner to them on this first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so as the crowd was gathering at his judgment hall, he stacked the deck by picking the worst prisoner he had, a rebel, an insurrectionist and murderer named Barabbas. We'd call him a terrorist. It was like saying today, "Here are your choices: I can release Osama Bin Laden or Billy Graham; which do you want?" He thought surely, they'll choose Jesus and He'll go free, the crowd will be happy and the Jewish leaders will be overridden by their own people. The perfect triumph! What a shock it must have been when the crowd shouted, "Barabbas!" You see, Pilate:

a. he knew Jesus was innocent (18) He was no idiot. He knew how popular Jesus was and how crowds upon crowds were listening to Him and how that drove the Jewish leaders insane with jealousy. Ordinarily he would have cared less about killing one more Jew; he would have been glad to oblige! Yet it wasn't that he was so concerned about Jesus or about justice; he simply hated these leaders and wanted a way to deny their desires and spite them! But at the same time, a message came to him **(19)**. You have to understand what that meant to him. In his view:

b. he was warned by his wife's dream as an omen. Tradition says her name was Procula and that she became a follower of Jesus; the Orthodox Church even canonized her as a saint! We have no way to verify that, but what we do know is that, among the Romans, poignant dreams were considered omens, signs of fate, harbingers of what would happen, and when she pressed the issue by saying that Jesus was a righteous man, that she had been deeply disturbed by what she had seen, and that he must have absolutely nothing to do with harming Him, Pilate was all the more strengthened in his determination to release Jesus.

Are you getting the theme in these verses? Jesus was innocent. Judas knew He was innocent. Pilate knew He was innocent. Even the Jewish leaders knew He was innocent and their charges were false. This was a cold-blooded murder, an officially sanctioned assassination! But Jesus was more than innocent; He was completely sinless. *He knew no sin*. Not one! He was God's pure, perfect, spotless Lamb being offered up. Why? Listen to Peter: *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God...* - 1 Pet 3:18. It is the great travesty of the ages. Sinful mankind puts the sinless God the Son on trial and sentences Him to die. One can hardly believe it as we watch:

IV. Jesus' Death Demanded By The Jewish People (20-23) Now this was no quick scene as these few words portray. John records the whole story; it appears that three separate times Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd, taking Him inside in between to question Him further. Yet each time they shout "Crucify Him!" You can't help but be shocked by:

1. the unbelievable fickleness of the people What on earth happened to them? On Sunday, they had flocked after Jesus by the hundreds shouting "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!", proclaiming Him their Messiah and King. All week long they had listened to His teaching in the Temple and lauded His words. But today they shout "Crucify Him!" How can that be? The only explanation we are given is that the chief priests and elders had infiltrated the crowd and somehow persuaded them to do it. Maybe they threatened people with being put out of the synagogue. Maybe they convinced people that Jesus was endangering their nation with the Rome. Perhaps many of them simply joined in the mass hysteria of the crowd, chanting "Crucify," without even realizing what was going on. Maybe it wasn't even the same people in the crowd that morning. We don't know. But for us it simply points out the changeability of people who don't have a genuine relationship with Christ! People like these are the shallow soil and the thorny soil in Jesus' parable, people who seem to cheerfully embrace Him right away with great enthusiasm, but when difficulties or danger or the pressures of life come against them, they turn against Him. You see, it's not enough to believe *about* Jesus; when the pressure's on, that will disappear. Only a true commitment of the heart to Him will last! So at length, we see:

2. the cowardly capitulation of Pilate (24) He gave in. The pressure was simply too great! Hundreds of people rioting and perhaps his soldiers needing to massacre some to settle it might put his position in danger with Rome; indeed it might endanger his own head! So, expedience won the day. He decided to appease the crowd and give them what they wanted. Yet he tried to absolve himself by symbolically washing his hands of the whole matter and saying to the crowd, "This is all YOUR doing, not mine!" But, of course, it wasn't. The power of death still lay in his hands; without his order, it could not proceed. In the end HE ordered Jesus' crucifixion. However, before we judge Pilate too harshly, let us realize that sometimes we do the same thing; sometimes instead of doing what we know is right, we are so scared of the consequences of that choice that we do what everyone is pushing us to do! But it is verse (25) that really grabs me. Hear we see:

3. the fearful responsibility of the people I can't emphasize enough the seriousness of this verse. These were not mere words; this was an oath before God, the pronouncing of a sentence upon themselves. They voluntarily said, "Let the responsibility for this man's death lie upon us and our children after us; let us be held accountable and any punishment from God fall on us!" And God took them at their word. After one final era to repent, as the Good News of the resurrected Christ came to the Jews first through the Apostles in Acts, and rejecting that opportunity also, God's judgment fell upon Israel as a nation. The Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem and decimated the Jewish people. Many were sold into slavery. John Gill says, *great numbers of them were put to death by crucifixion; and very likely some of those very persons, that were so clamorous for the crucifying of Christ; and if not, at least their children; five hundred of the Jews and more, were sometimes crucified in a day, whilst Titus was besieging the city; till at length there wanted "room for crosses and crosses for bodies", as Josephus says, who was an eyewitness of it:* The glorious Temple was destroyed and the remnant of the Jewish nation was left to be scattered and to wander over the face of the earth for 19 centuries with no homeland, hated practically everywhere they went. This verse has been used by everyone from the likes of Hitler to the very Church itself down through the centuries to brand the Jews as "Christ-killers" and persecute them. Throughout the Middle Ages, pogroms, massive violent attacks against Jews occurred one after the other, and they were repeated in the 1800's and 1900's in many parts of the world. It is only in our own lifetimes that the Jews have a homeland once again and the church has officially recanted from blaming them for Christ's death.

In truth there is plenty of guilt to go around. Verse (26). Pilate scourged Him (don't let that brief word diminish the awful thing that was; remember the film "The Passion of the Christ"); he gave the order. The Romans crucified Him. His blood was on Gentile and Jewish hands alike. The full truth is that His blood still lies on every member of the human race and on all their children. *He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not.* - John 1:11. The entire race reject-

ed Him and for our sins He was nailed there. We crucified the Lord of Glory and none of us can wash that away in some ceremony or blame someone else. The only way to escape the guilt of His innocent blood is to plunge directly into it as a cleansing fountain, to understand that that blood paid for all your sins and let yourself be washed in it by receiving the risen Christ. *Bible teacher Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote this concerning Barabbas: "He was the only man in the world who could say that Jesus Christ took his physical place. But I can say that Jesus Christ took my spiritual place. For it was I who deserved to die. It was I who deserved that the wrath of God should be poured on me. I deserved the eternal punishment of the lake of fire. He was delivered up for my offenses. He was handed over to judgment because of my sins — Christ was my substitute. He was satisfying the debt of divine justice and holiness. That is why I say that Christianity can be expressed in the three phrases: I deserved hell; Jesus took my hell; there is nothing left for me but His heaven."* Hallelujah!

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Passion Of The King - Mt. 26-28

The King Is Crucified - 27:26-44

In our study through the Passion of the King in Matthew's Gospel, this morning we come to reverently consider the suffering of our Savior in the process of crucifixion. It seems to me that when we human beings decided to kill the Son of God, we invented for Him the most cruel, horrible, awful death that could possibly be imagined and then we had the gall to stand around and mock Him while He died for us! The crucifixion was torture in the extreme. It reveals to us just how truly wicked man is, how awfully low He can stoop! As we gaze with tear-filled eyes at the torturing of Jesus, I am impressed over again with what a loving God we have, that instead of wiping us all out, He forgave us, and that forgiveness was purchased through the very suffering we inflicted! Hallelujah! It was between 7 and 8 o'clock on Friday morning when Pilate washed his hands and gave in to the demands of the mob gathered before him to crucify Jesus and release Barabbas. And as we re-enter the story, Matthew reminds us that:

I. Jesus Was Tortured BEFORE Being Crucified (26) As I mentioned briefly last time:

1. He had already been cruelly scourged or flogged. We literally have no idea what suffering that awful word means. Stripped of His clothes, Jesus was bent over and tied to a stake or a column in the judgment hall, then He was whipped repeatedly with a cat-of-nine-tails, a Roman instrument of torture composed of nine leather thongs tipped with bits of metal or bone, until His back was torn open into a mass of raw, bleeding flesh. Prisoners sometimes died from scourging alone; in fact, it was known as, "the intermediate death". By and large, Roman soldiers hated the Jews and any license to molest one was probably vigorously undertaken. By the time they were done, Jesus could barely stand, yet they were not finished. Cut and bleeding:

2. He was heartlessly tormented by the soldiers

a. it began with sarcastic exaltation (27-29) They took Jesus into the praetorium, the courtyard of the judgment hall, and dressed Him up like a king. They put on Him a *sagum*, the red-purple cloak or sash you often see on Roman soldiers in the movies; that color was worn by generals and commanders, even emperors. In fact, it may have been one of Pilate's own old cloaks that they draped around Him to look like a king. Then they wove a branch of sharp thorns from a bush or tree in the yard in a circle to form a crown and pressed it heavily upon his head to draw blood that ran down. They put reed, a stalk of cane, in His hand for a scepter. What a pathetic sight He must have made! Then they took turns bowing before Him, each in their own mocking way saying, "Hail, King!", attempting to make the rest laugh. You know how it works. Matthew says the whole company of soldiers, the whole portion of the Roman cohort stationed at Jerusalem, got in on it. That could mean hundreds of men, bowing and mocking and laughing, but immediately:

b. that was followed by merciless derision (30-31) As they rose, to their feet they spit on Him. Pause to think about that for a moment. Have you ever been spit on? It's the ultimate expression of human disgust and contempt. To spit upon a person is to say, "You are nothing; you are dirt to be spit upon!" Picture it, dozens of them over and over, spitting and cursing Him and then they would take the reed and beat Him on the head with it, which drove the thorns deeper each time. And they would mockingly demand of Him to prophesy, to declare the name of the man who had hit him. Somewhere in the process they yanked handfuls of His beard out by the roots according to Is. 50:6, which also declares that He didn't even turn His face when they spit upon Him. Is. 52:14 says that He was marred through all of this beyond recognition.

But here's what Matthew doesn't explain: look with me at **Jn. 19:1-6**. They actually did all this to Jesus *before* Pilate brought Him out to the people for the last time! In this pitiful condition he brought Him forth to the mob and shouted that famous Latin phrase, *Ecce homo! Behold the man!* It was Pilate's attempt to say, "Is not this enough? Look what I have done to Him; see how I have tortured Him? Look how weak and miserable He is; He is no threat. Is not this enough to satisfy you?" But they would not be satisfied. They screamed for His death. And so, in the end, the order was given and the soldiers dressed Him in His own clothes once again and led Him away. Then, after being tortured *before* being crucified:

II. Jesus Was Tortured BY Being Crucified A condemned prisoner had to carry his own cross. So, across Jesus' bleeding back and shoulders they laid the *patibulum*, the heavy wooden crossbeam weighing upwards of 75 pounds, and bound His wrists to its ends. A centurion and three soldiers surrounded him as they slowly marched him out through the streets, passing through the throngs of people who parted to make way for them, to the city gates. By this time, Jesus was so weak that He could not bear the weight and probably fell, perhaps repeatedly. So, we read of:

1. the forced conscription of Simon (32) Evidently impatient with the slow pace, the soldiers grabbed a passerby who was coming in through the gate and forced him to take the crossbeam and carry it behind Jesus. His name was Simon, a Jew from Cyrene, a city of Libya in North Africa, probably here for the Feast. His name would probably never have been remembered and written down, except for the fact that **Mk. 15:21** adds that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. His two sons were believers known to the church at the time that Mark wrote his Gospel! There is almost no doubt that as he followed Jesus to the crucifixion and watched Him die or soon thereafter, Simon became a disciple of Christ. In fact, he may be one of the men of Cyrene in Acts 11:20 who preached the Gospel in Antioch and planted the church there. He may even be the well-known teacher, Simeon called Niger, at Antioch in Acts 13:1 and his son Rufus, the disciple Paul greeted in Rom. 16:13. So you see, even as He was in His most vulnerable state, on His way to the cross to be lifted up from the earth, Jesus was already beginning to draw all men to Himself. His plan was right on track. As they left the city, the soldiers headed for:

2. the desolate place where Jesus was crucified (33) Not far outside the gate the road led by a place which had been given the Hebrew name Golgotha, the Skull, in Latin, Calvary. We don't know why. Early Christian tradition says that the skull of Adam, the first man, was found on this very spot, and there is today a Chapel of Adam beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which is located over the traditional site. Others guess that it was the usual place of execution, which it may well have been. Since the uprights for the crosses, the *stipes*, were probably already fixed with their bottoms in the ground, it would only make sense that this was a regularly used location, a place of death by its very name. As they arrived, we read of Jesus':

3. the steadfast refusal of the wine (34) For some odd reason it was customary after nearly killing someone to turn around and offer them a sedative to help take the edge off of the final pain of crucifixion. So, the soldiers offered Jesus sour wine, a bitter mixture to dull the pain of what they were about to do, but Jesus, after tasting what it was, would not drink any of it. He knew its purpose and He did not want to numb Himself. That's our human way, isn't it? If we can't escape the pain of our situation, our first desire is to numb ourselves to it. How many people numb themselves regularly with drugs or alcohol or something else so as not to feel! But Jesus deliberately chose to feel the fullness of all the pain that day. What redemption would there be in enduring the punishment for our sins but not feeling it? He did not want to be, indeed He could not be, exempt from any of it that He might suffer in full what we deserved! And now began:

4. the awful process of crucifixion stated so simply in the words of **(35a)**. The crossbeam was laid on the ground and Jesus' arms stretched out upon it and bound fast. Then one soldier took a heavy hammer and drove an iron spike, not through the palm, but through the wrist between the bones of each hand. While still reeling in pain, the crossbeam was hoisted up with Jesus attached and fixed to the upright. It was not high; His feet rested upon a small platform only a foot or two above the ground and soon they were crossed over one another and a single spike driven through both feet. Thus suspended a person could live for many hours, even days, as life drained out of them slowly until they could no longer pull themselves up to breathe and they suffocated. It was an ingenious method of torture designed to exact the last full measure of pain before death. But even cries of anguish did not move the soldiers; they had seen it all before. From them we see:

5. the callous gambling for His clothes (35b-36) - **John 19:23-24** makes it more clear, *When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier [his headpiece, outer garment, sash and sandals - and they probably cast lots for who got which one!]; also his tunic [or inner garment]. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be."* Jesus owned nothing but the clothes on his body and even these, now probably blood-soaked, were seen as a means of amusement for the bored soldiers watching Him die. Yet unknowingly, John adds, *This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."* - **Ps. 22:18**. Every detail of this scene down to the most trivial and gruesome fairly shouts, "This man is the Messiah, the Son of God!" Now we're told of:

6. the ironic charge above His cross (37) Technically, the centurion who walked before Jesus out of the city carried this white placard with the crime of the condemned criminal written on it so the public would know why he was to die. When they got to the cross, they nailed it above His head. It read, *This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews*. Sounds more like an introduction than a criminal charge, doesn't it? Ironically, the charge against Him was actually the truth, even though Pilate who had written it didn't believe it! This very placard caused a stir; look with me at **John 19:20-22**. The Jewish leaders were afraid people would actually believe what Pilate had written! They wanted it edited but Pilate would do them no favor. It stood and it still does! Jesus IS the King, the Messiah and one day, Zechariah

says, *[God] will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.* - 12:10. Meanwhile what Matthew does NOT record for us is:

7. the unbelievable cry of forgiveness As the soldiers hoist Him up upon the cross in agony, Jesus cries, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!* - **Lk. 23:34**. What a haunting cry! Forgiveness, not revenge, not justice, but forgiveness! That's what God wants; that's what Jesus is dying to provide and that cry opens the door, not only for the cruel soldiers, but for all of us!

Now lastly, not only was Jesus tortured *before* being crucified and *by* the act of being crucified itself:

III. Jesus Was Tortured WHILE Being Crucified His enemies would not even give Him the opportunity to suffer and die in peace. They continued to torment Him for hours as he hung there. Of course, it's not surprising that:

1. He was mocked by the soldiers - Lk. 23:36-37, *The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"* Right after He had prayed for their forgiveness! But really, the soldiers were just parroting the cries of the crowd that had gathered. You see, as He hung there:

2. He was mocked by the Jewish people and their leaders (39-43) Golgotha was by a main road and all day people passed by and stopped to watch and to jeer at the pitiful sight. And many of the Jewish leaders came out and stood round the cross also. This was their hour of triumph; at last Jesus was totally humiliated and powerless in the eyes of the people. And they heaped ridicule on Him in every way they could think of:

a. they ridiculed His "superiority" to the Jewish religious "system" "Destroy the Temple, will you? Try it now! Criticize us and call us hypocrites, will you? See who is dying and who is still standing here! We and our system have won! You and your new teachings have come to nothing!" Then:

b. they ridiculed His ability to provide salvation *He saved others; He cannot save Himself!* John Gill comments: *This was not so much a concession of theirs, that he had done many saving works, as healing the sick, cleansing lepers, causing the blind to see, and the lame to walk, and raising the dead; but rather a suggestion, that these were only pretensions and illusions; that either they were not really done, or done by the help of the devil; since now he himself was in the utmost extremity, he could not save himself.* They are actually mocking the very works which Christ had done for 3 ½ years. If He could not rescue himself, how could He rescue anyone else from anything! Then:

c. they ridiculed His office as Israel's King and Messiah "If you're the Messiah, if you're our King, then come down from the cross and we'll believe you! Haven't you read the script? Messiah doesn't die on a cross at Roman hands. Messiah leads Israel to glorious victory and throws the Romans out! You're an imposter! A fake! A fraud!" And finally:

d. they ridiculed His relationship with the Father as the Son of God "You say you're the Son of God, that God is your Father! Would God let His son die like this? Would He abandon His Son to the Romans to die on a cross? If God was pleased with you, if He really wanted you, He'd rescue you! He would swoop down here with a legion of angels and set you free! But where is He? You're no Son of God!"

Oh, how all of these things must have cut Jesus to the heart! Of course, He knew none of them was true, but to hear it said at the very moment that the Father is about to separate His presence from Him and pour out His full wrath that He never was the Son of God, we cannot imagine the agony! And, as if all of that was not enough:

3. He was even mocked by the two thieves crucified beside Him We deliberately skipped verse **(38)** Two robbers, not petty thieves, but armed bandits, hardened criminals, men who would kill for money, were crucified that day also, one on either side, putting Jesus right in the middle, showing Him as one of them in the lineup. Verse **(44)** seems to say that:

a. both of them initially ridiculed Him They took up the chants of the crowd! "Yeah, if you're who you say you are, save yourself AND us! Prove it!" Now He is not even good enough for the likes of them! But an hour or two of hanging on the cross and pondering their own death eventually did a number on one of them because in **Luke 23:40-43** we read that:

b. one eventually repented and was granted paradise One eventually realized that Jesus had indeed done nothing wrong, but his own sins were about to send him straight to hell. All he could possibly do was believe and he did and Jesus made Him that beautiful promise, not "Someday you'll be in My Kingdom", but *TODAY you will be with Me in paradise!* Still seeking, still saving, that's the heart of Jesus.

I have tried to paint the scene of the cross in a realistic fashion, but words cannot do it justice. Picturing it cannot make you feel the awfulness of it. In 1785 the poet Robert Burns coined a phrase in one of his poems which strikes us still and

describes what we see here: *man's inhumanity to man*. Or as the old-time radio show, *The Shadow*, put it: *Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?* Jesus knows! The cruelty of which human beings are capable defies our comprehension. Two weeks ago, a friend in Bishkek wrote how sad she was because of the death of a friend. James was an invalid who went to her church there, but vandals broke into his apartment one day. They tore it apart and destroyed every piece of furniture he had and then proceeded to torture him. They poured boiling water over him to burn him and they hit him in the head twice, hard enough to cause aneurysms and left him for dead. Those aneurysms burst and killed him. And it was all apparently for no reason; it was not a robbery; they didn't even take his wallet. The cruel delight that one human being can display in torturing another defies rationality; yet that capability lies in the sinful nature every human being is born with, and that includes you and I. Despite all our protesting that we could never be like those soldiers or like those Jewish leaders or like those callous passersby, the cold truth is that, given the right circumstances, we could and we would. The awful evil that lurks in our hearts and rears its gruesome head in moments like this horrid Friday morning is itself the very reason why Jesus died. That evil had to be punished; justice demands it. And for God to have us with Him forever, that evil had to be removed from our hearts; salvation demands it. So, through the cross Jesus accomplished both for us. May we never forget the price that was attached to it. *In one of his books, Dr. Tom Dooley, the great humanitarian to southeast Asia, wrote of building a cage for a small Himalayan moon bear someone had given him when an old Chinese man came by and saw the cage and began to cry. When Dooley asked the old man why he was weeping, he told him a dark story. He and his son had been harvesting rice on a commune in Red China. They were not allowed to keep any rice for personal use but the son had hidden a small bit of rice in his clothes to take to his mother who was suffering from beriberi. The rice was discovered, and the soldiers put the boy in a cage in the middle of the town. The cage was so small his son could not sit up or even move. The father and mother watched their son slowly die in that cage under the hot sun, starving, with insects crawling over his body. Even though many years had passed, the old man still cried every time he saw a cage. [Tabletalk, Feb 1996. Page 28.]* May we be like that old man. May we never forget. May the sight of a cross or the very mention of the word take us back to Calvary and move our hearts with tears of adoration.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Passion Of The King - Mt. 26-28

The King Dies - 27:45-66

We have been slowly walking with Jesus through the story of His Passion as it is recorded for us by Matthew. In our last study we reverently walked with Christ through the torture of His crucifixion and we left Him hanging there on Friday morning with the mocking crowd gathered around Him. Now in verses 45-49 the record turns away from the physical and emotional suffering of this whole ordeal and causes us to focus on:

I. The Spiritual Death Jesus Endured Many of Jesus' own followers down through the centuries have endured the physical suffering of martyrdom; I would humbly submit that some of them have even died deaths that were equally as painful and horrific. It is not Jesus' physical suffering which makes His death unique or procures our salvation. Paul said that the item of first importance in our faith is this: *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*. It is what happened to Christ in the spiritual realm as He died that saved us and that is what we turn now to consider. The first thing Matthew mentions is:

1. the physical darkness which betokened it (45) After 3 hours of suffering, at noon it rapidly grew dark. Luke adds the phrase, *the sun was darkened...* - 23:45a. It stopped shining, not for minutes like an eclipse, but three full hours; its light was obscured by an act of God in some way, so much so that the darkness extended, not merely to all the land, but in fact, the Greek word Matthew uses can literally mean the whole inhabited earth. The Roman Christian apologist Tertullian described Christ's death like this: *And yet, nailed upon the cross, He exhibited many notable signs, by which His death was distinguished from all others. At His own free-will, He with a word dismissed from Him His spirit, anticipating the executioner's work. In the same hour, too, the light of day was withdrawn, when the sun at the very time was in his meridian blaze. Those who were not aware that this had been predicted about Christ, no doubt thought it an eclipse. You yourselves have the account of the world-portent still in your archives. [Apology - Ch. 21]* Rome itself recorded this great darkness! The Father caused nature itself to reflect the reality of what was happening in the spiritual realm. The hymnwriter Isaac Watts said it best when he penned this familiar line: *Well might the sun in darkness hide and shut its glories in, When Christ, the mighty Maker, died for man the creature's sin*. Three long hours passed in gloomy twilight; Christ said not a word to indicate what was happening as He hung there suffering, until the very end when He shouted:

2. the cry of abandonment which expressed it (46-47) That was what happened during those three hours. For the first time in eternity, the Father withdrew His Presence from the Son, and in His cry, we hear summed up:

a. the agony He experienced as the wrath of God was poured upon our sins Consider carefully with me three other passages which help us understand. Peter wrote: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...* - **1 Pet. 2:24**. In those hours a gigantic spiritual transfer was made. Our sins were placed upon Him there while He hung upon the cross. Paul put it like this: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* - **2 Cor. 5:21**. He was made sin for us! A world's worth of guilt was laid upon

Him and as it was, the very wrath of God was poured out upon Him to such an extent that in those three hours He experienced the full weight of an eternity of separation from God; the infinite anguish of an eternity of suffering in hell descended upon His spirit for each one of us. There are no human words to describe the awful misery He experienced in being utterly forsaken by God! But its effect is this: *God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice... he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.* - **Rom. 3:25-26**. His death, sealed by His blood, His precious life itself poured out completely, became a propitiation, an atonement, a satisfying of the just wrath of God against our sins, so that by separating our sins from us and placing them on Christ, He could be just and punish sin and yet save us! Hallelujah! No, we cannot begin to comprehend all that is involved in that simple saying, *Christ died for our sins*, yet if we look closer, we CAN understand something else at the same time. We can understand:

b. the claim He made by saying this The words Christ shouted were absolutely true in their meaning, yet they were carefully chosen. Christ shouted the first half of **Ps. 22:1** to express and to explain His grief. Any Jew who attended synagogue regularly, who had heard the Psalms read from little on up, would recognize it. Surely the scribes and Pharisees would! Jesus wanted to call it to their minds; He hoped they would begin to recite it to themselves and would see that what it said was being played out live in front of their eyes. Look there with me. Verses **1, 6-8**. That's exactly what the crowd was shouting! Verses **14-18**. There He hung with hands and feet pierced with nails! There stood the soldiers who had cast lots for His clothing! He was shouting to them, "I am the man of Psalm 22. This was about Me! I am the Messiah! Look how it ends!" Vs. **24**. Notice that, despite what the hymns say, the Father DID NOT turn His face away. He suffered Himself by watching the whole thing and in the end, He was listening and this cry from the Cross was answered! It was answered by the resurrection and it was answered by verse **27**. In our zealous mission effort today, we are part of the Father's response to this cry of His Son! He has heard and because of what His Son did there He is saving some from all the nations of the earth! And the last line, verse **31**, says *He has done it* and is very close to what Christ shouted in the next moment, *It is finished!* He is still trying to save those standing by, yet thank God that even if it is lost on them, it is not lost on us! We get it! He IS the Savior of the world! But things are moving much faster now than I am portraying it. We read that the immediate response to this was **(48-49)**. It seems an odd response to Jesus' cry to run and give him a drink, except that **John 19:28** tells us, *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."* It must have been nearly as one cry, "Why have You forsaken me?... I thirst!" But the crowd doesn't understand the cry through His parched lips. They hear the Aramaic *Eli* followed by the 'yuh' sound as He pulls up to breathe and speak and sinks down again and they think He's calling *Elijah*, *Elijah*, whom he is expecting to come and save Him and to quench His thirst. That's why they run to give Him some wine vinegar from the soldiers' pot and wait to see whether Elijah will indeed come. But:

c. the cry of thirst confirmed again that He knew exactly what He was doing. **Ps. 69:21** prophesied, *They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst*. Yes, He was actually thirsty, but once again He's trying to jog their minds, saying, "I am the man of Psalm 69; look how you're fulfilling the Scriptures at every step. See who I am!" Sadly, they didn't. But with this cry, the spiritual death is over, and Matthew now turns our attention to:

II. The Physical Death Jesus Passed Through in verses (50-55). Notice carefully what verse **(50)** says. Literally, the Greek says:

1. He dismissed His spirit from His body He sent it away. He told it to go! It was just as He said, no man took His life from Him; He laid it down! He was in absolute control. And as He did, He wanted us to know something very important:

a. the work of our salvation was completed John tells us the whole pattern of how this happened, *When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.* - **Jn. 19:30**. Immediately after that brief drink, Jesus uttered this one wonderful word, in the Greek, *Tetelestai!*, which has such a broad, full meaning. *It is finished! It is completed! It is accomplished! Even, It is paid!* He wanted us to know that everything the Father needed to accomplish through His life and death was now completed to the full; there was nothing left to add to it. The wrath of God was satisfied, the debt of sin was fully paid and the salvation of man was purchased. And with that, Luke tells us that:

b. Jesus entrusted His spirit into the Father's hands *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* When he had said this, he breathed his last. - **Luke 23:46** He shouted it loudly so all would hear; the Father's presence was BACK and He made a deposit. He placed His spirit into the Father's hands for safekeeping and sent it off! What a wonderful picture of what you and I will do one day! Because of what Christ did here, when our time comes, we, likewise, will place our spirit in the Father's hands and depart from this body, just like He did! And look where He went! According to His own words:

c. He was immediately with the Father in paradise Remember what He told the thief hours before? *I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.* - **Luke 23:43**. Unless Jesus told a lie as He was dying, that very day

He was in paradise! I know that the later "Received Form" of the Apostles Creed, which some of you may be used to repeating, contains the phrase *He descended into hell*. But you should know that phrase was a later addition which does not appear in writing until nearly 400 AD and even then, the church explained it to mean that Christ simply went to the place of departed spirits of the just, not to the hell of suffering where the lost go; that is a much later false concept that developed. Listen, we have a direct definition of *paradise* in 2 Cor. 12:2-4. Paul shares an experience where he was caught up to *the third heaven* (that means not atmospheric heavens, nor the heavens of space, but the heaven where God dwells) and then he repeats himself, saying he was caught up *into paradise*! Paradise is heaven itself where God is and that's where Jesus' spirit went! His spirit was in the Father's hands in the Father's house immediately, and so will yours be because of what Jesus did for you! To be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord!

His death was exactly what ours will be, a departure, a shoving off from the moorings that hold us to this world and hold our soul to this body directly into heaven to enjoy *the paradise of God* as John calls it in Rev. 2:7! Hallelujah! Now in verses 51-53, Matthew tells us about:

2. the supernatural events that followed Jesus' death. First of all, we're told that:

a. the veil before the Holy of Holies in the Temple was torn (51a) The bystanders at the cross didn't see this, of course, but the priests who were in the Temple at this very time offering up the evening sacrifice must have had the fright of their lives. The huge thick veil which hung before the Most Holy Place where the ark was, began to tear in half, right down the middle. Now this veil, you understand, extended to the ceiling which in Herod's temple was 40 cubits or about 60 feet high, thirty feet wide, and it was a hand-breadth, about 4 or 5 inches, thick! It was untearable, but as they watched, it began to tear itself in two, not from the bottom up as any natural cause would do it, but from the top to the bottom! God Himself tore it open! Why? Heb. 10:20 says clearly that the veil in the temple is a picture or a type of Christ's flesh, His body. When Christ's body died, God tore the veil open to say, "Look the way into My Presence is now open. You can go in through Him! He was the true Evening Sacrifice, the last one ever to be made and through His death He has opened the way for you!" What a powerful visual lesson! How sad that instead of connecting the two events, the Jews just sewed up another veil and put it back in place! Then, at the same time this was occurring:

b. a strong earthquake rocked the whole area (51b) The ground beneath the feet of the bystanders trembled, buildings in the city shook, rocks on the hillside cracked and split open. Surely, they found themselves suddenly struggling for balance and some perhaps falling to the ground. Another effect of this earthquake was **(52-53)**. Tombs on the hillsides were normally sealed by placing large rocks across the openings and because of this earthquake:

c. many tombs opened; the rocks fell away from their entrances. And this paved the way for something far more miraculous. On the third day after Christ's resurrection, **some of the dead**, the saints, the holy ones, who had been buried in those tombs **were** actually **raised**, with Jesus as He rose and in their glorified form they went into Jerusalem and appeared to people just like Jesus Himself did! Of course, this is a mere mention and to say anything more would be pure speculation.

The other sign nobody ever thinks about, but the bystanders surely must have noticed, was that the darkness began to vanish and the sky grew light! Picture it: Jesus leaves His body, His head slumps forward and the ground shakes and people are knocked to the ground and the sky grows light and the sun breaks out! With what powerful effects the Father gave witness to the reality of what had just happened to His Son! And that is clear from:

3. the reaction of those who observed it (54-55) The callous soldiers around the cross were terrified and particularly the centurion, who confessed, *Truly this man WAS the Son of God!* We can't know what that meant to him, but at the very least, he was now expressing a belief that was opposite to the mocking of the crowd before! It is certainly possible you'll see these very men in heaven! After all, Jesus prayed for them at the very beginning! And if so, then Jesus is still saving people even in His death! And **Luke 23:48** concludes, *And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts*. I doubt that the Jewish leaders did so, but the rest of the common people who stood gazing were also impacted by the signs and trudged back into the city in sorrow, expressing it in Jewish fashion by beating their chests with their fists as a symbol of mourning. Meanwhile the women who loved Him and had followed Him from Galilee continued to faithfully stand at a distance and watch to see what would be done with His body and now Matthew tells us about:

III. The Burial Jesus Was Given in verses 57-66. With His spirit gone, all that was left was:

1. the interment of His body, which some bystanders had already been thinking about. We read first of:

a. the daring request of Joseph (57-58) He was an actual member of the Sanhedrin who was a believer; he had not consented to Jesus' conviction and now, while so many had fled, he had the guts to come forward publicly, straight to Pilate himself, to ask for custody of the body. And his request was granted. **Jn. 19:39** adds that Nicodemus, another member of the council, joined him, bringing a huge amount of burial spices and together they took Jesus' body and gave it a:

b. the reverent burial in the tomb (59-61) It was the only thing they could do. They were not able to stop His execution, but at least they gave Him a proper, if hurried, Jewish burial with a shroud and spices and a proper resting place, Joseph's own new, and no doubt expensive, tomb, carved out of solid rock. Before going home, the two Marys watched the whole process and made sure, both that His body was safe from further desecration and that they knew where it was laid so they could come back after the Sabbath. But the Jewish leaders were still not done; they insisted on:

2. the securing of the tomb (62-66) The next morning, on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders made a nervous request of Pilate. What the disciples forgot altogether, they remembered clearly, the fact that Jesus had said He would rise on the third day! Naturally they didn't believe He would actually DO it, but they were afraid His disciples might steal the body and create a hoax, so they petitioned for Pilate to make the tomb secure, just in case. Pilate disdainfully gave in to their request and a guard of several soldiers was posted before the tomb and a wax seal with the stamp of Rome impressed on it was placed on the edge of the stone that sealed the entrance. To break that seal was treason against Rome and meant certain death. They were quite sure His body would stay in there forever!

Well, Friday is over. The King is dead, buried and neatly sealed in a tomb. It's as though darkness has won the day and the world has said, "There, that takes care of that!" We have seen the reaction of the terrified soldiers, of the saddened crowd, of the determined Jewish leaders, but this morning, God is more interested in your reaction and mine. *About the year 1720, when Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf had finished university, he took a trip throughout Europe to see some of its cultural high-spots. When he arrived in the art museum at Dusseldorf, he saw a painting by Domenico Feti entitled "Ecce Homo" ("Behold the Man"). It was a portrait of Christ with the crown of thorns pressed down on his head and blood running down his face. Beneath the portrait were the words, "I have done this for you; what have you done for me?" As he stood there, as it were, watching his Savior suffer and bleed, he said to himself, "I have loved him for a long time, but I have never actually done anything for him. From now on I will do whatever he leads me to do." In that moment it hit him, "These wounds were meant to purchase me. These drops of blood were shed to obtain me." He could never get over it. He was not his own; he was bought with a price. His life was changed forever and that vision of his became the fuel that propelled the early Moravian missionary movement to the ends of the earth. [From John Piper's sermon "At The Price Of God's Own Blood" <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/at-the-price-of-gods-own-blood>].* I think Isaac Waats got it right in the unsung fourth verse of his hymn: *Thus might I hide my blushing face while His dear cross appears; dissolve my heart in thankfulness, And melt mine eyes to tears.* We could and should be overwhelmed with tears of gratitude and thankfulness and worship at what Jesus did there at the cross for us. Yet then comes the familiar fifth verse: *But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe: Here, Lord, I give myself away - 'Tis all that I can do!* You are not your own; you were bought by God at an immeasurably great price, the blood of His own Son. Give your life away to Him.

The Coming Of The King: The Gospel Of Matthew

The Passion Of The King - Mt. 26-28

The King Is Risen - Ch. 28

This morning we come to the crowning chapter of Matthew's narrative of Jesus' life, which proclaims to us the Resurrection of the King. It is obvious that Matthew does not attempt to recall for us all the events that occurred on that wonderful Sunday, nor does he attempt to tell us all the appearances of the Resurrected Lord. If you want a complete picture you have to compare all four Gospels. The New Scofield Reference Bible has a wonderful comprehensive note of explanation at Mt. 28:1 and Jn. 20:16; the NIV Study Bible has a chart at Lk. 24:21, and I'm sure other study Bibles can also help you. But that is not Matthew's purpose. He simply wanted to leave us with three important pieces of information: the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, how the Jews reacted to that fact, since he wrote primarily with a Jewish audience in mind and the Great Assignment Jesus gave us to take the news of Him to all nations. So, in the first ten verses Matthew declares to us:

I. The Incredible Fact Of Jesus' Resurrection (1-10) We pick up the story in (1-4). The first witnesses of the Resurrection were the women who had stood by Jesus at the cross and watched His hasty burial. John mentions only Mary Magdalene, Matthew adds Mary the mother of James the less, and Mark adds Salome, the mother of James and John. Some manuscripts of Luke say there were others. At any rate, they were concerned that Jesus' body had not been properly anointed for burial and so when the Sabbath was over, they returned early in the morning carrying spices and talking among themselves, hoping against hope they would find someone to open the tomb for them, apparently not realizing it was sealed and guarded. But when they arrived, they found that God had already taken care of their problem:

1. an angel had opened the tomb FOR them and was there sitting on the huge stone waiting for their arrival! Now let's take careful note of:

a. the circumstances that are mentioned. Jesus was crucified on Friday and hurriedly buried just after 3 PM, before the Sabbath started at sundown. So that's a piece of Friday which in Jewish time-counting counts as a whole day. Then from Friday evening through Saturday evening was the Sabbath, a second day. Saturday evening began

a third day and on Sunday morning Jesus rose about dawn. So, Jesus did rise on the third day, or in three days by Jewish reckoning, and, since any portion of a day counts as a whole 24-hour day/night period, it could even be called 3 days and three nights as Jesus referred to in one of His predictions. But it is interesting that the word Sabbath in verse 1 is plural in the Greek. You see, this is not just the end of one particular Sabbath day; it is the end of all Sabbaths; it is the end of the Sabbath as an institution. From now on, it is the First Day of the week, not the seventh, that will be observed and celebrated by believers as the Lord's Day, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead! Anyway, before dawn that morning, an angel, maybe the archangel Gabriel, came down from heaven and caused a violent earthquake. It must have knocked the guards to the ground and the women must have felt it as they were on their way. The angel rolled away the stone from the entrance to the tomb. Why? Not so Jesus could get out, but so the women, and the rest of the world with them, could look in and see that He was not there because He had risen!

b. the soldiers' reaction to it is in verse 4. Note that they didn't see the Lord Jesus because He didn't walk out the door! He was already risen and gone when the angel moved the stone. But don't miss the meaning: Rome had sealed the tomb and pronounced death on any man who opened it; God unsealed the tomb and all the might of Rome was powerless to stop Him! The four battle-hardened soldiers guarding the tomb saw the angel, were knocked to the ground, and were so terrified that they fainted dead out! So, the women arrived just after all this had happened to find the angel sitting on the stone before the empty tomb and when they came near:

2. the angel announced Jesus' Resurrection (5-7) The angel explains to them what has occurred. This has not been a body-snatching incident. There has been a Resurrection. Jesus has risen to life again in a glorified body. And this is not some far-out last minute surprise happening; Jesus Himself had said, not once but many times, that He would rise on the third day. The angel is trying to help them begin to get a new picture of this whole event into their minds and, indeed, it took all the disciples quite a while to realize that all of this was God at work, that everything happened according to His plan, that Jesus deliberately chose to die and rise again in order to save us from our sins. And the angel offers them:

a. the proof of it: the empty tomb "Come, look inside, you know where His body was lying! He is no longer here!" The tomb was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers. There was no other way in. Yet when opened it was empty! What else can that mean but that Jesus rose from the dead and, in His glorified body, left it! And we still have that same proof today; it is still empty. No critic, no enemy, has ever produced the body that was placed in it as an argument against His resurrection. He is not there because He is risen! And here's:

b. the promise we have through it The women were to go and tell the disciples He had risen and instruct them to go back to Galilee where they were from but the good part is, *there you will see Him!* "He's alive!" That promise is for us. The Resurrection of Jesus means that we too will see Him one day! He is a real, living person, our Lord and Savior, and on that day when the time is right in God's plan, we too shall see Him just as they did! However, as the story continues, it turns out, that seeing was not to wait until they reached Galilee. As they ran back to Jerusalem:

3. the women met the Risen Christ (8-10) Jesus Himself appeared and stopped them right on the road. They could do nothing else but to fall down on their faces and grab His feet and worship Him as the Living Lord! And Jesus repeated to them the message of the angel, making it His personal promise, *they will see Me!* We don't have that promise just from an angel's mouth, though that would be enough, but we have it from Jesus' own mouth, *you will see Me!* One more interesting note, He calls the disciples His *brothers*. These ones who forsook Him and deserted Him and even denied Him, they are now forgiven; in fact, they are given a new relationship as His brothers! And again, what joy that is for all of us, because we have that same privilege. Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, we are now forgiven and counted as His own brothers and sisters. He is now the firstborn among many brothers, as Paul put it! Now as this was going on, back at the tomb, the angel left and the soldiers woke out of their stupor, realizing the danger they were now in, so some of them ran back to the chief priests in Jerusalem to report **(11-15)**. Here begins:

II. The Unbelievable Lie About Jesus' Resurrection The soldiers faced a deadly problem. They had been assigned to guard the tomb of a dead man with their lives and had failed. But what I want you to notice is that:

1. the soldiers understood the truth In verse 11 they told the chief priests *everything* that had happened. They didn't lie or try to cover it to protect themselves; they didn't even say, "we don't know what happened". They told the priests everything; they were too shocked and traumatized to do otherwise! And what's more, the priests didn't even try to deny it or tell them it was impossible or that they were crazy or even accuse them of sleeping on duty. They practically admitted to the miracle and had to pay the soldiers a large sum of money to keep them from telling the truth of what they'd seen! They knew what had happened but they couldn't allow the story of it to get out so:

2. the Jewish leaders chose to formulate a lie They decided to bribe the soldiers to propagate the most logical explanation for the missing body: *His disciples stole Him away while we were asleep*. Sure, that makes sense! First of all, if they were asleep, how would they know who came and did what? And second, who would believe that someone could come and roll away a huge rock and carry out a body, all without awakening the four soldiers lying right next to it!

But this is the lie they formulated and paid dearly to get the soldiers to use. However, their plan had one last glitch. The penalty for sleeping while on duty was death and so was the penalty for letting a prisoner escape. So I assume they probably had to not only buy off the soldiers, but to bribe Pilate himself with an even larger sum of money in order to spare the soldiers. They went to a lot of trouble to cover up the truth, but because of it verse 15 mentions:

3. the fiendish circulation of this lie Their lie was so effective that it was still being circulated among the Jewish people at the time when Matthew wrote 20 years later. And I suspect that even today there are still lots of people who believe the same lie and see it as the only logical explanation for what happened because, after all, miracles just can't be real.

Well now Matthew skips ahead more than a full week in time and passes by all of the other appearances of Jesus to the disciples, in order to go right to the one appearance that both the angel and Jesus Himself referred to that morning (**16-17**). The eleven returned to Galilee and this extraordinary meeting took place. Jesus had in the meantime directed them to meet Him on a specific mountain and evidently a large crowd of His followers were present. Most Bible scholars believe this is the occasion where Jesus was seen by more than 500 brothers at one time which Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 15:6. When He appeared, they all fell down at His feet and worshipped Him, though some of those present apparently still had doubts at first. But what's important about this special appearance is the specific command Jesus gave to them on that day, what we have come to call the Great Commission. He had already given basically this same command to them three times already during His appearances to them in Jerusalem and He would repeat it once more a few days later at His ascension, but this day, in this grand setting, before all these witnesses, Jesus commissions them to carry out:

III. The Ultimate Purpose Of His Resurrection (18-20) When He draws near and begins to speak, He first declares to them:

1. the authority behind His commission He has all authority in heaven and on earth; He proved that by His resurrection. Nothing can stand before Him, nothing can stop Him, and nothing can stop us when we are following His bidding! Moreover, it is because of that very authority that He expects us to do whatever He has commanded us to do! He is our Lord, our Master, and He has given us, His followers, marching orders that stand for all time. In verse 19 is:

2. His commission: make disciples of ALL NATIONS I know you've heard this verse many times and can probably quote it backwards, but you must understand its Greek structure. This sentence contains one verb, *disciple* with three participles that modify that verb, *having gone*, *baptizing*, and *teaching*. Literally He said, *Having gone, therefore, disciple all the nations, baptizing them... [and] teaching them...* The verb is the command: *Disciple!* Or, clearer in English, *make disciples!* That is what we are commanded to be about; it is our very purpose as followers of Jesus. Followers of Jesus are commissioned to make followers of Jesus! Disciple whom? In Greek, *panta ta ethne*, **ALL THE PEOPLES** of the earth! This is the big point Jesus was making and it's the one we miss seeing, even when we're looking straight at it! Jesus had put it to them like this back in the Upper Room, *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."* - Lk. 24:45-47. There's a plan that God has always had in mind from the very beginning: that His Son would come to suffer and die and that this would be proclaimed to all the nations. Christ commissioned His followers to begin in Jerusalem and proclaim the Good News of His sacrifice and the command to repent and be forgiven, one by one to all the rest of the peoples of the earth, so that at the end of the age when He comes, He will have worshippers from every people on earth. That's what the last 2,000 years have been about and that's what the rest of human history until He comes is about, making disciples of all the peoples. That is to be our life's purpose. Do you realize that today there are still some 2.8 billion people, a third of the earth, who are part of nearly 4,000 ethnic groups, who are still unreached, that is they have NO opportunity to hear of Jesus; there are too few believers where they live to tell them. We have been commissioned to disciple them! Now Jesus embellished that command with the three participles which describe:

3. the process of carrying out His commission First of all:

a. it involves going It is not a command to go, but an assumption that in order to disciple all peoples, they would be going, that is, going where those peoples are. They were not to start a commune on that mountain in Galilee, praying and waiting until Jesus returned, any more than we are to be a nice little commune here in Glenside living comfortable lives and waiting for Jesus to come. They were to go to all nations and later Jesus would outline the path they would follow: Jerusalem then Judea then Samaria and then on until they reached the peoples at the very ends of the earth, who would be US. Listen, *going* is a natural part of the life of a believer. We need to be going wherever we *can* go and where we can't, we need to be going constantly in prayer and sending others who can. But the goal of all peoples needs to be constantly on our minds and hearts. Secondly:

b. it involves baptizing As we proclaim the message of Christ, we call people to join us and become His followers. And the public sign of that commitment to follow Him is to be baptized in His Name. All around the world, wherever the Gospel goes, when people hear the Good News, believing and beginning to trust in Jesus is often a gradual process, but when they make that decision to be a follower of Christ with finality, they universally declare it by being baptized. Baptism is not simply a religious ritual and it certainly doesn't save anyone; rather, baptism is my declara-

tion that I am truly a follower of Christ, no turning back! It is a declaration that I am no longer a Muslim or a Hindu or a Buddhist or a secular atheist or a self-centered materialist or whatever I was before; I am a follower, a disciple of Jesus Christ! And then, when a person has become a follower, thirdly:

c. it involves teaching, teaching them everything that Jesus commanded, everything that we ourselves have learned, training them up to maturity so that they ultimately become like us, disciples who are making more disciples by going and baptizing and teaching. Jesus Himself made the first set of disciples over His 3 years of ministry; they made thousands of others during their lifetimes to the ends of the Roman Empire and beyond, and those made others and so the Gospel has spread to us and now through us, it is spreading on to still others until all the peoples of the earth have heard and some from every people have become His disciples, just as we are. And when that has happened, Jesus said, then the end will come! He will return and this age will be completed.

Now that seems like an awfully huge assignment, but in verse 20 He gave us:

4. the promise of His commission (20) *Behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.* Well, the age hasn't ended, so He is still with us. We are not alone as we disciple the nations. He is with us always. That is the greatest benefit of the Resurrection. We follow a Living Master, not a dead teacher; we follow a Risen Christ who is with us personally every moment as we dedicate our lives to carrying out His commission to make for Him disciples of all the nations.

*I'm sure you don't realize it but the ancestors of some of you were Germanic Angles who invaded the isle of Britain in the late 400's AD and formed the pagan Kingdom of Northumbria in the north. The first Christian missionary to arrive in Northumbria was a young man named Paulinus. He arrived from Rome in 601 AD and with three companions successfully evangelized in Kent in the south of the island. But in 625, Edwin, King of Northumbria, wished to marry Ethelburga, the daughter of Ethelbert, King of Kent, a Christian who objected to a pagan son-in-law. But Edwin promised to allow the princess complete freedom in her religious worship, and even said that he himself would listen to Christian preaching and adopt her faith, if his wise men should consider it right and just. This was an opportunity for evangelizing Northumbria, so Ethelbert sent his daughter and Paulinus accompanied the princess as her religious adviser, and, to add dignity and importance to his mission, was consecrated bishop before he set out, on July 21, 625. While the King was respectful, he did not convert under Paulinus' preaching, nor did many of the people until at the feast of Easter in 626, an unsuccessful attempt was made upon Edwin's life. This eventually resulted in a national gathering near York to consider Christianity. Even Coifi, the high priest of their pagan religion, advised Edwin to adopt Christianity, saying that their pagan religion had not proved satisfactory. Another nobleman rose to say these words: "Your Majesty, when we compare the present life of man on earth with that time of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banquet-hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter's day with your thegns and counsellors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a moment of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came. Even so, man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what follows, we know nothing. Therefore, if this new teaching has brought any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it." That, brothers and sisters, is the very thing Jesus sent us to bring to a pagan world. He has emerged from death victorious with all authority in heaven and earth! He lives and has told us plainly, that because He lives, we too shall live, live with Him in heaven forever! We Christians are the only people in the world with certain knowledge of what happens after death and a guarantee of eternal life provided to us by the Lord and Savior we follow! Through the ministry of Paulinus in 627, King Edwin, his court, many of his chief men and a host of the common people of Northumbria became followers of Christ. For the next six years he disciplined Northumbria. So many of the peoples of earth still flounder in that same darkness! Solomon advised, *Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.* - Prov 24:11. At this feast of Easter, let us commit ourselves afresh to bring the peoples the light of our Risen Savior and finish carrying out His commission! Sources: [www.ccel.org/ccel/wace/biodict.html?term=Paulinus,%20missionary%20to%20Northumbria] and [<http://elvis.rowan.edu/~kilroy/JEK/10/10.html>]*

MARK

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Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

The Preparation Of The Servant 1:1-13

Each of the four Gospel writers tells the story of Jesus. But each one has a purpose in writing and an audience in mind and so, out of all that he knows, he tells the things that make the point he is trying to get across. For instance, Matthew is concerned with showing to the Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and so he has a proper Jewish genealogy and lots of references to Old Testament Scriptures. Luke wrote to Gentiles and concentrates on the things that paint Jesus as a true human being, a man just like us so he's got birth stories and other things that point out Jesus' humanity. John does the same with His deity. He was God, the Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us. But Mark painted a different picture in his book.

I. The Introduction To The Book We Are Studying (1) Verse 1 is actually the title of the book and the description of what he is about to write. This book:

1. it presents the origins of a mission

“the beginning”

Not the beginning of the book, but the beginning of the good news. You see, Mark is writing 30 years later, after the death of Peter from whom he got all his information. Churches have been planted all over the known world, even at Rome where he's writing. His view is like that of Luke, who wrote in Acts 1:1, *In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach...* so now I'm writing a second book about all that Jesus is continuing to do through His church! That story of what Jesus is doing is still continuing today through His people all over the world. Mark closes his book by saying in Mark 16:20, *Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them...* Mark is presenting the beginnings, the origin of a mission to reach the world, the same mission that you and I are carrying on as part of the church today. If we don't know our roots, our beginnings, we'll get side-tracked from our purpose. And here it is:

2. it publishes the saving act of God

“of the good news”

Good news is an announcement made by a herald. In this case, it is the good news about Jesus Christ and what He did for the human race on a cross, the saving act of God in sending His Son to redeem us. The mission is for the world to hear that news. That's why the last words of Jesus in Mark's record are *Mark 16:15 ... “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.* 2000 years ago God started a mission to bring salvation to the human race. We're part of that story today, but what Mark is writing is the beginning of that story, the news that we are publishing. The third thing that Mark's book does is this:

3. it portrays the nature of Jesus

“about Jesus Christ”

He tells us more about what Jesus did than what He taught. His favorite word is the Greek *euthus*, in English, *At once* or *immediately*. It occurs only 80 times in the whole New Testament and 40 of them are in Mark. And 36 of those 40 are in the first 10 chapters which describe how Jesus lived during the 3 years of his ministry. Mark paints Jesus as busy! Doing, doing, doing! What? Carrying out the mission! Carrying out the Father's purpose, serving Him. Publishing the news of the saving act of God in His words and His deeds, a servant diligently going about His master's business. But at the same time:

4. it proclaims the authority of Jesus

“Son of God”

Don't hand this gospel to a Muslim friend. He won't read past this verse. Mark makes no bones about it; Jesus was the Son of God, God the Son. Mark says it up front and tells how Jesus showed it in miracle after miracle (19 of them he records!). He was all-powerful, Almighty God, yet a servant about His master's business. And that brings me to the real reason I chose to preach through Mark:

5. it pictures our servanthood as sons of God - 10:43-45 Jesus was God, but even He didn't come to be served. He came as a servant to serve the human race and to give His life to save them. My friend, we too are sons of God, children of the Heavenly Father, heirs to all the riches of glory, the treasure He values most in all the universe, but as His sons, He has us in this world as servants, servants who need to give their lives to the mission of Jesus, saving the human race! We live in a culture that shouts the message, “Serve me, serve me!” And we have picked it up so well in our attitudes. The church exists to serve me; other people exist to serve me; the government exists to serve me; the world exists to serve me; and ultimately God exists to serve me. That's why our prayers are full of “Gimme, gimme, gimme!” That's the worldview that has infiltrated an entire generation and it has infiltrated us and our families too, like it or not! Oh, beloved, if there's one thing Jesus wants in His followers, it's a servant heart, a heart like that of Himself, and nobody paints that servant heart for us better than Mark. That's why we're studying Mark, to learn to be servants like Jesus.

So let's get started, shall we? The first thing Mark tells us about is:

II. The Preparation Of The Servant (2-13) The first 13 verses are the first major division of his writing. They show how Jesus was prepared for His ministry as a servant through His baptism and His temptation. And from them we can learn two very important lessons. The first is this:

1. God prepares for the ministry of His servant (1-8) Jesus did not just show up on the scene one day to serve God cold turkey. Before ever putting Him on the scene, God prepared in advance for the work that He would do. Actually, He did it throughout the whole Old Testament, particularly through the prophets, but we can see it most obviously in the fact that God sent a forerunner to pave his way in John the Baptist and the ministry which he had. John preached and ministered throughout Judea and had great crowds of people coming to him for months before Jesus began his ministry. And all that time, he was telling them to watch and look for the One who was to come, pointing them to Jesus who would come after him. And, my friend, you are no different.

a. God has prepared for your service through others (2-3) Isaiah and Malachi both prophesied in advance that God would send a forerunner to prepare for Jesus. His function was to “prepare the way”, to “make a straight path” for Jesus. When we read that, we don't realize that it was sort of a technical phrase. Israel did not have a crew of PennDOT workers (IsraelDOT?) like we have to fix and maintain the roads! When a king would travel, a repair crew

might be sent ahead to "prepare the way", that is, to level the road and fill ditches, and so on, to make it passable for him. John prepared the Lord's road into the hearts of the people of Israel so that when Jesus came preaching, they were ready to listen. That's how He works. However we serve God, God has already been at work preparing for what we do through what somebody else has done! Positively or negatively! God used the witness and caring of a friend to prepare my heart to be ready to receive the Gospel message two years later from a pastor. That happened for many of you. When I went to the second church I pastored, they had had several years of a very liberal pastor and were dwindling and falling apart. The first Sunday, I simply shared my testimony and gave an invitation and 14 people responded for salvation or rededication! Their hearts were hungry and thirsty for the things of God and they were starving. God had prepared for my simple service that day. You never go into any situation to serve God where He has not already been at work, where He has not already been preparing the way for your service and it's also true in the other direction:

b. God is preparing for the service of others through you (4-6) Now, focus on John as a servant for a moment. His whole ministry was preparing for the service of someone else, for Jesus who would come after him. Everything he did, all the people his ministry touched, all the crowds whose hearts were broken over their sins and wanting salvation, all of that was preparation for the service that Jesus would render! Everything you do in serving God ties in with one grand scheme; you are part of a master plan. The service of others prepares for yours and yours prepares for the service of others. You are not the be all and end all. You are a link in the chain of what God is doing and what you do is a contribution to all that will come later and build upon it. You see, the bottom line is that:

c. God is pointing others to Himself through your service (7-8) John's whole message was, "He must increase; I must decrease!" "Not I, but Christ!" John knew what it was to be a servant. "I am nothing; He is everything. Don't look at me; look at Him. I put you in water as a symbol. I can only work on the outside, I can only tell you the message and encourage you to change your behavior. He is the one who can make the real change, whose Spirit can enter your hearts and transform you from the inside out. I am a servant; He's what matters." Paul, great missionary that he was, knew this! **Compare 1 Cor. 3:5-8.** I am a servant. I serve Christ. It is He who does the real work, He to whom I point, He that really matters. In fact, it is not that I am pointing people to Him through my service; He is pointing others to Himself through me! It all depends on Him, not me! But what a privilege! To serve Almighty God, to have Him at work before me and in and through me to get glory to Himself!

Now we find here a second important fact about serving God. Not only does God prepare for the ministry of His servant, but:

2. God prepares His Servant for ministry (9-13) There were two special events that happened in the life of Jesus before He began His public ministry of serving God: His baptism and His temptation. They were preparatory events. God prepares us for the service He has called us to. He doesn't just thrust us into it when we are not ready or equipped in His eyes. Just as He prepares the work for us to do, He prepares us for doing the work! I'm sure Jesus was prepared in many ways throughout His first 30 years for these 3 years of service Mark tells us about. But here we only have two mentioned. So, what lessons can we learn from these two key events? Well, first, from the baptism of Jesus we learn that:

a. ministry is a work of God (9-11) Instead of looking at all the detail of why Jesus was baptized and all the symbolism of it, Mark summarizes and mentions three things, the time, the Spirit and the Voice. You see:

(1) God provides the opportunity for your service (9) at that time... What time? The very days when John was preaching that He was coming. In fact, John's Gospel tells us that Jesus showed up precisely just after John had told the authorities he was not the Christ but the Christ was here and the very next day, there came Jesus and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God..." The timing was perfect, the moment just right. The opportunity was provided for and orchestrated by God! And so is yours! God provides the opportunity for your service at His perfect time and place and a servant must know that! But not only that:

(2) God provides the power for your service (10) As He came out of the water Jesus immediately, the Greek says, looked up and he saw the heavens literally torn open and down came the Holy Spirit upon and into Him in the form of a dove. Now, did he not have the Holy Spirit until this moment? Of course, He did! This is an object lesson designed for us by the Father: "My Servant operates by the power of My Spirit, not His own! I provide the power for His service!" And God provides the power for your service by the indwelling presence of His Spirit in you, too! A servant must know that! But not only that:

(3) God provides the platform for your service (11) Was Jesus not the Son of God until this moment? Of course, He was! Did He not know it? Of course, He did! This is a public announcement made, perhaps for the benefit of His disciples and the crowd around, but primarily for us who would read it later. This One who serves Me is My Son; He does not become My Son by serving; He is My Son, therefore He serves. I provide the platform of sonship from which He serves. Oh, God may never have spoken audibly to a crowd about you but He has provided the same platform for you. You are His son, His daughter. He is well-pleased in you. You don't

serve to become His son, nor to make Him become pleased. You are already His son and He is already pleased by that before you ever serve at all! And a servant needs to know that!

My friend, ministry or service is a work of God through you, not a work of you for Him. He provides the opportunity to serve, the power to serve and the platform of relationship with Him from which you serve! That's a lesson that God is continually reinforcing in your life to prepare you for service. And sometimes He has to repeat it over and over again, because we forget it and make our own opportunities and use our own power and expect Him to be pleased by our works! My, how He has to break us of that to make us effective servants! Corrie ten Boom used to teach it this way. She'd take out an old glove and say, *I have a glove here in my hand. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, the glove can do many things. Thus, it is not the glove, but my hand in the glove that acts. The Christian is a glove. It is the Holy Spirit in us, the hand, who does the work. We have to make room for the hand so that every finger is filled.* That's what Jesus is showing us here. Learn it well! Finally, there's a second important lesson here in Jesus' Temptation:

b. ministry is a warfare with the Adversary (12-13) While the other Gospels get tied up in giving us the ways in which Jesus was tempted and the method by which He successfully repelled Satan's attack, Mark records neither the specific attacks nor the outcomes. He reports three simple facts about the battle: the Spirit, the time and the angels. And in those there are three lessons that every servant of God must know:

(1) God has thrust you into a hostile environment to serve Him Look where Jesus went. The desert, the wilderness, an uninhabitable, unhospitable, even hostile, place. When it says the wild animals were with Him, it doesn't mean that He sat around petting His friends the cute squirrels. The word means wild beasts, the jackals, wolves, foxes, leopards, hyenas! It was a place where there was no help, where the claw ruled. What a picture of this world we live in, a hostile place, a place of danger to life and limb. And who was there? Satan! Why? He's the ruler of this hostile place, the ruler of this world. It's his domain and he makes it so hostile. And how did Jesus get there? The Spirit drove Him there, thrust Him into it right away! My friend, no servant of God calls this world home. It is enemy territory. It is dangerous and scary. And God has put us in it by design. Why? Satan is at work here to kill and destroy men, but God has sent us into battle against him to rescue and save them. Our service is spiritual warfare; battle against a vicious deadly enemy who hates us, in his own territory. So, an effective servant knows that:

(2) Satan will continually attack you as you serve God It was not that at the end of the 40 days alone Satan offered him three temptations. The text says he tempted him the whole 40 days. Those last three were the climax, the big ones, but He was tempted and attacked continually. And so will you be. Always! Throughout your life Satan is prowling, looking for ways to devour you! Be alert, Paul said. Be on your guard! Be aware. Watch out. Don't be ignorant of his devices. But on the other hand, don't be afraid, because:

(3) angels will serve you as you serve God Angels served Him there in the battle. He was not alone. Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who are the heirs of salvation. Those who are on our side are more than those who are with the enemy! God has Divine troops at work serving together with you in this battle. Jesus knew it. He said that He could have called more than twelve legions of angels to deliver him from the cross. They stood ready. And they stand ready for you too.

You see, the cosmic battle for the souls of men is on, and you're in it. It is the servants of God against the servants of Satan. It's not some myth; it's real. It's a warfare and any servant must know that to be effective. Ministry is a work of God but it's also a warfare with the enemy. God wants to prepare you to play an effective role in this battle. You're a servant of God on mission in this world, part of a continuing campaign that He is mounting through the centuries. He has prepared for your part and is preparing for others through you, but the battle is His and He gets the glory. He fights through you to publish the news of salvation to the human race against all the attacks of the enemy. And the good news is that I've read the end of the Book; He wins! Yet so many of His servants go through life, having no real idea of why they're here or the cause they're involved in. They trust Him for heaven but serve themselves in life! Their image of success is to get things, to stay healthy, to experience pleasure, to accomplish something. *Writer Philip Yancey notes the fact that toward the end of his life, Albert Einstein removed the portraits of two scientists--Newton and Maxwell--from his wall. He replaced those with portraits of Gandhi and Schweitzer. Einstein explained that it was time to replace the image of success with the image of service.* I think its high time that we do the same! Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. You've been sent, not to be served by God, but to serve Him and to give your life as a living sacrifice for His purpose, seeking and saving that which is lost. My friend, do you know who you are? Or more importantly are you living like who you are?

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

The Ministry Of The Servant 1:14-5:43

The Servant's Mission To The Multitudes 1:14-45

Most people's lives focus around a very small group of people, our immediate and extended family, our handful of good friends and neighbors, maybe the people we work with. Almost all of our time, effort, energy, and resources are invested in this small group. The rest of the world passes by and we hardly notice. We live among thousands of people but those we don't know don't really register to us. We often see them the same way we look at a forest as we drive by on the interstate. Thousands of trees flash by and, while we might be impressed with the beauty of the forest, not one individual tree really registers on our minds. They're just the scenic background of our lives, against which we live with those few we really know and care about. But Jesus did not live like that. Most of His life and service was devoted to crowds of people whom He never knew personally. At times, He singled out individuals who needed His touch; other times, He taught a whole congregation in a synagogue or a crowd in a house or a multitude gathered on a hillside. He traveled from town to town and place to place so that more people could hear the Good News. And ultimately, of course, His focus was the whole world, as we see in Mark's recording of His last command, *Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation [that is, not the rocks and trees but to every created human being]*. Jesus' passion was to deliver the good news of salvation to every human being alive in His generation. And while he has not called most of us to adopt His itinerant lifestyle, His heart longs for us to catch His passion for the human race, to turn outward from the safety and security of our small circle to the great need of the multitudes of people around us! Now let's look at:

I. The Manner In Which The Servant Reached The Multitudes (14-20) There were two ways in which he did it. First of all:

1. He delivered the message Himself (14-15) personally. You see, it was:

a. his habit: proclaiming the good news to people Wherever He went, whatever situation He found Himself in, He found ways to proclaim the good news to people. It was His habit. It was to Him a way of life, delivering the Good News of God to people. That's so hard for me; isn't it for you? It's so difficult to talk about spiritual things with people, to even mention God's name in conversation. But it was Jesus' habit. As much as you or I talk about weather or sports, He talked about the Father. It's what He was about. And here we have the brief summary of:

b. his message: the Kingdom of God is drawing near It had three pieces. The time or era in which we live is completed, brought to its fulfillment. The time when God rules directly over men on earth is literally *nearing*, that is, drawing near. We live in a little window of opportunity between the two. It's time right now to repent, to change your mind about the way you live your life, and believe the Good News! Of course, this is just a simple three line summary. Jesus said a whole lot more. We would share a whole lot more, particularly concerning Jesus' death and resurrection, but the bottom line still is that today is a small window of opportunity to believe the Good News of God and our task is not merely to provide information, but to present people, by our interaction with them, the opportunity to change their minds and believe it! That's what our lives are about. God injects us into the lives of many people throughout our life because it is the right time, because their window of opportunity is open but will soon be closed, and uses us to offer them the opportunity to believe. So, our habit of life needs to be like Jesus', to see that Divine purpose that is going on and cooperate with it by delivering the message. But at the same time that He was delivering the message personally, Jesus concentrated on a second thing:

2. He developed others to do the same (16-20) He took four men and later added to them, until they became a dozen who were His disciples, His learners. He devoted three years to training them intensively and then sent them out as apostles (sent ones), people who would go out and deliver the message just like He did! Look at:

a. His call: to leave their own interests and devote themselves to His "Come follow me!" is a deep phrase. It means "Come, join My party; give your loyalty to Me," and the text says they left everything, their nets, their occupations, even their families and followed (literally, *walked the same road together with*) Him. What for? What was:

b. His goal: to cause them to become what He was, fishers of men To transform them from mere fishermen into people whose lives were devoted, like His, to fishing for men.

Now Jesus doesn't call all of us to physically leave our occupations and our families and become itinerant evangelists. But He does call all of us to forsake living for our own interests and devote ourselves to His, to be transformed in the midst of our circumstances into fishers of men, people who are reaching the human race for Him! And the point here is that, not only are we to be what He was, but we are to be developing others into what we are, as He did. Now let's watch how He did it.

Here begins Mark's record of Jesus' public ministry. First, we have the record of one very busy Sabbath day and then a summary of what must have been a few weeks or perhaps months' worth of ministry. But rather than concentrating on the recorded events for their own sake, let's look at them as illustrations for us of:

II. The Methods By Which The Servant Reached The Multitudes (21-45) Four things constantly characterized Jesus' life and ministry and they indicate four things that should also characterize ours. First of all:

1. a servant constantly seeks opportunities to share the message with people (21-22, 38-39) Jesus constantly sought opportunities to interact with people and share with them, whether it was a woman drawing water from the well, a group of guests gathered in a home for a meal, or the congregation gathered in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Notice how often:

a. Jesus used the opportunity of teaching in the synagogues The synagogue was a natural place. The community gathered each Sabbath day for the purpose of praying, listening to the Scriptures read and being taught. But it was a very democratic kind of place. Anybody the leader allowed could read or teach. And Jesus often took advantage of that opportunity, which was readily afforded to Him, to read from the Old Testament and then explain the true meaning and fulfillment of those Scriptures in His own coming! Jesus used this opportunity everywhere He went. Paul was also a Jew in good standing and copied the same plan. Wherever he went throughout the Roman Empire, he first looked for a synagogue and began by exercising this most obvious opportunity to teach. Jesus intentionally traveled from town to town throughout Galilee, deliberately using this opportunity. And when He did, what impressed the people was that:

b. Jesus declared the message with personal authority When the rabbinic teachers of the day taught, they made long boring dissertations about trivial points in the law and it went something like this: "Well, Rabbi so and so taught this but Rabbi what's-his-face taught this and I agree with what's-his-face, because..." Jesus came in and said, "God says this. This is what it says and this is what it means! Believe it!" He taught as one who knew what He was talking about and that it was a message from God!

Now I doubt this particular method would work too well in the US today; not many synagogues would invite you to teach. But the point is that Jesus continually, deliberately sought out and exercised opportunities that were available to Him to share His message, and so should we as His servants today. Your opportunities will look entirely different. It may be inviting co-workers to go with you to the lunch-time Bible study at work. It may be inviting some ladies of your neighborhood over for coffee or taking someone to a musical at church as a springboard for discussion. There are 1001 opportunities that could inject you into the lives of people, if you'll seek them, ask God for them. A servant of God knows His purpose and looks for ways to share the Good News continually! Secondly:

2. a servant boldly involves himself in spiritual warfare for people (23-28) On this day in Capernaum a man was present there who was indwelt by a demon, and it took control of his voice right there in the meeting and cried out with a loud shriek and spoke against Jesus. Boy, I bet that got their attention! I bet they went home saying, "Man, you'll never guess what happened in church today!" But what I want you to see is:

a. Jesus recognized the enslaving power of demonic forces Demons are not some first century imaginary beings who are now relegated to Saturday morning cartoons. They are real. They are actual beings. They enter people's bodies. In many parts of the world where there is open idolatry and even worship of the spirits you find it commonly and openly today. And it's not just over there. In occult ceremonies right here in Philadelphia, every day young people and grown adults openly seek demon possession in dark ceremonies you would never believe and they get it And even where people aren't actually indwelt, there are demonic forces constantly at work in their lives to keep them blind and in spiritual darkness, to keep them from hearing and understanding and believing the Gospel, to enslave them in sin and false doctrine and suffering. We saw last week that ministry or serving God is a warfare against Satan and all his hosts. Paul put it this way in *Eph. 6:12, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*. You see, it is not just people who resist. To reach people we must fight demons! Jesus knew that and:

b. Jesus exercised His authority to free people from their grip He spoke as Lord and said, "Be quiet and get out!" and they did! People were amazed. Jewish exorcists used charms and incantations and never really got anywhere. Jesus spoke a word and they obeyed!

You may never be involved in a visible demonic confrontation like this one, but as you deliver the message to people daily, you can rest assured that you are in the thick of a spiritual battle. The forces of hell are pitted against you and what you're trying to do as a servant of God. You will be opposed and attacked. And you need to learn to recognize their presence and stand against them in prayer with the authority of Jesus Christ. In a slum area in one third world city there was a man who became a language helper for a foreign man of God (missionary). One day he refused to give money for the celebration of worship of the city's goddess. He said, "I have been reading this holy book and it says we are to have only one God." Then he fled the slum and gave his life to Christ. During those days a train smashed into the community. Two houses caught on fire. The people said it was because he had turned against their goddess; it probably was! To enslave them deeper in their fear! But the missionary prayed and God spoke to his heart to take flowers and fruit to the families of the victims of the tragedies, and this act opened the door and people responded and a church was planted. Today there are emerging churches in 10 slums. But to get to that initial point cost a lot. One worker lost her hearing; another lost her health. 15 workers gave from 3-7 years of their lives with severe sicknesses and frequent demonic activities surrounding them. And behind the scenes several hundred people were praying regu-

larly. Folks, we're in a battle and Satan doesn't let go easily. The folks around us are just as bound in their materialism and their self-sufficiency and their religion of works. Satan wants them and he's going to keep them forever unless we servants of God recognize it and go up against these forces in prayer and tear down their hold in the mighty name of Jesus so that people can be set free! The heart of a servant of God longs to see people set free! Thirdly:

3. a servant compassionately strives to meet the needs of people (29-34, 40-45) Everywhere Jesus went, He saw sick hurting people, suffering people, people whose lives were filled with pain and agony. His heart was touched as he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying there ill and unable to get up. This man with leprosy was typical of the rest and perhaps the epitome of them. The leper was an outcast. Nobody touched him. Nobody talked to him. He had to hobble around covering his face and crying, "Unclean". His body was deteriorating and becoming disfigured as his fingers and toes gradually wore away. He came to Jesus, not demanding, not begging, but in simple faith saying, "You can help me; I know you can". But what I want you to see is:

a. Jesus' deep compassion for people who were suffering Verse 41 says He was, *filled with compassion*... Jesus looked at suffering people and He was moved in the very depths of His being. His heart went out to them. He never turned them away. In fact, what we see is:

b. Jesus' deep commitment to help them He reached out and touched the leper. Do you know what that meant? Nobody had cared enough to do that, to bandage his wounds, to hug him. He was unclean and they might catch his disease. But Jesus boldly touched him and in that touching he was cleansed.

Oh my friend, God has probably not given you the gift of bringing instant physical healing to sick people, but there's still a lesson here. A true servant of Jesus has a heart full of compassion that is touched with the suffering of people and reaches out to touch them and meet their needs any way it can. He sees the need of people and doesn't pass by on the other side. He stops and says, "I can't do much but I can represent the love of Jesus and help in this way." How many times are people brought to faith because somebody loved them enough to help in their suffering, in their hour of need, in their sickness, in their loss of a loved one, in their handicap, in their divorce, in their being out of work, in their blindness and lostness and empty religion? Is your heart touched by the needs of people like Jesus' was or is it callous toward the needs of people? Finally:

4. a servant steadfastly pursues communion with the Master (35) Early in the morning Jesus slipped out alone to pray. This was not an isolated incident. We read several times of Jesus going away to pray by Himself, sometimes continuing all night in prayer. Just look at:

a. the priority Jesus placed on prayer He rose early, literally in the last watch of the night, between 3 and 6 AM, but early enough that it was still dark. Here that would be equivalent to about 4 AM! He wanted to make sure He got time with the Father before another busy day started. It was important. A servant of God needs time with the Master. Then note:

b. the privacy Jesus sought for prayer He went to a solitary place alone and didn't tell anyone, so that they actually had to hunt for Him. Plenty of times they prayed together, I'm sure. But it was also important to be alone, to have personal deep communion with the Father. A servant needs that! But what I'd like you to think about is:

c. the purpose Jesus obtained through prayer Why did He pray? What did He pray for? I rather suspect His prayer didn't look much like mine often do. It didn't focus on personal needs. John gives us glimpses of some of Jesus' praying at other times. He prayed for the Father to be glorified through Him. He prayed for the Father's will to be done. He prayed for His disciples that they would be sanctified and steadfast. He prayed for all who would believe later. I think first there was personal communion with the Father and that is primary, but His prayer usually focused on the two things His life focused on, the development of His disciples and the reaching of people! He prayed the way He lived! His battle for the souls of men was waged in prayer and so must ours be. Serious, private, purposeful prayer focused on the needs of people and reaching them for Christ and growing them into mature disciples who reach others, that's the habit of an effective servant of God.

He interacts with people, He cares for people, He prays for people and rescues them from the evil one. That's the way a true servant of God lives. People are not just a nameless, faceless, scenic background for his life. They are eternal souls of infinite value, individuals just like us whom God loves and wants to rescue. And he will not rest until everyone has the opportunity to know and love Jesus like he does. *An old Rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun. "Could it be," asked one of the students, "when you see an animal in the distance and can tell whether it's a sheep or a dog?" "No," answered the Rabbi. Another asked, "Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it's a fig tree or a peach tree?" "No," answered the Rabbi. "Then, when is it?", the pupils demanded. "It is when you can look on the face of any man or woman and see that it is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night!" (Tales Of The Hasidim)* My friend, if you cannot see people as fellow human beings, individuals of infinite worth just like you, and care about their eternal well-being, it is still night in your heart. The light of the Son has not yet taken away all the darkness. Let Him, won't you?

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

The Servant's Conflict With Leaders 2:1-3:6

Mark these words. It is inevitable that a servant of God delivering the message of God to people will end up in conflict. Absolutely inevitable. And that conflict will always be with people who are strongly religious, religious leaders, whether they are Jews, adherents to some sort of Christian tradition who do not really know Christ, or zealous pagans. Everywhere Paul traveled throughout Asia Minor and Greece, he either early on or much later ended up in some sort of conflict! Often it was the Jewish leaders who would become incensed at his teaching in the synagogue and drive him out. At Ephesus, it was the worshippers of Diana who finally ran him out of town. It is no different today. In many lands it is Muslim or Hindu leaders who oppress Christians. However, Christian workers in Russia and other CIS nations often face opposition from the established Orthodox church leaders who would rather join the communists in standing against them. In China the older leaders of the official 3-Self Church in some cases aided in the persecution of believers in the unregistered house churches! Jesus Himself was in constant conflict during the 3 years of His ministry. Not with common or even notorious sinners. Not with tax collectors and immoral folks and thieves and drunkards and the like. But with the very religious, the leaders of the Jewish people to whom He went, the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, students of the Law, the zealously religious who Paul described as *having a form of godliness but denying its power*. It is always those who have merely a zealous form of godliness that most greatly oppose true godliness, whether they are Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or even Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu. You will meet them and end up in conflict with them if you are sharing the message. Why is that? John explains it, saying, *Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil*. The light which our true message brings, lights up the darkness and displays the true nature of their own lives and therefore, they reject and hate it. In our text Mark records four different occasions when Jesus found Himself in direct conflict with zealous religious leaders and they illustrate for us the kinds of conflict we will experience with religious people. First, there will be:

I. The Conflict Over Religious Dogmas (2:1-12) What is a dogma? The dictionary says it is a religious belief or principle asserted in an authoritarian, often arrogant way. All zealously religious folks have them (even us), beliefs and principles they feel strongly about and resent other folks challenging them. If you share the truth of the Gospel, you will challenge other folks' dogmas! On this particular day, Jesus deliberately chose to challenge one:

1. the presenting problem: claiming assurance of forgiveness (1-7) What a scene it must have been, the crowded house, the paralyzed man lowered through the ceiling by ropes. Everyone expected Jesus to say, "Rise and be healed!" But He didn't. He chose to tackle a more important issue. He spoke tenderly, "Son, I declare that because of the faith that you and your friends have in Me, your sins are forgiven!" Boy, did that raise the hackles on those Jewish teachers. Their dogma was true, "No one except God can forgive sins!" And, since none of us is God, not even Jesus, none of us can assert that sins are forgiven. You can't give that kind of assurance to anyone or even have it for yourself. In short, one cannot give or have assurance of salvation! How interesting that that same religious dogma is still around! And it is openly declared and propagated by one of the largest church communions in our area and the world to which many, many of the people you and I know belong. You cannot claim assurance; it is actually a sin to claim assurance. The average run-of-the-mill common person may not be aware of it and may even welcome the news that forgiveness is free and complete through the blood of Jesus when you tell him, just as the common Jews welcomed Jesus and His teaching. But when you run up against a zealous participant or a leader, you will boil his blood very quickly, just like Jesus did concerning this and many other dogmatically asserted beliefs. But let's examine it more deeply.

2. the root issues: You see, the real issue here is actually two-fold. The first issue is:

a. who Jesus is and therefore His authority Do you see that Jesus is making a bold assertion here? He is taking to Himself a right that belongs only to God. He is actually saying, "I am God; I forgive sins!" But their assumption was, "Jesus cannot be God because He is a man! Therefore, He has no authority to forgive sins and doing so is blasphemy!" It all hinges on what you think of Jesus! Is what He says really the word of God or is my dogma the truth? But at the root of it all really lies something much more personal which is:

b. my own lack of assurance "I don't know that MY sins are forgiven! And I'm a student of the Law, a teacher of the Law! If I can't know it, nobody can!" And you see, all this was going on inside their own minds and hearts. They never said a word but Jesus heard it loud and clear and challenged them directly.

3. the servant's viewpoint: Jesus is God and chooses to forgive sins (8-12) From a human viewpoint it's easier to say, "your sins are forgiven" than "get up and walk," because nobody can verify it to see whether it's true. But if I say "get up and walk" and the person doesn't do it, then I am immediately shown to be a fraud. However, the truth is that either one of those things requires the proper authority, the authority of God. So Jesus said, "If I have the authority to heal disease on command, that ought to show you that I have authority to forgive sins. Watch!" And the man got up and walked, a forgiven and a healed man! His power which showed so clearly in His miracles proved His deity and His right to choose to forgive sins. And that's the message that His true servants have been proclaiming ever since. *Eph. 1:7, In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's*

grace. It's free. It's once for all, forever. My friend, I don't care whose religious dogma we challenge or who gets upset, His blood at Calvary takes away our sins and we HAVE forgiveness! And we need to keep on delivering that message, no matter who gets upset or who we get into conflict with! The people were amazed and praised God. They saw the obvious, but the leaders never bought it. They said nothing, but instead, it seems, began following Jesus wherever he went to keep an eye on Him. And sure enough, soon there was:

II. The Conflict Over Religious Separation (2:13-17) How shocked they must have been that day on two counts. First, Jesus called a man named Levi or Matthew who was a tax collector to become one of His disciples. That was bad enough, but Levi was so in love with his newfound Master that he threw a dinner and invited all of his tax collector friends to come and meet and hear Him too. He was doing evangelism, introducing the people He knew to the Savior. But these leaders who were Pharisees couldn't believe their eyes!

1. the presenting problem: fellowship with sinners (13-16) Tax collectors or publicans worked for the Roman government. They were hired to collect tribute from their fellow Jews for the hated Romans, so they were seen as traitors, Jewish Benedict Arnolds, who were selling their own people for profit. Beyond that, they associated with Gentiles and so were always ceremonially unclean, and they often misused their own office and collected extra for personal profit! The Pharisees called them "sinners" and had long taught that the only way to deal with those kinds of folks was to have as little to do with them as possible. To eat together in a home was a sign of intimacy. They wouldn't go in and sit at that meal, but complained in a haughty tone to the disciples who were nearest to them, "With tax collectors and sinners He eats!" Think of it! An evangelistic harvest is going on. Lost souls are partaking of the bread of life. All of heaven is rejoicing. But all the Pharisees can say is, "You're not separated unto God like we are; look at the sinners you associate with!" Know any folks like that today? In our day we often call Pharisees Fundamentalists and we call lawyers legalists, and it seems there is always a zealous crowd of them watching to criticize you because you would go to a party at the neighbor's house where people were drinking or because you became friends with and cared about a person who's a homosexual and have compassion on him because he has AIDS or because you are spending time to build a relationship with somebody who's got a drug addiction or low moral standards. Contamination by association is the name of the game and the cure is separation; stay away! On another occasion Jesus addressed:

2. the root issue: my own self-righteousness He told a story of a Pharisee and a tax collector who went into the Temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed "Thanks God, that I'm not like this man; I'm better than him. Aren't I a gift to you compared to this guy?" He couldn't see his own sin and how offensive it was to God. He was self-righteous. He'd set up his own standards of right and he kept them and tried to impose them on others. To admit that Jesus is right to care about sinners and devote His life to them is to be forced to admit his own selfish pride. But Jesus replied directly with:

3. the servant's viewpoint: sick people need doctors (17) Jesus came to save sinners; there were no righteous to call, not even one, according to Rom. 3:10, not even the Pharisees. We're part of a sick race and we're all sick and we all need the healing hand of the Great Physician and the only way those who are sick get healed is by those who've already been healed introducing them to the Doctor! And that means being part of their lives now, not just mailing them a tract and waiting until they've changed their behavior! My friend, a servant of God goes after sick people no matter who doesn't like it. Don't expect the religious Pharisees to like it, but I assure you that the publicans will rejoice! But even as that night continued there was:

III. The Conflict Over Religious Rituals (2:18-22) The Pharisees at this point had developed a ritual of fasting twice a week, on the second and fifth days, as a means of pleasing God and securing merit before Him. It was a commonly accepted religious ritual in that culture. John's disciples adopted it likewise, although probably giving it more meaning than the Pharisees. In fact, Matthew tells us that some of them were there watching Levi's feast and they were the ones who asked why Jesus and His disciples were feasting when they should have been fasting!

1. the presenting problem: not fasting as others do (18) Not valuing the religious traditions and practices that are generally accepted and following them. Some will say, "You didn't baptize your babies; how could you ignore such an important thing and endanger their souls that way." Or perhaps, "You never confess your sins; how can you be sincere about wanting to live a holy life?" Others may criticize you because you don't raise your hands in worship and you've never spoken in other tongues. You don't even lay hands on the sick! And all this is from within Christendom. From other religions you may hear, "But you never offer sacrifice, you never..." In the Roman Empire the first Christians were actually charged with atheism, not believing in the gods and were chastised because they didn't participate in any of the religious rituals of the day. Why is that so important to folks like this?

2. the root issue: my own practices become meaningless "If somebody else cannot do it and still be OK, then it must not have great meaning or value, and since I've been devoted to it and am basing my confidence toward God on keeping the proper rituals, I have to oppose it." But Jesus gives us:

3. the servant's viewpoint: tradition is not sacred (21-22) Religious tradition is like cloth. As you wash and wear it, over time it shrinks and hardens and loses its stretch and give. So, if you try to patch a hole in it with a new shrinkable piece of cloth, it will re-tear the hole and make it worse! Or it's like a goatskin that you keep wine in. It's nice and soft

and stretches when you put the wine in and it bubbles and expands. But afterwhile it gets hard and brittle and loses its stretch. And if you try to put new wine in it, then when the pressure builds, it cracks and is ruined, plus the wine is lost. Jesus didn't come to patch up old Jewish tradition with a new piece or to pour new life into the old Jewish wineskin. He came to do a new thing! The Law of God was still important, but it had become coated with layer after layer of tradition and religious practices that made it hard and brittle and intolerant of anything new! The servant of God says, "Tradition is not the Word of God; it is not sacred. Only the Word endures forever. I am not bound to follow the religious practices that others have instituted. The important thing is delivering the message in the way God directs!" There may be a time to fast, to do that very thing, but only when it's real, only when it has meaning! So, the Servant of God just keeps on delivering the message, no matter who gets upset with him for not keeping their tradition! And very similar to that is:

IV. The Conflict Over Religious Rules (2:23-3:6) The Pharisees were continually angry with Jesus over:

1. the presenting problem: breaking the Sabbath rules (23-24) One Sabbath day they were walking through a field and the disciples plucked a few heads of grain and ate them as they walked. To the Pharisees that was "work", breaking the rules! Never mind whether they were hungry or not. Another day we find Him in the synagogue and there's a poor suffering man there whose one hand is all withered up and useless, probably from an accident. And the Pharisees are watching to see if He'll heal him, if He'll "break the rules". Never mind that the man is suffering and maybe in pain and probably can't earn a living! 3:5 tells us He looked around at them and He was angry inside at their indifference; He was grieved over their inability to see and care about human beings and their needs. How could anyone care more about simply "keeping the rules" than about people? But they do, don't they? They care about how you dress and what style of music you listen to and how long your hair is and whether you wear jewelry or makeup or a thousand other things that offend the rules they happen to have. Why?

2. the root issue: my own performance becomes useless "If I've spent all these years "keeping the rules", touch not, taste not, handle not and it doesn't really mean anything, it doesn't really impress God, then I've wasted it all. I've got to hold up the rules or all my efforts are a waste!" But the servant of God has a different viewpoint.

3. the servant's viewpoint: God's principles benefit man (25-27) God didn't mind that David broke the rules when he and his men were hungry and their lives were in danger. They ate the showbread which was only for priests. God saw their hearts and He didn't have a problem with them. The Sabbath is the same way. God gave it as a principle of rest and joy to bless His people, not to be a burdensome thing encrusted with rules to keep to impress God! The Sabbath was created to meet the need of man and serve him; man was not created to meet the need of the Sabbath to be observed! So, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath and all the other rules and principles He has put in place for our benefit! We're not talking about violating God's moral principles and standards here; we're talking about religious rules that people make and if you get around a little bit there are tons and tons of them! But the servant of God doesn't live to keep rules; His heart is full of the love of God; it is full of the love of people and is touched by their needs and he would rather help them than keep the rules and make other folks happy!

What's my point this morning? If you keep on delivering the Gospel as a true servant of God, you will rile up a bunch of very religious people of every stripe and variety. But it didn't stop Jesus and it shouldn't stop you. If you're like me, you hate conflict. I absolutely hate being at odds with people and my flesh would rather give up than face the 20th century Pharisees time and time again. It's discouraging. And it could get nasty. Just look at 3:6. It put Jesus on a cross eventually; it all started back here in these early conflicts. So, it could get rough for you. But don't quit. A servant is true to his mission and doesn't get sidetracked or discouraged by conflict with the few. He sees the paralyzed people who need to have their sins forgiven, the sinners who need his message, the people with shriveled up lives who need to be made whole by the power of Jesus and how gladly they receive it and that's what keeps him going. Paul preached to the Gentiles and critics in the Jerusalem church took him to task for it! But he kept on. In 1792 a young English pastor named William Carey was burdened to serve God by delivering the Gospel to the perishing millions of India. Religious leaders opposed him all the way. They said, "If God wants the heathen converted, it is His business to convert them; the Commission does not apply to us." But Carey went anyway despite the conflict and became the father of the modern missionary movement. A generation later J. Hudson Taylor saw the need to reach the millions perishing in China's inland provinces. Church and mission leaders opposed and criticized him, saying, "It will be too difficult, the workers will perish, they will be unable to face the rigors of the task". It nearly discouraged him and he hesitated, feeling guilty, fearing they might be right and he would be responsible. But, he writes, "On Sunday, June 25, 1865, unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone in great spiritual agony and there the Lord conquered my unbelief and I surrendered myself to God for this service. I told Him that all the responsibility must rest with Him and as His servant it was mine to obey and follow Him." He went and thus began the China Inland Mission and the great movement which took the Gospel to the interior regions of Asia and Africa. A generation later in 1931, a young man by the name of William Cameron Townsend conceived of the idea of translating the Bible into the language of the Cakchiquel Indians whose hearts were not being touched by the Spanish trade language. He writes "Friends told me, 'Don't be a fool. Those Indians aren't worth what it would take to learn their outlandish language and translate the Bible for them. They can't read anyhow. Let the Indians learn Spanish.' Others said, 'They'll kill you. Those jungle tribes are dying out anyway. They kill each other as well as out-

siders with their spears or bows and arrows. If they don't kill you, malaria will get you or your canoe will upset in the rapids and you'll be without supplies and a month away from the last jumping-off place...." But Cam decided to be Christ's fool anyway and so was born Wycliffe Bible Translators and with it the great missionary movement of today whose goal is not only to reach every place, but every people. Every true servant of Christ finds himself in conflict with religious leaders and zealots of every kind of stripe. But if his heart is one with the heart of God and burns to deliver the message he keeps on. Let me encourage you to do the same today!

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

The Servant's Appointing Of Apostles 3:7-19

From the time of His baptism Jesus had followers known as disciples, those who traveled about with Him and believed the Good News He brought. The Scriptures hint that there were many of them. A number of women followed Him about and helped to provide for the needs of the group. After the resurrection we find there were a group of 500 disciples to whom the Lord appeared and in the Upper Room, there were 120 gathered praying. The personal ministry of Jesus on earth touched thousands and brought them to faith in Him. Certainly, hundreds openly called themselves disciples of Christ. But from among them all there was a group of 12 men in whom Jesus invested His life in a particular way. As the story of His ministry develops, it is easy to see:

I. The Need Jesus Had For The Twelve (7-12) There were two particular:

1. the problems Jesus experienced The first was:

a. the increase in the number of people coming to Him Miracles authenticate words, but they also draw a crowd. Sick people came from everywhere to be healed. Others came to see the sight. Many were local, but others were coming from a wider and wider area, a radius of up to 200 miles, from south in Judea, and further southeast in Edom, from across the Jordan in the Decapolis and Perea and from northwest on the coast of Tyre and Sidon of the Gentiles. All came on foot to Galilee to see Jesus. Always more. Crowds of 4 and 5 thousand or even twice that number were not uncommon at certain times. The work was exhausting, non-stop, too much for anyone to bear. But with the increase in number came:

b. the decrease in the depth of their response to Him They grew impatient. The sick would press forward to try to touch him. For a while he asked some of his disciples to get a rowboat and follow him along the shore as He walked and taught so that He would be able to hop in at a moment's notice and pull away because they were thronging Him and He might be crushed. The more that came, the less they were really listening. They came for the miracles. Jesus tried to play those down. He commanded the demons to be quiet and not tell who He was. He told people like the leper he cleansed in chapter 1 not to tell anyone, but they did. So more and more of His energy was consumed in crowd handling. So, I think you can readily see:

2. the prudence of choosing apostles, men who could do two things. First:

a. they could assist Him in His current ministry Instead of always drawing huge crowds to one place, they could go out and take the message to other areas and multiply the spread of the Good News. Plus, when there were crowds, they could row the boat behind Him. They could pass out the bread to the multitude. They could help those with special needs to get to Him. They could make the work He was doing more effective. But there is another, more important factor:

b. they would continue His ministry beyond the Cross Jesus knew that within 3 years His personal ministry would come to an end on the cross and He would return to heaven. The work of serving the Lord by taking the message of the Good News of His own resurrection and the life it provides to the world had to be carried on by someone. So, Jesus chose from among all His disciples twelve who were placed into a special grouping, a special office of apostle, which means *sent one* or in the Latin, *missio* which means *missionary*, one who is sent on a mission with a purpose. What was that purpose? Look at **Acts 1:2-3, 8**. The apostles were to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, to bear the message of the Good News of Christ's death for our sins and His resurrection to all peoples. And the other way to talk about that is that it is the building of His church, a called-out assembly of disciples all over the world, which is, according to **Eph. 2:20**, *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*. These Twelve, minus one, would become the foundation layer of the church of Jesus Christ which He is still building today. Needless to say, the choosing of these men was important. So let's look at:

II. The Way Jesus Chose The Twelve (13-15) Look first at:

1. the manner of their calling (13-14a) Luke tells us that Jesus spent the entire night in prayer before choosing these men. Mark emphasizes that out of all the disciples that followed Him, Jesus literally, *called out from among them unto Himself twelve*. And He named them a new name, apostles. And He literally, *made twelve*. He bound them into a group which was thereafter known as *The Twelve*, the symbolic number of the people of God. But notice who got in. He called those He wanted and they came. This was no, "all volunteers take one step forward" sort of deal. In the Up-

per Room, Jesus made it clear to them in John 15:16, *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last...* He very deliberately chose specific people to take on this responsibility and then He trained them for three years, but look at the summary of:

2. the manner of their training (14-15) How were they to be prepared for this responsibility? In two ways:

a. they learned by observation ...*that they might be with Him*. The Twelve were always with Him, watching and helping in the ministry. The multiplied bread passed through their hands. They were in the boat when He spoke to the wind and sea. Others came and followed and went home to earn a living. These twelve spent every day for years with Him watching and learning. That's how we learn. Neither the Christian life nor Christian service works if it is merely taught; it has to be caught! Caught from somebody, learned from being part of somebody's life who models it, who shows you what it looks like in action. So, they watched their Model every day and then:

b. they learned by internship ...*that He might send them out to preach*. Twice Jesus sent them out two by two on their own to preach and to exercise His authority and they returned to Him. We'd call it an internship, a supervised ministry. We'll save the details for chapter 6, but the point is that they practiced what He modeled; they gradually did what they saw until they were ready to do it on their own and come back for debriefing and ultimately, He went back to the Father and left them on their own. We learn by doing, by practice, by trying some and then more and then more. That's how servants are trained for the work. Now hold onto these thoughts and let's move ahead to look at:

III. The Twelve People Jesus Chose (16-19) Here's the list. Just think about these men for a moment and look at them. First of all, think about this:

1. they were not chosen for ability The Sanhedrin noticed this when they arrested them later in **Acts 4:13**, *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus*. Several of them were fishermen. None of them was famous or well-known. None of them held a position in the community. Perhaps the most educated among them was Matthew the tax collector. Jesus didn't pick His team because of their intellect and technological knowhow and experience at preaching or knowledge of the Scriptures. In fact:

2. they were not chosen for similarity Hardly anything about them was alike. Some like Andrew and Philip were shy and retiring. Peter was impetuous and loud-mouthed. James and John, Jesus called "Sons Of Thunder", probably meaning that they were much like Peter. They were the ones ready to call down fire from heaven on their enemies. Simon was a Zealot and had some strong feelings about the Romans. There is no one particular type of person Jesus wants in His service. He doesn't call all Type A personalities with X amount of schooling. That's not what's important. If you ask me what was important, I think:

3. their chief quality was steadfastness - John 6:66-71, 64 This was a turning point in Jesus' ministry. From this point many of His disciples turned away, it says. But not these Twelve and Jesus knew from the beginning they would be steadfast and stand firm with Him to the end. They might falter and doubt, but in the end, they would stand firm and continue the office He conferred upon them. That is, all save one who was chosen to fulfill the Scripture. At the last Supper, Jesus said, *You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me - Luke 22:28-29*. Their commitment was tested and they stuck; they stood firm for Him. Now let's get personal:

IV. What We Can Learn From The Choosing Of The Twelve There are two very important principles here for us. First:

1. the principle of developing others in Christ's service - 2 Tim. 2:2 Paul caught it from Jesus. The things we have learned and grasped we must pass on to faithful people, reliable folks, who will also pass them on to others. It is just as important to develop others to do the work of serving Christ as it is to do the work ourselves, and perhaps even more important! Who do you develop? Not everybody who puts a hand up and says, "Me, Me!" Jesus prayed and chose those He knew would be reliable, whether they were gifted or not. And He let them be with Him and incorporated them in the work. That's what we must do. Whatever you do for Christ, whether it is teaching a class, pastoring a church, singing, witnessing, or whatever, you should be investing time and effort in developing someone else to do it too. Jesus had the Twelve; Paul had his Timothy and Silas and Titus and others. We too ought to be passing on our vision for serving Christ, letting others catch it from us. And here's the second principle:

2. the principal quality Christ wants in us is faithfulness - 1 Cor. 4:1-2 The precious truth of the Gospel has been entrusted to us. We are stewards of what we've been given and the principal ability Christ wants is faithfulness, reliability, dependability. He wants those that will continue to the end. He's not interested in servants who get excited today and tomorrow lose their vision. He wants those that are committed to go with Him in all His trials, who will lean on His strength and continue no matter what.

Did Christ choose well? Did they continue? Did His plan to develop future leaders for the mission work? Just listen. **Peter** stayed in Jerusalem for some years leading the church and then began to travel, preaching the gospel. He ended up in Rome where he was crucified upside down by Nero. **James** was the first of the Twelve to give his life in the early days, but not until he had won his Roman accuser to Christ and the two of them were slain together. **John** eventually became the overseer of the churches in Asia Minor. For a while he was exiled on the Island of Patmos, but returned eventually to labor in Ephesus until his death of natural causes at 98. **Andrew** traveled extensively through the region of Scythia, north of the Black Sea in what is modern Russia and the Baltic States, then into Macedonia and down into Greece where he was arrested and crucified in Petrea. **Philip** labored in Phrygia in northern Asia Minor. In Hierapolis they worshipped a huge live snake and he set himself to pray that God would prove himself to be the true God. The snake either died or disappeared and many turned to Christ, but opposition arose and he was executed. **Bartholomew** or Nathaniel traveled as far as India preaching the gospel, but returned to Hierapolis where Philip was, and the two died there together. **Matthew** or Levi, the publican, traveled as far south as Ethiopia and died among barbarians in southern Egypt, slain with a spear or battle ax. **Thomas** ventured into Persia preaching the Gospel and eventually into India, where he made it all the way to Chennai on the southeast coast. There Brahmin priests ambushed and killed him as he was praying. **James** the Less we must leave to God because we know nothing, but **Thaddaeus** or Judas (not Iscariot) died at Edessa in Syria where he had gone to preach. **Simon** the Zealot traveled through Egypt and west into North Africa preaching the gospel and some say he made it all the way to Britain where he was crucified after great hardships. Only one, **Judas Iscariot**, instead of continuing, betrayed his Lord for 30 pieces of silver and hung himself in guilt.

There is an ancient legend that says when Christ returned to heaven after having completed His work of redemption, one of the angels said to Him, "Does the whole world know of your love?" "No," the Savior replied. "Then how will they be told?", the angel continued. Jesus answered, "I left it in the hands of 12 men." "But," the angel asked, "what if they fail?" And Jesus said solemnly, "I have no other plan." They didn't fail. They, with the help of Paul who was later included in their number, took the Gospel to the boundaries of the known world. They never gave up and all but one gave their lives for their faith. Jesus had no other plan and He still has no plan other than that faithful servants of His will develop other faithful servants who will develop others and so our mission and our trust is passed on and will continue until the last person at the ends of the earth hears and the church is complete. Are you giving yourself to developing others, even your own children? If you aren't, your part in the plan will fail!

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

The Servant's Rejection 3:20-35

We live in a culture which tells us to expect success in doing right. If there is one thing Jesus taught His disciples repeatedly, it was to expect rejection because of serving Him. Listen to just a few of the things He said:

Mat. 5:11 - Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Mat. 10:35-36 - For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

John 15:18-20 - If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: "No servant is greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also...

Doesn't sound much like anything you've heard on the radio lately, does it? And they did persecute Him; they did reject Him. So, it is clear that we too can expect to receive rejection as we serve Christ. Consequently, it would be wise on our part to prepare ourselves for it, so that we're not overwhelmed by it when it happens. And we have the opportunity to do that this morning by considering two events in the life of Jesus in our text. First of all, let's talk about:

I. Some Sources From Which A Servant Of Christ May Experience Rejection It should not come as a surprise, if you take Jesus' words seriously, that:

1. you may be rejected by family (20-21) The word *family* is not in the Greek; it just says *those from the side of him*, that is, *those near to him*. We figure that is an idiom for his family, because it is Jesus' mother and brothers who arrive in verse 31 and John 7:5 records another occasion during this period in Galilee where his brothers argued with him and comments, *...even his own brothers did not believe in him*. How sad! At every Olympic Games, you see on TV the story of how a dedicated family stands behind their young athlete and encourages him or her and sacrifices for him and travels to the games and sits there and cheers him on. You would wish it were that way in serving God, but it isn't always, unless you happen to come from a solidly Christian family, and not even always then! If you were born into a Muslim family in many countries, you might find yourself driven from home, disowned, fired from your job, and in more fanatical locations, some of your relatives might even feel it their duty to kill you. In many, many cultures across the world, your family would feel that you had betrayed them and your ancestors or your people and even put them at risk from the gods by your actions! Here in the good old modern, pluralistic USA, rejection by family or others close to us

more often takes the form of verbal disapproval or simply intentional neglect and obvious lack of support. They may tolerate you believing in Christ, but just get really active in your church, start openly devoting your time and money to serving God, tell them you're going to Bible College or into the ministry or to the mission field. Get yourself involved in a publicly open way where the world knows about it, like Jesus was doing, and they may soon start finding ways to try to exercise control over you like His family wanted to! That's one source from which you may experience rejection. Or it may come from just the opposite:

2. you may be rejected by enemies (22) The Jerusalem boys were there, the teachers of the law, those who were professional students of the Law and had their Ph. D. from Jerusalem U., who didn't like this religious fanatic stirring up trouble by his popularity and drawing followers from their ranks. If you lived in Somalia today, about a year and a half ago you could have read this ad in your local paper placed by a fanatical group: *We declare a holy war against all Christian evangelism in Somalia. Anyone who tries to distribute anything concerning Christianity will be SHOT!* This past Wednesday in Kuwait an Islamic Court declared a convert to Christianity named Robert Hussein an apostate, has stripped him of his civil rights and family and is moving to remove his citizenship. If you lived in the CIS, you might find the Orthodox Church to be behind the effort to close the evangelical group you belong to or in China you might find the Religious Police sent to break up your house group by the leaders of the local Registered Church. But even here, if you serve Christ openly and aggressively and make some noise about it, you will find rejection by enemies. If you try to take a liberal politician to task on his voting record on abortion, you'll be called "the religious right" and accused of "single issue politics". If you protest Planned Parenthood's willingness to distribute condoms in schools or give taxpayer funded abortions without notifying parents, you're a "religious fanatic" trying to violate the civil rights of others. And if you win enough folks to a genuine relationship with Jesus and they leave their old dead church for a true fellowship, you may even find that it is the mainline clergy who protest the loudest. Things haven't changed much in 2000 years! You should expect rejection, both from friends and enemies. Jesus warned that we would experience it. Now let's look closer at:

II. Some Charges Which May Be Brought Against A Servant Of Christ What will they accuse you of? Well, let's see what Jesus was charged with:

1. you may be charged with hysteria (21) *He is out of his mind!* You're nuts! You've turned into some kind of fanatic! Look at how you've given your life to this religion thing! Why would you want to go halfway around the world and give up all you have? Why are you at church so much? This is the complaint that usually comes from family and friends, from those who think they're on your side. And it is based on:

a. the assumption is that you don't know what you're doing You have somehow gotten off track and become abnormal and you don't realize it. You somehow got caught up in this Jesus thing and maybe if I say or do something I can bring you to your senses to see just how obsessed you've become!

b. the intent is to return you to "normal", to make you like everybody else, to keep you from rocking the boat, endangering yourself, getting hurt. That's why Jesus' family came to try to take charge of Him! And:

c. the motive is genuine concern They cared about Him. These folks, in their own way, love and care for you. They want to stop you for your own good! And you have to understand and recognize that! And it demands a carefully measured response. But on the other hand, if it's your enemies talking:

2. you may be charged with evil (22) Can you imagine anything more absurd than this: Jesus is an agent of Satan! There's a demon in him and He's serving Satan, that's why he's so successful. You see, our enemies have a different assumption than we do:

a. the assumption is that what you are doing is evil One morning many years ago one of our missionaries found a note at his door that said, "We know what you are doing, trying to take the Somalis from Mohammed to Jesus. If you don't get this out of your crazy brain, then one dark night we will come and attack your house and do what we want!" A later letter said, "I understand your aim in leading astray Muslims, especially Somalis. On the Day of Judgment, you will go eternally to Hell. If God doesn't cause the earth to open up for you, then..." What a difference in perspective! Jesus warned, *...in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.* - *John 16:2.* Here we are, laboring for Jesus, loving lost people, trying to rescue their eternal souls and they see us as agents of evil engaged in a diabolical task! And it's not just Muslims. All our enemies believe that to one degree or another. Their values are backward. Our good is spoken of as evil. And of course:

b. the intent is to stop you, not to save or rescue you, but to put an end to your service and in many cases:

c. the motive is actual hatred These guys didn't have a benevolent distaste for what Jesus was doing. They hated Him. Just look back to verse 6! They already had the thought of killing him! Just this April, Professor Haaji, a prominent Christian in Mogadishu was kidnapped and murdered for his faith. Listen to this shocking fact in case you think the human condition has improved over the years: **More Christians have died for their faith in this century than in all the others that have gone before!**

Expect rejection! Expect to be seen as "out of your mind" or as "a detriment to the progress of the human race" or as "an enemy of religion!" And if you're not experiencing that personally, get on your knees and thank God, because millions upon millions of your brothers and sisters in Christ around the globe live in it every day of their lives! Pray for them! But when rejection does come to you at whatever level, even if it's only disparaging comments, here are:

III. Some Consolations In Which A Servant Of Christ May Rest What Jesus said on these two occasions is very important. Your first consolation is:

1. the encouragement of your spiritual family (31-34) Jesus knew why His family had come. They were opposed to what He was doing and wanted to stop Him from serving God. And Jesus took that moment to explain this principle:

a. the identity of your true family is the body of Christ When you come to Jesus, you don't reject your family as the cults might do. They remain your family by birth and you love them. However, you are joined in your spirit to another family, the family of God, the body of Christ, His church. With them you don't just share the same genetics, the same house, or the same history; you share the very same Spirit. Look at **Gal. 3:26-28**. You and I are one in Jesus Christ, part of one body, sharing one Spirit and one nature! And so, Jesus could wave his arm and say, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" I can do that too. I am closer to many of you than I have ever been to my earthly family because most of them don't know Christ and haven't a clue what my life is really all about! So, my friend, when you find yourself rejected by your family, your friends, those close to you, remember that you always have:

b. the support of your true family being united in the will of God Because they have the same Spirit, they comprehend the true will of God, which is to believe on His Son and serve Him. They agree with you in serving Him and you can count on them to stand with you and to comfort you! And I can testify that for all my years of serving God, wherever I have served and whenever I have experienced rejection, whatever sort of attack Satan has sent, it has always been the love of the body that I was a part of, that has comforted and cared for me in the midst of it and helped me face it. I have always had a family that loved and cared for me and God has used that family greatly in my life to keep me serving.

But there is a second thing you have and that is:

2. the confidence of your spiritual victory (23-30) When it came to His enemies, we find in Jesus' answer to them three important truths:

a. the ludicrousness of being called Satan's agent (23-26) How stupid it is to think that Satan would work through Jesus against himself, that a demon would cast out another demon! That's like helping yourself by shooting yourself! The viewpoint your enemy that you are serving evil is absolutely, unbelievably ridiculous. Don't ever listen to it or be discouraged by it. Jesus identified what was really going on:

b. the truth of Christ's superior power being evidenced (27) The only way to take what belongs to a strong man is to tie up the strong man first and take away all his guns and then you can rob his house. And to tie him up, you'd have to be pretty strong yourself! The only reason Jesus cast out demons was that He had more power and Satan couldn't stop Him. The only reason His service was successful and crowds were coming to hear the truth was that Satan wasn't big enough to stop it! If other people are bothered by what God is doing through you, just remember that the reason you're able to do it is because greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world! Your Rock is greater than their Rock; your Father is greater than all and nobody can pluck you out of His hand. No foe can stop you unless God chooses to allow it. Since He's for you, who can be against you? You, my friend, have victory. It was already won at Calvary and the final outcome is in the Book! If God chooses to allow others to reject you, that's OK, because they can't really touch you, nor ultimately stop what God is doing, try as they may! And finally remember this:

c. whoever rejects the Spirit's work through you rejects Him (28-30) This is the reference to the unpardonable sin, calling the work of the Spirit of God evil, a work of the Devil. We don't have time to get into studying that this morning and it's beside the point. Just remember this: you never have to worry about having committed the unpardonable sin, because if you can worry about it, you haven't committed it! The point here is larger. Jesus' enemies were not just rejecting Him personally as a human servant; they were rejecting the person of Almighty God. God put it this way to Samuel in his day, *...it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.* - **1 Sam. 8:7**. It is not you they have rejected, it's Me; it's My love, My work, My cross, My person. It's not you they want to kill, that they want to stop; it's Me. *The insults of all that insult you have fallen on Me!* - **Ps. 69:9**. Oh, there's comfort in that! You can let it all fall on His shoulders. It is not you, but Him and He can carry it. Release it to Him. Take it all to His strong arms and place it there. Face it in His strength.

I can't put a time on it anymore or remember the specific circumstances, but I remember a night many years ago when I was discouraged in serving God, when I had been rejected somehow, when what I thought was serving God was evil-spoken of, and I remember how that rejection hurt. And I remember coming to God and telling Him. And quietly that very verse came into my mind, *...it is not you they have rejected, it is Me*, and suddenly I was filled with the love and caring of

the Savior and encouraged to go on, in spite of the painful rejection. Were it not for that, I might not be standing here today. Oh my friend, He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He knows the pain you feel when you are rejected, but He has given you a spiritual family to support you; He has given you a power to continue that is unstoppable. If you can see it as He sees it, you can continue on! Keep on, my friend, keep on!

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

The Servant's Wisdom Displayed In Parables 4:1-34

One of the most unique things about Jesus' ministry that sets Him apart from Moses or David or Paul or Peter or any other writer of Scripture or teacher, Old Testament or New Testament, is that He, on a number of occasions, taught in parables. Outside of His teaching, there are maybe two or three parables recorded anywhere in the Bible. He was virtually unique in this. I believe they were a display of His great wisdom in the way that He related to His human audience and also in the actual truths which He taught us through them. Let's begin by considering:

I. Jesus' Adoption Of The Parabolic Method (1-2, 33) Jesus did not always teach in parables. On this day he began the practice when he taught the crowds for the second time. It was after He had been rejected by the Jewish teachers who were present. So, He deliberately chose to adopt the concept of teaching in parables on this day and on a number of other occasions for a specific purpose. He did not do it always, and maybe not even often. What were the parables like?

1. His parables taught spiritual truths by using common illustrations (1-2) They were stories, stories about things and experiences that were common and familiar to his listeners. Stories about planting seeds and growing crops, which everybody was involved in. Stories about harvesting crops, about putting yeast in bread, about catching fish, tending sheep, things that were part of the pattern of everyday life. Stories that could be easily remembered and understood, but which illustrated things that were true in the spiritual realm. So, the preaching of the word was like the sowing of seed; the running away of a son was like a sinner running away from God and coming home; the buying of a field with a hidden pearl was like Christ's purchase of the church for Himself through the cross. In many ways, parabolic teaching is like simple comparison for illustration. But there's a catch:

2. His parables could only be understood through ears of faith (9-12) One had to have ears that could hear in order to hear them, that is, grasp their meaning. You see:

a. for believers they aided understanding: clarified through explanation (34b) For those who were truly disciples of His, they helped to make the points He was trying to make. Their hearts were predisposed to understand because they believed Jesus was the Savior. And so, to them Jesus always clarified the meaning by concretely explaining the comparison. You see, He told the crowd the story of the sower, but even though the disciples believed, they couldn't understand and had to ask. Yet He was quick to explain, not only this one, but all the parables to them. And with that explanation, they served to aid understanding of the task that Jesus was about, the building of the Church, His Kingdom on earth for this age. But:

b. for rejecters they were confusing: given without explanation (34a) To that crowd, He did no plain teaching. He simply told stories, but without explanation. Why? That crowd was filled with His enemies, those who rejected Him and had called Him an agent of Satan. He did not cast His pearls of truth before swine. He simply told them stories but never explained what they meant, so they were left shaking their heads, wondering what He meant by the story about a farming planting his field. Why did He do that? Their hearts had already rejected Him. They did not wish to believe and they were fulfilling what Isaiah had predicted, that they would see but never perceive, that they would hear but never understand. And Jesus granted their wish! He left them in their sin. Those who genuinely sought truth came to Jesus and asked. Those who didn't were given none! He explained this whole concept further after He explained the first parable to His disciples. He gave them:

3. His parable about spiritual truth (including parables): The Lamp (21-25) You don't light a lamp to hide it, do you? You don't cover it up or stick it under something to block its light. You put it up on a stand so it gives light. Spiritual truth, Jesus said, is like that:

a. it is meant to be revealed at the right time (21-23) God does not intentionally hide spiritual truth, the knowledge of Himself and what He's like. He wants man to have it. He wants you to have it! But there are some things He keeps hidden until He knows it is just the right time to reveal them to you, the time when you're ready to respond. But in order for it to be revealed to your mind with understanding:

b. there must be a desire to understand it or it will be lost (24-25) You must be careful to listen and seek the meaning. If you do, the Spirit of God is in the business of illuminating the Word, bringing understanding. But it's sort of use it or lose it. If you don't diligently desire to know and experience God's truth, you'll gradually lose even what you do understand now!

So spiritual truth is available to all, but just as on that day Jesus' disciples had a genuine desire to understand and asked Him for the wisdom to make it clear, we have to do the very same thing today. He only gives His truth to those who diligently and truly want it. Put another way, growth occurs in those who truly desire it. Those who don't pursue it, shrink!

There is no standing still! Do you see how wise Jesus was? He could tell a story that would confuse His enemies and cultivate His disciples at the same time, all because of the condition of their hearts! Now the three parables that Mark records Jesus telling on this day are:

II. Jesus' Parables About The Church He Is Building (The Kingdom) In the stories He was telling, he was describing the process he was engaged in at that very moment with the people He was teaching. His job as the Servant of God was to build the Kingdom of God, which if you look carefully is a reference most of the time to the Church during this age, not the Millennial Kingdom the Jews were looking for. Our service to God doesn't bring about the setting up of a visible kingdom where God reigns from His throne on earth. Rather it builds this strange body, this strange organism made of people over whose lives God rules, which we call the Church. Serving God by delivering the message of the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus, builds the Kingdom of His followers. The first and key parable that a servant of God needs in order to understand God's purposes is:

1. a parable about sowing (individual response): The Soils (3-8) Have you ever scattered seed by hand on your lawn? Do you notice what happens? It doesn't all come up into a country-club style luxurious carpet, does it? Some of it blows onto the driveway or the sidewalk where it'll never grow. Some seems to come up and look great in May, but in July it turns brown in the heat and dies because the soil is shallow in that spot. In other spots the weeds come up in the new soil at the same time and grow faster than the grass and you get weeds instead of grass. However, over most of the area you get a real crop of grass, some places thicker than others. Have you experienced that? Good, you have just entered into the common experience of ancient Palestinians 2000 years ago! What does it mean? On the surface it means: Don't expect all the grass you planted to grow! That's all the Pharisees got out of it. It requires explanation and Jesus gave that to His disciples. You see:

a. Christ continually sows His word in individual lives (13-14) He was doing it right then to the crowd, broadcasting the message of the gospel, just the way you broadcast seed into the soil of a field. It fell upon individual lives and ears. He did that all through His ministry. And for two millennia He's been doing it through His church and now through us! I'm doing it right now! As His servants share His word with others in Glenside and all over the world, He is still sowing the seed of the Word of God into individual lives. But:

b. individuals respond differently to the word (15-20)

(1) some hear and pay no attention and forget it Some in that crowd, and in the crowd we speak to, hear it and it goes in one ear and out the other. They're not interested; they're hardened like the path or the sidewalk. Nothing is going to grow there because they've made up their minds ahead of time; they don't want it. So, Satan makes sure they soon forget what they heard. Expect that to occur with some. Then:

(2) some hear and claim it, but soon reject it amid suffering They're looking for fire insurance and when they see it offered to them, they quickly grab and claim it and go through all the motions, but they don't have any real roots that go down into the depths of their soul. They have an intellectual grasp, maybe, but no transformation in the heart, so as soon as they find out that Christians suffer, that, in fact, they will suffer because they have claimed Christ, they are quick to throw Him away and go back to their old life! They never really were genuinely related to Him! Expect that to occur with some. Then:

(3) some hear but choose other life-dominating desires instead They hear the offer of the Gospel and the call to give their lives to Christ but other things in their hearts are also vying for their allegiance, like the drive to make it, to succeed and take care of themselves in life, the desire to make lots of money and have wealth, desires for fame, marriage, pleasure. All those things the Bible calls "the desires of the flesh" are in there and even though the person is considering Christ those things are stronger and they end up living for those things instead of really giving their life to Christ. Some people just can't give those things up. Expect that. But finally:

(4) some receive it as their own and exhibit the fruit of change Some people actually hear and understand and obey the word and place their trust in Jesus and produce the fruit of His life in them. Some more than others, but nevertheless all exhibiting fruit.

When you serve God and share His word with others, those are the reactions you'll get from people. Jesus got them right there in the crowd that day as He taught. And you will still get them today. The response of an individual to the Word of God is determined by the preparation of the soil of his heart by the Holy Spirit. It doesn't depend on you, on how well you share or on how much you say. It's the soil into which the seed falls! So, the key to affecting people as you serve God is PRAYER! The Holy Spirit has to prepare the soil to receive the seed! Pray for those you love and those you share with. It's the seed that produces the crop, not you, so get on your knees regularly and ask God to do His thing! That's how Jesus is building His church. Then next we have:

2. a parable about growing (continual process): The Seed (26-29) Mark is the only one to write this parable down. You know, once you plant those seeds in your garden, a miracle happens. There is life in the seed and day after day, no matter what you do, the plants grow all by themselves. It's a wonderful process that God placed in motion called growth. They go from a seedling to a full-sized tomato plant and then the stalk develops fruit, tomatoes, and then the

fruit ripens and finally you harvest it. You may add water and a little tender care, but God makes the crop grow. That's a picture of what God is doing with the church. You see:

a. Christ seeded His field (the world) He came Himself and made the first disciples, planted the first seeds in the soil, His apostles and the other disciples with them. Then, as the years have been going by:

b. the crop (the church) is growing in stages to maturity It sprouted in the Book of Acts and grew into a stalk, a church that stretched all over the Roman Empire. Through the centuries, the crop has been maturing, producing heads of grain all over the world. Today it has spread to every corner of the earth. How?

c. the crop is growing through the life in itself In this sense, it happens automatically. The church is like that tomato plant. Once you start it, it grows from the life that is inside it. The church has been growing and growing over the centuries through the life that is inside it. It has Spirit-given power of life and growth and even when it has been damaged, it still recovers and grows again. This growth is happening through us as we reach out to others in our neighborhood and around the world! And it is happening in all parts of the crop. The field of grain is all ripening together all over the world and:

d. when it reaches maturity, He will harvest it at His return When the harvest is fully ready, when the crop has reached its full maturity, He will harvest it. He will say to His church, "Come up here!" and we'll all rise to meet Him in the air in that great ingathering! And He'll present that complete mature Church to Himself. And to illustrate what it will be like, He told:

3. a parable about maturity (eventual result): The Mustard Seed (30-32) The mustard seed was the smallest seed planted by the Jews. It takes 21,000 of them to weigh one ounce! They're like a grain of sand but when they germinate into an annual shrub, within a few weeks they grow into the largest garden plant the Jews kept, reaching as much as 12-15 feet in a few weeks' time, so big that birds come and build nests in it. See the point? Amazingly small to amazingly big! The church is like that:

a. the church started extremely small 12 apostles, 120 in the upper room. A handful among the millions of people in the world. But here is the prediction and the promise that, like that mustard seed:

b. the church will grow to be relatively large Oh today, my friends, that seed has grown to be over 600 million people in this generation! Now admittedly, among 7 billion, that leaves quite a job to do, but that's not the point. More than a hundred thousand people a day hear the Gospel and receive Christ. And by faith I believe that tree will grow even bigger until harvest time comes!

That's what God is about in history, my friends, spelled out in three little stories. He is planting His word in the hearts of individuals and they are responding. And through that He is continually growing His church, so that by the time He's done, it's going to be a tremendous group of believers touching every nation on earth and He'll take it home! That's His program. And if you're serving Him, that's the program you're involved in. Unbelievers and rejecters don't and can't understand it, but if you really want to know, He'll make plain to you the role He has for you in building His Kingdom. I'd like to close with a parable of my own. *There once was a farmer who went out to gather eggs. As he walked across the farmyard toward the hen house, he noticed the pump was leaking. So he stopped to fix the pump. It needed a new washer, so he set off to the barn to get one. But on the way to the barn, he saw that the hayloft needed straightening, so he went off to fetch the pitchfork. However, hanging next to the pitchfork was a broom with a broken handle. "I must make a note to myself to buy a new broom handle the next time I go to town," he thought. So he went into the house to get some paper and write the note. While he was in the house, his wife called him to eat supper and the day was over.* What's the lesson? If you don't focus clearly on your purpose, you never will get it done; instead, you'll be distracted by everything else. Jesus has told you what He's about, building His kingdom by sowing the word. That's your purpose too; if you get distracted by all the things life puts in your way, you never will get it done. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

The Servant's Authority Declared In Miracles 4:35-5:43

...Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him! - 4:41

Have you ever experienced a miracle? Other than the miracle of the new birth, probably not. The Scripture says, *John [the Baptist] did no miracle...* Neither did most of the other prophets. Noah never did one; neither did Abraham. David and Solomon, for all their splendor, experienced no miracles. Until Jesus walked the earth, miracles had been in Moses' day and during the time of Elijah and Elisha. That's it! But Jesus came doing miracles. Why? Well, the dictionary says that a miracle is *an extraordinary or unusual event that is considered to be a manifestation of divine or supernatural power*. In other words, while the world may call extraordinary things "miraculous" like the birth process or someone's surviving a terrible tragedy, a true miracle is an event that shouts a message: Almighty God has been here; none but Him could do this! After Jesus talked to the wind and the waves and told them to be still and they listened, look at the reaction of His disciples in

verse 41. The miracle brought those men to the unavoidable conclusion that God was in the boat with them and He was there in the person of the man Jesus. This man is God! Jesus did miracles to send a message. In the Upper Room Jesus told them, *Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.* - John 14:11. The miracles declared Jesus' Divine authority as God; they were the visible proof of the truth of what He taught. They confirmed His words and declared His authority in a way that could not be mistaken. In our text, Mark records four major miracles that Jesus did in a very brief period and each one of them shouts a message, both to the people who experienced it and to us. So, let's look at them one at a time. In the first miracle we see:

I. Jesus' Authority Over Nature (4:35-41) Have you ever stood in a thunderstorm and felt the power of the elements? The wind is whipping and the trees are bending and you can hardly stand. The rain is pelting you hard and you are almost blown over. You can feel what that's like as I describe it, can't you? Now, can you imagine telling it to stop? And it does! Have you stood on the sand at the beach and let the breakers hit you with all their force? We spent a week at the beach recently and all the kids liked to go out into the surf and sometimes you could watch a huge wave come up behind them which you knew was going to knock them flat. Can you imagine telling a wave to stop? And it does! Jesus did that! How could He? As God, He has authority over nature. He speaks and it listens. It hears His voice and obeys! Here's:

1. the lesson: He has control over the circumstances that surround me Here are the poor disciples rowing and struggling with all their might. The waves are breaking over the bow and the boat is filling with water. It's not a little rowboat, but a larger fishing vessel. I'm sure they saw it as an unfortunate tragedy that had overtaken them. But remember something:

a. He chose the path that took the boat into the storm Jesus said, "Let's cross the lake". He knew the storm was coming. He chose to take them into it. Yet:

b. He chose later to still the wind and waves He brought the storm, in one sense, and when He chose, He took it away. He put them into danger and took them out. And what baffled them was this:

c. He had unassailable peace in the midst of it all While the boat is rocking crazily and nearly swamped, He's in the back on a bench lying on a cushion, fast asleep and undisturbed! Who can sleep in the midst of all that? Only One who has the peace of knowing He's in absolute control over it all! And He proved it with a word when He woke up and said, *Peace, be still!* My friend, Jesus is in absolute control of all the circumstances that surround you, whether it looks like it or not. Whether it's wind and waves or cars and accidents or jobs and layoffs. He knows all the storms of life that will assail you and, indeed, sends you into them. He also stills them when it's time. He has complete authority over every circumstance that surrounds you. So, what does Jesus expect of me? Look at verse 40:

2. the application: by faith I rest in His authority over my circumstances (40) "You're afraid because you don't trust in my authority!" That picture of Him resting peacefully in the tossing ship is what He wants for us. To rest calmly in the fact that He is in control of everything that surrounds me, every circumstance, every problem, every difficulty. Fear comes from depending on me. My power is not sufficient to make it through the storm. On my own I will be swamped. But Jesus is in control and He loves me; I am His. I need to rest in Him! Now in the second miracle we see:

II. Jesus' Authority Over Demons (5:1-20) Have you ever been afraid of a human being? I mean really afraid. Here was a man so strong he could break ropes and even iron chains. No one, not even several men, could subdue him and nobody was brave enough to try any longer. Why? He was indwelt by a legion of demons, real beings, powerful spirit beings, far stronger than you or I, forces that seek to control, to harm or even indwell human beings. Yet they fell at Jesus' feet, begged His permission, and obeyed His command. What's:

1. the lesson: He has control over the forces that oppose me You see, demons do far more than indwell people. They oppose you and I as servants of God. Paul said, *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* - Eph. 6:12. We fight the same forces that were in this man every day. They oppose us and try to tear us down and stop us and tear our marriages and our families and our churches apart, to ruin and destroy our lives. It's a scary thought. But they listen to Jesus.

a. He chooses to allow them freedom to operate I don't know why, but He does. I don't know why He didn't just annihilate that legion of demons or confine them to the pit, but He didn't. He gave them freedom to operate and so He does today. Satan and all of His henchmen are busy and active against us and Jesus allows that, but:

b. He is in absolute control over what they can do He let them go into the pigs. They couldn't do it on their own. Satan had to ask God for permission to test Job. God's authority had kept him from it or he would have attacked long before on his own! Jesus is in absolute control of every force of wickedness that opposes us, even when that force is inside a person and inciting them against us! So, what am I to do when people and forces come against me and attack me?

2. the application: by faith I rest in His authority over my foes Look back to (1:27). He gives orders to evil spirits and they obey Him! Listen to 1 John 5:18-19, *We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.* No foe can harm me; no spirit can hurt me. I am kept safe by Jesus and those forces are under His control and, even if He allows them to kill my body, I am still safe. By faith I need to rest in that and not be afraid. Now in the third miracle we see:

III. Jesus' Authority Over Disease (5:24-34) Jesus was on the way to Jairus' house when He was touched by this woman with an issue of blood. It consumed her life. It cost all her money and yet remained uncured. Every day was a nightmare for her, because this disease made her suffer. Yet, in that instant when she touched the hem of His garment, it left and she was made perfectly well. It was not merely a swift recovery, but instant healing, a miracle that came forth from the power that was in the person of Jesus. What's:

1. the lesson: He has control over the body He has given me My body is a part of this created world and He has control over it. Now that doesn't guarantee that I will have good health. As you see:

a. He chose to allow her years of suffering Twelve years of it. That's a long time. He could have found her sooner. He could have stopped it earlier. But He chose to allow this suffering in her body until this moment and then:

b. He chose at this time to set her free He doesn't do that for everybody, at least not in this life. But the authority is still his. When my body ages, when I get sick, when I suffer and have pain, when I need an operation, Jesus is in absolute control of my body. He can choose to make it well or sick or anything in between. What am I to do?

2. the application: by faith I rest in His authority over my body Look what He told the woman (34). He commended her for trusting His control, His authority. No, we don't all get healed like she did, but Jesus wants the same thing of me, to rest in His authority and control over what happens in and to my body, to present my body as a living sacrifice to Him and trust Him with it in every sense, accepting what He allows. Then finally, in the fourth miracle we see:

IV. Jesus' Authority Over Death (5:21-23, 35-43) The whole time that the poor woman had been suffering with her disease, Jairus and his wife had been enjoying their little girl. They had held her as a baby and bounced her on their knees. They had watched her grow up healthy and strong, the joy of their lives. And then the unthinkable happened. She became deathly ill; her life was ebbing away and they couldn't stop it. Jairus ran to Jesus and begged Him to come. But He was too late. She died. Nobody could bring her back. None of them. But Jesus walked into that room and said, "O little one, LIVE!" And at His command, life sprang back into her body and she sat up. What's:

1. the lesson: He has control over the life that is in me He is the Lord of life. He controls life and death, whether it's in me or in those I love. You see:

a. He chose to allow the girl to die He could have stopped it right where He was. He didn't need to be present. But He chose to allow death for His own glory. And then:

b. He chose to raise her to life again It was that simple. Her living or dying depended on His will and His word, not on anything else, and so does yours and that of those you love. Life and death is not under the control of fate or circumstance or disease. It is under the control of Jesus. So, what am I to do?

2. the application: by faith I rest in His authority over my life Listen to what He said to Jairus (36). Those words are for me too, and for you. Don't be afraid; rest in Him. He controls life and death. Paul knew it; he wrote in *Rom. 14:8, If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.* He is the Lord of the dead and the living! I can trust Him with my life and the lives of those I love, to do what He wills! Do you see it? Jesus has authority over circumstances and demons and diseases and death. He declared it openly in His miracles! How far does it go?

V. The Ultimate Application - Mt. 28:18-20 After the final and most convincing miracle of all, His own resurrection, He reiterated for His servants what He'd been demonstrating for them all along:

1. the lesson: He has all authority in heaven and earth Not just a little bit, but ALL, every bit of it. He is God and has complete and absolute control over everything. All authority is His and He exercises it. So how do I live?

2. the application: I can go in confidence to serve Him and make disciples, for He who has all authority is always with me. Are we at the end of the age? I don't know and it doesn't matter, because the One who has all authority in heaven and earth is with me right now. He is IN me right now. So I can serve Him without fear. I can proclaim His Good News to the world. I can make disciples. I can be involved in His work. And I can have the same peace that He had lying there asleep in the sinking boat, the peace of God that passes understanding, the knowledge and certainty that He is in absolute control of it all and I trust Him.

My friend, I don't know what your circumstances are today. I don't know what difficult circumstances, what storms of life you're facing. I don't know what enemies you face and what attacks come upon you. I don't know what suffering you may

be enduring in your body. And I don't know whether you are staring death squarely in the face, whether for someone you love dearly or yourself. But I do know this: He is in control. He has authority over it. You don't need to be afraid; you can rest in His love. Trust Him! *I've told you before the story of Gladys Aylward who was a missionary to China more than fifty years ago. She was forced to flee when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng. But she could not leave her work behind. With only one assistant, she led more than a hundred orphans over the rugged mountains toward Free China. During that harrowing journey, she grappled with despair as never before. After passing one sleepless night, she faced the morning with absolutely no hope of reaching safety. A 13-year-old girl in the group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. "But I am not Moses," Gladys cried in desperation., "Of course you aren't," the girl said, "but Jehovah is still God!" Gladys and the orphans made it through. They proved once again that no matter how inadequate we are, God is still God, and we can trust in him. Jesus is Lord; He is Lord of all. Rest in His authority and get busy serving Him!*

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Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

The Training Of The Servant's Followers 6:1-10:52

A Lesson About Response 6:1-32

At Chapter 6 we move into a second major section of Mark's Gospel. After a brief introduction, the first 5 chapters focused on Jesus' ministry to the multitudes in Galilee. However, time for Him was growing shorter and He knew it. In chapters 6-10, Jesus begins to devote more and more attention to training His followers, His disciples, equipping them with both the truths and the experiences they would need to continue after He left them. These chapters are a series of experiences which provide lessons for the disciples and you can watch Jesus drive those lessons home. He's obviously training them in life-lessons that a servant of God needs to know. The first lesson is a lesson about response, the response of people to a servant of God. The disciples had seen nothing but crowd after crowd of people flocking to Jesus, crowding and pushing to get near him, never giving Him a minute's peace. Overall, there was such a tremendous positive response to Jesus by the public because of the miracles He did. But it was an unrealistic picture. How quickly it would change! There would be a cross to face. The church, while it started with a bang and spread throughout the world, was by and large going to face a lot of rejection and persecution. That has always been the case with servants of God, even those who accomplished great things and yes, even the Moses' and Elijahs who have done miracles! A servant of God should certainly expect some positive response, but he should always be prepared to expect negative response as well. To begin to drive that lesson home, Jesus deliberately took His disciples along on a return visit to His home town of Nazareth so they could see:

I. The Response Of Those Who Had Known Him Personally (1-6a) Luke tells us He had visited there once before at the very beginning of His ministry, before He had any disciples, and they rejected Him so thoroughly that they tried to throw him off a cliff! So now, after He had become greatly popular throughout all of Galilee, He took His disciples back to Nazareth to get a dose of reality. Here were people who had known Him for 30 years; He'd grown up there as a boy and lived out the first part of His adult life there. It was a small town; they all had known Him personally and now He returned with the message of the Kingdom and even miracles. How did they respond?

1. they were struck by His knowledge and abilities (1-2) The word *amazed* here means "struck by a blow"; it hit them! This teaching He was doing, where did He get it? He never seemed to have that when He lived here? He hadn't been to some rabbinic school; where did He get all this wisdom? And the miracles; for 30 years He never did one of those. Now He's traveling all over Galilee healing people and casting out demons. The great difference, the tremendous wisdom and authority He displayed, knocked them over! But at the same time:

2. they were hindered by familiarity with His past and family (3) Jesus was a carpenter. For 15-20 years his place was at Joseph's carpenter's shop, working wood, building things, not teaching like this. Then comes an unusual remark, *Isn't this Mary's son?* That is characteristically un-Jewish. He would be Joseph's son. They knew and remembered what was, in their eyes, His illegitimate birth. He had brothers and sisters who still lived there among them and were just like them; none of them was like Jesus. They couldn't figure out where Jesus got all this wisdom and authority. It was either a supernatural act of God or a Satanic counterfeit and a fraud. But this familiarity was a real hindrance, so much so, that:

3. they chose to reject Him because of it (3b) Literally, they were *made to stumble*; they tripped over their own familiarity with Him and the mighty works that should have been the occasion of their believing became instead, the occasion of their rejecting Him. They chose to say, "This can't be real; this can't be true; we know better!" It was bizarre. In fact, Mark notes that:

4. Jesus marveled at their not-believing (6) He was astonished. After all, here's a man who stills storms, casts out demons, heals the sick and raises the dead. Wouldn't you believe that, at the very least, He was a messenger of God and God was at work through Him? Sure, you would. After seeing some of those things, it would be harder to not believe than to believe! But amazingly, they managed and so, Jesus did two things:

a. He spoke a proverb (4-5) He didn't quote it, at least not from a source I know of, but invented it: *a prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown and among his relatives and in his own family*. Everywhere else, at least somebody listens, somebody believes. But the familiarity of relationship keeps unbelieving people from recognizing the work of God. And rather than do miracles on the spot to force them to believe, He left without doing any, only healing a few believing sick folks along the way. So, in this whole incident:

b. He taught a principle Expect that those who have known you the best may respond the least, when you come back to them as a servant of Christ to share the message of the Gospel. Lamine Kante, whom we support today as a national missionary, was a Muslim in the country of Guinea. After studying the Scriptures, he accepted Christ. When he went to tell his wife, she said, "If you do, I will go back to my parents!" She packed her things and left and he went with her back to their village. She told his parents and the townspeople about his conversion. Two days later he fell sick; actually, he was poisoned. His wife and his parents and his neighbors left him lie alone in a hut. But God intervened after a week and brought healing to his body. The next morning, he walked outside and heard the people with his parents saying, "It is taking him too long to die!" He left the village and did not see his wife for two years! At last, she showed up and also gave her heart to Christ! Then God gave him the vision to go back to his own village of Telimele as a missionary! As soon as a few converts were made, the leaders began persecution. For a whole year he was not allowed to preach outside the courtyard of his own house! Gradually, over time the situation has improved and acceptance and even respect in the village has come, though there is still no mass conversion there. Why? *A servant of God is not without honor except in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own family!* How about you? Where do you find it the hardest to share and the least response? Why? *A servant of God is not without honor except....* They stumble over the familiarity they have with you! Now we're going to momentarily skip to verse 14 and look at another kind of response:

II. The Response Of Those Who Heard About Him (14-29) Word about Jesus was everywhere; His name was on everybody's lips. He was a public figure and a household word, because of the miracles He was doing. People talked about Him like they talk about political figures or celebrities today. In the marketplace, sitting on the doorstep with the neighbors, around the dinner table, everybody talked about Jesus. And Mark records for us:

1. the speculation of the general public (14-15) Some folks thought He was a reincarnation of John the Baptist come back to life. John preached repentance like Jesus, but never did miracles. If he was raised from the dead, he might have miraculous powers. Maybe that's who Jesus was. Other folks said, "No, he is Elijah the miracle-worker come back to us, just like Malachi said he would! That's why He can do miracles." Then others were more rational and said, "No, he's just another in the line of the great prophets like Elijah or Jeremiah or Isaiah. God has sent another prophet to teach us." Of course, the Pharisees thought He was an agent of Satan possessed by a demon. Everybody always speculates about people that are famous, but that they don't really know. And it's not just famous people. It'll happen to you too. You're a servant of God. People who don't know you very well will see that you're different from them (whether you work miracles or not!) and try to figure you out. They'll speculate about you and form their opinions of what makes you tick and what's really going on. Some will see you as a religious fanatic who's gone off the deep end; some will see you as just another person full of the milk of human kindness; others will think you're out to get something. They'll speculate about you privately and quietly. And it's not limited to the common people. You see here:

2. the fascination of Herod with Jesus (16) Herod was the ruler, the tetrarch of Galilee under the Roman government. News reached his ears too and he bought into theory #1, the Baptist theory. Why? Because it fitted his own need! How? Well, in verses 17-29 we have a flashback, an explanation of:

a. what Herod had done with John (17-29) and you know the story. John had spoken out publicly about Herod's immoral marriage. He married his own niece who was his uncle's wife and got her to divorce his uncle by divorcing his own wife so he could marry her. No wonder John publicly lambasted them both! And he put John in prison to placate his wife, so you see in the story:

(1) his fascination with John (20) He was tantalized by what John had to say. He liked it, but it was confusing to his blinded immoral mind. Yet at the same time, you see:

(2) his fear of John He knew he was a righteous and a holy man and he didn't want to hurt him, but he had to live with his wife who hated his guts. So, he left him in prison, but one night it was his birthday and he'd had a little too much to drink and got his step-daughter to come into the party and do a lewd dance for the "boys". And while they were whistling and cheering at her, he wanted to look magnanimous and offered to let her name her reward. So, she asked for John's head on a platter and he was stuck. "Do I do what's right and protect John by refusing or do I play the big oriental macho king and deliver a head on a platter and look like I'm somebody!?" Of course, in the end, he made:

(3) his ultimate choice to sacrifice John (26) To keep his rash oath and impress his guests, he killed a servant of God! Why did Mark spend all this space on that story; what did it matter? Well, look:

b. what Herod later did with Jesus - Lk. 23:8-12 He had killed John before Jesus was so popular. But he was also fascinated with Jesus. He thought maybe he was John come back and doing miracles. He always wanted to see him and see a true miracle for himself. So, when Pilate sent Jesus to him, he made the same choice. There was a fascination but no faith and, when Jesus didn't produce, instead of standing up for the innocent Servant of God, he chose one more time to sacrifice him to the crowd! John's death foreshadows Jesus' death and Mark is pointing that out.

Servant of God, don't expect the general public to stand with you, to be on your side. They will speculate about you and try to figure you out. They may get fascinated with you, enamored of the things you do, awed by the skills you have, and be grateful for the help you may provide, but they will just as quickly turn on you and sacrifice you when it is convenient to their own need, just like Herod did to John and the people of Nazareth and even the whole Jewish nation did to Jesus. Never put your trust in the public, in people at large and how they will respond to what you have to share. But now, backing up to verse 6, you can see how Jesus prepared His disciples to go out on their own for a test run and we can talk about:

III. The Response Of Those Who Heard Through His Followers (6b-13, 30-32) The disciples had followed Him from village to village and watched His pattern of teaching. They had learned enough that they were ready themselves to declare the message, so He sent them out in pairs on a brief mission of their own to let them stretch their wings a bit and see how this servant business would go. But notice the things He said to them as He sent them, because they are likewise for us! First of all:

1. His servants were sent as His personal representatives (6b-7) They were sent on a mission by Him and:

a. they were given His authority (7) He had the power and authority to cast out demons and to heal. And He gave that authority to them to operate in. They could cast out evil spirits in His name. Matthew adds that they could heal disease. He conferred His authority on them, so that when they did His work, it was Him doing the work. But at the same time:

b. they were sent in utter dependence on Him (8-9) For this trip they were not to take anything extra, just the clothes they had on and the shoes they were wearing. They were not to pack a bag and extra shoes nor to reserve lodging ahead of time. They weren't even to pack a lunch, but simply to trust Him completely that they would be provided for as they had need, through people who would invite them to stay. Now, you or I would never go traveling like that and Jesus didn't mean to make that a permanent standard. It was specifically to teach them a lesson. Jesus reviewed it for them in the Upper Room before He died. Compare **Lk. 22:35-36**. What's the lesson? "You're My servants; trust in Me. Live in utter dependence on Me as you make your plans and you will lack nothing. You are my representatives, my Servants; I will take care of you! You go in My Name, dependent on My power and My provision!" Then, in the next breath:

2. His servants were warned to expect the same rejection He got There would be a two-fold response to their ministry just as there was to His:

a. by some they would be received (10) Some folks would believe the message and respond to them and care for them and take them in. But:

b. by others they would be rejected (11) There would be places like Nazareth, where people would not listen to them and would run them out of town. And Jesus said even more, which Matthew records (**Mt. 10:16-18**) and He continued on for a long while explaining the rejection His servants would experience. Hold that thought for a moment. What happened?

3. His servants obeyed and went (12-13) They went out two by two, just as He said, depending on Him and exercising His authority. What was the response?

a. they were at that time received by many who heard (30-32) It was evidently a positive response in most places. People responded at that time in droves and crowds, and Jesus' popularity was multiplied. Jesus' warning was not fulfilled on this trip and that shows us that it really wasn't FOR this trip. It was for later. He was talking about the time when they would be once and for all sent out as His followers into the world to reach it, after His resurrection, and at that time:

b. they were later rejected by many as Jesus had warned Every one of those things came true. They were not only ridiculed and asked to leave town in many places, but were sometimes arrested and handed over to local councils; they were flogged in synagogues. They did stand before kings like Agrippa and governors like Felix and give testimony of their faith.

Jesus taught His servants to expect treatment like He got! And He taught them what to do, to shake the dust off their feet and find somebody who would listen. They were to trust their rejecters' judgment to God and go find somebody else who was open to receive the truth. Jesus never went back to Nazareth. They had two opportunities to believe Him and receive Him, but when they refused, He went on to other villages where people would listen. He never quit. He told His followers

to do the same, to expect some to stumble over familiarity and refuse to listen; to expect the public to speculate about them and maybe get enamored of them for a while. But don't let that put you off guard. The message of the cross is still foolishness to those that are perishing and you will receive negative responses. Expect it. Shake the dust off your feet and keep going. Leave it with God and go on serving those who will listen! You're His personal representative. You're on His mission and you have His authority to declare His message to people. And you can trust Him to sustain you, no matter what people do! *When David Livingstone appeared at the University of Glasgow to receive the honorary doctor of law degree, he was received with silent respect. He was gaunt and weary from 16 years of exposure to Africa's hardships. One arm hung useless at his side because of an attack by a lion. Livingstone asked, "Shall I tell you what supported me through all those years of exile among a people whose language I could not understand and whose attitude toward me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this: 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'"* Jesus has all authority; He has sent us into the world to serve Him and He will always be with us to sustain us!

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Followers: A Lesson About Responsibility 6:32-56

Today in our study, we come to one of the most tremendous and most public miracles Jesus ever did. He multiplied five loaves and two fishes to feed more than 5,000 hungry people. But Jesus never did anything without meaning and purpose. Practically everything Jesus did during this latter portion of His ministry was done specifically for the purpose of training His followers, to teach them important lessons that they needed to learn and remember. And so, this great miracle is more than just a miracle; it's a lesson about the responsibility that a servant of God has. It is:

I. His Powerful Lesson About Meeting The Needs Of The Multitude (32-44) Jesus' disciples had returned to Him from the little mission He'd sent them out on and things were so busy with people coming and going that He wanted to take them aside for a little while into a more private place to get some rest. So, together, they got into a boat and started rowing the four miles across the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee to a quiet stretch of shoreline near Bethsaida. But people saw them going and were able to track their progress, and many of them ran the eight mile distance around the shore, gathering others from the towns along the way, so that when Jesus and the disciples pulled the boat up on shore and stepped out, there was this huge crowd of people, the last thing that they expected and the very thing they had hoped to avoid for a while. I can just see the disciples putting their hands over their faces and going, "Oh man, not more of them!" Have you ever been there? Not that you've ever had thousands of people follow you around, but have you ever just been tired of people and you want them to go away? I've been there (of course not with any of you!) Your patience grows thin, your energy is gone, your tolerance is at its limits and your thoughts go something like, "Can't you handle life without me? How come I have to be involved? Can't you just go away?" Now I don't really know whether the disciples thought that or not; I'm projecting a little of myself and of human nature into them, but I do know that Jesus didn't see people that way! And somehow:

1. we must learn to see people the way Jesus did (34) To Him they were like **shepherdless sheep**. That doesn't mean a whole lot to you and I, because most of us have never seen a shepherd and the only sheep we know are in the petting zoo. But let me remind you of just three things about sheep. First of all:

a. they cannot feed themselves They will eat what's in front of their noses and keep eating until it's gone and the earth is bare. They will eat what they can see but when there's nothing in sight, they don't have any facilities to locate more. They will wander aimlessly and may never find a fresh pasture or water to drink. They need a shepherd to lead them, a shepherd who knows where the green pastures and the quiet waters are. People are like that spiritually! They are starving and dying for spiritual truth, but they can't get it by themselves; it's not in them to find it. They don't know how or where to get it. They need someone to feed it to them. Jesus looked at that crowd and saw people with perishing souls, starving for the knowledge of God which would give them life. What's more:

b. they cannot direct themselves Sheep don't really know where they are or where they're going or how to get there. They have no plan; they wander aimlessly and often get lost. Jesus looked at that crowd and saw lost people going down paths of life that went in all directions, but all leading to destruction. People don't know how to live, how to choose, how to be a family, how to love, how to make it in life. Oh, they think they do, but without a shepherd, without someone to show and tell them, they're lost and following the ruts that the world has worn under their feet. And thirdly:

c. they cannot protect themselves Sheep have no claws, they can't run fast and their teeth don't bite very well. They have no defense. They flee in terror at the sight or sound of anything strange. Any old dog or coyote can kill a sheep at will, if the shepherd is not around. Jesus looked at that crowd and saw defenseless people. They could be devoured by any false teacher or Pharisee who came along. They could be hurt and abused by any Roman soldier at any time. For all the defenses they try to put up, people are really defenseless.

In a word, Jesus didn't see people's actions; He saw their needs! He saw them not as noisy and bothersome and aggravating, but his eyes looked deeper; they were helpless and hopeless and had nobody to protect them from harm, nobody to feed them spiritual truth, and nobody to show them how to live, nobody who cared about them, no shepherd. And that's how we must learn to see the people all about us and then:

2. we must learn to react to people the way Jesus did (34) How did He react? He was moved with compassion:

a. He was deeply touched by their plight Let me read you these lines by Philip Keller: *The tenant sheepman on the farm next to my first ranch was the most indifferent manager I had ever met. He was not concerned about the condition of his sheep. His land was neglected. He gave little or no time to his flock, letting them pretty well forage for themselves as best they could, both summer and winter. They fell prey to dogs, cougars and rustlers. Every year these poor creatures were forced to gnaw away at bare brown fields and impoverished pastures. Every winter there was a shortage of nourishing hay and wholesome grain to feed the hungry ewes. Shelter to safeguard and protect the suffering sheep from storms and blizzards was scanty and inadequate. They had only polluted muddy water to drink...In their thin, weak and diseased condition these poor sheep were a pathetic sight. In my mind's eye I can still see them standing at the fence, huddled sadly in little knots, staring wistfully through the wires at the rich pastures on the other side. To all their distress, the heartless, selfish owner seemed utterly callous and indifferent. He simply did not care. What if his sheep did want green grass, fresh water, shade, safety or shelter from the storms? What if they did want relief from wounds, bruises, disease and parasites? He ignored their needs - he couldn't care less. Why should he - they were just sheep - fit only for the slaughterhouse. I never looked at those poor sheep without an acute awareness that this was a precise picture of those wretched old taskmasters Sin and Satan on their derelict ranch, scoffing at the plight of those within their power. That's how Jesus saw people. He didn't see a wicked woman taken in adultery who needed to be stoned; He saw a lost sheep, eating the weeds in front of her, with nobody to lead her to the truth that would bring life to her soul. He didn't see a greedy traitor of a tax collector making himself rich at poor people's expense, but a helpless sheep caught in the bushes of greed and unable to free himself. All of them, helpless sheep, destined for the slaughter and dying on the poor pasturage this world has to offer. How do you see the people around you? Are you touched by their needs? His heart was moved and so:*

b. He involved Himself in meeting their needs He started to teach them and He didn't give up after one hour. He taught them all day until late afternoon. Their most important need was to hear the truth and He shared it with them freely, though He himself was tired and needed rest. We need to learn to react that way, to see people as needy and lost and helpless and throw ourselves into meeting those needs. That's what Jesus was showing His disciples by example. But that will only happen for us when:

3. we must learn to see our responsibility the way Jesus did All day long the disciples watched him teach and the sun went further and further down. Their stomachs were growling, I'm sure, and the question on their mind was where such a crowd as this was going to get food to eat out here in such a deserted area. So, they approached Jesus and interrupted Him with their idea. It represents:

a. the common view: let them go feed themselves (35-36) Send them away and let them go find themselves something to fill their needs in the nearby villages and towns. Of course, their dull brains can only think on the level of their stomachs at this moment. But that's pretty much how they saw the crowd, period: *Ok, we've done enough to meet their needs. It's really up to them. We can't take care of everybody all the time. They are responsible for themselves and they need to go find bread. People should know better than to come out here without a lunch anyway. People should know better than to get trapped in drugs and alcohol; they should know better than to be immoral and catch AIDS; they should know better than to worship idols or bow down toward Mecca or let communism tell them there is no God. Everybody's ultimately responsible for themselves. If they don't find truth, too bad! I can't help it. Am I my brother's keeper?* Sound familiar? Feel familiar? Go away, I don't want to be bothered with you and your needs! That's the response of human flesh to the needs of the world! But listen carefully to:

b. Jesus' view: you give them something to eat! Feed them! It is your responsibility. Don't send them away to help themselves. They're helpless sheep. YOU help them! You minister to them. You meet their needs. You tell them the good news. You heal their wounds and tend them in their diseases. You're the missing shepherd they need and I've put them in your path. If you love Me, feed my sheep! Boy was that a rude awakening to them; "5,000+ people here around us and we're responsible for them? We have to feed them?" As responsibility dawned on them and they considered it, they were unsure how to react. They had a mix of feelings. Yes, they didn't want the people to go hungry, but on the other hand, they felt a couple of other conflicting things. My friends, this is a whole lot bigger than a crowd in Galilee, 2000 years ago. This is Jesus' mission for us: He sets the world before us and says, "GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT! FEED THEM! This isn't about bread; it's about the Bread of Life! They are helpless sheep with no shepherd and I have charged you with the responsibility of feeding them! YOU are responsible to help those poor sheep in your neighborhood. You are responsible to feed those sheep in your class in school, those sheep you work with in business." And ultimately, together the bread of life has been given to us and we are responsible to feed the millions and billions of starving sheep throughout the world with the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Six non-Christians die every minute throughout the world and it is our responsibility to get the Gospel to them so they can find life in the True Shepherd! But when we seriously consider our responsibility:

4. we will experience the ambivalence the disciples felt (37b) Yes, we want to see people have life, to see the whole world reached, but we also know:

a. the frustration of our pitifully small resources They'd already pondered the idea and had an estimate in their minds. It would take eight months wages to feed this crowd supper. At current rates, if you bought them each a Big Mac and a Coke it would have taken \$20,000 plus. Where would they get that or where would we, for that matter? The need is so great; we are so few and we have so little compared to the need. How can our effort make any difference? But the NIV also tries to translate the tone of their reply? "Are we to spend that much?" Do you hear:

b. the unwillingness to sacrifice for the sake of others Should we give up that much, be willing to lose that much to give them bread? There's an element of sacrifice here. Taking responsibility for those around you costs something. It costs time. It costs energy. It costs money. It requires changing the focus of our life away from self. And, like the disciples, you and I might be a little hesitant to do that. That's our flesh. "How on earth can I make a difference?" often is accompanied by "I'm not sure I want to make a difference, that I'm ready to let go of my self-dreams and self-pursuits.", if we're honest. We're not sure we really want to be shepherds! Well, only God can deal with you on the point of willingness, but once we get past that, there is an exciting lesson here for us:

5. we must follow Jesus' method of meeting needs Jesus has a way that our pitifully small resources can make a difference in meeting the immense need of the shepherdless sheep in the world. Here it is. First:

a. we must examine the resources we do have (38) They hadn't even looked. Philip found a boy who was willing to part with the five little barley loaves and two small fish that were his lunch. It was nothing among 5,000, but it was SOMETHING! So often we waste our time focusing on what we DON'T have and what we CAN'T do. Jesus commanded them to look at the opposite: Go see what you do have and what you can do! They would have said, "We can feed two kids half a lunch to hold them over." We might say, "I can invite my neighbor for coffee, I can give time for that hurting person at work, I can pray 15 minutes every day for lost sheep, I can write to one international penpal, I can adopt one unreached people group, I can give \$10 a month..." I don't know what you can do, but you can do something. Once you get the vision, Jesus points you to the mirror to look. What can you do; what have I given you that can help lost sheep? And once we find the things He's given us:

b. we must present them to Jesus for His use Matthew records Jesus' response: *Bring them here to me!* That's the key, "Lord, I don't have much, but I give what I have to you; it's yours to use to meet the need. Lord, here's my car, here's my computer, here's my time, here's my voice, here's my money. I see the responsibility, but this is all I have. I give it to you to use. Feed your sheep!" You see, here's the neat part:

c. we must trust Him to multiply them to meet the need (39-42, 44) He took those five little loaves and two little fish and looked up to heaven to the Father and presented them with thanksgiving and then broke them apart to share. And as He did, they multiplied in His hands over and over and over, until every person in that huge crowd had not only a small piece, but as much as he could eat! What a miracle! And Jesus has been doing it through His people over and over again through the centuries; did you know that? Martin Luther could not reach all of Europe with the truth that salvation is by grace alone, but he could nail a protest on the church door, so he did and God multiplied that. Through the sacrifices of Luther and others like Him Europe was turned upside down as the Protestant Reformation swept through. William Carey could not feed all the lost sheep of India but he could stand and preach sermons about our responsibility to reach the lost sheep and could go himself to reach some. And God took what he had to give and multiplied it, along with the sacrifices of others, into a mighty missions movement that swept the world and today is bringing over 100,000 people a day to Christ as believers all over the world take their little loaves and give them to Jesus! He takes our feeble efforts and gifts, small and insufficient, and changes the world through them, feeds the shepherdless sheep through them. And He will do it through you, my friend. He will use you to touch one who will touch two or three who will touch others and so, what you invest in ministry to people will be multiplied over and over again. However, note His warning:

d. we must not waste what He has provided for us (43) - Jn. 6:12 They picked up all the leftovers but John tells us why, because Jesus told them to. *Let nothing be lost [or wasted]!* We've been the recipients of what Jesus has multiplied through somebody else to us. We can't let what has been provided go to waste! We can't let it be lost to the Kingdom. We must channel it back into our purpose, feeding more sheep.

So, Jesus moved on from there, and you can see:

II. His Personal Example Of Meeting The Needs Of The Multitude (53-56) It happened to Him again and again. Everywhere there were more sheep and He gave Himself to meeting their needs. Notice just two points:

1. it was continual - ...wherever He went It was a habit of life, a way of life, to feed the sheep with the bread of life, to heal their broken hearts and lives and:

2. it was comprehensive - ...all who touched him It wasn't for the select few. It was for all. All who would touch Him. All who would listen. He made it available to everyone.

What an example to us of a lifestyle of caring about and ministering to lost helpless people? That's our responsibility. Will you ask Jesus to give you His view of the people around you, to let you see with His eyes? Will you present what you have to Jesus and let Him use it however He wants to touch people with it? No, you can't do it all. But you can commit yourself to do what you can do, and Jesus will multiply that. *A young man, walking along the beach at dawn, noticed an old man ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Catching up with the man, the youth asked what he was doing. The answer was that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun. "But the beach goes on for miles, and there are millions of starfish," countered the young man. "How can your effort make any difference?" The old man looked at the starfish in his hand, and then threw it to safety in the waves." It makes a big difference to this one," he said.* Somebody once wrote this prayer; may it become ours:

*Oh, give me, Lord, Thy love for souls, For lost and wand'ring sheep,
That I may see the multitudes and weep as Thou didst weep.
Help me to see the tragic plight of souls far off in sin;
Help me to love, to pray, and go to bring the wand'ring in.
From off the altar of Thy heart take Thou some flaming coals,
Then touch my life and give me, Lord, A heart that's hot for souls.
O Fire of Life, O Flame divine, make thy abode in me:
Burn in my heart, burn evermore, till I burn out for Thee.*

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Followers: A Lesson About Legalism 7:1-23

After seeing Jesus feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish and then watching Him heal the sick time after time, you would think that everyone would be just hanging there with their jaws open in amazement. Who could possibly nitpick and complain and criticize after seeing that? Well, there were some and Jesus heard from them soon after. They were people who were caught up in a belief called legalism. Now legalism is a subtle, nebulous, underlying kind of thing, so I wrote out a definition for you to help you and I think clearly together. ***Legalism is the belief that performance makes me acceptable to God.*** What I do, how I act, how I look, is the basis on which God likes or doesn't like me. His rating scale is graded and my performance determines the degree to which I am accepted. Now, in an unsaved person who doesn't know and believe that Jesus paid it all, the issue is simply getting to heaven. Salvation is by works, period. That's raw legalism and true Christians of all stripes repudiate that! Salvation is purely a gift by grace; it is not earned or deserved. But you see, even after we wake up to that one area, legalism is still very much a part of the way we have learned to behave and to see God, a part of our flesh, if you will, and we can and do still very much operate by it in all the other areas of our Christian life. Only I am no longer performing for salvation, simply for acceptance and approval from my Heavenly Father. How good a child I am to Him depends on how well I perform! He's still rating me in that area. Now, how that belief affects me, depends on how well I think I'm doing. If I don't think I'm doing so well, it may rob me of the depth of my relationship with God. However, if I think I'm doing very well, it will usually lead to pride and eventually to comparing myself to others and, ultimately, to being critical and self-righteous toward them. And that, my friends, is what creates a Pharisee in Jesus' day or ours! Let's look at:

I. Jesus' Confrontation With Legalism (1-5)

1. the accusation of the legalists (1-4) As incredible as this may seem to us, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were able to ignore the mighty miracles. What they noticed was that Jesus' followers sat down to eat without washing their hands. Now before I alienate our Nursery School teachers who are also really big on washing your hands, let me hasten to explain, as Mark does for his readers, that this whole thing was not about eating with dirt on your hands. Years earlier, the practice had begun among very religious Jews of ceremonially washing your hands before eating, in case you had touched anything that was ceremonially unclean. It meant dipping them in water and holding them up so that it ran down all the way to the wrist. For instance, what if you had shaken hands or simply touched someone who, unknown to you, was ceremonially impure, for example, a Gentile or a woman who had her period or somebody with a bleeding sore or even someone who had normal marital relations with their spouse the night before. They were unclean and when you touch them their uncleanness is transmitted to you. So, you must purify yourself. When they came home from the marketplace, having touched many people in the crowd, they would bathe! The rabbis had developed 18 decrees intended to keep the good Jew from all defilement and impurity, and among these were intricate instructions for the washing of various types of cups and pitchers and kettles, and other items. It was known as the oral tradition, the teaching of the elders, and was later written down and recorded as part of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*. Jesus' disciples were breaking this important tradition and the Pharisees were quick to point it out. Now notice:

2. the beliefs underlying the accusation (5) Two issues bothered them. The first is the issue of:

a. authority: *Why don't you obey the tradition of the elders?* This is what we've been taught and we respect our teachers; why don't you? You see, under legalism ***obeying what I'm taught makes me acceptable to God.***

That's why Jesus ruffled their feathers all the time. He was forever breaking, not the Word of God, but the traditions that everybody was following and if obeying those traditions is the measure of my acceptance and you're telling people they don't have to do that, then you're a threat to my whole performance-based system, aren't you? And the second issue here is:

b. defilement: *You eat your food with "common" hands*, hands that have lost their purity and holiness by contact with the outside world. Under legalism, **contact with anything impure corrupts me before God**. I must stay pure and clean to be acceptable and I can't touch anything or anyone that might stain that, because it makes me less acceptable.

And there you have the two major traits of legalism even today: rule-following and separating themselves from everybody who's not exactly like them! And believe me, it didn't die with the Pharisees; in its Christian form it's alive and well today! It's one of the chief tools that Satan is using to ruin the mission of the Church all over the world! One of our missionaries told us how the Baptist Churches in Russia that survived the communist era have such a problem with this and shared the story of how he had personally taken a whole group of 10 or 20 new believers to one church and none of them were allowed to come in, because several of the women were wearing pants! Why not? Because women wearing pants breaks the rule we've been taught and we must be faithful and keep the standard that has been passed down to us and further, if we let those unspiritual pants-wearers come in here, it would make us like them, make us party to their uncleanness and corrupt us! One elder was removed from office because his daughter wore an earring. Rule-following and separatism! And it's not only over there! There's plenty of it right here! The issues range from pants and jewelry and makeup to the use of Bible translations and down to much more subtle issues like particular interpretations of the scripture where we must believe the right "facts" (though they're not actually God's Word but systems of teaching begun by men) to be spiritual. It's everywhere and it's even here in our own hearts sometimes. Now Jesus had absolutely no time for that sort of thing, so He addressed both issues for the benefit of His disciples. First:

II. Jesus Exposes The Legalistic View Of Authority (6-8) He attacks their view of authority, using a quote from Isaiah that fit them to a T. These guys were already so far into legalism that there was no turning back, so by looking at His comments directed to them, you can see:

1. where it eventually leads (7b-8) Legalism always starts out good. It starts out with a sincere desire to obey and please God. But when you believe that performance is what counts, it eventually leads:

a. to teaching rules created by men rather than truths given by God The Jews had started with good intentions. They had read the law and the things God had given Moses for them about avoiding uncleanness. But, because of their performance mindset, they wanted to be sure that they didn't break any of God's rules, so they added additional rules that were clearer and more direct and more restrictive to make sure they were within the bounds of acceptability. For instance, God had told Israel not to work on the Sabbath day. Now what is work? Is that your job? Is it making supper? Is it gathering sticks for a fire? Is it lifting up something that the wind blew over? It would be so much easier to obey if it was only more specific. So, they invented rules about things like that. But eventually, the rules that men made took on a life of their own. They became the things that were important rather than the truth God had given for their good. They were widely accepted and became part of the culture. How sad that their teachings were reduced from Divine truth to man-invented ideas! But the worst part is that it eventually leads:

b. to rejecting Divine commands in favor of human teachings Ultimately the Divine truths are forgotten and when they resurface, things have gotten so out of whack that they conflict with the human rules of what you have to believe and do and performance-based human beings usually choose to reject truth for rules, to throw it away! That's where it always goes! The authority of the men who taught you what you know and the power of the pull of the system you're caught up in is so great that you simply deny what goes against it. If you're a performer, you're eventually left standing there holding tightly to humanly invented ideas of behavior and pushing away from you the very truth of God which you claim you hold. Jesus gave them an example:

3. Jesus' illustration: the Corban vow (9-13) Now everybody knew and quoted:

a. the command of God - honor your father and mother... (10) Parents are important and God commands that they are to be honored and respected and cared for. But the Jews had developed an interesting:

b. the tradition of men - Corban! It is given to God! (11) If you wanted to be pious, the Jews had developed a custom whereby you could dedicate something to God, a portion or all of your property or goods. You would pronounce the word *corban*, meaning *it is a gift to God*, over it in the presence of witnesses and so would make a vow. And that item belonged to the Temple thereafter. In many cases it was much like a will, "When I die, my land goes to the Temple, my money goes to the Temple, and so on. So, here's a guy who is pious and wants to please God and dedicates everything he has to the Temple. Then his parents get sick or get older and can't care for themselves and he has to take care of them. But all his reserves and all he has have been promised under oath to the temple. What should he do? The Pharisees had an answer:

c. the choice to disobey God in order to obey men (12) The keeping of the oath is more important than caring for the parents. The Temple is more important than the people. Consequently, it's not even that he wouldn't take it back on his own; they wouldn't let him! They forced him to disobey God and let his own parents suffer to keep their own human tradition! And it wasn't just this one thing:

d. the extension of the problem (13) They did many things like that. That reasoning was everywhere. The Word of God was being overlooked and disobeyed in the name of following religious pious performance and gaining the approval of the group! One rather large branch of Christendom is especially obvious for this. It is a sin to say or believe that Jesus had brothers and sisters, that Mary had any other children, though Mark 6:3 plainly says He had brothers and sisters. For centuries clergy have been forbidden to marry and for years no red meat was allowed to be eaten on Fridays, even though 1 Tim. 4:3 warns clearly about false teachers who would come in the future saying, *They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.* - 1Tim 4:3. And verse 19 of our text clearly says *"Jesus declared all foods clean!"* But some other branches have not been much better. They have declared at one time or another that dancing is sinful, though Psalm 150 commands us to praise God with the timbrel and *dance!* Or they have said that no believer may ever touch a drop of wine when Jesus commanded His disciples to use it as the very symbol and reminder of His precious blood! Oh, when we think that we must perform to please God, we make rules and rules become idols and we obey them rather than God. Every time! That's where it leads and look:

2. what it accomplishes (6-7a) It does two things:

a. it breeds hypocrisy - outward acting without inner reality Jesus calls them hypocrites, the Greek word for an actor, one who wears the mask and acts like somebody even though that's not who he really is! If you have to perform to please God, much of the time you're going to go through the motions, to follow the rules even though you hate it on the inside. And further:

b. it empties worship - makes it an act, not an attitude of the heart "Your worship is empty, without meaning; it's an act of the hands, not of the heart and the heart is what I want," Jesus says. Thousands upon thousands of worshippers go through motions of performance in America every Sunday (and some days you and I are among them!), simply for the reason that that's what you have to do to please God, or so they've been told, but their hearts are far from Him! So what's:

The Point: Focus on loving God because He's already accepted you! If you set your mind on performing for God and earning His acceptance, you're dead in the water. You're already accepted in the Beloved One, Jesus. Believe that. Bask in that. Enjoy that. Now focus on loving Him back as He loves you. Love Him for loving you. And if you love Him, your heart will worship Him and your actions will line up with His Word because your heart loves Him. Jesus said clearly that all the commandments in the law hang on the first one, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...* If you love Him, you'll live in loving service and your life will line up with His Word. Focus on that, on staying in love with Him and it will keep you from the trap of legalism. Those man-made rules will be seen for the lies they are: Jesus won't love you unless you go to church, unless you pray, unless you read three chapters a day, unless you dress right and listen to slow music and so on and on! John McArthur wrote this in his book *Our Sufficiency In Christ: Many years ago, a college acquaintance said to me, "I don't think you're a very spiritual person." I was puzzled because he didn't know me well enough to come to that kind of conclusion, so I asked him why he said that. "Because you don't go to mid-week prayer meetings," he answered. "What does that have to do with my spirituality?" I responded. "For all you know I might spend all day and all night in prayer." "No," he said, "spiritual people attend prayer meetings."* How many of us have said things or at least thought things just like that? Do you see the trap? It is not the Divine communion with God but the man-made practice of going to a meeting which became the measure of spirituality. *Col. 2:16-17, Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.* And not only don't let others judge you; don't judge them that way. Focus on loving Him, not on performing for Him! Then your worship will be real and true, from the heart and what you are on the outside will match what you are on the inside. Now that brings us to the second part of Jesus' reply where:

IV. Jesus Corrects The Legalistic Concept Of Defilement (14-23) Jesus made sure the crowd and then His own disciples heard it loud and clear. He laid out a two-fold principle about this whole idea of what defiles you, what makes you common and unclean and unworthy before God. And here it is:

1. things outside a person do not defile him by contact You can eat mud; you can eat garbage. You can smear trash all over your body or fall in a cesspool. Those things may make you physically dirty and give you germs but nothing on the outside can defile you before God by being in contact with you. Why?

a. they have no effect on the heart (spirit) If you're a child of God with a brand new spirit and a clean heart, not one iota of that stuff can ever touch it. The things you eat nourish you and pass right on through. The things you touch merely soil the skin. Nothing touches the spirit and so:

b. they have no effect on his acceptability to God Paul said this about eating meat that had been offered to idols, *But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.* - 1 Cor 8:8, None of that stuff has any effect on our status a child of God or on how pleased He is with us as His children. For years the debate among Christians was things like, "Do I go to movies? Do I eat in a restaurant that also serves liquor? Am I sinning if I have a glass of wine with my spaghetti dinner?" The whole idea was this, "If I touch anything that there is any chance God might not approve of, it will defile me before Him; it will ruin my performance before Him!" But that's not what God is concerned about. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God is busy looking where? At the heart! So, Jesus said:

2. things inside a person defile him by coming out It's not what goes in but what comes out. You see:

a. sin is what defiles a person before God In the unbeliever the presence of sin lives in and controls the very spirit of the person, the heart. That's why Jesus has to get rid of that one and give you a new one when He saves you! He can't dwell in a sinful spirit! But even as a believer, the presence of sin still lives, not in your spirit, but in your body and it is still trying to get you to let it control you, to serve it as your master. And when you choose to let it, the:

b. sin inside manifests itself externally in thought and behavior What a list in verses 21-22! When those immoral, awful, evil things show up in your thoughts and your behavior, they are evidence of the presence of sin reigning in you and evidence that you are defiled! If they show up continually, they are evidence that you have never been transformed by the power of Christ and made clean in your heart! If they show up in your life as a believer, they are evidence that you are yielding yourself to the wrong master, letting sin reign like a king in your mortal body. You are acting like what you aren't, behaving below your identity like any common human being, instead of the child of God you really are! So, what's the point:

The Point: Focus on allowing Him to manifest His character through you! Stop focusing on what touches you and separating yourself from everything and anybody so you don't "catch any dirt". You can't hide in this nice little Christian enclave of friends and keep yourself unsoiled and when it's all done, say, "Here I am God, I'm clean. Nothing unclean has ever passed these lips or touched these hands. Look at how shiny I've made myself for you!" That's what legalistic performance turns you into! But God looks inside and what He wants is to develop the fruit of His presence, His Spirit in your life. He wants to manifest His character, His love, His joy, His peace, His gentleness, His goodness, His kindness, all those things through your body! He can only do it if you submit to His control, if you say each day and, in each situation, "Lord, here I am, I'm yours, live through me!"

Oh, what a lesson. It took the disciples years to fully grasp it, until after Acts 15! But then it took me a lot of years to grasp too. I was in the ministry 15 years or so before God really began to show me how caught up in legalism some of my thinking had been and how much I stressed performance, and I began to let go of some of that and to get free of it! Don't let it take that long for you! Start today to focus on loving God rather than "doing" for Him and focus on yielding to His control rather than "trying harder" to be holy. God loves you; you're His child. All He really wants is for you to love Him and give yourself to Him fully just as He has given Himself fully to you. Will you do it?

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Followers: A Lesson About People 7:24-37

How many of you enjoy watching the Olympics? I think one of the neatest parts of the whole experience is watching things like the opening and closing ceremonies where you have people from every nation swaying back and forth to music with each other in what looks like such perfect harmony, listening to songs about bringing peace and love to all the world. It's almost like a little three week millennium where lions and lambs all rest in peace with each other and the world is the way we might wish it were. The problem is that the real world is not like that at all. One of Satan's oldest strategies is to divide. Almost as soon as God separated the peoples of the world at the tower of Babel, Satan went to work building walls between the groups, raising partitions of hostility to keep them at odds with and away from each other. Not only has it been a way to inflict suffering on human beings which delights him no end, primarily, it keeps the Good News of Jesus Christ from being shared easily from group to group. Thus it keeps people in spiritual darkness and bondage. In Joseph's day, it was detestable for Egyptians to eat with Hebrews. Today millions of Arabs would like nothing better than to wipe Israel off the map and it still takes tremendous pressure to get them to sit down at the same table. For generations in South Africa, it was official policy called apartheid that the white race was superior to the blacks and the only one fit to rule! In 1992 the Muslim government of Sudan declared holy war against the 20% of its population in the south who were not Muslim. 3 million people died over 3 decades in this tension; 10,000 women and children were kidnapped and sold as slaves. That's the real world, friends! And if we're honest, the same kinds of walls have existed here. Though we outlawed slavery at the cost of a great civil war, the wall between blacks and whites was still pretty high until my generation and it's still there today! For more than 50 years, Russia, Eastern Europe, and later China were to us the enemy, in a great cold war which kept us apart and kept the Gospel from millions of people. It was easy to listen to prophecy teachers talk about the great Russian/Arab confederacy of Ezekiel 38 and Daniel 11 and not think of them as people but as enemies who will eventual-

ly be destroyed (and good, they deserve it!) There is no group of people on this earth which does not have its prejudices, its walls of hostility which divide it from others. And the world into which Jesus came was no different.

I. The Dividing Walls Of Hostility Which Jesus Destroyed - Listen to Paul's description of his world in these passages: *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" ...For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility - Eph. 2:11, 14.* The Jews saw the world as Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised. The Greeks did too, *Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.* - *Col. 3:11.* Those who did not know Greek language and culture were barbarians, non-Greeks, and the Scythians (the Russians!) were the worst and wildest of the bunch! *Gal. 3:28, There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* In Paul's culture, slaves were less than free people and women less than men. Just look at the words and you can see what separates people from one another. There is:

1. the racial barrier ...Greek, Gentile are racial terms. People look different from us. Their skin is a different color and their features inferior and unattractive to our eyes. Then there is:

2. the cultural barrier ...uncircumcised is a cultural term, a national practice of Israel that set her apart. People have strange customs and clothing. They eat with their hands out of a common bowl and eat things that are revolting! Then there's:

3. the language barrier ...barbarian means a non-Greek speaker, even if he's moral and educated. People don't talk like we do, even if they learn our language, and we certainly wouldn't want to learn theirs! And finally, there's:

4. the religious barrier The KJV and the hymns are full of words like **...heathen, pagan, infidel**. People are idol-worshippers; they worship false gods and, in the process, do things that are abominable to us!

These same barriers are no less present in our own day and in our own lives. We are prejudiced people in our hearts in many ways, if we will dare to look into them, just as people anywhere and everywhere have always been. One Christian author from the Middle East wrote, *Most Christians have as much compassion for Muslims today as first-century Jews did for the Samaritans. At best we show only apathy and carelessness.... The Western church has a tendency to look down on all non-western cultures. This lack of sensitivity or concern for their souls must be turned upside down by the Spirit of God if we are ever going to reach them!* Jesus knew that and I believe that's why, in our text, He took His disciples on an extended:

II. Jesus' Mission Into Gentile Territory He deliberately left Galilee and went north and west along the sea coast into an area where only Gentiles lived. He went to Tyre and then to Sidon, port cities of Phoenicia (then ruled by Syria). He swung in a big arc around to the Sea of Galilee and down into the Gentile territory east of Jordan, known as the Decapolis, the "Ten Cities". This trip, no doubt, took weeks and I believe that it was a deliberate lesson to His disciples, showing them His compassion and desire to minister to non-Jewish people. To them, this trip carries all the connotations that a missions trip to Russia or to Indonesia would for us, even though it was nearby. And Mark records three major events that happened on that trip:

1. He freed the daughter of a Gentile woman (24-30) from demon possession and brought her to faith. Then:

2. He opened the ears of a Gentile man (31-37) who was deaf and partially mute and brought he and many others to faith. Finally:

3. He fed the mouths of a Gentile crowd (8:1-10) The 4,000 he fed were Gentile idolaters, not the 5,000 who were mostly Jews of Galilee He fed earlier, and look what He says in 8:2! He has the same compassion on this hungry crowd of Gentiles that He had for the other one!

This trip was designed to teach His disciples that: "People are people. I love them all. I want them all. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in My sight. I want to free them and heal them and feed them. I don't see them as Jew and Gentile, Greek or barbarian, capitalist or communist, white or black, high or low class, clean or dirty. They are people and they need a shepherd!" So, let's look briefly at the first two of these events and the lessons they contain about people.

III. His Parabolic Lesson In Helping The Woman (24-30) This woman was not only from a Gentile area but, according to Matthew, was of the Canaanite race, which to the Jews, of course, was cursed. The last verse of Zechariah says of the Kingdom, *...on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty.* - *Zech. 14:21.* She was an idolater whose people had worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth and probably still did. Yet she approached Jesus in a most interesting way:

1. the woman's approach ...Son of David have mercy on me - Mt. 15:22 records the greeting. She calls him by his Jewish title, the title of the Jewish Messiah, Son of David! She isn't just looking for some miracle-working magician of any stripe. She was looking to the God of Israel through His Anointed One in faith to set her daughter free from demonic bondage. She saw it as an act of mercy, of stooping to care about a poor Canaanite woman who didn't deserve

notice. But when Jesus did not answer her right away, she was persistent. She begged and pleaded with Him repeatedly to heal her daughter, but He did not respond at first. Now, Matthew also records:

2. the disciples' reaction ... *Send her away; she's bothering us* - Mt. 15:23 This is the reason I think Jesus waited. He wanted to see what they would say, what they would do. Would they say, "Master, please help her! Hear her cry! She has no hope but you!"? No. They said, "Master, she's annoying and bothersome. Tell her to go away!" What attitude is showing? "Canaanites are not really people, like we are. They are not worth helping, worth caring about. If her daughter is demonized, she deserves it, the old idolater!" If we can just categorize people by race, religion, language or culture, we can reduce them to being less than us somehow, not as fully human and as fully worthwhile as we are. Jesus' response is quite shocking and unexpected to us. He told a:

3. Jesus' parable ...*Children must eat before pets* (27) The setting here is a supper table and the family is gathered around. All the children are hungry and the food is set out. The family pets, the little dogs (Greek *kunaron*, not the curs that roam the streets) are also there by the table waiting to be fed. But what father will take the food that was set out for the children's plates and give it to the doggies instead. No, the children get to eat all they want and then the dogs are fed out of what is left. Children must eat before pets. Isn't that right? Or do your pets sit at the table like one of the family? Jesus was not being derogatory or offensive in His reply. He simply:

a. it taught the order of God's plan God had a plan. Jesus was sent to His own first, to the Jew first. That's how Paul saw it too, *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.* - Rom. 1:16. That's not a statement about who's worth more or who God loves more. God's plan was to give the knowledge of Himself through His Son first to the Jews because of the covenant relationship He had made with them, and then to the Gentiles. Matthew mentions one more phrase that Jesus spoke, *I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.* They are the children and they have to get first opportunity until they are full before I move on in the plan! You would think she might have gotten angry but instead:

b. it elicited a response of genuine humble faith (28) Even the pet doggies get to eat the crumbs that fall under the table before it's their feeding time! "I'm not going to argue about what I need or deserve. I'd be happy to be God's pet, much less his child! I wouldn't want to change God's plan and have Him do things any other way, but I trust Him and couldn't I please just have a leftover crumb of His goodness and mercy ahead of time!" Oh, Jesus had been holding back. All along He cared about this woman and her little suffering daughter. He wanted to help. When she put the lesson that He wanted to teach His disciples so clearly, He couldn't hold out any longer! He praised her faith and granted her request immediately. He didn't even make her wait until He could walk home with her; He cast that demon out from a distance so the girl wouldn't suffer one moment longer and when her mother got home, she was resting peacefully! Do you see the lesson? Being made a child of God is an undeserved privilege of infinite measure. It is not something I can get proud about and look down on others. There is nothing in me that made Him choose to work in my life. It is all by grace! But there are others who are not His children, yet he loves them and cares for them and He wants to take the food, the crumbs of the rich knowledge that He's given you and I, and feed others so they too can become children! You see this whole scene:

c. it demonstrated God's intention to reach Gentiles In God's timing, within a few years the Jew was basically set aside. Nationally, Israel's privileges were over until the Kingdom comes. It wasn't that God didn't plan to feed the pets too. He did, and very soon the time came! And for this whole church age God has been busy, as Paul put it, calling out from among those despised heathen Gentiles like us, a people for His name! He was showing them that there are crumbs of blessing enough for this woman and her daughter and for this man and for this crowd and for the world! God loves these people that you don't love, these people on the other side of the walls, these people of a different race and culture and language and religion, and He wants to take the walls down. More specifically, He wants YOU to take the walls down and share love and the message of Jesus with them so that He can make them His children and they will be one with you, because in His Church all those walls are down, all those distinctions are past and gone; we are all one in Christ Jesus! The Church that will be around His throne is not Jewish or Gentile, black or white, Chinese or American, but simply one body of redeemed human beings transformed by His grace!

And here's what He wants to do for them right now. Look at:

IV. His Symbolic Lesson In Healing The Man (31-37) There is more to this than just another healing among the many that Jesus did. Mark alone singled out this man and this incident to record it. Why? Because I think:

1. he symbolized the state of Gentiles: unable to hear or to speak properly You could talk to him all day long but he couldn't hear because his ears were unable to hear. And because of that, he was unable to speak right things about Jesus or anything else. That's the state that the whole Gentile world, including our own ancestors, was in at that time. Listen to Paul, *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.* - Eph. 2:11-12. Like this man, all we who are Gentiles were without hope and

without God in the world. Only the Jews had the knowledge of God. And even if they wanted to, nobody could tell us because we couldn't hear. We were dead in trespasses and sins and separated from the life of God. We had no hope! But look how:

2. Jesus symbolized the process of reaching Gentiles in dealing with this man. Note three things:

a. communication precedes understanding Why did Jesus go through all these motions? Sticking his fingers in his ears, spitting on the ground, touching his tongue, looking up to heaven. Was this some magic formula connected with the healing? No, I think Jesus was simply using sign language. He was communicating with the man: "I'm going to touch your ears and your tongue; I'm going to pray to God!" Communication is the first step. If we are ever going to reach those on the other side of our walls, we must start where they are and communicate with them, share with them at whatever level they can grasp. However, the bottom line is:

b. God must provide ability to hear God must open their ears; He must make them able to grasp and understand truth. He must reveal it to them. Or to use another metaphor, *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* - 2 Cor. 4:6. That's the way it was for us; God turned the light on in our hearts so that we could see and grasp His glory and know Him. And He must do it for them too, as we communicate. But:

c. the result is a change in hearing and corresponding speech When God opens their ears, they will hear and then they will speak rightly of God and the world. Just look what happened, not only to this man, but to many others of the crowd around. The miracle had:

3. His intended effect Matthew says...*they praised the God of Israel* - Mt. 15:31 Gentiles, once far away and without hope, praising the true and living God. That's what this trip and this lesson were all about. No more walls!

Oh, how Jesus wanted His disciples to get that lesson, to see that the day of favoritism and separatism was ending and that God loves people from all races and cultures and languages and religions and wants them to become His own children through faith in Christ. But sadly, it took them years to grasp it. A long time later, God had to give Peter a vision from heaven to convince him of that and send him to the house of a Gentile named Cornelius. And as he stood there and saw a Roman soldier begging to know the truth of God, the light went on for him and this is what he said in Acts 10:34-35, *I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.* God loves and wants Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, male and female! They can all come; He wants them all to come, to be leveled out as simple human beings loving a Savior at the foot of the cross. In "The Whisper Test," Mary Ann Bird writes: *I grew up knowing I was different, and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I looked to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and garbled speech. When schoolmates asked, "What happened to your lip?" I'd tell them I'd fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me. There was, however, a teacher in the second grade whom we all adored--Mrs. Leonard by name. She was short, round, happy--a sparkling lady. Annually we had a hearing test. ...Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in the class, and finally it was my turn. I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something, and we would have to repeat it back--things like "The sky is blue" or "Do you have new shoes?" I waited there for those words that God must have put into her mouth, those seven words that changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said, in her whisper, "I wish you were my little girl."* Oh, God is just like that teacher. He whispers to every human being deformed by sin, unable to hear and to speak right, "I wish you were my son" or "I wish you were my daughter." And God needs people that will be just like Him, who will take down their walls and love people who are different, who will see them as worthy and valuable in His sight, who will accept them the way God has made them and love them with His love and communicate with His truth so that God can open their ears and make them His children. My friend, search your heart. Ask God to show you the walls that are there in your life, where others are somehow beneath you or less than you. They're there! Ask Him to tear them down!

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Followers: A Lesson About Provision 8:1-26

When you were in school, did you ever take a test and have a question that you got wrong and then that same question showed up again on the next test and you got it wrong all over again? Well, even if we've never done it in a school classroom, most of us have done it a number of times in the classroom of life. At one point, Jesus put a crowd of 5,000 hungry people in front of His disciples. Their response was, "Send them away!" but Jesus said, "Wrong! You feed them!" And He taught them that tremendous lesson about how He can multiply bread or anything else we have to offer, if we give it to Him to meet the needs of people. Then some months later, at a different time and place, Jesus put a crowd of 4,000 hungry people in front of His disciples and left them respond. Do you think they got it right this time? Of course not! But before

we criticize them, let's look into the mirror of the Word for ourselves a little bit, concerning this area of provision. First, I want you to notice carefully:

I. The Compassion Of Jesus For The Needs Of His Followers (1-3) Jesus was still on His mission trip in Gentile territory in the Decapolis across Jordan; this was a crowd of Gentiles who had come to listen to Him and believed. The effect was tremendous. They had come from all over this wide area; some of them had traveled for miles to meet Him in this remote region. And they didn't go home. They just slept on the ground and stayed for more. At this point they had stayed for three whole days; whatever lunches and provisions they had brought with them were long since exhausted. Now observe that Jesus:

1. He was aware of their physical needs (not just spiritual) He knew they were hungry and in a state of fasting because of the desire to hear His words. He knew they had a long way to go and nowhere to buy food. None of this escaped His notice! I am reminded of what He taught his own disciples earlier, *...your Father knows what you need before you ask him.* - Mat. 6:8. A good Father is always aware of the needs of His children; a good Shepherd is always aware of the needs of His flock. And Jesus is aware of every single thing that you need before you need it, and even before you know that you need it. And not just spiritual things, but physical and emotional things too! Further:

2. He was aware of the consequences of those needs He knew that if He sent them away hungry, some of them were weak and would faint and never get home. How many times do we think that we have such an accurate picture of things but God doesn't? We build up elaborate scenarios in our mind of just what's going to happen to us if God doesn't come through and wonder whether He really knows just how serious this need is in our lives! "But God, my rent is due and if I don't meet it, we'll have to move and I can't afford another place because I won't have down money. So where will I go; I have nobody to stay with and what about my kids and if we have to move, they'll have to change schools, and on and on." Let me assure you that He knows everything and far better than you do! He knows what happens if He does and doesn't. But what's most important is that:

3. He was moved by their needs He said, "I have compassion on these people because of their needs!" He said that about the 5,000, only there it was because of their spiritual need. They were like sheep without a shepherd and so He taught them. Here He'd already been doing that for 3 days. It was their physical need that touched His heart. He didn't want to see them hungry. His heart went out to them in love. Remember *Heb. 4:15, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin.* Our High Priest, Jesus, IS touched by our needs. He's felt them, every one of them! He suffered with us and His heart is moved when we hurt. But most wonderful of all:

4. He was committed to providing for those needs The obvious point of His statement to the disciples is, "I've got to feed them! I can't let them go away like this! I must provide for them!" Jesus urged us to pray and trust God to provide for our needs in faith because of that attitude. He challenged us, *Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone; or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give...* - Luke 11:11-13. He's a compassionate God, a good Father, who is committed to provide for the needs of His children.

This is what Jesus was telling His disciples but they didn't get it. So, this event becomes:

II. The Repeated Lesson Jesus Provided His Disciples (4-10) Look at:

1. the incredulous question (4) which the disciples asked. Duh!! Isn't it unbelievable? They had been right there once before; you'd think they'd have to see it! Where could ANYBODY get enough food? Do you know who you're talking to? Obviously not fully yet! But Jesus is patient and gives the same:

2. the instructive response (5) "Go see what you have and give it to Me. Just like last time. Remember? It doesn't matter how little you seem to have, if you give it to me, watch what happens!" **(6-10)**. He fed over 4,000 people with those seven loaves and a few small fish. And not only that, but they picked up seven basketsful of leftovers! And get this, the word for *basket* in this story is not the same one as in the 5,000 story. Those were little lunch or picnic size baskets. These were large carrying and storage baskets. A basket like this was used to put Paul in to let him down the city wall years later. They all ate as much as they wanted and a TON was leftover! What's:

3. the obvious lesson: I am Lord; I meet your needs and others' through you "I am Lord. I speak to the wind and waves and they listen. I touch the sick and they are healed. I multiply loaves and fish to feed thousands. I am the Great Provider. I meet all your needs and I meet the needs of others through you! I am your great Resource! You never have to ask that question, "How can ANYBODY meet this need?" I can! I am Lord." You see it, don't you? Surely the disciples will get it this time, won't they? Well, sadly enough, all that is needed is a fresh set of circumstances to bring out:

III. The Disciples' Lack Of Understanding (11-16) Jesus gets into a boat and crosses back to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, back into Jewish territory, and he is no sooner there, than look who shows up:

1. the fresh encounter with the obstinate Pharisees (11-13) They wouldn't go over into Gentile territory but they waited patiently for Him to come back so they could harass Him some more. This time they openly demanded a miraculous sign to prove His authority. Like they hadn't already seen a hundred of them, right? Miracles increase the faith of those who believe or are genuinely seeking. But a heart that is obstinately set on not believing will not be convinced, even by an outright miracle. So, Jesus refused. He would not give them a sign. He got back into the boat and left again. But the incident moved Him to give:

2. the spiritual warning to the disciples (15) Everybody knew that leaven or yeast was a fermenting or corrupting agent. Once you put a little bit of it in your bread dough, it spread through the whole thing. Jesus was warning His disciples to beware of becoming in any degree like the obstinate unbelieving Pharisees they had just left, because it would become a corrupting influence that would ruin their faith. He didn't want them affected by these people who refused to believe the very work that God was doing before their eyes. But look at:

3. their pathetic misunderstanding (14, 16) The word *leaven* makes them remember that they forgot lunch. They only had one little cake of bread with them. So, they get busy thinking about that and translate His warning to mean that He was concerned about them procuring bread, and not to buy any from the Pharisees! Isn't it sad? It's sad for two reasons:

a. they still did not understand His ability to provide He had just fed 4,000 people with seven loaves; couldn't He feed thirteen people with one loaf! That huge lesson and they are as blind as the Pharisees; they still can't see that He is absolutely Lord and God and can provide for all their needs no matter what! And what's even sadder is that, because they couldn't lift their eyes any higher than their own stomachs:

b. they missed His warning about unbelief creeping into their lives They never did get what He was trying to warn them about and they were actually practicing it at that very moment. The unbelief was already creeping in; it was already their thought pattern to depend on themselves instead of looking to Him and trusting in Him to meet their needs. So, Jesus resolved to tackle it this time, right then and there, and so we have:

IV. The Opening Of The Disciples' Understanding (17-21) In Jesus' rebuke to them we can see:

1. the problem revealed and apply it to ourselves. Like those disciples:

a. we are prone to short-sighted observation We see only the most immediate aspect, without looking beyond to the meaning. We see only the outward, without looking beyond to the inward. We are short-sighted by nature! When we sit down to our meal, we see that there is enough and we enjoy it, but fail to look beyond to the fact that God loves us and has seen our need and has provided it and it is His gift. When our paycheck comes and we pay all our bills and buy the things we need or even want, we see that we have enough, but fail to look beyond and see that this is a gift from God, that He has loved us and seen our need and provided it all. When we get well, we are glad to feel better, but fail to look beyond and see that God has loved us and seen our need and wrought the healing process in our bodies. So often we are just like the Jews, seeing but not seeing, hearing but not hearing! We seldom look beyond the temporal to the spiritual. We look at the circumstance, but fail to see God at work in it, to see the hand of the Loving Father in all our life. And what compounds the problem is this:

b. we are prone to short-lived memory We have good forgetters! Jesus feeds 5,000 people with five loaves and a couple months later they have forgotten it totally! Then He feeds 4,000 and only a day or 2 later they have forgotten it all over again, when they think about lunch. He pleads, "Don't you remember?" But before we get too critical, let's point the finger back at ourselves too. I have a very well developed forgetter! And so do you, probably! God has gotten us through all kinds of tough circumstances in life, has so often provided strength that we knew was not our own to endure difficulty and tragedy and circumstances that would have absolutely slain us. He has spoken to the winds and waves in our life and said, "Peace Be Still!" Yet when the next storm comes up, our unbelieving flesh whispers, "How am I ever going to get through this one?" We forget so quickly and see so little of God's working in our lives. What can we do? Well, for the disciples you can see:

2. the problem resolved It was resolved:

a. immediately by heeding His rebuke - Mt. 16:12 records the effect that Jesus' sharp words had on them, *Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.* They were reminded of His ability verbally and remembered His compassion and provision for the multitudes and realized He could feed them too. And they saw that He was really warning them about the teaching and character of the Pharisees, not about buying bread. The immediate issue was fixed, but that did not ultimately solve the problem. It can only be solved:

b. ultimately by understanding His identity The whole of His ministry to them had been building toward this point. He had taught them lesson after lesson and displayed miracle after miracle for one simple purpose, to bring them to realize His identity, who He really was. It was very soon after this that He brought it all to a head in **8:29**. Nobody had dared to voice that before. It was a revelation. He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I want to

leave that text alone for next time, but that's the key; once you know that, once you understand that He is absolute LORD and GOD and that He has loved you and called you into relationship with Himself, it changes the way you live and the way you think about your circumstances.

You see, what they had missed is a bare bones basic lesson. They didn't have bread. They didn't have resources. They didn't have the wherewithal to meet the great needs in front of them and around them. But they already had what they needed most; they had Him. The chorus says, *He's all I need, He's all I need, Jesus is all I need!* It doesn't matter how low my circumstances may seem, how high the mountain of my needs may seem, I already have the one thing I need most. I have Jesus, a loving compassionate Savior who knows and feels my every need before I ever realize it and an omnipotent Lord who can supply all my needs according to His riches in glory! If you focus on the greatness of the need and the smallness of your resources, Satan and your own flesh will be quick to shout at you, "Jesus doesn't care! Nobody cares! There's no help for you; your needs will never be met!" Unbelief will creep in and begin to infiltrate your life. You'll quickly forget how often He's cared for you and comforted you and met your needs in the past. You'll be discouraged and maybe even give up! *In 1772 in a dismal flat in London, a man stood gazing into the fireplace, overcome by discouragement. He walked out into the fog to a horse-drawn cab and ordered the driver, "To the Thames, Sir!" for he had decided to jump from the bridge. They became hopelessly lost in the fog and after 1 ½ hours of wandering, surprisingly ended up in front of his own home. So impressed was he that he climbed the stairs to his flat, lit the lamp, and knelt to ask God to forgive him for what he had thought to do. He never forgot how God had stepped into His life and met his need. His name was William Cowper and he wrote this hymn:*

*"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.
"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break In blessings on your head.
"His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste But sweet will be the flower.
"Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain."*

Oh Beloved, Jesus loves you. He cares about your physical and emotional and spiritual needs. He knows what you need before you do. Never doubt His caring. But remember that you have Him and in Him you have all you need! Trust Him, rest in Him, abide in Him!

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Followers: A Lesson About Cost 8:27-38

Somewhere in the middle of the Rocky Mountains is an imaginary line called the Continental Divide. It's the peak, the top, the dividing line. Rainwater on one side flows ultimately downhill to the Atlantic and on the other to the Pacific. If one were traveling in a line from east to west, everything on this side would eventually lead up to it and everything on the other side down from it. This passage is the continental divide of Jesus' ministry. Everything before it leads up to it, the miracles, the healings, the ministry to the crowds. They are preliminary, preparatory. They all lead up to this moment for the disciples. And everything from here to the cross and beyond to the end of the age flows out of this moment. There is one issue that Jesus wanted them to settle, and when they did, it ultimately changed their lives forever. And Jesus wants every one of us to settle that same issue. However, it is an issue that is settled at a cost. There is a price which must be paid in the process and that is what I'd like to talk to you about today.

I. The Issue Jesus Wants Us To Settle: *His Identity* (27-29) Jesus took His disciples away again by themselves and this time He intentionally brought the issue of His identity to a head. As they were walking, He asked them a question about:

1. the insufficient opinions people have (27-28) "What do people say about my identity? Who am I?" People had to explain His presence and His miracles somehow. Some thought this and some thought that. And they parroted all the common theories to Him, but every one of them stopped short, not only of the truth, but of commitment. We could do the same today. Ask the man on the street who Jesus is and what will you get, "a great religious leader", "the founder of Christianity", "a tremendously gifted teacher", "a great prophet", "the greatest ethical, moral person the world has ever produced"? All true, but not enough. The world has to explain Him somehow. But then Jesus coaxed from His disciples:

2. the life-changing truth we must know (29) Here is the supreme question that divides the human race into two. "Who do you, personally, you who have seen and heard me, who do YOU say that I am?" All that Jesus had shown them and taught them was designed to bring about the answer that came from Peter's lips, *You are the Christ*, and Matthew's record of the moment gives the rest, *the Son of the Living God*. No one had dared to voice that directly up to this moment, even if they had thought it. But it MUST be voiced both personally and publicly by them and by us. First of all:

a. He is the Christ, the Anointed One, the long-awaited Messiah. Now for us, that term does not hold the same depth of meaning it did for them. Messiah was the one whose coming would change the entire world and establish the Kingdom of God. It is usually coupled with another word which fills out its meaning, **the Lord - Luke 2:11**, *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. Acts 2:36* ...God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both **Lord** and Christ." Lord means Master, Sovereign, Absolute Monarch and Ruler, the One before whom you bow and to whom you owe ultimate allegiance. And all those concepts are inherent in His identity as the Christ. That's what He had been showing them. "I am Lord, I control the wind and the waves; I control sickness and health; I multiply bread for thousands and demons flee at my command; I am Lord, the Creator and Sovereign of the universe and of you, and therefore I demand your loyalty!" At last, they saw it! And then Peter uttered words that had never been spoken by any Jew:

b. He is the Son of the Living God (that is, He is God) - Mt. 16:16 To be a son of someone was to be of the same flesh and blood as them. To be a son of Abraham was to be of Abraham's bloodline, to be a Jew. To be a Son of David was to be of David's line, to be a king. To be the Son of the Living God was to be one with God in substance, to be Divine, to be God! Peter's confession is the same as that of Thomas after the resurrection, *My Lord and my God!* The one who is in charge and who holds my absolute allegiance and is the object of my worship as the true God! Nothing less than that will do. To the world, Jesus is a teacher, a prophet, a religious figure, but to the believer, He is my Lord and my God, the one to whom I swear ultimate allegiance and worship! Now why doesn't everybody get that? Shouldn't everybody realize that? No:

c. the method of comprehension: revelation - Mt. 16:17 God has to open our eyes to see it! Until then, we walk around and wonder and guess at who He is, but when God finally turns the light on, we fall at His feet and cry, "My Lord and My God!" Rom. 10:9-10 says that when our heart believes, our mouth confesses, "Jesus is Lord!" That is the mark of a Christian by definition. The word *Christian* simply means one who follows or belongs to Christ. A Herodian is one who swears allegiance to Herod. An American is one who swears his allegiance to the USA. A Christian is one who swears allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus the Christ!

Our missionary Dan Lunow grew up in Hitler's Germany. From childhood he was one of Hitler's youth. He signed up and swore his allegiance. He gave heart and mind and soul to the service of Hitler. But when Hitler died, he was disillusioned with life and promised himself he would never sign up with anybody else again, never! But several years later, now on a farm in America listening to a preacher on a radio broadcast, the Spirit of Jesus whispered to his heart, "Do you want to sign up with Me?" And, as he puts it, "I signed up! And when I signed up, I signed up the same way. I gave my heart and mind and strength, everything to Jesus!" And he is quick to chide, "You Americans have a hard time understanding that!" We don't give ourselves to anything, do we. We are the center of our universe and everything in it serves us somehow. To be a Christian is to swear total allegiance, to take everything I am and have, even my very life and give it to Jesus! "You are my Lord and my God!" That's who He is and that's the response His identity demands from us. But, having established that, Jesus then began to explain:

II. The Price He Had To Pay As Messiah (30-31) It was not only on this occasion but from that time on that He began to emphasize to them that He had a price to pay. Being the Messiah meant being what Daniel called, "The Son of Man", becoming one with the human race to redeem it. It meant doing all that the Father had laid out ahead of time that the Messiah would have to do. And that entailed suffering. He explained three things:

1. he had to suffer many things They would arrest him, hit him, flog him, press thorns into His brow, make him carry a heavy cross, put nails through His hands and feet and finally hang Him upon a cross. And that's just the physical things. There was all the agony of Gethsemane, the suffering on the cross and being made sin for us and separated from the Father. What a price to submit to the Father's will and redeem the world! Then it meant:

2. he had to endure the rejection of men They would humiliate Him, criticize Him, accuse Him falsely, spit on Him, mock Him and condemn Him, even as He hung there dying. Such was the price of allegiance, of loyalty to the Father. But it went even further than that:

3. he had to be killed and raised to life It meant His very life. It meant taking His very spirit and placing it in the Father's hands. It meant being obedient even unto death and trusting the Father to raise Him to life.

Those were the terms of allegiance to the Father, of being the Son of God. That was the cost! Jesus put it this way, *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. - John 6:38. I always do what pleases him. - John 8:29.* And that will mean suffering and a cross! Jesus knew it and willingly accepted it. But then He turned the issue around to talk about:

III. The Price We Must Pay As His Followers (32-38) Now let's first notice from the story something that is true of all of us:

1. we are repulsed by the concept of self-sacrifice (32-33) As soon as Jesus began to talk about suffering and dying, Peter took him aside and got in his face right away. But before we feel too self-righteous, let's admit that we'd be

right there with him! Where did he get this strong urge to reject the self-sacrifice Jesus was talking about? The same two places we do and Jesus mentioned them both:

a. our flesh tells us it is horrible Self-sacrifice is one of the "things of God", not the "things of men;" it is against our very nature, or to put it another way, our human flesh rebels against the idea because it is self-centered. I have flesh that says, "I do what is good for me, what feels good, what protects me, what aids me. I am more important than anything." So, as soon as God lays the idea before us, powerful forces inside us raise up against it! And they have help:

b. Satan tells us it is horrible I don't think Jesus is calling Peter Satan here; I think He clearly sees Satan planting this idea in Peter's mind and using him to tempt Him to avoid the cross. And He simply addresses him directly, "Get behind me!" But Satan will do the same with us. When God calls for self-sacrifice, Satan knows what our flesh is like and whispers, "No, this can't be. If you do this, then..." and out come a hundred reasons why choosing to benefit yourself is better. Often, he plants his thoughts in the first person singular, "I don't want to do this..." and we think they are our own true thoughts.

So, I guess I'm telling you up front that, even as we look at these next words of Jesus, your flesh is going to scream "NO!" and Satan is going to help it all he can. You need to recognize it. But here goes anyway. Look at:

2. the sacrifice that Jesus' lordship requires of His followers (34) If I will be His follower, if Jesus is my Lord and God, then here's what it means:

a. I must stop choosing to live for my will: ...deny himself This is not talking about depriving yourself, fasting, or denying yourself things you want. It means that when Jesus is your Lord, you stop one way of thinking and start a brand new one. I used to live for my will. I was supreme. I was ruler in my life. I chose to do what I wanted to do. I must stop that and:

b. I must start choosing to submit to His will: ...take up his cross Usually when we read this, we emphasize the cross and try to figure out what it is. But after some reflection, I think the key word in this phrase is *take up*. In Roman justice a criminal was made to pick up his own cross and carry it to the place of execution. Why? It was a sign of resignation, of submission to Roman authority. "Before, I broke Rome's law; now I submit to it." The criminal could refuse, of course, and probably be killed on the spot, but he could die resisting if he chose. To take up the cross is to choose His will over my own, to submit myself to the fact that He is my Lord and what He wants takes precedence over what I want, what is best for Him takes precedence over what I think is best for me, what He needs is more important than what I need. I must start choosing to die to self-will and:

c. I must adopt this as a way of life: ...follow me Literally, *together with me*. That is, *as I am doing*. "Just as I have continually laid down my will for the Father's, so you must adopt a way of daily living that chooses my will over your own." Peter said the same thing very clearly in **1 Pet. 4:1-2**, *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.* We need to be done with choosing human desires; we need to die to them and live the rest of our earthly lives for the will of God. That is the price of being a follower of Jesus. Once you sign up, your life is no longer yours; it's His.

Now why on earth would anybody sign up for that? Why would I choose to die to me and my needs, interests, and desires and give them all up for His? Especially if it means suffering or even dying! I know a missionary family from a nearby church who were serving in Indonesia. One day, they were awakened by Muslim intruders who broke in. The husband was stabbed in the chest and the knife missed his heart by 1 cm.! He was medevacked to Singapore for surgery on a lung. But why would anybody go there in the first place? Why would anybody choose to put themselves in a hostile foreign culture and risk their lives for the sake of sharing the Gospel, even if it is His will? Why this price? Why must I surrender to Him? There are two reasons:

3. why I must surrender to His lordship (35-37) First of all:

a. it preserves the value of my earthly life (35) What a paradox! In the Living Bible it reads, *If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live.* You see, it is only through surrender that my life on this earth gains any value. There are millions of people who will go through 60 or 70 years of life, choosing their own will, doing what they want, living their way, and when they die, it will be all over; it will have been wasted as far as the purposes of God for the world are concerned, and all they will have to show for it is an eternity in hell. They will never have accomplished what life is really all about accomplishing, the will of the Sovereign God. So what Jesus is saying here is this:

(1) if I hold on to control of it, I destroy it I ruin it! I waste it! I throw it away! I prevent myself from really living. But:

(2) if I surrender control of it, I preserve it If I deliberately choose to let go of my life, to take that control and place it in His hands, then no matter what happens in my life, it will have served His purpose and it will have infinite eternal value and I will have preserved the value of my earthly life. You see, Jesus explained that:

(3) it is more valuable than all other things (36) A person's soul, his spiritual life (not his bodily life, in Greek *bios*) is more important than anything else he may acquire. In fact, Jesus made it plain that, *...a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.* - **Lk. 12:15.** Life is a whole different thing; it's of a whole different order than possessions, fame, position, power. That surrendered life is the only thing which does Him any good in the eternal scheme of things. And:

(4) it cannot be replaced or reclaimed (37) There's nothing to exchange for it and once it has been wasted, you can't order another one. You can't get it back.

So that's why I've got to let it go. God has designed it in such a way that the only way my life has meaning and value and purpose that lasts into eternity is for me to let go of it, to surrender it to Him. If I live for pleasure, for what pleases me, I am already dead while I live! I am wasting the eternal value of my life on this earth. I must surrender it as Jesus did or I lose it! But there is a second reason I must choose to make Him Lord:

b. it determines my eternal destiny (38) Someday He's coming again, or else I'll die and meet Him that way, and if I have been ashamed to call Him my Lord, to declare my allegiance to Him, I am lost. I'm not talking about being embarrassed to witness; we all experience that. But if in this life I feel it is a shame for me as a human being to confess Jesus and follow Him and believe His words, then it will be a shame for Him as Lord and God to confess me as belonging to Him and He will be unable to do it. I will be banished from His presence forever. Not only do I lose the value of my life on earth, but I lose life in His presence forever. That's why I must step out from the low opinions of the people around me and choose to proclaim Him Lord! And then I must proceed to live in that fashion.

But oh, how my flesh grates against that. I have taken the step. I have made Him my Lord, but when those choices come up, His will or mine, it's so hard to die to self, isn't it? *A little boy about eight or nine, who liked to have his own way, one day was told by his father, "Philip, you ought not to want your own way." He dropped his head as if he had been given a big problem to solve. After thinking a while, he said, "Father, if I choose the will of the Lord and go His way because I want to, don't I still have my own way?"* Let me put it another way: His way must become my way. That's what Lordship means.

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Disciples: A Lesson About Power 9:1-29

One of the unfortunate problems with our English translations is that sometimes chapter divisions separate things that really belong together. Mark 9:1 is really a continuation of what Jesus was saying to His disciples at the end of chapter 8. That all-important lesson of Jesus' identity was spelled out in Peter's famous two-fold confession: *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.* In our last study, we focused on Jesus' Lordship as the Christ and how we need to lay our lives at His feet. In chapter 9 we focus on Jesus' power as the Son of the Living God and how we need to trust in it! Jesus made a very bold statement in the last verse of chapter 8, *I will return in My father's glory with the holy angels to judge the world!* And then He became even bolder in 9:1, *I will show some of you the kingdom and you will see it come with power!* You see:

I. Jesus Declared Visibly His Power To Set Up A Kingdom (1-8) He said He would show them the kingdom *with power* or literally, *IN power*. He would show them the very power that would transform the world and set up His Messianic Kingdom. How would he do it? Well, about a week later, He did just that in an event which we call the Transfiguration. This event was unlike anything Jesus had done and, more than anything previous:

1. the transfiguration demonstrated the power of His Person The transfiguration is about power; it is was a visible display of His omnipotent power as God. First of all:

a. He displayed it in His own glorification (2-3) He was transfigured before their very eyes. The Greek word is literally *metamorphosized*, and it means *to be changed into another form*, to be transformed. He didn't just take on a new appearance; there is a different Greek word for that. His very being was changed and his clothing began to glow a brilliant white and Mark is quick to point out that it was a brightness that was supernatural, something that could not be duplicated, no matter how many brighteners are in the laundry detergent! The radiance of the very glory of God began to emanate from Him and, for those moments, He took on the appearance that He would have in His glorified state in the Kingdom. No chemical on earth could do that, only the power of Almighty God. And then:

b. He displayed it in the prophets' glorification (4) This is incredible. Two men appeared with him. Moses had been dead over 1400 years, but here he was, living, walking, talking with Jesus and transformed from the old, dead body that was laid in the grave! And Elijah too! 700 years earlier, Elijah had been taken to heaven in a whirlwind without dying. And here he was, alive and well and not a 700 year old shriveled up old man but transformed! And

the amazing thing is that the disciples who had never seen even a picture of them, knew them and knew who they were! All of a sudden, they found themselves in the presence of, not only the glory of God, but of living saints who were long since gone, just like it will be in the Kingdom of God! Only the power of God can preserve a person through death and transform and glorify them! And then:

c. He displayed it through the Father's confirmation (7) There, on that mountaintop in the middle of nowhere, a clearly audible loud voice from heaven thundered out, *This is my Son whom I love. Listen to Him!* Lots of people have heard voices, but this was an audible one out loud from up above, the same voice that spoke back in Moses' day to the people while they trembled as the commandments were given, the voice of God speaking directly to men, just as it will be in the Kingdom. You see:

2. the transfiguration certified the promise of His Kingdom (1) Jesus displayed for those moments the same power that it will take to transform the world. It had an obvious effect and one of those who saw it was Peter. Look at what he says about it in **2 Pet. 1:16-18**. Peter says, "When I told you Jesus is coming again, it isn't some fable I made up. I was there. I saw Him. I saw His power. I saw His glory up on the holy mount. I watched Him be transformed. I heard that glorious voice of the Father speak from Heaven! This ain't no joke; His power is real!" What's:

The Point: He has power over the world! Jesus can change it. He can change anything. He is not limited by what we know and can figure out. It is no fable that one day He will appear and destroy all the armies of earth and wipe it clean of every unbeliever and set up a kingdom. He is God; He can do things that are absolutely impossible to human beings. And God isn't like Duracell; His power never runs down! He still has that same power right now today and it is available to work in the circumstances of your life! Then on the way down the mountain:

II. Jesus Declared With Certainty His Power Of Resurrection (9-13) He didn't want to draw any crowds, so as He was telling them not to tell anyone about the transfiguration:

1. He predicted His own resurrection (9-10) They didn't understand it, but they had clearly understood Him to say that He would be resurrected. So they discussed it, trying to figure out what He meant or when He was talking about. Finally, they decided to raise one of their issues with Him and in His answer:

2. He predicted it would follow His rejection (death!) (11-13) He said, "Look what they did to John the Baptist. They rejected and killed him. He was my Elijah. And that same rejection is going to happen to the Messiah, the Son of Man. The Son of Man must be rejected and then He must be resurrected." Jesus was sure of it, certain of it, because He knew that as God, He had power to accomplish it. And sure enough:

3. the Resurrection later fulfilled His prediction - Rom. 1:4 says He was *declared [to be] the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*. In other words, His identity was demonstrated in an act of power; He rose from the dead. None but Almighty God could have that kind of power. What's:

The Point: He has power over death! Life and death are in His hands. It is given unto all men once to die. Not one of us can stop it, prevent it, or change it. But Jesus has the power of life and death. He is the giver of life and the lord over death; He holds the keys to it! And unlike some of us, He never loses His keys! That power stronger than death is still His today and it is at work in your life. And then look at this:

III. Jesus Demonstrated Publicly His Power Over All Opposition (14-27) Jesus had only taken three of the disciples with Him up the mountain and when they returned to the nine, they found them embroiled in a problem about the casting out of a demon. And what we see first is:

1. the failure of the disciples to cast out the demon (14-18) They couldn't do it. It wasn't that they didn't have the authority to do it; Jesus had given them that earlier and they had cast out demons many times. It wasn't that they were trying to do something illicit or wrong. They just tried and couldn't; it wouldn't leave. And, of course, the Jews were trying to argue that Jesus was a fake and he had no power. Their failure reflected on Him. But what we have in the end is very clearly this:

2. the demonstration of Jesus' power over Satan (19-27) "Bring him to ME!" He gave a simple command and in a moment that tremendously powerful demon which had tried many times to kill its victim, which was so strong that it could resist all human efforts to drive it out, fled at His word. But before he left, he tried to do his worst, to hurt the boy enough to kill him and many thought he was dead. He may have been. But Jesus reached down and power flowed forth from Him and He literally raised him up alive! It is the same word used in the phrase *to raise the dead*, the word used for *resurrection*. But whichever way, the point is clear:

The Point: He has power over the Enemy! Satan and all the hosts of hell cannot stop Him, cannot defeat Him, cannot accomplish their purposes if He does not allow it. His mighty power is unstoppable and it's as unstoppable today as it ever was! Early in the 20th century Satan built a wall around millions of people in Eastern Europe and Asia to keep

them in bondage to him and keep Jesus out. It was called Communism. For decades Christians assailed that wall with prayer and Jesus took it down. Today the Gospel is being freely proclaimed and thousands are pouring into the Kingdom. Centuries ago, Satan built a wall around what is now almost a billion people to keep them in bondage to him, to keep Jesus Christ out. That wall is called Islam. And today Jesus is starting to smash that wall and Muslims are beginning to come to Christ by the thousands. Nothing can stop Him; He has power over the enemy and all his schemes, even in your life!

Now if Jesus has all this power, that leaves us to ask the same question the disciples did.

IV. The Reason We Fail To Experience His Power: Unbelief (28-29) Mark recorded only part of the reply. *Mat. 17:19-20, Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."* And then verse 21 continues, *But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.* The problem is not with God's power or lack of it. The problem is our unbelief! We have so little faith. What does that mean?

1. we're not sure that Jesus can do anything about our problem We're like the man in (22b) who said, "Help me IF you can..." And Jesus caught it, "IF you can?" That wasn't good enough. That is unbelief. And I know you're thinking, "I don't do that; I believe God can do anything!" But when it comes right down to it, there are things in your mind you have just walled off, thinking God can't really do anything about that. There are things we pray about and people we pray for that we don't have any genuine expectation that God can change. I have relatives and so do you whom I've prayed for for years but I don't really expect God to do anything in their lives. I don't really believe they can be any different and that means that I'm not sure Jesus has the power to save them like He did me! It's unbelief. And even if we are sure when we start out:

2. we become discouraged and give up when there is resistance When the demon resisted their command, the disciples assumed they couldn't cast it out. They could have if they persisted and prayed and fasted but they became discouraged and gave up. The father started out with real certainty, but after the initial failure he was reduced to, "if you can". And this is how we most often fall into unbelief. We pray about something and it doesn't happen right away or circumstances don't change or the person doesn't get saved or our temptation doesn't go away or our habit doesn't break completely. So we get discouraged and begin in ourselves to believe it won't work and we quit. We give in to unbelief and so:

3. we fail to demonstrate continual dependence on Him in prayer When we are convinced He can do something, we pray like a house afire. We cast ourselves at His feet. We may give up food to pray. But when unbelief starts to creep in, we stop depending on Him and we start trying to find ways to cope on our own!

This happens to all of us. There are so many areas of our lives where we fail to recognize God's power which is directed toward us who believe. What can we do about it? Well, right here in our text is:

V. The Remedy For Our Unbelief First of all, we must accept:

1. Jesus' promise: His power is sufficient (23) - Mt. 17:20 *...I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.* That doesn't mean you can have anything you want or can do anything you want. It simply means that there is no limit to God's power. It is enough. It is sufficient. He can do anything. He can touch your situation. Accept that as truth. Reckon it to be so and then here's:

2. our posture: humble dependence on Him, even to believe (24) *Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.* "I confess my faith in You and Your power. I also confess how easily I fall and have fallen into unbelief. Lord, I'm not going to try to 'work up' more faith; I'm asking you to create it in me! Lord, deepen, strengthen, confirm my faith. I am absolutely dependent on You!" And it is there, in that posture of humility, depending only on His power, not only to live but even to believe, that we will find Him at work doing mighty things.

I could spend another hour telling you stories of the power of God at work in my life and around the world to encourage your faith. But I'll limit it to one particular story that I heard Stephen Olford tell on the radio the other day. *He grew up on the mission field (Africa, I think). His father was a mighty man of faith and prayer and there was much opposition to his work. At one point in his teens there was a local man who made a public threat on his father's life and the lives of his family. He said, "When the sun is there (pointing), both you and your wife and your sons will be shot. At the appointed hour the next day the family was gathered in the house praying and his father prayed, "Father, if this is the hour of our martyrdom and you will be glorified to take us home in this way, we are satisfied. But if not and it is your will to demonstrate your mighty power and glorify the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by preserving us, then demonstrate it! Lord, demonstrate it!" The man appeared in the street and walked up to the house with his rifle cocked. The father went out on the veranda to meet him. As the man lifted the rifle to shoot, he cried, "In the mighty name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and by His power, I rebuke you!" Immediately the gun fell from the man's hands and the man himself was dashed to the ground!" No shot was ever fired. That became the breakthrough that was needed and after that Stephen Olford's father*

had the largest and most successful Gospel meetings in all of his ministry in that area! What a story! It impacted Stephen's faith to this day. But look at his father's attitude, humble submission, not trying to tell God what He had to do, but believing with all his heart that God was able and willing to act on it to the point of risking his life. My friend, where has unbelief taken root in your life? Jesus has power to transform anything, power even to give life to the dead, power to cause His plan to succeed over any opposition you face. Accept the truth of His power, confess your unbelief and ask Him to build genuine true deep faith in you.

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Disciples: A Lesson About Humility 9:30-50

There is another very important lesson that Jesus had to impress on His disciples before He left them. It was a subject that they repeatedly had trouble with. In fact, He had to refresh them about it with a very vivid lesson of washing their feet in the Upper Room the night before He died. I can picture how it all started as they continued on their journey after the transfiguration. Only three of them had been taken up the Mount to see Jesus transfigured. Meanwhile, the nine had failed to cast out a demon without them. So, they fell to arguing about the pecking order, to vying for position among themselves. Can't you hear it? "Well, Jesus took me up there, but he didn't take you; you really failed without me; if I'd been there, I would have cast that demon out..." But of course, they did all this sort of under their breath and hung behind so Jesus wouldn't hear it. But He knew what was in their hearts anyway and rather than addressing it right away, He first explained to them again His own:

I. Jesus' Example Of Humility (30-32) In these verses you have:

1. the repeated prediction (31) "I will be betrayed, I will die, I will rise." How many times did Jesus teach them that? They were saying, "I'm going to this" and "I'm that", but Jesus said, "Not Me! I'm going to suffer and die!" And then you have:

2. the puzzled reaction (32) Losing, suffering, dying. Those were not concepts that fit with their concept of a Messiah. Messiah wins, He conquers, He defies death. They were puzzled and confused and couldn't understand, but they'd already been rebuked once and didn't want to let on. However, what's really going on here is:

3. the missed lesson - Phil. 2:6-8, 3-5 Jesus knew their hearts were full of pride and self-seeking and He was saying, "Watch Me. I am Messiah. I am God. But I'm a Servant. I'm humble. I'm going to suffer and die on a cross to save the world! Get the pattern. This is the mind that needs to be in you. Each of you needs to do the opposite of what you're doing, to consider others above yourselves and commit yourselves to serving them, just like I'm doing." But they couldn't see it so when they got to Capernaum, Jesus sat them down and spoke to them directly on the subject and here we have:

II. Jesus' Teaching On Humility (33-37) They are not unique. What they were displaying was common to all of us. It is:

1. the desire of our flesh: to be more than others (first) (33-34) To be first in importance, the one who gives orders, the center of attention, self on the throne. We're born that way; it comes with the turf of being human. It's in that Adam-ic nature. It's called pride. It's what took down the first man, Adam, and it haunts every one of us. It is ingrained in our patterns of life and it sticks, even after we get saved. We want to be faster, stronger, richer, smarter, more handsome or more beautiful. There's a piece of every one of us that wants to be greater than others, even if it's at a good thing. We may want to be a better servant, a better person of prayer, a more self-less disciple THAN someone else is but it's still pride! But Jesus shared with them something absolutely revolutionary to their value system:

2. the desire of God for us: to be a servant of all (very last) (35) Greatness in God's eyes can't be obtained by seeking it! In fact, as long as you're seeking it; you can't have it. On God's scale the person who genuinely seeks it least has the most of it! Jesus said, the person who is the greatest among you is the one who, in his own eyes, is the very last of all and is committed to serving every other person in their lives. They see nobody they won't serve and nobody as having to serve them. Now, how many of us can think of at least one person that we think we're better than? If we were honest, we'd all have our hands up. God deals with me about this all the time. I see somebody that's in a leather jacket with a tattoo riding a Harley and there's a piece of me that puts a rank on that. "What a turkey; I'm above that." I see another believer whose life is all fouled up and just can't seem to get it together and there's a part of me that whispers, "What a bozo, I'm above that." Jesus looked at every single person in the human race, the nice and nasty, together and not together, capable and helpless and said, "I am a servant to that person. That person's eternal well-being is worth My life; I will die for them." That's the kind of humility Jesus wants to build in His disciples. And He brought it home to them by way of:

3. the illustration Jesus used (36-37) This is another one of those places where Mark doesn't record the whole story and you have to turn over to Matthew to get the first part of the lesson Jesus taught. He was in a home and there was a young child somewhere about. And he called that child and stood him there beside him and said here is:

a. lesson one: becoming like a child (36a) - Mt. 18:1-4 Jesus is not saying that little children are humble and we need to imitate them. They certainly aren't! In that room and in that culture, the littlest child is the one of least importance, the one with the least right to speak, the one who commanded the least respect, who always had to defer to others. If the Rabbi or Elder was the head, the littlest kid was the tail, the last in line. And Jesus was saying, you need to change your way of thinking. To Me, *this* is you! You need to choose to **see yourself as a little child, that is, in the least position**. Now I'm not talking about your identity; I'm not saying that you need to reverse that pride flesh pattern for the opposite one where see yourself as worse than everybody else and hate yourself and put yourself down. You're a child of God; that makes you of eternal value and absolute importance --TO HIM! I'm talking about seeing that God has placed that same eternal value on every person in your life. Our value is not determined by our looks or our possessions or our performance. And I'm talking about choosing to place yourself, as Jesus did, in the position of serving everyone else in your life, of choosing to love them enough to meet their needs and further their well-being rather than your own, to say that what I get out of it is not what matters; what I can do for them is what matters. My thought should not be, "How do I compare to them?" but "How can I serve them and meet their needs in the name of Jesus?" And then, going back to Mark, Jesus gave them part two of the lesson:

b. lesson two: hugging a child (36b-37) He took that little child up in His arms and hugged him and loved on him! It probably made the kid feel special and wonderful in the midst of that adult crowd. And Jesus said, "This is what service is like. When you do that for a little child, you do it to Me and to the Father! You need to change the way you look at serving God. You need to **see your service to others as done to God, knowing the simplest act is important**. Serving God is not doing a bunch of good deeds that He writes down and keeps track of and adds up for merit. God loves people and when you express the simplest act of love and caring to another human being, you are doing it directly to God! And that makes even the simplest act, hugging a child, changing a diaper in the church nursery, singing a hymn to God with the congregation, saying a kind word to encourage your neighbor, everything you do for others, important because you're doing it to God! Greatness in God's eyes is not about who does the most things FOR Him; it is the person who most clearly recognizes Him in the faces of the people around him every day and serves Him through them.

Now is that convicting to you? It is to me and it was to John. He immediately confessed a recent incident that he was troubled by and in it we can see:

III. Jesus' Application Of Humility (38-41) Isn't this a good example of:

1. the pride that often exists between Jesus' followers (38) "This man says he loves you and he was casting out demons in your name to help people, but he isn't one of us so we told him he couldn't do that unless he joins our group! After all, we're the true disciples!" Hasn't that characterized the Church all the way through? Isn't it still true in our own hearts? "We're better than those Presbyterians because they don't use enough water when they baptize and they aren't looking for the Rapture. We're better than those Southern Baptists, all narrow-minded and everything (never mind that they're in the forefront of the world missions movement) and we're better than those rowdy charismatics and Pentecostals (even though they've often reminded us how to really worship!). Man, everybody just ought to quit their churches and join ours!" But it's not just between churches; it's even among ourselves. We would never argue about who's the greatest, but in the secret closets of our mind, we have the order laid out anyway! At least John was honest and Jesus could then lay out:

2. the proper way for His followers to view one another He said:

a. we are all engaged in serving Him together (39-40) "Whoever is not against us is for us. It's obvious that this man is one of us, that he believes. We're all on the same team! Like it or not, he's part of what we're doing." We are all engaged in serving God together and:

b. each person's service is individually important to Him (41) It's not just those who preach long sermons or write great books that are noticed. God sees giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty brother as important. Some of you tell me, "I wish I could do more; all I can do is pray." All you can do? What greater is there to do? Humility is not seeing that my service is worth less than someone else's; it is seeing that the simplest act of service that I or anyone else performs is necessary and important to God and we are not in competition, but somehow, we are all little parts of one great body and supplying a necessary piece in God's design.

Now this is a serious subject and Jesus' next words form a:

IV. Jesus' Warning About Humility (42-50) I don't want to spend time on this section today, but just notice:

1. the eternal warning for those who harm His children (42-48) He says:

a. it would be better to be drowned (42) than to cause one of His children to fall away into sin and then he said:

b. it would be better to be maimed (43-48) than to hurt one of His children because hell is hot and the fire never burns out and the worms never die!

This is not a warning for believers about losing their salvation, but a warning for the "anyones" out there who would hurt them. It helps us to see how important God's children are to Him and that's what makes serving one another so important. But as Jesus closes His lesson, he finishes with:

2. the serious warning for us who are His children (49-50) This verse is very difficult to figure out and people have speculated about it all the centuries. Some manuscripts have an additional phrase, "Every sacrifice must be salted with salt," but here's my simple take on it. Every sacrificial animal offered had to be salted. We are God's living sacrifices according to Rom. 12:1 and every one of us is salted with the preserving presence of Christ within. But salt deteriorates and loses its saltiness, so it must be kept carefully or it will become useless. At any rate, the last line makes the application:

a. don't lose your flavor: *be careful to display the character of Christ* Let the taste of the salt that's in you show by displaying His character. How?

b. be at peace: *display it by pursuing peace with other believers* rather than trying to compete with them or be first over them. Display His humility; be a servant toward others.

Every time I think about our need to maintain a servant's heart, I think of this story which you've probably read or heard. An American poet, Edwin Markham, told about a cobbler, a godly man who made shoes. One night the cobbler dreamed that the next day Jesus was coming to visit. It seemed real and he got up early to decorate his shop for his Guest. He waited, but the shop remained quiet, except for an old man who limped up to the door asking to come in for a few minutes of warmth. While the man rested, the cobbler noticed his worn shoes and gave him a new pair. In the afternoon, an elderly woman came, and seeing her struggling earlier under a heavy load, he invited her in to rest and gave her a nourishing meal. At night, a child was heard crying outside his door, lost and afraid. He went out, soothed the child, and took the child home. When he returned, the cobbler was sad, convinced the Lord had come while he was away. Now he lived through the moments as he had imagined them: the knock, the latch lifted, the radiant face, the offered cup. He would have kissed the hands where the nails had been, washed the feet where the spikes had entered. Then the Lord would have sat and talked to him. In his anguish, the cobbler cried out,

"Why is it, Lord, that Your feet delay?

Have you forgotten that this was the day?"

Then, soft in the silence a voice he heard:

"Lift up your heart for I kept My word.

Three times I came to your friendly door;

Three times My shadow was on your floor.

I was the man with the bruised feet;

I was the woman you gave to eat

I was the child on the homeless street."

And the greatest ones in His kingdom are those who do it joyfully, unaware of self, not thinking, "I'm serving this person, so I'm serving Jesus and I'll be rewarded". They are those whose service flows out of the love of Christ within them and when they see Christ, the scene will be something like this: *"Then the King will say..., 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"* - Mat. 25:34-40.

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Disciples: A Lesson About God's Love For His Children 9:42-48

Last April the World Evangelical Fellowship called for the establishment of this day in September as a time for believers worldwide to pray for their brethren who are part of the persecuted church. Dozens of church and mission organizations have joined them in this call. It is hoped that around the world 150,000 congregations in 110 countries will join together to pray as one body for believers who are persecuted because of their faith in and testimony for Jesus Christ. The first question the average American Christian will ask is, "What persecuted church?" There has been an incredible silence about this in the news media. They would like us to believe otherwise, that we are really becoming one world community linked together by the bonds of humanity. But the truth is the exact opposite. The 20th century has seen a dramatic increase in the persecution of the church. In fact: *"There have been more people martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ in the twentieth century than in all the previous nineteen combined."* - WEF. Numerically we're talking about 100 million martyrs More people have died in circumstances related to their faith in this century than in all the 20th century wars combined. To have a Bible study meet in your home can cause severe persecution in countries like China and Vietnam. To own a Bible is

illegal in Saudi Arabia. Iran has special religious police who are given the task to keep Islam pure and Christianity down. In India and Pakistan to become a Christian can bring rejection from your family and beatings by local Islamic zealots. Even within our own country the courts have tried to legislate the elimination of the faith from our public schools. Let me give you just a few recent examples:

- On June 9 ten Protestant churches were attacked and destroyed by Muslim mobs of more than 5000 people as Christians gathered for Sunday worship in Surabaya, Indonesia. Many were injured or mistreated, even hospitalized and others were threatened with violence. Did you hear a word of this in the media?
- An estimated 500 Christians are killed every day in Sudan where the Muslim government in the north is systematically eliminating the non-Muslim population of the south. Since 1982 300,000 believers have died. Every year hundreds of them have been sold into slavery or the women raped and taken as concubines. Southern Sudan is facing a war-created famine and the government is forbidding relief organizations to help. Reader's Digest had a great article on this not long ago. Not a word in the regular media!
- The Chinese government has begun a fresh crackdown on unregistered churches whose members number in the millions. It is illegal to hold a house meeting of believers. In the last 3 months 3 house church leaders were beaten to death by authorities in China. This summer more than 300 unregistered house churches were closed down. Some who are arrested are tortured with boiling water or electric probes and sent to labor camps where they are denied food and water.
- The government of Vietnam has set out on a course of oppressive brutality aimed at the Church. Believers who profess their faith openly have been arrested and imprisoned.
- Muslim militants murdered two Christian men in Atledem, Egypt for refusing to pay "protection money".
- In Cuba churches often are forced to close and leaders are interrogated and threatened. Church properties are confiscated or destroyed. Members of one Havana congregation were forced to dismantle their own building.

And the list goes on and on and on. This century has seen more people come to Christ than all others combined. Millions have been gathered into the Kingdom in a short time. In 1960 70% of evangelicals lived in the western world. Just 3 decades later as of 1990, 70% of all believers in the world now live outside the western world, in the 2/3 world. A phenomenal number of people are coming to Christ in the rest of the world but Satan is fighting back. A tremendous number of them are paying the price of persecution, suffering and even martyrdom.

This should not surprise us. Jesus repeatedly taught us to expect oppression.

- *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. - John 15:18-20*
- *"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. - John 16:1-2*
- *"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. - Mat. 10:17-22*

The whole story of the Book of Acts is one of the tremendous success of the Gospel followed by horrible persecution, imprisonment and martyrdom of believers. Paul, who suffered more than most, told us, *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, - 2 Tim. 3:12*. How many times have you and I read those verses and passed thoughtlessly over them for things more relevant? Friends, that was not just a message for the early times or for the end times. It is everyday life for believers just like you and I around the world right now.

When we wake up and realize that, one of our first responses might be, "How can that be? How can God allow that to happen to His children? And what if it happens to me?" Now I want to go back to the verses I skipped last week in Mark 9 and show you:

I. God's Tremendous Love For His Children Remember, last time Jesus was giving His disciples that important lesson on humility, on putting themselves in the place of a little child, seeing themselves as last and serving others. But even as we do that, we can rest in the fact that God has an unbelievable tenacious love for His children. Here we see:

1. Jesus' warning to those who would hurt His children (9:42 = Mt. 18:6) Let me point out three things to you that will make the meaning clear. First:

a. the action: It is regrettable that the NIV translates it as *cause to sin*. The Greek word is **skandalizo**. The *skandalon* was the name for the "stumbling block", the trigger stick on a trap or snare against which an animal would stumble and set it off, so it came to represent the whole device. So, the verb means **to trap or snare**, that is, **for the purpose of harm**. He's talking about those who would snare His children to hurt them either physically or spiritually. It could be false teachers and false religions who would lure them to stray from the faith. It could be enemies

who would drive them away from it and try to force them to deny it. It could be those who simply get joy out of torturing His children because they hate them. Oppression comes in many forms. Second:

b. the object: *little ones who believe (all believers)* Back at verse 38 He had switched from talking about little children to talking about adults, specifically to *you*, meaning the disciples, who were to put themselves in the place of children, His children. He's talking about all believers but individually. "Whoever harms even ONE of my children" will suffer:

c. the punishment: *worse than death (eternal)* What's worse than being drowned with a millstone around your neck, without any hope of surfacing? Eternal punishment! The fire of hell in verse 48 where the fire never goes out and the worms never die, where the torment never ends. God loves His children and those who oppress and persecute and hurt them face the prospect of eternal death, unless they repent and find forgiveness for their sins through Jesus Christ!

But why does God let them be hurt in the first place? Well, there are several things that Matthew records in this conversation that Mark doesn't, and they are important. Verse 42 was the same as Mat. 18:6. Now turn there to verse 7 and you have what Jesus said next:

2. Jesus' explanation of the oppression of His children - Mt. 18:7, *Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin ["people" is not in the Greek and the word is to snare, referring to "my children"]! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!* There are three important pieces here:

a. it is the world system which hurts the children of God The *kosmos* is the system of this inhabited world, the way it has been set up, the way cultural patterns of thinking and acting have been established. Hurting God's children has been part of the system ever since Cain slew Abel. You can trace it through the whole of human history. The wicked always persecute the righteous because they seek for power and force and might and use it selfishly, rather than for justice and to do good. That's the way the race is set up and who set it up that way? The Scripture tells us that Satan is the ruler of this world system, the prince of the power of the air, the one who is at work in all unsaved people! Satan has engineered the world as an environment that is hostile to the Gospel. And in every religious system that he sets up to enslave men, from Islam to spirit worship to Communism, there is an inherent hatred for Christianity and those who promote it! He is desperately trying to stop the tremendous harvest of souls that God has planned to bring in! Now understand:

b. God has chosen to allow this suffering in His sovereign plan It is necessary. God in His wisdom has chosen to allow it to be this way. It is not that Satan has simply outsmarted or succeeded in overpowering God somehow. God has a grand global plan for the world and He has chosen to allow it for His glory. It has to be. Jesus said so! We have to trust Him with that. However:

c. individual oppressors will bear personal responsibility Woe to the man that does the oppressing! Oppressors don't get off the hook. They can't stand before God one day and say, "Satan made me do it" any more than a Nazi war criminal can say, "I was just following orders!" Or they can't say, "it's part of your plan and I'm just a necessary part of what You decreed!" God is a just God and they will be personally responsible. They will pay a grave, personal, eternal price for the harm they have done to His children. So, you have:

3. Jesus' warning to oppressors: (9:43-48 = Mt. 18:8-9) What's He saying? He's not saying to believers, "Be careful not to cause each other to sin." He's saying to offenders, oppressors, trappers, persecutors, to the wicked of this world: **"Don't hurt My kids!** And if you can keep from it by cutting off your hand, cut it off. And if you can keep from it by cutting off your foot, cut it off. And if you can keep from it by gouging out your eye, gouge it out. Do whatever you have to do to keep from it, but don't touch my kids; if you do, there'll be hell to pay!" Oh, your Father loves you. He says about you what He said about Israel in *Zech. 2:8*, ...*whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye*, touches the most tender part of Him, His own dear beloved children! But if we go back to Matthew, He then said one more thing. We have:

4. Jesus' warning to the church - Mt. 18:10-14 This is a switch back to the disciples, a warning for us. Every single believer is important to God, regardless of how far away and unimportant they may seem to us. We are so important that:

a. God has assigned angels to care for every one of His children (10b) I don't think this verse proves that every person is assigned a specific "guardian angel". Hebrews tells us that angels are ministering spirits who are sent to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. I think here he's saying that God has assigned angels to care for every single one. He cares for His children so much that He has angels constantly going and coming from Him to intervene and serve in their lives, even those who are suffering persecution. God's angels are on duty for them. And:

b. it is not His will for a single one of His children to perish (12-14) Here is the familiar story of the lost sheep, but here Jesus tells it for a different point than on the other occasion in Luke. A good shepherd cares about each individual sheep. If any single one is in danger, he expends Himself for it and his heart is thrilled when it is rescued. The point is verse 14. It is not His moral will for a single one of His children literally to perish, to be destroyed! In earthly terms that means this: God's desire, what His heart wants, is not to see a single one of His children hurt, harmed, or destroyed. He has chosen to allow it of necessity in His overall plan, but when any one of His children hurts, He hurts with them. He suffers with us! And in eternal terms, not one of His children ever will perish. Not one is lost. The persecutor merely sets them free to be in His presence at death! Ultimately, He makes sure every one of His sheep is safe in the eternal fold. So, if God sets that level of importance on every one of His children, then:

c. we should not regard any one of them as of little importance (10a) We should not forget them. We should not toss persecution off when we hear of it with a smug, "Oh well, there's nothing I can do about it" or "It isn't happening to me so I don't have to worry about it." In the midst of all this persecution of some of our brethren, the rest of the church worldwide has by and large sat back and said and done very little. You might be saying, "What can I do? I don't want to forget them, to ignore their plight, but what can I do for them?" Let me suggest three things:

II. How We Can Love His Oppressed Children

1. Be informed about them *Prov. 24:11-12, Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it?...* Go on the web and the websites listed below. In our day there is no excuse for not knowing what's going on. Become informed. And don't just get information:

2. Pray for them *Heb. 13:3, Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.* Don't learn and forget. Make praying for them a regular part of your devotional life as you get information, even if it is remembering only one need per day. Let your heart be broken for them and pray. In most of these situations there is nothing man can do. Only God can help. Talk to Him about it. And finally:

3. Act on their behalf when you can Sometimes there are things you can do. Give to a relief effort. Supply Bibles and literature. Write letters. Write to authorities. Robert Hussein is a Kuwaiti citizen who converted from Islam to Christianity and allowed it to be known. When he did the police ceased to protect him from radical Muslims. His house was vandalized and his wife raped. On May 29 he was convicted of apostasy in a religious court which said he should be killed, even though their secular constitution guarantees freedom of religion. His children and wife were taken away and he went into hiding for months. An appeal was set for Sept. 15 but before that time with the help of one of these organizations he was able to get out of the country and seek asylum in the US. His future is undetermined. But he is not the point. This summer a massive effort was mounted by Christians all over the world who heard about this. Information flowed over the internet and a website was established. The personal fax machine of the Crown Prince of Kuwait was flooded for weeks on end with protests from all over the world urging him to honor the constitution. The government of Kuwait was forced to issue an appeal for this flood of mail to stop and to make public statements about freedom of religion for its citizens. The situation for all believers in Kuwait was bettered by the informed prayer and action of the world community of believers and it may be easier for them to live because of this. When there is something you can do, do it! If you don't, who will?

III. Some Sources Of Information And Action:

- Open Doors USA - www.opendoorsusa.org
- Voice Of The Martyrs - www.persecution.com
- International Christian Concern - www.persecution.org

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Disciples: A Lesson About Marriage And Children 10:1-15

There are no subjects more universally dear to the hearts of all human beings than the marriage relationship and children. These things transcend all cultures, all languages and all places. They are the basic building blocks of human life. On the other hand, these two basic human relationships have been horribly distorted and twisted in almost every culture on earth, including the Jewish culture Jesus lived in and including our own. It is hardly conceivable that Jesus could have left His followers and returned to heaven without giving them some lessons on these important subjects. The first lesson occurred in the context of Jesus' final journey up to Jerusalem as He passed through the Gentile territory of Perea across the Jordan. Some Pharisees approached Him with a question about the very popular subject of divorce and Jesus gave them all a lesson about:

I. The Permanence Of Marriage (1-12) Now I want to say up front that I am very conscious of the fact that as soon as I use the word divorce, it touches the hearts of people that I love. For many of you the pain of divorce is a reality that you've

either lived through personally or gone through with someone else you love and my heart goes out to you. It is not my intent to dredge up painful memories nor to make you feel anything less than 100% accepted and loved here, just as you are before God. That's my heart and this sermon is not about you; it's about God and His view of marriage, a view that He intended for the human race to hold and preserve to all generations. But almost universally it hasn't been held. The Pharisees approached Jesus with:

1. the world's view: marriage is an agreement between two persons (1-4) It's a contract, an arrangement, a deal between two people where they agree to behave in a certain fashion. That is ultimately where human societies take the concept of marriage. On one end of the spectrum, some cultures take the view so low as to see it almost as a purchase; the man buys his wife from her father and she belongs to him. Here in the US, we are at the opposite end of the spectrum; marriage is a relational contract between two parties who have equal rights and privileges created by filing a document with the court system and therefore dissolvable by that system. In fact, we now see it so much as only a legal agreement that it does not even require a man and a woman; two men or two women can be married! But my point is that ultimately the world sees marriage as a relationship that does not change the individuality of the two parties and therefore as a relationship that can be broken or cancelled. A Jew had to draw up a document of divorce. A Muslim need simply say "I divorce you" and mean it. For us, we must file legal papers and settle property. What these Pharisees were actually trying to do was to drag Jesus into a theological debate that was going on in their time between two schools of thought among the leading Rabbis. But that debate is just as current today:

a. some feel it can be cancelled for any reason The school of Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for virtually any reason including (and I quote) "if she spoiled a dish for him" or "if he found another fairer than she". This is pretty much where our culture is: if you fall out of love, get a divorce, if things aren't as rosy as you thought they'd be, get a divorce, if you meet somebody else who's prettier or more handsome or who makes you feel that spark that your spouse doesn't anymore, get a divorce. It's only an agreement, a contract, and you can cancel it and make a new one (or even live together without it). This is the majority view in our day, as it seems to have been in Jesus' culture. But not everybody holds that view:

b. some feel it can be cancelled only for serious reason The school of Shammai was much stricter and more conservative and taught that divorce could only be pursued for adultery. Thank goodness that there is still a conservative element in our culture who believe that it's not enough to simply want a different spouse, that only serious issues like adultery, spousal abuse and desertion are viable grounds for divorce. It is this conservative element that keeps our society from totally falling apart.

But you see, there is a problem common to both of these groups. The Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus into a debating position on what's a big enough excuse to divorce. In other words, marriage is still just an agreement between two people; it's simply a matter of what level of importance you attach to the agreement. But Jesus didn't buy into it. He basically said, "You're asking the wrong question! God has a whole different view:"

2. God's view: marriage is a union of two lives (5-9) Jesus said, "What did Moses command?" They thought he was talking about Deut. 24 which says that if a man divorces his wife, he must give her a written bill of divorce. But Jesus says, "No, there Moses only permitted and regulated the practice of divorce for a bunch of hard-hearted people who were divorcing one another already. He didn't command divorce at all. I wasn't talking about that passage. Moses wrote Genesis as well as Deuteronomy and in Gen. 2:24 Moses wrote down God's command." God's view is this:

a. He created man and woman for union: ...made them male and female Physically, He made them in such a fashion as not to be complete in themselves. If the human race were all men, if He had created only Adam, there would be no race. Individuals can't clone themselves like amoebas! He created the male to require a female to supply to his life that which is missing from him and He created the female to require a male to supply to her life that which is missing from her. Now please don't take this wrong; I am not saying, nor is God, that a single person is only half a person or incomplete somehow without marriage. That's not true, nor is it the point. The point is that their very physical creation as male and female shows that they were made for union and then:

b. He created the process (which we call marriage) which unites them: ...be united to his wife A man is supposed to leave behind, forsake, chop, the lesser bond that ties him to his parents and, literally, *glue himself* (and the verb is in the intensive, that is, *cement himself*) to his wife. In what fashion, so that they are tied together with a rope that can be cut? So that they are taped together with a good brand of duct tape? No, so that they are united together into a single unit; they become a "one-flesh" unit. In the language of metallurgy, they are welded!

c. He joins them in an actual union: they are no longer two but one Literally, *they shall be into one flesh* and the one who has caused that is God. Malachi says the same thing. He rebuked that generation for the prevalence of divorce and said, *Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His.* - 2:15. God joins them and the verb is literally, *to yoke together, to put into the same yoke*. Two oxen are put into one yoke together so they become one yoke of oxen, a singular with plurality. That's a picture of marriage, a one-flesh unit with duality, joined together permanently by God, so the point is:

d. the point: *man should not separate what God has joined* God puts husband and wife together in a permanent, forever, until death do us part, union and makes them one; why are you sitting around debating how big an excuse you need to break it apart and undo His work? Marriage is not some contract you can break but a God-created union that should only be broken apart in the most dire of circumstances when it is unavoidable. You should be affirming the permanence of marriage, not discussing excuses for divorce! Now this must have really been a novel concept, not only to the crowd, but to Jesus' own disciples. You can tell by:

3. the reaction of the disciples When they got Him alone, they asked:

a. a question: We are left to imagine the question but judging from the answer it must have been something like: ***Is it really that serious? (10)*** "Are you for real, man? Are you kidding? Nobody sees marriage like that anymore!" What else is there to question except to say, "Do you really mean what you said back there?" And look at:

b. Jesus' response: *Yes*, in fact, ***remarriage is an act of adultery! (11-12)*** The general rule is that marriage is so binding that if you find somebody you like better and divorce your present spouse and marry another one, it doesn't count! It doesn't dissolve your moral obligation. Your re-marriage constitutes an act of unfaithfulness against your first partner. Now please, please, please hear me. He is not saying that all remarried people are living in adultery and neither am I. Remarried people are married and they are living in marriage. There are times when divorce unavoidably happens and remarriage is legitimate. What those times and circumstances are is the subject of another message and a different discussion. Jesus is saying that marriage is so permanent that just saying "I divorce you" or getting a writing on a piece of paper, doesn't make it go away! Paul interpreted what Jesus had to say this way, *To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord [Jesus]): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. - 1 Cor 7:10-11.* Why? Because the divorce paper doesn't make it go away; it's deeper than some contract! That's the general rule. There are some rare exceptions which he goes on to mention, but the point is that marriage is a God-created permanent union and we need to elevate it back up to where it belongs, instead of seeing how we can cheapen it! Jesus' own disciples had adopted a cheap view of marriage from the culture around them and the church today has largely done the same. The divorce rate inside the church and out is about the same, I'm told. Our young people are getting married with the view that if it doesn't work out, I can try again. It's high time we elevate the status of the marriage bond and see it for the permanent union God intended it to be and make it so before our children! How about you? Are you sometimes tempted to quit and give up, to find somebody else, to lower your view of marriage so you can find a way out of the contract and avoid the struggle and difficulty? Don't buy the lie! Marriage isn't what they say it is; it's what God says it is! Get help. Talk to someone competent about your problem today! Now while He was in the same house, Jesus got an opportunity to teach a second lesson that is much like this first one:

II. The Preciousness Of Children (13-16) Parents began coming to him with their little kids so He would hold them or touch them and pray over them. Maybe they had seen Him hold and hug that little child in chapter 9! But after all, what parent doesn't like to see somebody love on their child? What parent doesn't love to see some spiritual leader they respect hold their little one and pray over him or her and ask God to bless and keep them? We do it still today in our own infant dedications, only with a little more pomp and circumstance. Anyway, there must have been quite a group of them, coming one after the other. One or two might have been fine, but the disciples began to become annoyed and went to some of them further back in line and began to shoo them away and perhaps say, "Go home; stop troubling the Master like this, He's too busy to be bothered with this sort of thing!" Why did they do that? Because, as with marriage, they had adopted:

1. the world's view: *children are of little value (13)* They are not important, except for what they can do for you. They're not really people like us grown-ups. What matters is our needs and our feelings as adults. Boy, has Satan had a field day with that one in the pagan world. In their demon worship tribes have practiced child-sacrifice! In Thailand thousands of girls age 11, 12, 13 and up are sold by their families into prostitution to make money. The child pornography and sex business in the Philippines brings in millions and attracts travelers from Europe and Australia on the international circuit! In some big cities of Brazil abandoned street children roam by the hundreds and are sometimes shot by police to keep them under control. In parts of India and some Muslim countries they are forced into child marriages at 8 and 10 years old or undergo horrible atrocities of cultural ceremonies. We recoil at that, but is our culture really much better. We've debated the subject of partial birth abortion. Partial birth abortion simply means you can kill the baby when 95% of its body, all but the head, is out of the womb. Three more inches and it would be legal murder of an infant. Thank God it is still forbidden, but only with a penalty not to exceed 2 years in prison! We have nearly legalized infanticide, the killing of unwanted children, only you have to do it quick, before the last inches are born. It's only one step to killing deformed babies after birth and who knows what's next. Child abuse, molestation, and even kidnapping is on the rise all around us, the more we tell ourselves that kids are less than people. But even beyond those extreme acts, I see time after time after time that grownups choose themselves and their wants and their needs over their children and hurt them deeply. I watch kids whose parents live for themselves, for their careers, for their hobbies and kids are left to roam or get love and examples wherever they can find them. Grown up after grown up sits in my study for counseling who was damaged unthinkably by the selfish actions and choices of their parents from outright abuse of all

sorts to pure neglect. Why? Because in the world's view, kids aren't important, we are! Even the disciples were unconsciously buying into that view but look at:

2. the reaction of Jesus: *he was moved with indignation* This is the only time this phrase is ever used of Jesus. The root of it means *to feel pain, to hurt*.

a. He was greatly upset at the disciples' attitude and action Jesus saw what the disciples did and it hurt Him deeply. Jesus hurts for little children and He sees what we do! And He had had enough. He said to them, "STOP IT!"

b. we must never hinder children from coming to Jesus Oh, we would never do it outright. We would never say, "Don't believe! Don't go to church! Don't pray!" But by our words, by our actions, by our attitudes, by the life example we set before them, or by simply ignoring them, we can hinder them from coming to Jesus. We are the living illustration of Jesus to them. They feel His love and compassion through us. They learn to love Him through us. If we live self-centered and treat them like the disciples did, that will be what they think of Jesus. But that's not how He feels at all. Look at:

3. the attitude of Jesus: *he took them in his arms and blessed them* He picked them up one at a time and hugged them and loved on them and prayed over them. You see:

a. He has a special love for children He has a high view of children. They are precious and important and individual. They hold a special place in His heart. Why? Because He is one with the Eternal Father, the perfect Father. Fatherhood is a part of His character. The love of God is the love of a Father for His children. In fact:

b. He demands childlikeness of every follower We must come to Him in simple helpless childlikeness to enter His kingdom. To put it another way, His Kingdom is actually a kingdom of children! We who believe are all His children. And look at the love and care He lavishes on us as His children, how He sweeps us up in His arms and loves on us, how He sacrifices Himself to provide for and protect us; shouldn't we earthly fathers and mothers and others be mirroring that same great love for the children in our lives and all around us?

Somewhere I read the following illustration: *There it was--a tiny rosebud thrown in a heap with other uprooted and discarded rosebushes. Out of the tangled mass, one long stem pushed its way upward, thrusting forth its one tiny bud. The rosebushes had been thrown away by a disgruntled homeowner who could not seem to get them to grow well. As the man passed by the heap, he noticed the little rosebud, but he went on his way. The next day he noticed that the bud still seemed to have life and was trying to bloom. Donning gloves, he retrieved the bush on which that one bud clung tenaciously to life. He planted the bush and was rewarded several days later when a beautiful rose bloomed. Before long the whole bush came alive. In fact, that one bush outbloomed and outgrew other rosebushes the man planted later. Each year the bush seemed to have one especially long stem with an exquisite red rose on it. Many Christians are surrounded with families in their neighborhoods who never go to Sunday School or church. The children grow up without learning that Jesus died for their sins and wants to be their Savior. We may try to witness to these neighbors and find they are not interested. After several tries, we may be tempted to "leave them to their dying." We can think of each child as a rosebud that should have a chance at eternal life. We need to reach them while their hearts are tender toward God. How can we reach them? Invite them to Sunday School or [Pioneer Clubs]. Make friends with them; when you know them well, talk to them about the Lord. Because one tiny rosebud was unwilling to die, the whole bush was saved. Likewise, whole families have been won to Christ because one child came to know Him first. May we never lose hope for the children who need to know about Jesus and His love for them! And how about your own children? How important are they in your life? Culture impacts us silently and quietly all the time and we don't even feel its subtle influence. If we let our guard down it is so easy for our view of marriage, and ultimately of our own marriage, to deteriorate and lower. It is so easy for our view of children, and ultimately of our own children, to change until we find ourselves pushing them aside and don't even realize it. Let's put marriage back up on the pedestal where it belongs. Let's love children the way Jesus did.*

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant Of God

Training His Disciples: A Lesson About Rewards 10:17-45

Now Jesus is nearing Jerusalem for that last time and the opportunity for one final lesson for His disciples presents itself. It's a lesson about rewards. We all know that salvation is a free gift; eternal life cannot be earned or deserved. It comes simply by trusting in the shed blood of Jesus to take away our sins. But when it comes to the subject of being rewarded as a believer, if we could really see deeply into our own hearts, we might be surprised to find just how deep is:

I. Our Attachment To Materialistic Thinking (17-27) A young man whom we have come to call the rich, young ruler came to meet him and fell at his feet, and in him we have:

1. the rich young ruler: *materialism revealed* (17-22) Let's think about this young man. First of all:

a. he was a morally "good" person externally He called Jesus "Good Master" and Jesus could see his heart and called him on it right away, "Remember there is none good but God" (which meant that He qualified because He

was God!), but he saw Jesus simply as someone who had achieved moral excellence and he saw himself the same way. He had worked hard to keep all the commandments of God from his youth. In the outward sense he had personally succeeded. He hadn't lied, stolen, cheated or murdered. He was not some rich, mean, selfish Herod or Pilate type who sought to get wealth by any means and use it for wrong purposes. He thought of himself as good and blessed of God materially because of it. Secondly:

b. he was sincerely willing to "do" what God would require He was not expecting Jesus to mention the same old things but to name some great feat that would guarantee him the possession of eternal life. What more could he do for God to insure His position? Rebuild the Temple? Go on a pilgrimage? Fast and pray? What? But you can see, can't you, that his whole mode of thinking was wrong? His spiritual life was another business transaction. You do in order to receive. You work in order to get. You serve God in order to inherit eternal life later. Oh, how many millions of people are stuck on that treadmill, believing that eternal life comes by good works! He thought he was good, almost good enough, certainly very sincere, just like all those other folks around us who are praying and giving and attending and helping and whatever, thinking they will get life. But the tragic thing is that he couldn't see into his own heart. Jesus could, and so He struck what He knew was the magic chord. If He had said, "Do you love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength", he'd have replied, "Yes, and I repeat it from Deut. 6:4 every day to remind myself! I even have it on my wall!" But Jesus didn't put it that way. He said, "Go, sell all you have and give it away and follow me." In other words, "Show me whether you love Me more or your things more!" And the sad fact is:

c. in his heart he loved gold more than God Now Jesus wasn't trying to be mean. He looked at him and *loved* him! He was trying to show him his own heart in order to reach him. It was in great personal sadness that Jesus watched him walk away disheartened, saying, "No, the cost is too much!" But it's not surprising. If Jesus asked that same thing of a great many people today, He'd get the same response. What is surprising is the reaction of the disciples:

2. the surprise of the disciples: *materialism absorbed* (23-27) It shocked them when:

a. Jesus talked about prosperity as a death trap Most rich people fall in love with what they have and love it more than God. It's easier to squish a camel through the eye of a needle than to get a rich man saved, because 99.99% of the time he loves his gold more than God, which is idolatry and God can't stand for it. It takes a miracle of God to save anybody, to shake them out of their "I'll earn my salvation" thing, much less a rich person. They have no sense of need, no sense of inadequacy, no sense of needing a Savior to extend mercy to them in their helplessness. That's one of the reasons it's so hard to win Americans to Christ; we have too much. Prosperity is a death trap; it keeps you from life and it takes an act of God to open your eyes and let you see it. Well, they about fell over! Why?

b. they had come to see prosperity as a sign of God's blessing God gives good things to those He loves. He showers them with the good things of life. The happy man, the blessed man is the man who has things. That's what their society taught them. Happiness is every man sitting under his own vine and his own fig tree, contented in all he has. That's the blessing of God! Good grief, if good moral rich people can't be saved, then the rest of us poor peons have no chance at all! Our culture has taught us the same thing, materialism. Strive for more. Strive for better. Get a house. Get a car. Get money. Get power. He who dies with the most toys wins! And it seeps into our hearts as Christians. We Christianize materialism. Barbara Walters interviewed former PTL leader Jim Bakker on 20/20 now that he's out of prison and she asked him what he'd learned. His answer was, "I had lots of time and I studied the Bible and saw what it really had to say. I was teaching people how to be rich. I was telling people to seek after worldly riches and that God would bless them with it. I WAS WRONG! The New Testament teaches the opposite; you will have difficulty and trouble and persecution!" He is perhaps the most vivid example I know of a modern, worldly Christian who got caught up in the materialism of his culture, but we all tend to absorb that same thinking too! It may come out clearly in a life given to seeking after material things or it may come out in another, more "spiritual" way:

II. Our Desire For Earthly Rewards (28-31) Jesus' words jogged Peter's mind and he blurted out, "Hey, wait a minute! We did that. Every one of us left behind our homes and our families and our businesses to follow you and we've been following You around for three years. What do we get for that? Surely there's a spiritual reward for that in the Kingdom!" And Jesus said, "You're right. Let's talk about rewards". And then He distinguished them in two categories:

1. our present reward (28-30) Look at these tremendous words. They are for right now in this life. He promises to every follower:

a. an immeasurable spiritual replacement blessing A hundred-fold return. That's 100 times not 100% (twice as much). The ultimate replacement. "Have you left family for me? Have they cast you out for your faith? Right now, in this life I'll give you a family that's 100 times better! In my church you'll have fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters that are true and real and loving." I've found that! "Has your faith cost you possessions, money, houses, lands? The possessions I give you you'll find 100 times better! I'll take care of your needs but I'll give you peace in

your soul and joy in your heart, and hope in your future. I'll give you all the things those things could never buy and things you can't lose. I'll fill your heart with love and satisfaction." I heard one Bible teacher put it this way, "Even if there was nothing to look forward to after death, even if there was no heaven to look forward to, I'd still rather be a Christian than anything else I know. The blessings He provides in this life are enough!" They're a hundred-fold! But there's a catch:

b. but in the context of suffering and persecution The greatest peace often comes through loss; the greatest joy often comes through persecution and suffering! The Christian life is the most blessed life there is on this earth; make no mistake about it. But it comes with large doses of suffering and pain and hurt like all of life does! That's why Corrie Ten Boom could find the fullness of life in a German prison camp, why Joni Eareckson Tada could experience the greatest joy of her life in a wheelchair with no use of her limbs and why Paul could testify like many of the Christians in China today, that through the suffering of all kinds of difficulties he had learned the secret of contentment: the strength provided by Jesus Christ! Folks, the Christian life is a life you wouldn't trade for anything the world can give; trust me, a lot of folks have tried it and found out! But it doesn't look the way our culture would have you picture it! And then there's the icing on the cake:

2. our future reward: a life with Him forever (30b) It's not a thing; it's a life. Never mind what heaven is like and all its glory and beauty. Never mind the kingdom where Jesus says we're going to reign as kings with Him forever. In the age to come, we simply get to live with Him in His presence, to share His eternal no-beginning, no-ending life with Him for the rest of eternity. What more bliss could there be! It's what we were created for. The rewards there are not material. Silver and gold and possessions and houses and lands are meaningless there. But yes, Jesus rewards His followers. Yes, He gives them wonderful things. But having said that, He turns right around and gives His disciples:

3. a warning about comparison and evaluation (31) He could see where their thinking was going. They weren't free of that old "get and acquire" thing yet. So He told them, "There are going to be some big upsets in heaven. It's not going to be like you think. It's not going to work on a system that you can figure out. A lot of people who look like they're first, #1, here are going to be last there. A lot of the people who look so good because they're so sacrificial and they do so much, may be in last place. And there are a lot of little old praying widows and shut-ins who don't look like much here, who are going to be honored there. My value system is backwards from the one the world has drummed into you, so don't try to sit and figure it out and get caught up in evaluating how well you're doing, especially by comparing yourself to others. Man, that won't work!" But the disciples didn't hear this part too well! OK, so we quit looking for earthly rewards. What comes out then is what came out in the disciples down the road further near Jericho:

III. Our Desire For Heavenly Rewards (35-45) There is one small piece of that last conversation that Mark didn't record and it's important. **Mt. 19:28**, *Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* This was special, just for the 12 who would be the foundation of His church. Then He went on to talk about earthly rewards for all of us. This stuck with them and two of them now came with a request which shows that we can also have:

1. our improper concern with heavenly rewards (35-40) "OK, so we're not going to get rich here or even there. But position is still a thought. We could still be #1 and #2, your right and left hand men in the Kingdom!" Prominence, importance, power, those things are a reward to be sought too! But Jesus' reply is so instructive. Look what He says about those things:

a. they are not simply handed out by God to His favorites In all fairness, that was how any government they knew worked. A ruler invested his closest friends with important positions. Political jobs are not new. But God doesn't work like that. He doesn't pick and choose favorites. He loves all His children equally. He doesn't reward some highly simply because He likes them more. You can't go to Him and ask for some position in the Kingdom. He has a better system in place! So:

b. they are never to become the focus of our service on earth They are never to become the motive that drives us to serve. Why not? First:

(1) we do not know their true nature "You don't know what you're asking!" We have all these crazy jokes about heaven that are materialistic, like the little old lady who gets a Cadillac and the preacher on roller skates. You've heard them. We take that idea of laying up treasures for ourselves in heaven pretty literally and materialistically. But we don't know what our rewards are going to be like. One thing I do know, they're not going to be material. Heaven is not going to be more heavenly or luxurious for some than for others! We don't know what our rewards will be. Certainly, part of them will be meeting the people that are there in heaven because of our efforts. What a joy! Yet another part will be the place of service we have in God's eternal program, but as soon as I say that, it gets materialized in our minds and we think, "Oh, so some of us get to be heaven's street cleaners and others sit on thrones..." No, it's not like that at all! We're not working here to have high rank there, to get ahead. And what's more Jesus reminded them that:

(2) we do not know ourselves fully "Can you suffer what I'm headed for?" "Oh yeah, sure, we can take it!" Jesus said, "Well, you're actually right. James you will die by the sword and John you will suffer until the day you die." But the point is, you can't know yourself that well. You can't know what you will or won't be doing in your life and how you'll respond to certain things. And you can't know about the billions of others who belong to His kingdom. The focus is still wrong; it is self-oriented. When it comes to our thinking about rewards let's think this way:

c. God prepares rewards for people by His unerring judgment It's not like there's a finite set of material prizes up there, only so many to be won and when they're all claimed they're gone. God prepared that #1 and #2 spot for particular people He has in mind. God prepares rewards for each of His people, He prepares a personalized future for each one of His children that is just right, just fitting to the life they lived on earth. And it's based on His perfect knowledge of our lives and our hearts, not on our skimpy view! So basically put, rewards are His concern, His business! It's great that we know that they exist. But we're not to focus on them, to strive for them as if they are things to be amassed and acquired. We need to leave our heavenly rewards, whatever they are, to God the Just Judge of all the Earth who always does right and focus on:

2. our proper concern: an attitude of servanthood on earth (41-45) The 10 got hot at James and John. That probably means they all coveted those spots for themselves and thought they were cheating by asking them as a favor! But Jesus gave them all another lecture on this important subject of servanthood. They needed it over and over again and so do we. You see:

a. to men leadership usually means privilege To be in charge means power. It means you get perks. You get to do what you want, to choose what you want and enforce your will on others. But it doesn't work like that in God's kingdom:

b. to God leadership means servanthood To be in charge means to be responsible, to be charged with the care of others and meeting their needs. It means servanthood, ministering to the needs of others, not getting for yourself. So, the greatest leader in God's eyes is the most humble servant, selflessly giving of himself for the needs of the most people! So, our fleshly desire to be rewarded is wrongly focused:

c. we should desire to be great in service not in privilege Jesus is Lord of All, King of Kings. But not so that He can get His way and enforce His will, not so He can have privilege. His focus was to die and rescue men from their sins. His greatest command was for the church to go to the ends of the earth and rescue men and give them eternal life through the Gospel. He didn't sit around thinking, "I can endure this; after all when I get back to heaven, look at the privilege I'll have." He saw the need of a dying world and His heart loved every one of them and wanted to save them. His desire was to serve and save as many as possible, not to be personally great. So we should desire to be #1 in serving, not privilege, #1 in giving ourselves away for the sake of others. That's what God loves. It mirrors His heart. And that's what He rewards. But as soon as you consciously focus on the reward, even service becomes selfishness.

Let me close by telling you about a woman you've never heard of. *Dr. Eleanor Chestnut arrived in China in 1893 under the American Presbyterian missions board. Dr. Chestnut built a hospital, using her own money to buy bricks and mortar. The need for her services was so great and so compelling upon her that she performed surgery in her bathroom until the building was completed. One operation involved the amputation of a common laborer's leg. Complications arose, and skin grafts were needed. A few days later, another doctor asked Dr. Chestnut why she was limping. "Oh, it's nothing," was her terse reply. Finally, a nurse revealed that the skin graft for the patient, a coolie, came from Dr. Chestnut's own leg, taken with only a local anesthetic. After 12 years of this kind of selfless servanthood, during the Boxer Rebellion of 1905, Dr. Chestnut and four other missionaries were killed by a mob that stormed the hospital.* Material rewards? There were none. She died a martyr's death. Some would call it a waste. But she gave her life for the cause of serving other people and in God's economy I can assure you that is not a waste. Is she the greatest in the Kingdom? I don't have any way to know and quite frankly, I don't think she cared. But I do know that she lived the life of selfless servanthood that Jesus was talking about here. That's what He wants for us. And it isn't only for doctors but for fishermen and all the rest of us. And it isn't only for those who go to China or some far place; it can be lived right here. The reward is not in the joy of what we will get or be; it is in what we are able to give to others. It is to see a patient relieved of suffering, to see the fear go out of a frightened child's eyes, to see the joy of the person who finds forgiveness of his sins through Jesus. It may be costly but that's the life I want. How about you!

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

IV. The Rejection Of The Servant Chs. 11-13

The Servant's Final Offer 11:1-11

The remaining chapters of Mark's Gospel all deal with the last week of Jesus' life on earth. Three chapters, 11-13, cover His entry into Jerusalem and the rejection He received there as he taught during that Passion Week. 14-15 cover His Last Supper, arrest and trial and His crucifixion, and in chapter 16 we find the glory of His resurrection. And it all begins with that familiar scene which we call the Triumphal Entry. Every Sunday school child is familiar with the story of how Jesus rode into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday on a donkey. And on the surface, what an exciting day it must have been. Jesus rode down into the city with multitudes in front and behind shouting and cheering for Him, waving palm branches and throwing their garments down to make a "red carpet" path for his donkey's feet. For the disciples it must have been a "cloud nine experience", the kind of acclamation they'd been waiting to see their Master receive all the way along and right there in Jerusalem, the capital city and center of all Jewish life. But there is a far deeper significance in this scene than we realize. So, let's begin by looking carefully at:

I. The Factors Involved In His Triumphal Entry First, before it even began:

1. there was a demonstration of His power (1-6) Jesus has been coming up the road from Jericho. He has not been to the little village ahead of him. Yet He sends his disciples on an errand to retrieve a donkey for him to ride. And what is abundantly clear is that:

a. He saw every piece of the scene ahead of time In His mind He could see into that town. He could see a donkey and her colt standing there, tied at a doorway. He knew who owned the animals and saw that the owners were standing nearby. He knew how they would react when the disciples loosed the donkey and that, in the end, they would allow it. Plus, He knew they would be there right at the moment when He needed them! It kind of reminds you of when Philip first believed and he ran and found Nathaniel and brought him to Jesus and Jesus said, *I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.* - *John 1:48*. And Nathanael immediately saw the significance of that and said, *Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.* What Jesus was displaying was His **omniscience**, that He knows all things as only God can. And then did you ever notice this? The colt which they brought back for Him to ride had never been ridden, yet:

b. He rode an unbroken colt all the way down the mountain and into Jerusalem **without a problem** Now I've never raised donkeys, but growing up we raised ponies and if there's one thing I learned, it is that you don't just go up to a colt and hop on its back without some resistance! In fact, I remember one unriden, untrained two year old pony colt that it took two men to load onto a truck, one pulling with all his might on a rope from the front and the other pushing from the back end, and he got kicked! Donkeys are probably a bit more docile, but I'd be willing to bet that the first ride is still no easy thing, yet Jesus was demonstrating once again in a small way His **omnipotence**, His power over all things. He walked on water, He told the wind and waves to be still and He silently sat on an unbroken donkey and it obeyed Him!

What is Jesus saying to His disciples? I am omniscient and omnipotent; I know all things and can do all things; all authority in heaven and earth is given unto me! I am the Son of the Living God, the King of Israel! Now notice a second factor here:

2. there was a fulfillment of the Scriptures (7) Jesus could have chosen to simply walk into Jerusalem. He walked every other time and in every other place. Choosing to ride in on a donkey was unique; He had never done it before. In fact, He says he "needed" it. Matt 21:4 tells us why. *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:* and then he quotes **Zech. 9:9**, *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* Four hundred years earlier God had said through Zechariah that Jerusalem would know her King when He came, because He would come to her riding on a donkey and she would rejoice and shout! And not just on any donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey! He was fulfilling the Scriptures. Why? Matthew links it with *Is. 62:11*, *The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes!... It was Jesus' way of quietly shouting, "I am your King; I am your Savior!"* And then notice a third factor:

3. there was an acclamation by the multitude (8-10) A crowd had come out to meet Him from the city and a crowd had gathered behind him as well, and they were honoring Him by throwing their garments and palm branches down for Him to ride over. But what's important is what they were shouting. It was a:

a. their prophetic confession quoted from **Ps. 118:25-26**. *Hosanna* is the Hebrew word for *Save us!* It was originally a prayer, but by this time it and these verses had become part of the liturgy of the Passover celebration, so that it was simply an expression of praise like *Hallelujah!* But if you check, back in Ps. 118 it is, *O LORD, save us!* It is directed to Jehovah God Himself! Yet here they point it at Jesus! This whole Psalm was chanted during Passover

time and these verses often were used to welcome pilgrims to Jerusalem, but this time it goes way beyond that. It is not only, *Blessed is He...*, but they added their own interpretation which is not found in the Psalm, *Blessed is the coming Kingdom...* They are acclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and King promised by the prophets of old! What they said was true; He was the King and the King was coming to them and the Kingdom was coming to them in His person. But you wonder how the same basic crowd could turn around on Friday morning and shout, "Crucify Him!" Well, turn over to Matthew for a moment and notice:

b. their shallow understanding - Mt. 21:10-11 Oh, see how far short this falls! They're shouting and calling Him Messiah and King and fulfilling the Scriptures with every step, and yet they see Him as "the prophet Jesus from Nazareth". A powerful prophet, to be sure, but only a prophet. You see, they missed:

II. The Purpose Of His Triumphal Entry What was He doing in this entry from start to finish?

1. He was openly declaring His identity as Messiah and King Up to this point, He had always told His disciples "Don't tell anyone. Hush! Be quiet about it!" But this day, He in His Divine Sovereignty arranged things so it would be shouted to the world, "I am the Messiah; I am the King of the Jews!" It was an open, public declaration of His identity before all of Israel who were gathered at Jerusalem for Passover. And it had to be so. God had to make it clear to the Jewish people and their leaders who Jesus was. In fact, it was so necessary that we read this in **Lk. 19:39-40**. If the people hadn't declared His identity, He would have had the rocks do it! That's how important it was that His identity be declared publicly at this time. Why?

2. He was offering the promised Kingdom He was offering Israel and all its leaders for the last time the opportunity to receive Him as their King and Messiah in a way they couldn't miss or mistake. In theory, if they would have turned *en masse* to Him with their hearts they could have had the Messiah they always looked for and the Kingdom they were always waiting for. But He knew they wouldn't. Even as the ride neared its end, look what He said in **Lk. 19:41-44**. "If only you knew! If only you would receive Me as your King. If only you would recognize this time. God is coming to you right now and I am He!!!" But it was hidden from them; they were blinded by sin and their man-made religious ideas. They missed the message and rejected the King. However, there is one other thing Jesus was doing:

3. He was displaying the nature of His Kingdom He did not come on a war horse or in a chariot like a conqueror. Listen to **Zech. 9:9-10** again, *...your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey...I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.* By coming this way, on a donkey acclaimed by disciples instead of on a war horse followed by an army, He's saying "I am coming to be your King, but I'm not coming to fight the Romans as you'd like; I'm not coming to bring war; I'm coming to bring peace and to extend that peace to all the nations of the earth!" How prophetic that would be, as we'll see in a moment!

So, what does all this mean for me. I wasn't there. Was it just an act of history that had meaning for that moment and now is over? I think not. There is a threefold:

III. The Meaning Of His Triumphal Entry First of all:

1. it symbolizes His whole first advent His coming to Jerusalem is, in one sense, a miniature of His coming to earth. It represents all that the Father was doing in sending His Son that first time. Look how John puts it in **John 1:9-14**.

a. He, the Creator, came in flesh to offer Himself to His own creation Just as Jesus, the true King, the true light, was coming into the city, to the Jews, so in the incarnation Jesus was coming into the world as the light. But what happened?

b. the majority rejected Him or only shallowly received Him The crowd was glad to shout hosanna today but had no real understanding. The Pharisees and religious leaders were utterly outraged by His entry and demanded that He rebuke His followers. And so it was that first time, He came to His own but His own world and His own people didn't recognize who He was and didn't receive Him. Oh, what a travesty! The King comes to His subjects and they don't want Him. The Creator comes to His creation and they don't want Him. But nevertheless:

c. a minority truly received Him and became children of God It was not wasted. His disciples did believe truly, did receive Him fully, and became God's children. And John takes us a step further. He says, "Here's what I saw: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we saw His glory, the very glory of Eternal God coming to His own creation! And I received it and I received Him and I became His child. And that is for all who receive Him, for all who will believe in His name, as many as receive Him become children of God." You see, in a very real way, what Jesus did by riding into Jerusalem:

2. it symbolizes the whole of the present church age All through this age ever since, He has been doing the same thing:

a. He is coming in His body, the Church, to the peoples of the world Then, He became incarnate in a body of flesh. Now, we are told that the Church, WE, are His body. He is incarnate in us; He lives out His life through us. He is the Head and we are the arms and feet. And as the Head He has directed us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel and wherever we go. He comes riding into town peaceably, telling people who have never heard of Him that He is the King through our lips, through our Hosannas of praise to Him, offering Himself peaceably as Lord! But what happens? Now as then:

b. the majority reject Him or only shallowly receive Him Nearly three billion people have still not had a chance to hear. He has not come to town through us yet where they live. Then, another two billion have heard but like those Jewish leaders have said "No! You are not the King. We do not believe! We have our own ways, our own religions, our own gods!" Then, another billion and a half have said, "Yes" and shouted Hosanna, but only to the prophet Jesus from Nazareth. They are "Christian" in the sense that they are not Jewish or Muslim or Hindu. They acclaim Christ as a historical figure, a visionary leader, an important teacher. We might broadly call them Christendom, but they do not receive Him as King of kings and Lord of lords in their own hearts! Yet, praise God that today, as then:

c. a minority receive Him and become His children A growing number, now increased from that handful of disciples to more than 600 million do receive Him as Savior and become Children of God. And it is those who are really a part of His kingdom. And then let me point out one last thing. That Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem:

3. it is a contrasting reminder of His second coming Jesus is going to come riding again and riding into Jerusalem again. Only this time it will be a different way. Look at **Rev. 19:11-16**:

a. He is coming the second time on a conqueror's horse, not a peaceful donkey. He is coming to judge the nations and fight His enemies and not one of them will stand before Him. The first time, His own world did not receive Him. Through all this age, by and large, His world did not receive Him. But:

b. He is coming the second time to enforce His Lordship and set up a Kingdom that will never be overthrown. And in that day the Lord, Jesus, will be King over all the earth and every knee shall bow!

Greg Fisher tells this story: *"What will he say when he shouts?" The question took me by surprise. I had already found that West African Bible College Students can ask some of the most penetrating questions about minute details of Scripture. "Reverend, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that Christ will descend from heaven with a loud command. I would like to know what that command will be." I wanted to leave the question unanswered, to tell him that we must not go past what Scripture has revealed, but my mind wandered to an encounter I had earlier in the day with a refugee from the Liberian civil war. The man, a high school principal, told me how he was apprehended by a two-man death squad. After several hours of terror, as the men described how they would torture and kill him, he narrowly escaped. After hiding in the bush for two days, he was able to find his family and escape to a neighboring country. The escape cost him dearly: two of his children lost their lives. The stark cruelty unleashed on an unsuspecting, undeserving population had touched me deeply. I also saw flashbacks of the beggars that I pass each morning on my way to the office. Every day I see how poverty destroys dignity, robs men of the best of what it means to be human, and sometimes substitutes the worst of what it means to be an animal. I am haunted by the vacant eyes of people who have lost all hope. "Reverend, you have not given me an answer. What will he say?" The question hadn't gone away. "Enough," I said, "He will shout, 'Enough!' when he returns." A look of surprise opened the face of the student. "What do you mean, enough?" "Enough suffering. Enough starvation. Enough terror. Enough death. Enough indignity. Enough lives trapped in hopelessness. Enough sickness and disease. Enough time. Enough!" When He comes next time, He will say "Enough of this" and opportunity will be over! But today He still comes gently and peacefully and patiently, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Aren't you glad that you're part of the crowd shouting Hosanna, but you mean it! You know who He is! Well, if you are, let Him ride gently and peaceably into the lives of others through you; declare His glory like the multitude did; tell them who He is and how important it is to receive Him. One day He will come on that white horse and shout "Enough" and it will be too late!*

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Rejection: His Divine Authority 11:12-12:12

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that donkey on Palm Sunday, He was declaring Himself Messiah and King of the Jews. After His resurrection He inflated that claim even further in *Mat. 28:18, Then Jesus came to [His disciples] and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* Put simply, it means, "I run the universe; I am Lord." The dictionary says that authority is *the right and the power to command, determine or judge*. That's a pretty good summary of the meaning of the Greek word too. It means the right to be in charge, to tell others what to do, to determine what is going to happen or to judge the performance of others. But it also includes the power to enforce the right. Unless you have the power to see that your command and determination is carried out, your right is pretty well useless! Jesus has both the right and the power to be Lord. What that authority means to you depends on whether you've accepted it or you are in the

process of rejecting it. And that is what the two incidents in our text today are about, His authority. They are addressed to two different groups of people with obviously different responses to His entry. First, we find:

I. His Authority Displayed To His Disciples (12-14, 20-26) Jesus and His disciples went back out of the city and spent Sunday night in the village of Bethany with friends. On the way back in on Monday morning Jesus:

1. He demonstrated the meaning of authority for them through a very peculiar event **(12-14)**. I've read several explanations of this, but in Palestine fig trees bear multiple crops of figs and have fruit on them about 10 months out of the year. In April at Passover time, leaves are an advertisement that fruit is either hanging or ripening on the tree (even though the first fig crop doesn't ripen until later) and Jesus went to look. But this particular tree was all advertisement and no production. It was a barren fig tree, a fruitless tree taking up space but yielding nothing. And so:

a. He gave a command concerning the fig tree In verse 21 Peter called it a curse. He gave a decree. "No one will ever eat from this tree again. I am Lord. By my authority I say so. It will be so." That's the sense of it. I'm sure the disciples didn't think very much of it and went on their way into town without giving it too much thought, that is, until the next morning when they passed by it again **(20-21)**. They were astonished; they were astounded. There stood the same fig tree they saw yesterday all green and leafy, now all brown and dead and dried up. And the lesson became obvious:

b. His power carried out His command Jesus' authority is such that when He talks, the universe listens, even trees! He is Lord and what He speaks with His mouth comes to pass by His power and it happens:

(1) in the intended timing If they'd come back a year later and seen the tree dead, the words would still have been fulfilled, but it would have been seen as a kind of natural act; a tree dies. But when Jesus said, "Go dry up!", He meant "Go dry up right now!" and the tree knew it. What He determines comes to pass exactly when He wants it! That's the kind of Lord He is. And it comes to pass:

(2) in thorough detail Notice that the tree was dried up from the roots. It wasn't just that the leaves turned brown or even fell off. The trunk was dead and the bark dry like an old dead tree. It was dead for good; no watering by the owner would bring it back. Jesus said "forever" and it happened forever! Down to the details.

Now why on earth did Jesus dry up that fig tree? Was He angry about not finding figs and took it out on the tree? Does He simply not care about our precious natural resources and kill trees like some whimsical kid in the woods with an ax in his hand? No, the tree gave its life for a purpose. It was a deliberately chosen act which Jesus designed to show His disciples the power behind His words, the authority He had. And why did He do it?

2. He demonstrated that authority to embolden our praying (22-26) Now Jesus teaches about praying. Sometimes we get caught up right away in what Jesus said next, and we skip what He said first, which is His major point:

a. we are to count on God's authority (22) - have faith in God Realize who you're dealing with here! God is not some half-powerful struggling being who may or may not be able to do what He'd like to do or says He'll do. If He says a fig tree is going to wither, it will wither. If He says that the Mt. of Olives will jump into the Mediterranean, it will jump! If Jesus says that the Gospel will be preached to all nations and then the end will come, the Gospel will be preached. He has the right to determine and decree what will happen and the absolute power to carry it out, the devil and all his angels notwithstanding! This is our God; this is our Savior. Trust Him and that will revolutionize your praying! Jesus said:

b. we are to believe that God will do what we ask (23-24) In every religion in the world, the worshippers come to their god half-hoping, half-wondering, half-pleading, trying somehow to persuade him through prayer and offerings or whatever to grant their requests. Jesus said, "Don't come like that! When you come to God, come knowing that God is for you, that He loves you, that you are His child and heir. Come knowing that He is able to do exceedingly abundantly far more than you can ask or think. When you come to God, come in faith. Come expecting Him to do what you ask; come fully confident of His ability to do it and expect it to be done! Trust Him! When you pray like that, trusting that you have received an answer, you receive it!" You need to come to God like Jesus did. At Lazarus' grave just a few days earlier He had said, *Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me but I said this for the benefit of the people...* Jesus knew that the Father always heard Him; He wouldn't even have mentioned it, except to encourage the bystanders! Then He cried, *Lazarus, come forth!* expecting that the Father would hear His cry and raise Lazarus. And a dead man got up and walked out! Jesus said, "That's not just for Me! That's for you! When you pray, do like I do; trust that the Father ALWAYS hears you! Trust His authority; trust His power. Believe that it is already done! That's how to come to the Father!" Boy, what a tremendous encouragement and promise! But the minute we hear that, the flesh wants to take over and try to make it mean something else. So let me issue some cautions:

(1) we need to trust His power, not our believing This often gets interpreted to mean that whether I get what I ask for depends on whether I have enough faith, on whether I believe hard enough. But that's not the point. In fact, one time when Jesus taught this, He even added that it only takes faith the size of a grain of mustard seed. It's not a matter of the quantity of faith; that makes faith some kind of good work you have to produce to get God

to do something for you and that's not true. We are to approach God believing, trusting His authority because of who He is and how much He loves us. The second caution is:

(2) we need to seek His will in what we ask Can I just walk around getting what I want with this, withering up fig trees whenever I please? No, and Jesus didn't do it either. He said, *I always do what pleases Him!* - John 8:29. The apostle John put it this way: **1 Jn. 5:14-15**. God is not about to let you become a spoiled kid who always gets what he wants on some whim! This promise works when we line ourselves up with His will. You see, He has the authority, the right to determine how things will be, not us! We are to line ourselves up under it, but once He makes clear what it is, we are to ask in faith and watch the mountains move! And finally, notice verse 25:

(3) we need to display His character in what we ask (25) His love and forgiveness and all the rest of it! We can't go around like the disciples wanted to, calling down lightning on our enemies! But when we line up our character with His, when the Spirit of God is bearing His fruit through us and our heart is as His heart, then we can pray in boldness and confidence expecting it to be done!

There is a primitive mountain tribe in Vietnam called the Churu people. Just a few years ago the Lord moved the hearts of some other national believers to reach them. Here's the story: *The witchdoctors among the Churu have a lot of demonic power All the village people live in fear of them. If a witch doctor decides to curse someone who isn't a Christian then there is no way that person can survive... Because of the power and intimidation of the witchdoctors, the Churu have lived in fear and bondage for centuries. They are also trapped in poverty because of these evil men. Whenever something goes wrong such as a sickness or a poor harvest, the family are forced to consult the witchdoctor [and] the remedies are never cheap, whether they demand the sacrificing of valuable livestock as offerings to the evil spirits or simply the paying of a fee for weddings, funerals, etc. After we started sharing the Gospel, the witch doctor in the village stirred up the people against our message. We told them not to listen. The main symbol of the witch doctor's spiritual authority was a huge wild pig's tooth which he wore on a chain around his neck. The tooth is passed from one generation to another as a sign of authority. The witch doctor came to us and said, "If your God can make this tooth catch on fire, then we will believe in Him, but if it does not, we will kill you all right here!" As you can imagine, we prayed very fervently and cried out to the Lord! Hundreds of Churu gathered around us to see what would happen. After praying for some time, suddenly the pig's tooth burst into flames by itself!! The whole village saw it and were amazed. After that, many believed the message of Jesus Christ. Today we have a church of more than 300 people among the Churu.* My friend, God hasn't changed and the promise still stands! Pray according to His will but trust God when you pray; trust that He has both the right and the power to do what He wants to do, no matter what the odds against it! Now, this would be a great place to end this sermon, but Jesus displayed His authority one more time that day and this time we see:

II. His Authority Displayed To His Enemies (15-19, 27-33) And the place He chose to do it was at the Temple. Herod's Temple had various courts. The largest and outermost court was the court of the Gentiles; no non-Jew could go any further than there to worship. But the High Priest had authorized a market to be set up there for the sale of ritually pure items for sacrifice, such as wine, oil, salt, and approved sacrificial animals and birds. Also, the temple tax had to be paid in Jewish money, so money changers set up booths to exchange Greek and Roman coins, for a small percentage, of course. Plus, the Temple was pretty big (500 yards x 300 yards) and if you were passing from one section of the city to the other or out to the Mt. of Olives, it was a long way to go out around it; it was a whole lot easier to cut through the outer court! So, there was traffic passing through, even merchandise being carried by, all the time. It was here that Jesus:

1. He demonstrated His possession of authority

a. by clearing the Temple courts (15-16) He did not lose His temper. He deliberately (see verse 11) entered and began to chase out the merchants and people passing through. He overturned their tables and shooed their animals out. He deliberately defied the Jewish authority that had given them permission to be there. This was a big area and the process took a while but even as He was doing it, He taught the people:

b. by declaring God's desire for the Gentiles (17) He quoted Is. 56:6-7, *And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant-- these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.* This great court was to be a place of worship, a place where the peoples of the earth could come and fall before the God of Israel in praise. But then He quotes Jer. 7:11, *Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!* declares the LORD. He took Jehovah's prerogative and cleansed His house so that the despised peoples of the earth could worship there. That's His heart but it really boiled the blood of the Jewish leaders.

2. they denied His possession of authority in two ways:

a. they plotted against Him privately (18-19) They hated Him for claiming authority over them. They plotted to kill Him, but yet were afraid of Him because of His popularity. So, the next day:

b. they challenged Him publicly (27-33) and brought:

(1) their accusation: you have no authority (27-28) The Sanhedrin didn't tell you that you could do this; the elders didn't tell you that you could do this; the High Priest didn't tell you that you could do this. By whose authority did you defy us and clear the courts and who gave you this authority? But here's:

(2) Jesus' reply: My authority is like that of John (29-33) We usually focus on how He silenced them by His counterquestion and that was masterful, but the point is "My authority, like John's, was the very authority of God Himself! I have Divine Authority; I don't need yours! I don't have to tell you Whose authority it is; you know very well!" So even though they badly wanted to, they could not in that moment find a way to defy the authority He had claimed for Himself.

Now there is a lesson here in both of these events that we need to take home with us:

III. The Lesson: You Cannot Ultimately Defy His Authority! You can protest it and disclaim it verbally, but the bottom line is that whether you're talking about a small fig tree or an entire nation, ultimately what He decrees, goes.

1. it was true in the life of Israel

a. He displayed it in the picture of the withering of the fig tree The fig tree was the national symbol of Israel. Israel had all these leaves on it, a Temple, pious and devout religion, sacrifices and so on. But Jesus came looking for fruit, looking for a heart response of love to God, and found none. It was Israel's last chance. He declared that she would now wither and dry up from God's purposes. In case you think I'm reading in, just look at what He said to the leaders after their challenge to Him:

b. He declared it in the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1-12) Jesus made it plain and they understood that God was done with them and was rejecting them. 40 years later the Roman armies burned Jerusalem to the ground and destroyed the Temple and scattered that whole generation abroad. Why? Jesus had said so and it came to pass. They could deny it, but they couldn't escape it. History is the witness. And the same lesson:

2. it is true in our lives today He is Lord! What He says will be, will be! You can try to defy it and reject it but you can't escape it. You can deny it, but it is not lessened. You can deceive yourself and think all your life that you're making your own way and shaping your own future, but He's still in charge and one day you'll stand before Him as Judge. How much better it is to be His child and seek His will and surrender to it and pray for it to be done and trust His Divine authority as His will unfolds before your very eyes!

Once when George Mueller, the renowned man of prayer was crossing the Atlantic, the ship ran into a fog. He said to the captain, "I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon." "Impossible!" said the Captain. "Very well," said Mueller, "If your ship can't take me, God will find another way." "I'd help if I could, but I can't, said the Captain. "Let's go to the chartroom and pray," said Mueller. "Do you know how dense the fog is?", asked the Captain. "No" was Mueller's answer, "My eye is not on the density of the fog but on the living God who controls every circumstance of my life." Mueller prayed, "O Lord, if it is consistent with Thy will, please remove the fog in five minutes." The Captain was about to pray after he finished, but Mueller tapped him and said, "First, you do not believe He will, and second, I believe He has, so there is no need for you to pray about it. Get up and open the door. You will find the fog gone." The Captain opened the door. The fog had disappeared! He is Lord, my friend! Trust Him!

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Rejection: His Unassailable Wisdom 12:13-44

It was Tuesday of Passion Week and Jesus already had the blood of the Jewish leaders boiling. On Sunday He had ridden into town with His disciples proclaiming Him King and Messiah. On Monday He had declared His authority by single-handedly clearing the Temple's outer court. First thing Tuesday morning, when they challenged Him, He told them a parable that said God was going to kill them and give His vineyard to somebody else (the Gentiles!). You can imagine how hot they were. So, they now set upon a course of trying to discredit Him and His teaching before the crowds in the Temple, and began to send to Him a string of experts from various groups to try to trap Him in His words and discredit Him, or to get Him to say something which would form the basis of a charge against Him. But 750 years earlier God had made a prediction through the Prophet Isaiah, *The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish."* - Is. 29:13-14. Jesus had astounded the nation with His power through miracles; now He would destroy the wisdom of its finest through His unassailable wisdom as God. Each case became an opportunity for Jesus to display His Divine wisdom, His omniscience. The world then, as now, is filled with people who believe that they know more than God, that they have developed a right way of doing life, that their understanding and their belief and the way they do things is superior. Yet in the end, the wisdom of God still shatters all human wisdom, no matter from which direction it comes. First of all:

I. It Silences The Opportunists: *The Herodians* (13-17) The Herodians were a political party among the Jews, not a religious group. They favored the rule of Rome over the Jews and supported the Rome-appointed leader, Herod! Any talk about the "Kingdom of God" or "King of the Jews" would inflame them; they did not favor an independent Israel. Why not? Because they believed that no one could defeat the mighty power of Rome and they were afraid that any disturbance would bring that power smashing down on Israel. Their wisdom might be summed up like this, *Always side with the winner!* The guy with the most power is always right! They needed to silence Jesus and so they joined ranks with the Pharisees and came to Him with:

1. their deceitful question: *Should we pay taxes to Caesar?* (13-15) While they buttered Him up, saying He always told the truth without regard for people or consequences (which, by the way, was the opposite of what THEY did), they were really trying to trap Him. Luke tells us they were spies sent to get him to say something for which He could be arrested. And so, they asked Him whether it was right to pay taxes to Rome or not. Can a Jew who only acknowledges Jehovah God as his true sovereign, acknowledge a heathen, pagan government and its emperor-god by paying tribute to it? Now, of course, if He says NO, they have a charge of treason to accuse him of. In fact, they accused Him to Pilate of saying it anyway, according to Lk. 23:2. But if He says YES, then it would seem that He is not much of a Messiah and that He is denying that the promised Kingdom will indeed come when the Lord will be king over all the earth and the nations will bow to Him! One way or the other, they think they have Him, but look at:

2. His wise answer: *Give to God what belongs to Him!* (16-17) He asked for a coin which, of course, had the Emperor's picture on it and said, in effect, "It has his picture and writing on it; he obviously made it; it obviously belongs to him and you are using it by his permission and he has a right to demand that you give it to him! But what's really important is that you be careful to give God what belongs to Him! Give Caesar the coin; pay your taxes. But give God your worship, obedience and ultimate loyalty which belongs to Him alone." What a masterful reply! You see, they had done the opposite; they had given Caesar their ultimate loyalty because of his earthly power instead of God! They voted for what looked like the sure winner! But 40 years later Rome turned on them and smashed their nation. I'm sure they didn't feel so wise then! Always rooting for the winner isn't really so wise a course. If it were me, I'd always root for God, even if it looks like He's the underdog! They went away shaking their heads and marveling at Him and how He saw their trap and His wisdom in evading it.

But, before we go off pointing the finger at them and feeling good about ourselves, are there not times in our own lives when we are at least tempted to seek first the kingdom of man in order to add all these things to ourselves, instead of seeking first the Kingdom of God and letting Him take care of it? Are there not times when we give the allegiance that belongs to God to something or someone else, times when we choose what our job and our boss commands over what we know God wants, because if we do it His way, we'll lose it? Times when we yield to what a person demands, even sometimes our spouse, instead of choosing what we know God wants because we fear the consequences? Give God what belongs to Him, that first place, that ultimate loyalty that chooses Him, no matter what. That's true wisdom, not the other. Oh, and by the way, pay your taxes. Jesus said so! Now Jesus went on and His Wisdom:

II. It Silences The Rationalists: *The Sadducees* (18-27) The Sadducees were a sect of religious liberals. They, in a kind of general way, believed God runs the universe and thought religion was a good thing to cultivate human behavior, but they denied any kind of life after death, the existence of angels and especially the resurrection of the dead, which was the cornerstone of Pharisaic belief! They were rationalists; their wisdom said, "I believe what I can see and understand. Reason is ultimate and faith must bow to it." There's a lot of folks around today just like them. But they came to Jesus with:

1. their mocking question: *How could there be a resurrection?* (18-23) Now, they didn't believe in a resurrection in the first place, so it seems to me that they were being ultimately ridiculous. Here's a woman who's been widowed seven times. Who will she be married to in the resurrection? Do you know any woman that's been widowed seven times? In my book, they're being ridiculous, mocking the resurrection, saying, "Look how ridiculous it is to believe in a resurrection of the dead! Anybody that had been remarried won't know who to be married to! There can't really be a resurrection! When you're dead, you're dead and that's it!" But look at:

2. His wise answer: (24-27) He said two things:

a. *You don't know the Scriptures: they declare a resurrection*, but not the way you're talking about it. They didn't really study the Scriptures to find out what they taught. They just assumed that the Scriptures teach that the next life is a material one like this one where we marry and so on. But that's not so. We will be primarily spiritual and our existence will be of a whole different sort. Marriage matters here on earth; in heaven it's a whole new ball game, a whole new order. But they just set up a straw man that was easy to knock down. Most rationalists do. They don't study the Bible, so they quote a few things they've heard that it teaches and proceed to knock them down in order to make themselves look wise. One of our youth was telling me how his college professor does this all the time, saying to the class, "The Bible teaches this...look how ridiculous!" and leads students to disbelieve and be prejudiced against what they haven't even studied! Jesus called their ignorance of the Scriptures and then said:

b. *You don't realize the power of God:* You start with the premise that there is no supernatural God who can do supernatural things. You deny His power. But only four days earlier, Jesus had shouted to a corpse that was dead

for four days to get up and he did! Lazarus was still walking around Jerusalem as living proof of the power of resurrection and the whole city knew it! God talks about dead people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the present tense. He didn't say, "I used to be their God, but I AM their God!" He still is their God because they're still alive. And Luke adds a phrase, **for all live to Him - Lk. 20:37-38**. There is no such thing as dead and gone! Beyond the grave you live! God says so. It's just a question of where!

I was sitting in a seminary lobby one day when an older Korean man who was a pastor came in. He had just taken a man for a dialysis treatment and was so sad. He said, "I feel so bad. I have no words for him, no hope to give him." When I suggested, "What about helping Him to focus on the hope of heaven?", the man looked at me and said, "You mean you believe in a literal heaven with palm trees and all that?" I said, "Well I don't know about palm trees but yes, it's real and literal and those who know Christ are going there to enjoy it." And sadly, he said, "But I can't believe that..." Why couldn't he? Because reason had become a god to him; he couldn't believe what he couldn't see. So many around us are like that. Some of them are our relatives and loved ones! They don't know what the Scriptures teach and they've never experienced the power of God. How sad that they will choose their own wisdom over His. All we can do is be honest with them about how badly mistaken they are! Well, Jesus went on and His wisdom:

III. It Silences The Religionists: The Pharisees (28-40) Now, the Pharisees were the experts in religion and the law of Moses. They knew every jot and tittle and were careful to tithe, even the herbs in their gardens. They knew how far you could travel on the Sabbath and carefully washed their hands before eating, all so they would be seen as righteous before God and earn His favor. Their wisdom was, "Just do it right; do it better than everybody else and God will love you." Oh, how many people around us have become practitioners of religion, have bought that same piece of earthly wisdom and become devout in praying, in going to services, in carrying out religious duties. To these folks the commandments were everything and so one of them approached Jesus with:

1. their controversial question: Which is the greatest commandment? (28) Matthew tells us that this guy didn't just happen by; he was sent as an expert in the law with all of its 614 commandments. There was much debate on this subject. When you've got 614 to keep, it's hard to remember the list, and if you're going to fail, you'd like to overlook the least important things, so the issue of what are the most important duties to God is an important one and they wanted to engage Him in an argument. But note:

2. His wise answer: Love the Lord with all your heart... (29-34) Jesus summed up the whole point of the Law in two simple phrases, "Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself." That's what the law was really all about! How could you argue with that? And look what a profound effect it had. The expert had to concede. In fact, he very nearly became a follower of Jesus; Jesus said, "You're not far from the Kingdom"; all he had to do was acknowledge the King! But then, to put this whole attempt to contest His knowledge of the Scriptures to rest, Jesus turned around and posed:

3. His unanswerable question to them (35-37) You want to debate the Scriptures? Check out Ps. 110:1. How can the Messiah be David's Son and His Lord at the same time? Figure that one out! Well, we know the answer; it's in **Rom. 1:3-4**, *...regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. As to His humanity, He was of David's line; but He was in reality the eternal Son of God who came into the world and took that humanity and proved it by the resurrection from the dead! But they didn't know the answer and left Him in silence! Whereupon He turned to the crowd and issued:*

4. His warning about them: It's religion without reality! (38-40) "These Pharisees have a religion they practice, but it has no reality. It doesn't change their hearts. They keep commands but their hearts are filled with pride and greed! They live for recognition and for acquisition, even though they stand publicly and pray lengthy prayers!"

Jesus knew that no amount of religion can change the heart! No amount of doing to impress God will change the inside. Unless you first learn to love God with all your heart and let your obedience and actions flow out of that love, your religion has no reality! And Jesus' Wisdom can tell the difference:

IV. It Recognizes The Real: The Poor Widow (41-44) All the rich people, all the leaders, all the religious folks with the Pharisaic dress, passed by the Temple offering box. Some threw in huge amounts. But that one poor widow, Jesus singled out and made her an example to His disciples. She threw in two of the smallest coins then circulated, two small brass or copper coins called *lepta*. Each was worth 1/64 of a *denarius* or a day's wage. So, in equivalence to today, she put in two dollar bills compared to the 50's and 100's that others were throwing in. It wasn't much by comparison, but Jesus in His Wisdom:

1. He knows the circumstances He knew that it was all that she had, everything she had to live on. She had nothing left to buy food with, nothing left to purchase the necessities of life. She gave it all to God. Jesus knew that and, not only does He know our circumstances, but:

2. He knows the heart He knew that she could have at least kept back one to buy supper, but she sacrificed it all. And to Him, that heart attitude, that willingness to give all to Him, was worth more than all the thousands of dollars that others gave out of their spare change.

You see, Jesus is not interested in religion, in performance for God to get something from God. He's interested in reality, in a heart that loves Him so much that it's willing to give everything to Him. And He knows the difference. Man looks on the outward appearance, but His omniscience sees the heart. He sees right through religion. And some of us may be caught in that same trap today. We're practicing religion; we're going to church and Sunday school, singing hymns, praying, giving money, carefully watching our speech and our habits of life, all because we think these things will cause us to be accepted by God. But we have never given our hearts to Christ and received Him in love and gratefulness for providing our salvation for us on the cross once and for all; we're too busy trying to get it ourselves. Know that He sees right through it. He wants to give you a new heart, not for you to give Him behavior! Come to Him and let Him! And then, even some of us who have done that, who've received Christ, can still fall back into that trap. We can let the Christian life become a regimen of obedience, a set of actions, instead of the response of a heart that is in love with Jesus. I was like that at a point or two and some days I still am. I do all the expected things; I practice my religion, but not out of the love in my heart for Christ. I live a self-life instead of a Christ-life. And Jesus is wise enough to see and know the difference. A.B. Simpson found that in his life too and wrote these words to a hymn:

*Once it was the blessing, Now it is the Lord
Once it was the feeling, Now it is His Word;
Once His gift I wanted, Now, the Giver own;
Once I sought for healing, Now Himself alone.*

*Once 'twas painful trying, Now 'tis perfect trust;
Once a half salvation, Now the uttermost;
Once 'twas ceaseless holding, Now He holds me fast;
Once 'twas constant drifting, Now my anchor's cast.*

*Once 'twas busy planning, Now 'tis trustful prayer;
Once 'twas anxious caring, Now He has the care;
Once 'twas what I wanted, Now what Jesus says;
Once 'twas constant asking, Now 'tis ceaseless praise.*

*Once it was my working, His it hence shall be;
Once I tried to use Him, Now He uses me;
Once the pow'r I wanted, Now the Mighty One;
Once for self, I labored, Now for him alone.*

*Once I hoped in Jesus, Now I know He's mine;
Once my lamps were dying, Now they brightly shine;
Once for death I wanted, Now His coming hail,
And my hopes are anchored safe within the veil.*

*Chorus: All in all forever, Jesus will I sing;
Ev'rything in Jesus, And Jesus ev'ry thing.*

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Rejection: His Triumphant Return Ch. 13

Jesus had already spoken to His disciples on a number of occasions about the concept of a "Coming" of Himself and His Kingdom, an entry and arrival. He taught them parable after parable that said this age would have an ending and it would end with His coming in glory with the angels and the destruction of the wicked. Many months earlier He had said, *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.* - Mark 8:38. And then He had taken a few of them up on the Mount of Transfiguration and shown them His glory. He had taught them to expect a glorious arrival of His Kingdom. And I'm sure that the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem had their minds wondering, "Is this the beginning of it? When will it happen?" As they were walking out of Jerusalem that Tuesday evening of Passion Week after a long day, one of them began to gloat and marvel over the beauty of the Temple with its magnificent and massive stones. It was huge, 300 X 500 yards of walls and structures, all of white stone, gleaming brilliantly in the setting sun. Some of these stones survive today and measure from twenty to forty feet long and weigh a hundred tons. Any of us would marvel that they could be quarried and carried and fitted without iron tools, and would feel that they would last forever. Let's see what Jesus said:

I. The Universal Question Of The Disciples: *How Will We Know When?* (1-4) "These huge stones will be all knocked down like so many dominoes!" It was a statement designed to blow their socks off and make them think. Immediately they related it to this concept of His coming and the end of the age. And they asked what has become the universal heart cry of followers of Jesus ever since, "When will it be? When will this great coming occur? When will all these future things you've predicted happen?" And more specifically, "How will we know when? What will be the sign that shows us that it is near? What is that thing that will tell us that your arrival is at the door and the age is almost over?" Isn't that what you'd like to know? How many sermons have you heard in your life on the idea of the "Signs of the Times"? How many prophetic teachers have you heard talking about things like the "sign" of the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 and detailing current events that sound just like some of the things that the Scripture describes in the end time? Well, it is interesting to note, that Jesus began to answer their question by talking about:

II. The Things Which Are NOT Signs Of Christ's Return (5-13) Throughout the centuries, well-meaning people of faith who lived through times of immense upheaval and catastrophe have wanted to take these things as signs of the end, and Jesus specifically warned His disciples against that. Instead, He taught that:

1. these things will characterize the entire age until He comes. For instance, He said that:

a. false teachers are *not* the sign (5-6) Jesus warned that there will be many who will claim to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior and deliverer. The Jews had many, each one trying to gather followers and lead a rebellion. Acts 5 mentions a guy named Theudas, who promised to divide the River Jordan, and Judas of Galilee, who led a large sect of people to revolt. Paul was mistaken in Acts 21 for a well-known Egyptian who led a band into the desert, promising signs and wonders and that the walls of Jerusalem would fall down. The best known came a hundred years later when a man called Bar Cochba, "son of a star", was proclaimed Messiah and led such a huge revolt that the full power of Rome was brought to bear against it and Jerusalem was made into a Roman colony where no Jew was allowed to enter! And it has continued through the centuries, whether it was Joseph Smith and his Mormons, or Emmanuel Swedenborg who claimed that Christ's second coming was in his own writings and established the Church of the New Jerusalem right here in Bryn Athyn, or Rev. Moon whose followers believe he is their messiah. Jesus said, "No matter how bad it gets, no matter how many of them there are, even if there is one who deceives the whole world, don't be fooled. This is not the sign. This is the nature of the age. Paul declared, *...evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.* - 2 Tim. 3:13. And then know this:

b. wars are *not* the sign (7-8a) Arthur Koestler said, *The most persistent sound which reverberates through man's history is the beating of war drums.* This century alone has seen two world wars, the first of which was supposed to "end all wars", plus Korea and Vietnam. This past year has seen war in Liberia, in Bosnia, in Afghanistan, in Zaire and, on a smaller scale, in a host of other places. Countries fighting other countries; peoples within a country fighting one another. This has been the course of history. Jesus said, "No matter how large the scale, no matter how many die, no matter how hopeless it looks for the world, that is not the sign! It is the nature of the age, the way history will be until I come!" And further:

c. natural disasters are *not* the sign (8b) Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tidal waves, mudslides, famines where thousands die of starvation, all these things seem like the end of the world and they are, for the people caught in them! But they are not the sign! You can't tell when His coming will be by monitoring them! They are the character of history. It is filled with disasters; it's just that we learn about them faster today! How many times have prophetic speakers cited the frequency of natural disasters as a sign that He must come soon? Jesus said, "That's not the sign!" and further:

d. persecution is *not* the sign (9-13) "Church, here's your future. Here's your history. Expect persecution. Expect it everywhere. Expect to be hated and to suffer." And that has been the history of Christianity. It began almost immediately in Jerusalem and went large scale worldwide within 30 years and got worse! Everybody from Nero through Hitler has tried to eradicate believers in Jesus Christ, including the governments of many major countries, even today. One might reason that, at the time when persecution seems the fiercest, that Jesus would intervene to save His children, but He said, "That's not the sign. That's the character of the entire age until I come! Don't read this as the sign of my coming but stay faithful! Trust Me for what to say. I want to use it!" And then let me cautiously point out that:

e. preaching to all nations is *not* the sign (10) Some mission speakers imply that when we get the job of preaching the gospel to every people done so that everyone can hear, then Jesus will immediately return. But in itself, that's not the sign. It's the character of the age UNTIL He comes. He told us to go to all peoples and preach the Gospel; He let us know He's going to accomplish that task in the midst of all the tragedy and persecution the world can dish out. It must be accomplished BEFORE the end of this age but it, in itself, is not a sign that can be read as a time indicator. None of these are. In fact:

2. all of these will characterize the 7 year Tribulation Period at its end There will come a moment when Jesus appears in the air to Rapture out His church and this age will enter its last phase, a period of seven years foretold by Daniel and called the Tribulation Period. And, for as bad as we think things have been at various times in history, that period will be worse. These verses can be read as Jesus' description of the tribulation period. They correspond exactly with the first five seals of **Rev. 6**, if you care to check it out! During that period:

a. there will be a global deceiver (5-6) - Rev. 6:1-2

b. there will be global war (7-8a) - Rev. 6:3-4

c. there will be global famine (8b) - Rev. 6:5-6

d. there will be global disaster and death (8b) - Rev. 6:7-8

e. there will be global persecution (9, 11-13) - Rev. 6:9-11

f. there will be global proclamation (10) done by angelic means as described in **Rev. 14:6-7**, even if the church hadn't gotten the job done first! The key is in verse 8. All these things are only the beginning of the world's labor pains. And you know about labor pains, don't you? They get worse! In the tribulation period the world's labor pains will escalate to hard labor!

There is only one thing Jesus said that men could look for, one event that can be used as a timetable event that will mark the nearness of His return.

III. The True Sign Of Christ's Return (14-27) and that is this:

1. there will be an unmistakable desecration of the Temple (14a) It was predicted by Daniel the prophet in **Dan. 9:27**. After the time of Messiah's death in verse 26 and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and an intervening period of war and desolation, when the age is finally coming to its end, a king, a world leader will set up something abominable in God's rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Fortunately, we are not left to wonder about what that will be, but we have it described for us in detail in the New Testament in **2 Thes. 2:3-4**. Now how will he do that? **Rev. 13:14-15**. This man, this antichrist, this world leader, will put up his own statue in God's Temple and declare Himself to be God Almighty and demand that the world worship Him. When you see God's temple standing rebuilt where the Dome of the Rock mosque sits today, and you see a world-renowned military leader erect his statue in it and proclaim Himself God, then you've seen the sign. It hasn't happened in the 2000 years since Jesus spoke this. But when it does:

2. it will trigger the flight of Israel (14b-18) The Jews will flee with all haste from the city into the wilderness. **Rev. 12** tells us that God will protect them there, even though Satan and his Antichrist try to eradicate them. And:

3. it will begin the time (3 1/2 years) of Great Tribulation (19-20) That sign will be in the middle of the final 7 years and will begin the final 3 1/2 years of horrible suffering by the human race which we call the Great Tribulation, a time unparalleled by anything in the whole of history. If you think Hitler's Germany was bad, this leader and his tactics will be worse! If you think the disasters and famines and human suffering of history is bad, there will be more of it in 3 1/2 years than in all the 2000 behind us today! People will not die by the thousands but by the billions in this carnage. God's wrath will be poured out on a bankrupt human race. One fourth of the world, or if it were today, almost 2 billion people die from the natural catastrophes of the first part and another 1/3 or 2.5 billion die from the deliberate annihilation of this second half, the Great Tribulation. Jesus spoke truthfully that if God hadn't cut it short and put a limit on it, the human race would not survive! But on top of that:

4. it will be a time of diabolical deception (21-23) even worse than before, with the false Christ doing Satanic miracles and signs and wonders to prove his deity. But:

5. it will close with unmistakable celestial signs (24-25) We're not talking about comets passing by or shooting stars or about planets lining up. We're talking about the shaking of the entire heavens, the darkening of the sun on one side and the moon on the other and the whole world being lit up by one thing.

6. it will end with the glorious visible return of Christ (26-27) That's His coming. All the angels of heaven behind Him and all the saints in glory with Him. There will be no mistaking it; no one will need a telescope to see it. And there will certainly be no opposing it! Jesus Christ will come again to this earth and that's what it will look like and then this age will end. It will be over and done.

Now all this is very exciting and we could take months just to study all the details of Bible prophecy which relate to all these events. We are so blessed to have so much information about it. But Jesus was not concerned about that. He gave them only this brief outline, which took Him probably only a fraction as long to say as it did me to talk about it. What was important to Him and what should be to us is:

IV. The Application Of This Truth To Ourselves (28-37) You see:

1. that future generation will anticipate the time with certainty (28-31) When you see the Temple desecrated (which you won't because you'll be raptured out first, if you're saved), that is, when those who are alive in that day see it, they can simply count off 3 1/2 years and mark the calendar. That generation can know when Jesus will return, the same way that when you see the leaves come out on the fig tree, you can count the weeks until summer. The genera-

tion that sees this will not die out, like all the rest have. It will see Jesus come. They can know; they can write it down. They will see the sign. It will come; it will happen; it is sure; it is His Word. They will be able to know with certainty when it is near, but guess what. Looking from our perspective:

2. we absolutely cannot know when that time will come (32-33) The Father has given no one, not the angels, not even Jesus at that moment, the date of His return. In Acts 1:6-7 the disciples asked again after the resurrection, ...*"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. God has reserved that knowledge for Himself; you do not know. When anybody sets a date, I don't care who they are, unless they see a man setting up his statue in the Temple, they're wrong! Don't listen to them! We cannot know. Nobody can until that day. However, here's the point:*

3. the certainty that it will come must impact our lives (34-37) Jesus is really teaching two things in this little parable:

a. we must live in a continual attitude of expectancy *An elderly lady decided to take a short railroad trip through an especially beautiful section of the country. It was to be her first experience of this kind, so she looked forward to it with great anticipation. After boarding the train, however, it took her quite a while to get settled. First, she couldn't find the right seat, then she spent a long time arranging and rearranging her baskets and parcels on the rack overhead. After they were finally in place, she took great pains to adjust the shade on the window until it was just right. When at last she was ready to sit back and enjoy the scenery, the conductor called out the name of her station and she had to get off the train. "Oh, my!" she lamented, "if I'd only known we would be here so soon, I wouldn't have wasted all my time fussing about those little things that really weren't important." Just think how it would have been if she'd thrown her things on the rack quickly and jumped into her seat gazing out the window. Her attitude is what ruined it; she forgot she was on a train swiftly moving to a destination. Get it? So many of us spend so much of our lives fussing and fooling with things that don't really matter and aren't why we're on the train, and by the time we figure out why God has us on the planet, our life is half gone! History is moving toward a finish. It will suddenly end; we don't know when. Our life is moving toward a finish. It will suddenly end; we don't know when. If we adopt a nonchalant attitude and forget the train is moving and there's only so much time to get the job done, it'll never get done. But the point here is not that we're to stare out the window watching for the Lord to come; it is that:*

b. we must carry out our assigned service with diligence because we know He's coming. We must live with purpose! Carry out the task He has given us of reaching the world, of touching lives with the Gospel, of making disciples, of seeing our friends and neighbors won. We don't want to live life spiritually asleep and get woke up later like Peter in the garden, who slept away his opportunity to labor with the Savior in prayer!

With a shining quarter, a tiny little boy went into a candy store. With the utmost seriousness, studying each assortment with deep thoughtfulness, he wandered from case to case. Tired of waiting, his mother called, "Hurry son, spend your quarter. We must be going." The child replied, "But Mama, I've got to spend it carefully; I only have one!" You too have only one life; how are you spending it? God has put you in a particular place in His house and given you a task. Get on with it! Don't look for signs; you know that He's coming and rather suddenly the time of opportunity will be all over.

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Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

V. The Sacrifice Of The Servant - Chs. 14-15

His Anointing 14:1-11

We come in the 14th chapter of Mark to a precious and wonderful scene, which appears to actually be a flashback that Mark and Matthew include here, to explain why on Tuesday night of Passion week, Judas went to the Jewish authorities and agreed to betray Jesus. John makes clear that this event actually took place in Bethany on the Friday evening before Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The scene is a dinner in the home of a man named Simon, who used to be a leper before Jesus healed him. The dinner was given in Jesus' honor. His good friends were there with the disciples; Martha was busy about serving dinner as usual, and his beloved friend Lazarus, whom He had already raised from the dead, was reclining at the table with him. Then suddenly, dear Mary appeared, the one who loved to sit at His feet and listen while everybody else was busy, and did something which instantly brought a hush over the entire group. It was an incredible, shocking action, even though it sounds so placid as we read it.

I. The Woman's Incredible Action (3) - John 12:1-3 Mary brought out a white stone flask made of alabaster, filled with an oily perfume and poured it on His head and then on His feet. Now what's so incredible about that? Well, our minds are 2000 years and half a world removed from the scene. To understand it you must see:

1. the preciousness of the nard Nard or spikenard was an oily perfume derived from the dried roots and stems of the nard plant. Let me share three things about it. First let me mention:

a. its beautiful fragrance Its fragrance filled the whole house, John reported. It had a beautiful smell. Solomon's bride was perfumed with spikenard. That was important to people who lived in a world that basically stank. They had no sewers except open ones. They had no showers and bathtubs and deodorants, nor washing machines and dryers or even a wardrobe full of clothes to change every day. Things that smelled good, that gave off a lasting good scent were rare and valuable and provided welcome and necessary relief in their world. Then, you should know of:

b. its extreme rarity The nard plant grew in India on the slopes of the Himalayas, not in the arid climate of Palestine. It was imported in stone jars or flasks made of alabaster and carried by traders across the hundreds of miles in between. It was not something the average person had nor perhaps had even seen, because of:

c. its tremendous cost This jar held 12 ounces in weight, or perhaps a pint in volume, of nard. Not very much. But we are told in verse 5 that it was worth more than a year's wages, literally more than 300 denarii. A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. Today that little flask would be worth the equivalent of \$40,000 or more. And everybody knew it and recognized it instantly. Where Mary had gotten it or why she had such a precious thing, is not told to us. It was far and away the most valuable thing she owned, undoubtedly worth far more than the house she kept it in. Perhaps she had saved all her life and purchased it to be used for her own burial. We don't know, but what's important is what she did with it: She poured it on her beloved Jesus to anoint Him. Now what does that mean?

2. the meaning of the act Well, first of all:

a. it was an act of highest honor The ancients tell us that, "An alabaster of nard was a present for a king" (Bruce). Herodotus says, "It was one of five presents sent [on one occasion] by Cambyses to the King of Ethiopia." To give such a precious thing to Jesus was an act of highest esteem and love and honor. It would be an acknowledgement of His exalted position in her eyes. But she did not give it to Him; she poured it out upon Him so that:

b. it was an act of complete sacrifice The stone flask had a very narrow neck shaped at the top like a closed rosebud, no doubt to prevent evaporation and spills. It was nearly sealed and could only be dispensed slowly. But Mary did not just pour on a few drops. She broke the neck of the flask off to open it larger. There was no turning back. She poured, not just a third or a half out, but all \$40,000 worth of it. It was completely and totally given to Him. And that:

c. it was an act of utmost devotion She anointed His head and then she poured the rest on His feet and she bowed down almost prostrate, as though she were a slave girl, and wiped His feet with her own hair. What is she saying? "I love you. I am your servant; you are my Lord. I give myself to you, everything I am and have. I keep nothing back for me. It is all yours. I belong to you!"

From that day to this, devoted followers of Jesus Christ have been doing the same thing, taking their most prized possessions, their houses and lands, their careers, their precious children and even their very lives and laying them at the feet of Jesus, saying "All that I am, all that I have is yours; You are Lord; I love you!" *During his reign, King Frederick William III of Prussia found himself in trouble. Wars had been costly, and in trying to build the nation, he was seriously short of finances. He couldn't disappoint his people, and to capitulate to the enemy was unthinkable. After careful reflection, he decided to ask the women of Prussia to bring their jewelry of gold and silver to be melted down for their country. For each ornament received, he determined to exchange a decoration of bronze or iron as a symbol of his gratitude. Each decoration would be inscribed, "I gave gold for iron, 1813." The response was overwhelming. And what's more, these women prized their gifts from the king more highly than their former jewelry. The reason, of course, is clear. The decorations were proof that they had sacrificed for their king. Indeed, it became unfashionable in Prussia to wear them as jewelry, and thus was established the Order of the Iron Cross. Members of the order wore no ornaments except a cross of iron for all to see, which said, "I've given everything I treasure to my king. Somehow, I think Mary was the founder of that order, the order of those who have given everything of value to their King, Jesus. But in that day, and I would dare say in this one, it was NOT fashionable to belong to that order! You can see that by:*

II. The Disciples' Immediate Objection (4-5) The hush of those few seconds of shock and surprise soon gave way to:

1. the harsh criticisms they raised The disciples, men who had left their jobs and families behind to follow Jesus, were appalled and they said so out loud. They rebuked Mary for what she had done. How odd! When somebody gives a little, somebody makes a small sacrifice for the Lord or for others, people clap, they applaud. They say, "Isn't that wonderful?" But when somebody gives everything, surrenders it all, they become instant critics. Why?

a. they counted giving it to Jesus as of no real value (4) The word *waste* is translated almost everywhere else as *destruction, perdition, perish*. They literally said, "You've destroyed this ointment! It was worth a fortune but now you've poured it all out and rubbed it on dirty feet and in hair and it's gone; it's destroyed!" It was as if she had taken a \$40,000 bale of money and lit it on fire and burnt it up, instead of spending it. Handing the flask to Jesus as a gift would have been alright, but not pouring it out upon Him, anointing him with it. Giving it to Him in the most direct

sense, not to keep and hoard, but to smell its fragrance as it was intended, that's useless. It has no value. Why? Because:

b. they counted value only in tangible earthly terms (5) You can see their mental calculators going. "\$30,000, maybe \$40,000. What we could have done with that? We could have fed the homeless in Philadelphia for an entire month! We could have put a missionary on the field in Kyrgyzstan for maybe two years with that money! We could have supported 50 national evangelists in India for a whole year. Oh, the things we could have done and now all we have to show for it is a house full of good smell that will last only until Jesus takes his next good bath." They counted value in terms of things they could touch and count and measure. What matters is the effect a thing produces, not the act of giving it. She didn't honor Jesus; she destroyed a valuable resource!

If you think that followers of Jesus won't criticize you harshly for acts of whole-hearted surrender like this one, think again. Good Christian parents and many others encourage kids to read their Bible and go to church and love Jesus, until one of them says, "I'm letting go of everything in my life for Jesus and moving to Indonesia or China to share His love with people who've never heard." "Now, let's not get too hasty about that; that's a pretty crazy idea; look at how God could use all those gifts and talents you have right over here..." A man gives up a successful career as a doctor or lawyer or businessman to give his life to the ministry of the Gospel and even Christians quietly say, "What a waste! He could be making so much money that he could give and help so many more!" Why is it that whenever anybody sells out lock, stock, and barrel to Jesus and lays everything they are and have at His feet, half the Christian world criticizes them for it, sometimes out loud, sometimes under their breath? Well, check out:

2. the underlying source of those objections - John 12:4-5 reveals to us:

a. the identity of the objector: It was **Judas** who had shouted out, who complained to Jesus, who was appalled, Judas who would a few days later betray Him. And it was he who got the others, at least some of them, to murmuring. Why? We also have:

b. the motive of the objector: self He didn't care about the poor. He was a thief, a person driven by greed. He was the treasurer of Jesus' little band who carried all the funds and, as the Living Bible puts it, he *often dipped into them for his own use!* He wasn't really thinking about the poor or about Jesus, but about himself. What about the others? They weren't thieves. They didn't plan to steal it or keep it for themselves. But they were thinking about what *they* could do with what was given *to Him!* How *their* goals and objectives could be accomplished by *His* means. Self. They looked right past the sacrifice this woman had made and the incredible act of love she had done. But if I put myself in their place, I think I really know why. It's because each of them looked at her and looked at themselves and felt shame, because they knew that they would never have done that. The reason even good believers object and criticize when somebody sells out all and all for Jesus is so very often because they are forced to look in the mirror and to know that they have not yet given everything they have to Him. And it is always easier to criticize than to repent. This incident and Jesus' rebuke which followed had a tremendous impact on Judas.

c. the reaction of the objector: rejection of Jesus (10-11) He sulked over that for several days. But that following Tuesday, after Jesus had publicly stood up and had the leaders so angry that they were plotting to kill him, look at **(1-2)**. He saw Jesus doing the same thing, giving His all, refusing to compromise, challenging the authorities, heading for death. And he said to himself, "I'm going to get something out of this..." and he went and sold out to the chief priests, rejected and turned his back on the Savior. Self can drive you pretty far, if it rules your life, if it's your bottom line. Anyway, back to our story. Jesus did not keep silent and after the disciples' objection we have:

III. The Savior's Incriminating Vindication (6-9) "Stop it! Let her alone! Quit thinking of yourselves!", Jesus said, and then He explained some principles we must never forget:

1. her act was done to Him and He saw the depth of her love (6) "I don't care about what you could have done. Look what SHE did. She gave me everything she had. It looks stupid to the world. It doesn't do you any good. But she did it directly to Me. This is a transaction of the heart, of love between her and I and I regard it as beautiful, wonderful, precious. The value of the act of her heart far exceeds the value of the ointment." You see:

2. love to Him is always more important than doing for Him (7) There will always be poor and sick and hurting people until the Kingdom comes and it is wonderful to want to help them. You can do it whenever you want; the opportunities are limitless. But at that moment, Jesus had only a week left to live on this earth. And He said, "I am more important than all of the good you can do! Loving me, adoring me, worshipping Me, surrendering all to Me, is what is most important. And even if you do feed 5000 hungry people, if you are not doing it UNTO ME, as an act of love for ME, as an act of laying everything you have at MY feet, it may be good, but it is not what I want. He said in **Mt. 25:40** that He, being... *The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."* That's how He always sees it. "What's the motive? Self or Me? Sure, you're doing good things, but are you loving Me or serving yourself. More important than all obedience is loving Me with all your heart! Her love is worth more to me than all the good that \$40,000 worth of oil would do!" So is yours! Then He mentioned this:

3. she did what was within her grasp to do (8a) Literally, "Me you won't always have; what this one had she did!" She was the only one who listened to what He'd been saying all along, "I'm going to die; I'm going to the cross; I'm going to be crucified! And it's going to be very soon." She was the only one that listened and believed Him, who took His words to heart. But there was not much she could do about it. She couldn't stop it; she couldn't prevent it; she couldn't do it for Him. She couldn't even go with Him and be there to hold Him as He died. But she could take her precious nard and anoint His body ahead of time for burial. You see:

4. she was fulfilling a Divine plan they refused to recognize (8b) They could envision more miracles, more multitudes fed, more sick healed. But a cross was not in their thinking. And so, they judged her for it being in hers. Look at **Jn. 12:7**. John's account supplies a thought... "*[It was intended] that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial*". God had a plan and her heart was responding to it in love, whether anybody else could see it or not. And that's what counts. Oh, there will be many times when we can't understand the reason for the sacrifices made by others, but God has a plan and we must stand in awe of the devotion of their hearts and imitate it. Jesus was so touched by what she did that:

5. her act of love was memorialized permanently by Jesus (9) 2000 years later and on the other side of the earth, we sit here this morning fulfilling Jesus' promise, remembering and honoring dear Mary, who shocked the disciples by boldly loving Him enough to give everything she had to Him and pour it out, holding nothing back.

In A Book of Saints, Anne Gordon tells the story of Father Maximilian Kolbe, who was a prisoner at Auschwitz in August 1941. One prisoner escaped from the camp, and in reprisal, the Nazis ordered that ten prisoners had to die by starvation. Father Kolbe offered to take the place of one of the condemned men. The Nazis kept Kolbe in the starvation bunker for two weeks and then put him to death by lethal injection on August 14, 1941. Thirty years later, a survivor of Auschwitz described the effect of Kolbe's action: "It was an enormous shock to the whole camp. We became aware that someone among us in this spiritual dark night of the soul was raising the standard of love on high. Someone unknown, like everyone else, tortured and bereft of name and social standing, went to a horrible death for the sake of someone not even related to him. Therefore, it is not true, we cried, that humanity is cast down and trampled in the mud, overcome by oppressors, and overwhelmed by hopelessness. Thousands of prisoners were convinced the true world continued to exist and that our torturers would not be able to destroy it. To say that Father Kolbe died for us or for that person's family is too great a simplification. His death was the salvation of thousands. ...We were stunned by his act, which became for us a mighty explosion of light in the dark camp." 2000 years ago, our Father in heaven took His most precious and valuable treasure, His only Son whom He loved, and He sent Him to earth to be broken and spilled out for you. He went to the cross unknown, like everyone else, tortured and bereft of name and social standing; He went to a horrible death for the sake of us who were not even related to him, to save millions and create an explosion of light in this dark world. Broken and spilled out; nothing held back for us. How can we do less for Him? The young missionary, Jim Elliott, who died impaled by the spear of an Aucas Indian on a sandbar in an Ecuadorian jungle in 1957 had this motto: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Whatever you think you can hang onto for self in this world, you can't keep anyway, not people, not possessions, not even life itself. But if you give it to Him, it can never be destroyed. The ointment was not wasted; it was not destroyed. Its fragrance has filled all this very house this morning. She was no fool who gave what she could not keep, to gain what she could not lose. Neither will you be if you make the same choice.

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Sacrifice: His Last supper 14:12-25

When Leonardo da Vinci painted his now famous painting, *The Last Supper*, on the wall in the dining room of the convent in Milan, Italy, the monks who lived there began to have many questions about his ability, and his integrity. They noticed that the picture was merely a copy of the dining area; the table, linen, even dishes used by the monks were identical to those he painted in the picture. Some monks thought da Vinci was taking advantage of his contract to paint this picture and were resentful of his long periods of inactivity, when he would stand for hours without touching his brush to the wall in front of him. When they asked da Vinci about this apparent inactivity, he replied, "When I pause the longest, I make my most telling strokes with my brush." No other event in the life of our Lord has been painted more often, but still, none can match the one painted by da Vinci nearly 500 years ago. Today we're coming to study that very event. We've heard the story of hundreds of times and our temptation is to pass lightly by it because it's old hat. But I don't want us to make the same mistake those monks did. I want us to see about Jesus what they should have seen about Da Vinci and his painting, that this whole event was painstakingly and carefully crafted with a purpose and that purpose was to include THEM in the event! The Last Supper was painstakingly and carefully crafted by our Lord for a purpose and that purpose was to include US in the event of His death. As they sat down to it, Luke tells us that literally, *...he said unto them, 'With desire [or passion] I did desire to eat this Passover with you before my suffering - Luke 22:15*. He looked forward to it intensely; He planned it with purpose. You can see that almost immediately in our text.

I. The Lord's Orchestration Of The Supper (12-16) The first thing you can notice, if you think about it is that:

1. He controlled the timing of His own death (12) Connect this with verse 11 which precedes it. Judas watched from Tuesday night on for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to the Jews. But Jesus didn't give him one until Thursday night, until the night when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. Why? To assure that He would be arrested and would die on Friday, on Passover to fulfill His role as the once-for-all sacrificial Lamb of God. None of the events of His life, and particularly His own death, was an accident. It was all carefully orchestrated by His own sovereign power. And that is displayed in detail here in that:

2. He predicted unlikely circumstances for the Supper (13-15) That Thursday morning the disciples knew they would have to celebrate the Passover, so they asked Him where they should make the preparations. He did not give them a straight answer. Instead, He sent two of them, Peter (who had the most zeal) and John (who had the most love) into Jerusalem and told them they would find there three very unusual things. First, they would meet as they arrived:

a. a man carrying a pitcher Now that was unusual because men did not normally carry earthen jars or pitchers of water from the well. That was for the women. So, a man carrying a jar would stand out in a crowd. But note that Jesus didn't say, "Go to a well and look for a man waiting with a jar," but "you'll see a man passing by..." The timing would be exactly at the moment they arrived. Then, they were not to speak to him, but simply to follow him to the house where he was headed and there they would find:

b. an owner willing to lend his house The man with the jar was a servant fetching water. But they approached the owner of the house and asked him what Jesus told them to say, "The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room..." Would you walk up to a stranger and talk to them that way, ask for the use of space in their house? Would you find someone willing to lend it? Well, I will admit that it was more likely then than now. This man evidently knew who Jesus was and was immediately willing to lend them his house. In fact, Jesus asked for, literally, my *kataluma*, the same Greek word for the inn where there was no room at His birth, an open place where strangers could stay. But the man did far better. He himself personally took them up on the roof and showed them:

c. a room furnished and ready It was laid with carpets and the table was there and the pillows or dining couches were there for reclining at the table. And not just settings for two or three, but to accommodate at least thirteen! How many people do you know that keep a spare large dining room set up for large groups? But this man did. He was anticipating guests. Now, these very things have caused many to say that Jesus must have made some kind of secret arrangement with this man earlier in the week which He did not tell the disciples about and arranged the sign of the servant carrying water, in order to keep Judas from knowing the whereabouts of the spot and planning an arrest there. But how would He have timed Peter and John's arrival to exactly meet the man passing by with the pitcher? I say, this is just like the previous Sunday morning when He sent the disciples to get the donkey for him to ride. It is so unlikely that it must be Divinely orchestrated.

3. the point is this: the controlling power of His word (16) Jesus is Lord and what He says comes to pass. He carefully picked the place, prepared the man's heart and planted the servant by His Divine control, not by some ordinary pre-arrangement. How can He do that? **Heb. 1:3**, *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining [or literally carrying] all things by his powerful word...* Jesus orchestrated, not only this Supper and their lives, but He orchestrates your life as well by His powerful Word. The Psalmist said, *My times [the events of my life] are in Your hands...* Your life is not a series of accidents or chance coincidences, or even a chain of causes and effects. It is a divinely orchestrated living drama carrying out His purpose and plan, whether you're aware of it or not. Oh, what a comfort that can be, to know that all this mess is in His hands, in His control. However, in those moments when it hurts and you're tempted to blame Him and criticize Him for allowing suffering in your life, just remember that He orchestrated His own life to include the cross for you!

Now there is much about the supper which Mark in his brief account does not include, so that makes it that much more important to note the things that he *does* include because they are important. The only thing he mentions about the actual meal time itself is:

II. The Lord's Identification Of The Traitor (17-21) Early on in the evening, as they were eating Jesus made a bold clear statement, *One of you will betray Me*, one who eats with me, one who is so close to Me, so intimately related to me that he shares in this supper with me and dips his hand in the same dish. John tells us that he himself was reclining next to Jesus at the table and whispered, "Lord, who is it?" and Jesus quietly said, "It is the one I give this piece of bread to" and He handed it to Judas. Matthew tells us that when Judas asked, like the rest, "Is it I?" Jesus said, "Yes, it is!" Judas knew that Jesus had singled him out and knew what he was up to. Now why did Jesus do this; why this announcement that there was a traitor at the table? For four reasons, I think:

1. it was an act which displayed mercy in warning Judas Jesus said, "This is not an accident; it is my plan to be betrayed and to die, but woe to the one who betrays me..." That's a warning. That's a, "Don't do it, Judas, even though I know you'll choose to!" It was an act of mercy, a final warning, a "stop now before it's too late". Jesus loved Judas, even though He knew his black heart and that he was not really a true follower like the rest. He warned him of the eternal punishment he would face and made his choice clear to him, yet still gave him the freedom to choose that path.

It was the plea of a loving Savior with His arms quietly outstretched to a sinner about to make a horrible choice. And I gather that it was nearly effective, because John tells us that at that moment Satan himself entered into Judas. He would not let go. He came and took away the good seed. He filled Judas' mind with lies, his emotions with anger and his will with determination. And immediately he jumped up from the table and left, as Jesus said, "What you do, do quickly!" Secondly:

2. it was an act which caused self-examination in the disciples They were all sad and sorrowful and asked one by one, "Is it I?" It caused every one of them to look into their own hearts. I think this was healthy. Paul told the Corinthians, *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?* - 2 Cor. 13:5. The ranks of the church through the ages have always contained those who, like Judas, had the right outward appearance, but whose hearts were not regenerated, who sprang up joyously upon hearing but had no root, and later fell away from Christ. Jesus did this for us too, so that we might heed His warning to make our salvation sure, so that we might make sure that we are not just playing church, not just saying "Lord, Lord..." with our mouths and going through motions of service to impress God, but that our hearts have been changed by the power of God and we belong to Him. How reassuring it is to be able to honestly look into your own heart and say with true confidence, "Yes, I do know Him, I do belong to Him; I am one of His." Thirdly:

3. it was an act which displayed foreknowledge Once again the disciples would shortly find everything just as He had said. Judas would come leading the mob and identify Jesus with a kiss. Jesus had made it plain at the Supper, *...But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'* [Psalm 41:9] *I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He.* - John 13:18-19. He carefully, carefully orchestrated and controlled everything relating to His death, so that the scriptures would be fulfilled and so that His disciples would look back and be convinced of His Deity. And so are we. Then finally:

4. it was an act which orchestrated the events of the evening

a. it moved Judas to leave, giving privacy with the eleven Jesus wanted this special time with His disciples desperately. These were important hours to prepare them for His leaving and He didn't want the traitor present. He wanted time with His true sheep. And also:

b. it set in motion the events leading to Jesus' arrest that night By the time Judas would gather his mob, Jesus would be in the garden and have had time to pray. They would arrive at exactly the right moment for His arrest. So He chose to put Judas to the test at exactly the right moment. He knew exactly what He was doing.

So, Judas left and then Mark records his final important thing:

III. The Lord's Institution Of The Ordinance (22-25) The meal they were eating was the traditional Passover meal with its lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread and cups of wine and all the ceremony that had evolved in Jewish tradition. We don't have time to look at it all, and neither does Mark. But in the course of that meal there were two particular:

1. the symbols Jesus invested with new meaning

a. the Passover bread becomes a symbol of His body He took the *matzoh*, the unleavened bread made without yeast, which was broken and shared and eaten during the meal. He gave thanks for it and broke it as usual, but before He passed it out, He elevated that bread to a whole new meaning by saying, *This is My body!* He didn't mean it literally, because His body was the thing holding it out to them. He meant, "This bread will now symbolize Me, my body, unleavened, sinless, broken, but most importantly, shared by all of you. Then, Luke tells us, He added, *Do this unto the remembrance of ME!* Likewise, a little later:

b. the Passover cup becomes a symbol of His blood The third common cup of wine which was shared at the table, He lifted to the Father and then said, *This is my blood...*, not literally for His blood was still in His veins. "The red color of this wine is a reminder, like the bread, of Me, of My blood which you will see shed tomorrow on the cross. It will remind you that I gave My life for you!"

And so began a new practice, a new command for the disciples to carry out, that would be a continual reminder of His body and blood, a new ordinance that we call the Lord's Supper or the Lord's Table or Communion. Since then, it has been fancied up and institutionalized and ceremonialized until it has almost lost the very genius of its original simplicity. There were five:

2. the lessons Jesus taught in the new ordinance, but to get them all, let's read the parallel account in **Mt. 26:26-29**, and also Paul's account in **1 Cor. 11:23-26**. Lesson #1:

a. the act of His death would incorporate all believers (for many) It's for you, you all eat it, you all drink of it. My broken body, my shed blood, my death, it is for you. It incorporates you! It incorporates many, all those who will believe. They are included in My death. Now what does that mean? Well, lesson #2 is:

b. the effect of His death is a new covenant (the remission of sins) between them and God. A covenant is a promise, a vow, an agreement offered by Almighty God. Every covenant was made with blood. The covenant of the

Passover was, "Kill the lamb and put the blood on the doorposts and when I see the blood, I will pass over you and you will not die like the Egyptians!" And in this case, the blood of Jesus was the blood of the lamb poured out unto God for the remission, the forgiveness, the sending away of sins! Those who are the participants in this covenant have their sins forgiven. They are justified, cleared of all guilt, pardoned completely, accepted before God as righteous, so that because of the blood of the Spotless lamb which has covered them, their judgment is passed over forever. He's saying, "My death is for you! It is your once-and-for-all, eternal Passover! *For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us - 1 Cor. 5:7.* Hallelujah! Now that brings us to lesson #3:

c. the thought of His death should move us to thanksgiving (eucharist) Jesus gave thanks for the bread and gave thanks for the cup. The Greek word is *eucharist* which became the name by which the ordinance was known, the Eucharist, the giving of thanks! It is not simply a sad remembering; it is a remembering with joy and thanksgiving that our Passover is sacrificed and we are free! As we take the bread our heart should cry, "Thank you Jesus for giving your body for me!" And as we take the cup, our heart should cry, "Thank you Jesus for giving your blood, your life, for me!" One of the saddest things I can think of is that so often, the Lord's Supper becomes simply a ritual that we observe and go through the motions, when it should be the Eucharist, the great time of thanksgiving! Now lesson #4 is that:

d. this reminder of His death should be repeated (till He comes) It was not simply for that night. He said, "Do this to remember Me." And Paul comments that as often as we do it, we display or remember again the Lord's death until He comes. The simple act of eating bread and drinking wine to remember Him should be repeated over and over so that none of us will ever forget what He has done for us. He doesn't say how often; He doesn't create a new law or a new ritual. He simply commands a perpetual reminder so that we will never forget. And the last lesson is the best of all:

e. the fact of His death guarantees the promised Kingdom (25) "Tonight is the last. I will not drink wine any more. But do not think that my death is the end. I make you a promise which will stand as surely as everything else I have said. I will one day drink this cup with you again, freshly squeezed, in the Kingdom I have promised! I promise you that we will celebrate together there. My death is the guarantee that the Kingdom will come to this earth. This is the truth; write it down! But until then, keep practicing this reminder so that you will not forget."

In 1958, a U.S. soldier wandered the streets of Berlin to see the sights. Despite the bustling new life in parts of the city, reminders remained of the destruction of World War II. Walking through a residential area one evening, across the cobblestone street he saw an open space edged with flowers. In the center stood the stone front of what had been a church. The building was no longer there, but the rubble had been cleared away in an attempt to fill the empty space with a little park. The former church's main door was shaped in a Gothic arch, and over it was carved into the stone in German: HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY. Jesus displayed that in preparing for the Supper, He displayed that in identifying the traitor, and He displayed that in a simple ordinance He commanded with bread and wine that we still keep 2000 years later, and every time we celebrate it, it cries out, "My Word will not pass away! I've included you in My death, in My covenant. You have received the remission of your sins and I will come and set up the Kingdom and we will drink it together for real. Count on it!"

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Sacrifice: His Surrender 14:26-42

It was already dark when Jesus and the disciples left the Upper Room and began their walk out of the City of Jerusalem that Thursday night. He had much to say to them. In fact, all of John 15-17 was spoken on that walk. He even stopped and prayed that great high priestly prayer of John 17 somewhere along the way. But Mark records nothing of all that. The only thing he points out for us from that discussion is:

I. The Self-Confidence Of The Disciples (26-31) As they began to walk, Jesus said something they didn't want to hear. He made a prediction:

1. Jesus' lasting prediction: you will ALL fail Now notice the difference from what He had spoken at supper. *ONE of you shall BETRAY ME...* "One will throw away his faith; one will become an apostate and forsake Me completely and forever. But *ALL of YOU will fall away.* The Greek word is *Be scandalized* and Matthew adds, *in Me.* The word means to stumble over the trigger of a trap or snare and be caught. What did He mean? He spells it out by quoting a prophecy from Zechariah which says:

a. they would all fail Him and scatter from Him that night They would not have the courage to stand by Him at His arrest. They would not have the guts to openly acclaim Him as their Master. They would leave Him and run away for a time. They would be caught in the snare, the trap of fear, and fail. And He would be the trigger of the trap over which they would stumble. In fact, Jesus predicted that:

b. Peter would personally deny Him three times before morning He would deny being His follower. He would say, "I don't know Him!" three times on that very night and swear to it, just after the wonderful intimate time of the Supper! Jesus would prove to be a stumbling block to him!

Now let me bring this a little closer to home. I think this was a lasting prediction that has stretched down through the ages. I think Jesus' word *all* is equally true for every disciple of Christ. You will ALL be scandalized in Me, if not tonight, then some night. We will all fail Him. If not today, then one day. We will all come to a place, a moment, a time, a situation when we act like what we're not. A moment when we choose sin and self, instead of the Savior, whether we're driven by fear or by greed or by pride. There will come a moment when you act like you don't know Him (whether the situation is big or little), when you hide the fact that you belong to Him, when you fail! And probably there will be many of them! Now, there are two ways to react to that news. The RIGHT way is to accept it as truth and fall at His feet continually, daily, to beg Him for grace and strength not to fail. It is to learn that you cannot live in your own strength; you need His. The WRONG way is the one the disciples took. Listen to their:

2. the disciples' loud protest: we will NOT fail Peter was the first to speak and very vehemently, "Not me! They might, but I never will! Why I'd die with you! I would never deny You!" But they all said the same thing and there's a whole lot of Christians just like them today who contemplate the sins of others and say, "I'd never do that; not I. Others might, but my love for the Savior is so great that I would never deny it that way!" Why did they respond like that? Well first of all:

a. they didn't know themselves They didn't think very deeply, and certainly never spent much time looking at themselves. Paul did. He had looked long and hard trying to figure out why he failed, no matter how hard he tried and here's his conclusion, *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.* - **Rom. 7:18**. Sin lives in my flesh and I am capable of anything. Nothing good at all lives in my flesh. If I am left to me, it is a foregone conclusion that I will fail. I, in myself, CANNOT carry it out, even though I want to! But the disciples had not yet looked that deeply at themselves and so they still:

b. they put their confidence in the flesh They still trusted in their own ability to perform; they thought they were pretty good disciples, followers who would die for their Master. They didn't trust His word, but their flesh. Paul learned better, *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh* - **Phil. 3:3**. That's where we need to stay; putting no confidence in the flesh. On my own, I will fail in every way imaginable, even the worst; I must cling to Him and His power daily to avoid it.

However, Jesus did not say this to chide them ahead of time for failing:

3. Jesus' loving purpose: to reassure them after they failed Look at His words. He didn't just say they would fall away, but that:

a. they would be regathered after His resurrection (28) He was saying, "Don't lose hope when you fail. I will die but I will rise and we will be together in Galilee. Don't give up! Don't let your failure overwhelm you. You belong to Me even though you fail!" Look at what Luke records that He said to Peter in that very moment:

b. Peter would fail in performance but not faith - Lk. 22:31-32 "I have prayed for you! Your performance is going to stink! You'll deny me three times. But I love you; you're Mine. Your faith will not fail. You will deny Me with your actions, even with your mouth, but your heart will still belong to Me; your trust will still be in Me! And when you learn this lesson, strengthen the others! Bring them to realize that I still love them and they belong to me even though they fail Me!"

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the famous 19th century Russian novelist, was sentenced to 10 years in a Siberian labor camp. Upon his arrival, a woman slipped a New Testament into his hand when the guard wasn't looking. There in a bare board building with three inches of ice on the windows and an inch of filth on the floor, Dostoyevsky discovered the parable of the prodigal son. He saw in that camp the pigsty and himself the son and the truth of God's love and willingness to pardon gripped his soul. Years later, on his deathbed, his daughter describes it thus: "He made us come into the room and, taking our little hands in his, he begged my mother to read the parable of the prodigal son. He listened with his eyes closed, absorbed in his thoughts. 'My children', he said in his feeble voice, 'never forget what you have just heard. Have absolute faith in God and never despair of His pardon. I love you dearly, but my love is nothing compared with the love of God. Even if you should be so unhappy as to commit some dreadful crime, never despair of God. You are His children; humble yourselves before Him as before your father; implore His pardon, and He will rejoice over your repentance, as the father rejoiced over that of the prodigal son.'" That's what Jesus was doing. On the eve of His death, He drew His children, all of us, close and said, "Listen, you will fail! You will fail miserably sometimes. But when you do, you belong to God and His love for you never changes. Your acceptance is not based on your performance, but on My love and on the forgiveness I purchased at the cross!" Oh, come to Him with your failure! You will find His arms wide open and waiting. Don't let Satan convince you that your failure, no matter how bad, how deep, how awful, is a forfeiture! But also, never let Him convince you to live in self-confidence like the disciples! Instead let's imitate:

II. The Submission Of The Savior (32-42) By and by they crossed the brook Kidron and came to a garden called Gethsemane, "the oil press", a quiet grove of olive trees surrounded by a low wall, where Jesus often came with His disciples to get away. But tonight, He brought them with Him for a specific purpose:

1. their purpose in the garden (32-34) To the majority He simply said, "You sit here by the gate while I go over there and pray." They needed to be prayed for by Him! But He took the three who were closest to him along "over there", near to Him, and He gave them an:

a. His entreaty to share in His own need "Tonight is serious. I am overwhelmed with sorrow. I am not just depressed; I am under intense pressure. This is so serious that I could die right here. I need you. I need you to share in My hour. Now stay here and watch (and Matthew adds) WITH ME! Pray with Me. Pray for Me. Share My hour of deepest trouble and the pain of My heart! I need you!" But that was not His only purpose for them. Luke reports:

b. His encouragement to acknowledge their own need - Lk. 22:40 "Pray about your own need too! Take Me seriously; I told you that you're going to desert Me tonight. Pray about it. You will be enticed to do evil. Pray that you won't enter into that temptation, that you won't yield to it, that you won't be overcome by it! Recognize your pride and vulnerability and pray! You need it! Prepare for the hour I've warned you is coming."

They were to share in His agony and to agonize for themselves. So, He moved forward from them a little way, about a stone's throw Luke says, and there began in earnest His own:

2. His agony in the garden (35-36) In Hebrews chapter 5 we have a comment and an explanation of the depth of:

a. the struggle in which He was engaged - Heb. 5:7a The cries were loud ones, "Abba, Father!" He was weeping loudly. They could hear Him cry and weep. Luke tells us He was in agony, sweating profusely, under such intense physical pressure that would have killed you and I with a heart attack or stroke. The capillaries under his skin were bursting and His sweat mingled with it and became great drops of blood dripping on the ground. The cries were petitions, requests to be saved from death! But not merely from death, Philipians says, it was about becoming obedient unto the death of the Cross! Christian martyrs and atheists alike by the hundreds have faced death in absolute serenity, without hysteria. But this was not just death. It was not even just horrible, bloody death. He who knew no sin would be made sin for us on the cross. Our sins, the sins of the world, would be piled upon Him. That is, the punishment, the eternal wrath of Almighty God against sin would fall on Him. The Father would separate from Him and the infinite agony of eternal hell would torment His soul. And so, He screamed, "Father, I don't want to do it; can't there be another way?" It was a cry of intense anguish. But it was not the cry of a rebel who wanted to thwart what God had decreed for him. Just look at the brief outline of His prayer and you'll see:

b. the surrender which He affirmed - Heb. 5:7b says He was heard because of His reverent submission.

Throughout His praying there was:

(1) the confident expression of trust in the Father's ability "Father, Daddy, I know who you are. You can do all things. All things are possible for you. I trust you implicitly. I am not questioning your ability or your wisdom!" What was He doing then? This prayer was:

(2) the clear admission of pain at the Father's choice "If it is possible, take this cup from me! I don't want to do it. Everything in me recoils against it. I am in pain; I am in agony." But He was not wrestling with the Father to see who would win, to get his own way. He was wrestling with Himself. He was struggling against everything that was built into Him as a true human and against the very holiness of His nature as truly God, struggling to deny everything in His nature, except for one thing:

(3) the continual decision of surrender to the Father's will It had been His rule of life, *I always do what pleases Him!* In speaking of the cross only a few days earlier, He had said, *Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.* - **Jn. 12:27.** He knew before He left heaven to come to earth what He would do. He knew during all of His life and all of His ministry what he would do. He would say, "Yes!" He knew that, ultimately, He would surrender His own will and choose the Father's will. It was a continual decision for Him. How could He pray to be saved from it? That night He openly acknowledged its price and admitted the pain of wrestling with it. It nearly killed Him. In essence He was crying out to the Father for strength to make the greatest surrender He would ever make, but His will was already decided, already surrendered. He would do the Father's will, not His own. He would go to the cross. And look what happened; look at:

c. the strength which He received - Heb. 5:7b says He was heard. The Father answered Him. But how? *An angel from heaven appeared to him strengthening [literally putting strength in] him* - **Lk. 22:43.** The Father, to whom all is possible, put the strength in His Son to surrender to His will! And here's something deep:

d. the submission which He learned There was a great purpose in Gethsemane, in this intense struggle and suffering. The Savior learned something, **Heb. 5:8.** He learned, He was disciplined in, He increased His experiential knowledge of, obedience, of what it means to place yourself under the authority of the Father. It means to take eve-

ry last shred of self, of self-interest, of human desire, of natural urge and throw it down. In short it means to die! To die to self and live only for His will. Jesus did die in that garden; He reaffirmed His death to self once for all, completely, forever, in the hour when the meaning of the choice most clearly stared Him in the face. And because of it, look at:

e. the salvation which He wrought - Heb. 5:9-10 He went to the cross and bought salvation for every one of us who will place ourselves under Him, who will submit to Him.

That's the struggle He was engaged in in the garden. That's what He wanted Peter and James and John to understand and stand with Him in. But sadly, Mark records instead:

3. their stupor in the garden (37-42) They fell asleep, not once but three times! Mark says their eyes were heavy; they couldn't keep them open. Now, on a human plane we can understand that. It was late at night; they had eaten a full meal; Jesus' prayer drug on to an hour the first time and you know how it is to pray for a solid hour! We can sympathize with the fact that they were really sleepy, but what's sad about it is:

a. the incapability of the disciples to enter the Savior's struggle Put yourself in their place. If He told you that he was in such distress that He might die, that he would be betrayed that very night, that they would all be scattered away from Him that night, wouldn't you be sitting there, sword in hand and eyeballs peeled, knowing danger was at hand, whether you felt sleepy or not! How many times have you stayed up all night for lesser things, for family emergencies, sick children, and so on. Your adrenalin would be flowing and you would grasp the urgency of the situation, but they couldn't seem to do it; they couldn't seem to enter in. They were almost in a sort of blind stupor to what Jesus was trying to tell them from His heart. In their defense, Jesus said their spirit was willing; it wanted to enter in with Him, but their flesh was weak. They let their bodies overrule their hearts. And, as He wakes them, you can hear:

b. the disappointment of the Savior's heart "Simon, You sleep! You were not able to watch with me one hour! Couldn't you stand by Me? Couldn't you hear My heart and pray with me for a single hour on this My most important vigil!?"

Before you judge them in your mind and think what you would or wouldn't have done in their place, maybe you and I ought to ask ourselves what we are doing right now in our lives. Most of us (and I include myself) have great difficulty entering into the depths of the Savior's struggle with Him. We have trouble even entering into a struggle for ourselves, "Do I surrender to His will for my life or not?" We just do what the flesh says, what comes naturally, what self wants to do. If there is a cross somewhere up ahead, if there's pain and suffering up ahead, there's no question; just do what you have to in order to avoid it! How disappointed He must be when we don't even see the struggle, when we don't enter into it. Jesus told us, "Enter in with Me; take up your cross daily and follow Me." Well, this is where He took it up, in the garden, in surrendering His own will, in dying to self and choosing obedience to the Father's will. That choice faces us in the daily events of our lives and our attitude needs to be the same as His, one of continually reaffirming our submission, "Father, all things are possible for you. You know what my humanness wants, but what I really want is what you want. My true bread, what I live for, is to do your will! I die to me, to self, and I choose You."

And let me escalate our thinking one more level. Jesus knew that His choice was even bigger; it was not just personal. The cross meant the salvation of millions of human beings. God's will, God's purpose was the saving of millions of souls from eternal hell. Jesus entered into that with the Father by saying yes, by surrendering to the cross. The disciples hadn't even a clue what God was up to. Jesus wanted them to enter in with Him into the salvation of the world, but they slept through it. Well, understand, His purpose has never changed. It has always been the salvation of the world. And since the cross, His purpose has always been to take the Gospel to every people and tribe and tongue and nation on the face of the earth so that every human being can hear of that salvation and have the chance to receive that forgiveness He bought. For 2000 years He has been wrestling and agonizing through His church in order that the Father's plan be accomplished. And Jesus has called us to enter into that with Him, to pray with Him, to labor with Him, to expend our lives with Him to reach others, to give, to go, to pray, to send, to surrender all the things that merely please self, to learn obedience and pursue His goal. Yet what are we doing? Most of us are fast asleep to the tremendous struggle He's involved in all over the world. And there are moments like this one, where the Spirit comes and wakes us up and says "Watch with Me; enter in with Me!" And our spirit wants to, but our flesh is weak and we fall back to sleep, back to the humdrum routine of meeting our needs, instead of entering into the travail of His soul that the whole world would know. How sad His heart must be sometimes! Here's something I heard on the radio: *Most of us have been goldfish owners at one time or another. You get them and bring them home in a bag and put them in a goldfish bowl and they live a week or two, maybe a couple months and die. They never seem to get any bigger; they just swim from side to side in their little closed in world. But if you take that fish and put it in a pond, it will grow to a foot or even two feet long and become a real monster in proportion. Know why? The goldfish emits an enzyme that inhibits growth. As long as it is in the bowl its little environment of water is saturated by the enzyme and it can't grow. But if you put the goldfish in the pond, the enzyme is disbursed in that huge environment and it grows freely and quickly. Now the sad thing is that the goldfish doesn't know it! He has no idea of what he could become if he could just get out of the bowl! The next time you look at a goldfish in a bowl, you could say this: "How sad! You have no idea of what you could become if you could just get out of that bowl!" And many of us are like that little*

goldfish. We are trapped in the little fishbowl of our little self world, family, job, friends, church. It is so sad to the Lord because we have no idea of the tremendous things God could do with us if we could just get our thinking out of this little fishbowl life and see what He's doing in this huge pond, the world. If we could only lift up our eyes and look on the fields, at the billions the Father is longing to bring to Himself, instead of staring at the grass at our feet and we could enter with Him into His great enterprise of reaching every people with all our hearts. The result of that surrender would be the salvation of the world. Yes, we have all failed Him in this regard, but His purpose is to reassure us that we can start again. We can wake up. We can begin now. We have a fresh opportunity to lay our all at His feet and enter into His cause.

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Sacrifice: His Arrest 14:43-65

Five years ago, among the Hausa people of northeastern Nigeria, a Christian pastor was caught carrying a Bible. His sentence was carried out in the village square. In the middle of a circle of villagers stood a blue-robed warrior with a sword held high. The young man knelt calmly before him and gently placed his right arm across the dead tree stump in front of him. The warrior shouted, "This Pastor Selchun was carrying a Christian Bible! This is what happens to infidels!" and swung the sharp sword through the man's wrist and into the wood. As the villagers watched in silence Pastor Selchun mustered his strength, raised his left hand and began to sing, "He is Lord; He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Everything in my flesh recoils against that. If there is one instinct I have a good dose of, it is self-protection. When you're in the right, defend yourself, protect yourself, get even with those who do you wrong. And if you have to lose, put up a good fight, inflict some damage while you're going down. Not this young man. He accepted the loss of his hand, an unjust, cruel punishment, as an opportunity to testify to his faith. Where did he get that idea? Where did he get that kind of strength and self-restraint? Well, as we re-enter the Garden of Gethsemane to find Jesus late that Thursday night of Passion Week, I think you'll find out. The two things which struck me most about the passage which is our text today are actually one and the same thing. The first is this:

I. Jesus Endured His Arrest Without A Struggle (43-52) He had been praying there for several hours while His disciples slept. But as He woke them for the third time, three things happened:

1. He was betrayed by a friend without reproach (43-45) Judas, His own disciple, led the mob to the place. The signal that he had arranged to betray Him with was a sign of peace and friendship, a kiss! Jesus knew what he came for and could obviously see the mob behind him as Judas leaned over to kiss him. Now, you know what I'd have been doing, waiting for that jaw with a right uppercut! The agony of being betrayed by a friend was described by David. His best friend and counselor had betrayed him and he shared what it felt like in **Ps. 41:9**, *Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.* But Jesus didn't shout, "How could you! I trusted you! I loved you! I fed you! You snake, you're lower than dirt!" He didn't push him away saying, "Don't you touch me!" Matthew reported that: Jesus replied, *Friend, do what you came for.* - **Mt. 26:50.** He said, "Friend, Companion, Comrade." There was no reproach, no condemnation. no self-protection. "Do what you have to do. I am!" This attitude continued as:

2. He was arrested by a mob without resistance (46-49) The first thing that strikes you is:

a. His obvious cooperation Most people being approached by a mob with swords and clubs would either run or fight. Peter had a more natural human reaction. He pulled out his sword and swung at someone, who turned out to be a servant of the high priest, but his aim wasn't very good and he only whacked off an ear. But at least he stuck up for himself and the Master! But what did Jesus do? He stopped Peter and told him to put away his sword! He picked up the man's ear and reattached it by His healing power. He said, "I am not leading a rebellion. I am a teacher, not a terrorist. You don't need swords and clubs. I'll come willingly; would you expect anything less after what I've taught?" No resistance. He willingly hands himself over without defense. Why? Is He a coward? No, Matthew says He told Peter that He could have called 12 legions of angels, 72,000 angels, to set Him free. But He chose not to. Why?

b. His true reason - the Scriptures must be fulfilled "God's Word must come to pass! I must be arrested. I must die tomorrow. I must fulfill what He has spoken. I must fulfill what He wants for Me." In fact, John records that He said to Peter in that moment, *...the cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?* - **John 18:11.** He did not resist because He knew that He would be resisting the Father, resisting the very thing the Father had chosen to bring into His life! Oh, how often we do that. God brings suffering our way and we do everything within our power to resist it, to avoid it. We're like Peter and pull out our swords and swing them, before we stop to look at what will glorify the Lord. But not Jesus:

3. He was deserted by His followers without even a rebuke (50-52) Everybody ran away:

a. the eleven fled (50) Those who had so bravely said, "Master, we're yours. We'll defend you to the death." ran like scared rabbits when it appeared that the death might be their own! And then Mark alone mentions:

b. the young man (Mark himself?) fled - (51-52) Most interpreters feel this was Mark talking about himself. Perhaps it was Mark's own house where the Last Supper was eaten and he had come out to the garden to warn Jesus that the mob was coming. But, at any rate, he too started to run and they grabbed him hastily put on night garment and he ran right out of it.

What would you have said? I'd have been yelling, "Hey, come back here. What kind of friends are you? You bunch of yellow-bellied so and so's!" Or perhaps I'd have been begging and pleading, "No, don't leave me. Stay with me.

PLEASE!" But Jesus suffered that feeling without a single word of rebuke.

So, they took Him back to Jerusalem, first to the house of the former high priest Annas briefly, and then to the house of his son-in-law, the current high priest, Caiaphas, where Mark describes in detail the second major thing that struck me about this passage. Just as Jesus endured His arrest without a struggle:

II. Jesus Endured His Trial Without A Protest (53-65) Now, that is surprising when you consider what was going on. Just look for instance at:

1. the prejudiced court before which He stood (53-54) Caiaphas had already stated his position back when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, *...it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.* "He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation." - John 11:50-51. He already decided that Jesus must die, declared it officially and had been working to bring it to pass! It was three or four o'clock in the morning, but wicked Caiaphas had assembled a goodly portion of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body into this illegal pre-dawn assembly. All Jesus' enemies, the ones who had been plotting against Him all week, who had been trying to publicly discredit Him, who had paid money to one of His own disciples to betray His location for a secret arrest, they were all there. A pack of vultures converging upon a dying man. Not a friend. Not a follower. Not a bystander. No public. No cameras in the courtroom. No hope of justice. A secret gathering of His enemies to try him swiftly, in time for the usual dawn court session of the Roman governor. Yet He did not protest. Look at:

2. the false charges which were brought against Him (55-59) They were not looking for truth; they were looking for evidence of something serious enough to rate the death penalty. They were not looking for the thousands of true witnesses to what He really said, but for false ones who could contort His words into something that the Romans would call treason. But they couldn't find two liars who could agree. They best they could do was to try to twist His words about his own death and resurrection, "Destroy this Temple and I will raise it up," into some kind of charge about wanting to tear down the Temple, but even that didn't work. False accusations, one after another. I'd be shouting, "I never said that! I never did that! You're lying!" But what strikes you about this account is:

3. His refusal to defend Himself (60-61a) Not a word! Not a refutation. Not a retort. Not a comeback. The prophet put it this way, *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.* - **Is. 53:7**. And understand that in this court system, there are no lawyers. The Sanhedrin are the jury; the witnesses are the prosecution; the only defense is to represent yourself! But like a sheep who stands and lets himself be "fleeced", if you will, Jesus refused to say anything in His own defense, anything to justify Himself, anything to make Himself superior to them, to fight on their terms. The only thing He would give is:

4. His clear testimony before the court (61b-62) Finally, Caiaphas could stand it no longer. His false witnesses were so inept that they were defeating their own case. So, he hopped in himself and decided to "put Jesus on the stand", so to speak. He forgot all the piddly stuff and got right to the core question, "Are you the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God?" And to this, Jesus could not keep silent. He gave clear testimony:

a. concerning His true identity "I AM!" He could not deny Himself or who He was. He told them plainly and He coupled that with a word:

b. concerning His true destiny "One day I will sit at the right hand of God; The words of Psalm 110:1 are about Me. I will sit at the right hand of God until my enemies are made a footstool for my feet. I'll be the judge. You'll be there. You'll see me. Furthermore, one day you will see Me doing what Daniel said, coming with the clouds of heaven. The whole world will see me. That is who I truly am; I cannot deny it!"

When it came to telling the truth, declaring His identity, He did not hesitate. Paul did the same thing at his trial. He refused to wrangle about all the false charges, to try to mount a self-defense. He simply said, *...they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets* - Acts 24:13-14. "My crime is this, I am a Christian, I love Jesus Christ. Of that I am not ashamed! I declare it freely and openly for all the world. If that is worthy of death, then kill me!" No protest, no self-defense, just a true testimony of faith. Just like Jesus. Of course, there followed:

5. His unfair conviction by the court (63-64) They got what they wanted; they called it blasphemy, a man claiming to be God. It was a Jewish crime worthy of death. But just remember, it's only blasphemy if you're NOT God, and He

was! But they convicted Him anyway, without further evidence or even considering the possibility. Again, He said nothing, not even when there followed:

6. His abusive treatment as a prisoner (65) They didn't just smack Him; they hit him with their fists. They punched Him. They taunted Him and spit in His royal face. Then they slapped or beat His face repeatedly with their hands and maybe their rods. But not a whimper, not a complaint. He suffered in silence.

And that's where we'll leave Jesus this morning so that we can take the time necessary to learn from His example. You see, the whole point is that:

III. We Must Learn To Endure Unjust Suffering As He Did - 1 Pet. 2:19-23 The theme of Peter's whole letter is to encourage us to endure suffering for the name of Christ without retaliation, without fighting back, without focusing on rescuing ourselves from pain, but instead on the glory He will get through it. This may not mean much to you personally this minute. It would if you lived among those Hausa people in Nigeria! It would if you were in the house church in China whose pastor was arrested in December and all his money confiscated. It would if you lived in Indonesia and a crowd of 5000 Muslims burned down your church building with the pastor and several others trapped inside, as happened last summer. It would if you belonged to Word of Faith church in Uzbekistan where 62 members of the congregation were arrested Nov. 18 for being an unregistered church but the government won't allow them to register. Or it would if you lived in Vietnam where a 41 year old pastor was beaten with metal pipes for conducting theological training. And the list goes on and on and on. Around the world thousands and thousands of believers just like us suffer unjustly, simply for believing, and they must learn this lesson in the fiery trial, to endure unjust suffering as He did, giving clear witness but not retaliating in kind. The level of suffering that comes to our lives is obviously much less severe (at least for now), but it is not absent. There will be times when you will be mocked and discredited for being a Christian, in the classroom, in the university, in the workplace. There will be times when you're treated unfairly, unjustly, when you're denied things you should rightfully have. So, we need to have this lesson down pat too, because eventually somewhere, we will need to endure suffering as a believer and we want to do it in the way Jesus did.

1. why should we do this? Peter gives us two reasons:

a. it is pleasing to God (19-20) It is what He wants of us. It pleases Him. It represents Him well. It models His character. In fact:

b. it is following the example of Christ (21) These verses are Peter's comments on Jesus' trial and the way He suffered. He suffered unjustly and endured it as He did to provide us an example to follow, footsteps to walk in. We are called to follow His example. But it's extremely tough.

2. how can we do this? Like He did. First:

a. we must refuse to sin in word or deed (22) Two wrongs do not make a right. Someone being angry at us doesn't justify our anger at them. Someone mistreating us doesn't justify our mistreating them. Someone hating us doesn't justify our hating them. Someone cheating us doesn't justify our cheating them. We must take responsibility, not for their actions, but for our response and we must refuse to sin in our suffering, either with our mouth (what we say) or our deeds (what we do). We must trust God for the grace to be angry and yet not sin, for the grace to react like Jesus:

b. we must not retaliate (23a), not hurl insults back when insults are hurled at us, not threaten when someone hurts us and say, "I'll get you, you just wait!" But to trust Him for the grace to suffer as a Christian who lives a different standard, who doesn't do things the way the world does, an eye for an eye, but instead:

c. we must trust ourselves to the True Judge (23b) Jesus knew that justice would ultimately be done. He trusted the Judge of all the earth to right it in the end. Injustice is never gotten away with. Sin is always punished, unless it is paid for at the cross. Vengeance, payback, retaliation, justice, it all belongs to God, not to you. Trust it to Him and bear a clear testimony, so that through you He can be glorified. That is the lesson of Jesus' trials.

Just south of the old city of Jerusalem outside the wall overlooking the Valley of Hinnom is a field called Akeldama, the field of blood. It was the field where Judas hanged himself, the field which the high priests bought with his betrayal money. A few years ago, archaeologists were excavating a cave in that field which was used as a burial site. Inside they found two well-preserved and ornately engraved boxes called ossuaries containing the bones of a human family. The Jewish custom was that the dead were placed in tombs unembalmed and, after a long time of decay, the bones were cleaned and placed in ossuaries or bone boxes to make room for fresh corpses. When they looked at these ossuaries, the archaeologists recognized a familiar name. Guess who? Caiaphas. It appears that all that is left of this haughty man who abused his power and treated Jesus so terribly is a dusty pile of bones in a stone box. It is a graphic reminder of the final end of every wicked oppressor. At the opposite end of the old city, outside the north wall, there is a hill called Golgotha and at its base another stone tomb hewn in the rock. Inside that tomb there is no ossuary, no bones. It is empty. Jesus, who was laid in it, is not there; He is risen; He is seated at the right hand of God. The meaning of this contrast is set forth by Paul who said, *For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has*

given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." - Acts 17:31. As Jesus that day stood before Caiaphas, Caiaphas and all the rest will one day stand before Jesus and the sentence of eternal punishment handed down will be just. As we have followed Jesus through the fire, so we will follow Him to the Throne. Justice is His responsibility then; ours is to suffer as He did now, following His example.

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Sacrifice: His Denial 14:66-72

While Jesus was being silently tried before Caiaphas in the early hours of that Friday morning of Passion Week, another trial was going on in the same building. The hour of Jesus' trial in the chamber above was also the hour of the trial of Peter's faith in the courtyard below. And we all know that he failed miserably; we are quick to say that he denied the Lord three times. But then we easily overlook it because we know that in the end, he became the leader of the church and a great apostle. But it is really worth some prolonged consideration on our part, because there are some deep lessons here about sin and failing that we don't want to miss. First of all, I'd like you to turn with me over to Luke and notice carefully:

I. Jesus' Preparation For The Hour Of Peter's Trial - Lk. 22:31-32 On the way to Gethsemane earlier that night, Jesus had warned them all that they would be scattered from Him and fall away. They did not believe Him. But He particularly spoke to Peter at that moment to prepare him for the trial he would face in just a few hours. And He prepared him by giving him two truths that are essential for us to understand.

1. Satan's desire to shake us from our faith When the ancients harvested wheat, they would first thresh it by beating it or having oxen tread on it to separate the heads of wheat from the stalks. Then they would winnow it. They would take a basket of the threshed grain and throw it up in the air a little at a time so that the wind would blow away the lighter chaff and only the pure wheat would fall back into the basket. Jesus said, "Peter, Satan wants to winnow you like that; he wants to shake you and throw you and expose you to the force of the wind so that your faith will blow away and you will be shaken loose from it and let go of it." And here's something you can't see in English. Jesus deliberately used *you* plural here, not the singular. All of you! That is his desire for all believers, to pit all the forces of this world against us and shake us so that our faith in Christ is shaken loose by the testing and trial and blows away. Jesus wants us to know of that diabolical design, but at the same time He assures us of:

2. Jesus' provision to protect us You see:

a. Satan's shaking is limited by God He has to ask God for permission to sift us, to winnow us. His power and authority is limited. "Peter, Satan begged to have for himself this opportunity to sift you; it has been granted; but the very fact that he has to ask shows you who is in control; I have limited it!" Paul expressed the same thing with great confidence in **1 Cor. 10:13**, *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.* God always limits our temptation, limits Satan's working in our lives to what He knows we can bear through His strength! And on top of that:

b. Jesus' intercession keeps our faith from failing "I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail! It will not fly away in the wind and leave you." Does what Jesus prays for ever go unanswered? No, if Jesus asks it of the Father, it is done! "Your faith will not fail because I have prayed for you." But is that promise for Peter alone? **Heb. 7:25** says, *Therefore he is able to save completely {Or forever} those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.* It is Jesus' eternal living presence, His eternal intercession on our behalf that guarantees that our faith will never fail! We will never lose it, never be separated from it, if it is genuine and real. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* - **Rom. 8:35, 37.**

Every time God sends us into an hour of trial where our faith is tested, we can know that He has sovereignly limited that test and guaranteed already that our faith will not fail! What a comfort! But what could fail is our performance so let's look at:

II. Peter's Performance In The Hour Of His Trial - Mark 14 We often fail to appreciate:

1. his initial depth of commitment that evening. He didn't just fold at the first sign of danger, as we might easily picture it. Remember that:

a. he did try to defend Jesus in the garden (47) He was the one who quickly pulled out his sword and started swinging when the mob walked up to Jesus. That is no light matter. He was outnumbered, yet ready to lose his life in battle to save the master. But Jesus stopped him in his tracks. He expected the others to join in and a battle to ensue. Jesus said "No" and gave Himself up. Peter was confused. He ran away into the dark to reach safety, as did the other disciples. Yet, he did not desert Jesus. Just think about the fact that:

b. he did follow Jesus into Caiaphas' house (54) Talk about jumping out of the frying pan into the fire! John and he followed the crowd quietly and went together to Caiaphas' palace. John tells us that he knew somebody there and he got himself and Peter in past the doorkeepers, not only into the outer chamber, but through the second door

into the inner area of the palace, the inner courtyard from where he could see the Master being tried up above. He took his life into his hands once again. Why? Matthew says, *But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.* - Matt 26:58. To see the end, what would happen to his Master. This was a brazen, bold step, sitting with the guards who had just taken Jesus there! What courage he had in the beginning! How did he end up denying? Well, it was because of:

2. Satan's intense personal attack (67) *YOU are one of them!* When there was a group, it was OK; even when he and John came together it was OK. But now he was alone and Satan pressed the attack on the most personal level by pointing his finger through the mouth of a servant girl and saying, YOU! What he's using is:

a. his stratagem of fear Paul tells us not to be ignorant of Satan's strategies. He gave this one away when he wanted to shake Job. He told God what he believes, *"Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life.* - **Job 2:4**. That is Satan's theology of man. When a man is afraid he's going to die, he'll do anything to prevent it. He will give up his most valuable possession. He will give up his faith and curse God. And it works. **Heb. 2:14-15** says, *...that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.* Man is afraid to die. As long as Satan can make a man afraid to die, he can get him to do anything. And he's been enslaving people like that for centuries. He can get a mother to drown her baby in the Ganges River or a father to sacrifice his baby in fire or a billion people to fall down five times a day to Allah, just because they're ultimately afraid to die! That pointed finger and the word *YOU* struck fear, the fear of death, into the heart of Peter and it shook him to the roots. The first time it seriously crosses your mind that you are in imminent danger of dying is a sobering moment and a terrifying one and if you are not fortified to know how to deal with it, you might easily revert to the old flesh pattern known as "save your own neck!" Fortunately, we have:

b. Christ's antidote for fear - 2 Tim. 1:7-8 We have the Holy Spirit who is not a spirit of fear. He is a spirit of Power. And when we're afraid, we can stop and call upon His power and give a clear testimony, standing for our faith. *Judy Anderson, whose husband is the West Africa Director of the World Relief Corporation, grew up as the daughter of missionaries in Zaire. As a little girl, she went to a day-long rally celebrating the one-hundredth anniversary of Christian missionaries coming to that part of Zaire. After a full day of long speeches and music, an old man came before the crowd and insisted that he be allowed to speak. He said he soon would die, and that he alone had some important information. If he did not speak, that information would go with him to his grave. He explained that when Christian missionaries came a hundred years before, his people thought the missionaries were strange and their message unusual. The tribal leaders decided to test the missionaries by slowly poisoning them to death. Over a period of months and years, missionary children died one by one. Then the old man said, "It was as we watched how they died that we decided we wanted to live as Christians." That story had gone untold for one hundred years. Those who died painful, strange deaths never knew why they were dying or what the impact of their lives and deaths would be. Yet they stayed and by the power of the Spirit testified of Jesus, even in the face of death. We do not need to be afraid of dying. Death can't touch the real us; it is gain; it is the doorway to glory. But Peter wasn't there yet and so, instead of an honest, "Yes, I am His disciple," we have:*

3. his frantic attempt to hide his identity (66-71) as a follower of Christ. Now here's a piece of truth that struck me this week that I have never seen before and I want you to see:

a. the true nature of his denial: it was a denial of himself, not Jesus! He never denied that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior. He never turned against Him and cursed Him and intended Him harm. He never sold information about Him for profit that would lead to His harm or death like Judas did. Rather, he denied himself! He said, "I don't know the man; I am not a follower of His!" He denied his own identity and tried to hide it. If they had marched him upstairs and made him face Jesus and said, "We're going to stone him; prove yourself; throw the first stone," he would never have done it. He still loved Jesus. He still believed in Jesus. His faith hadn't failed. He was just scared to death and so, he tried to deny himself. That is often what happens to us when we face a trial. We are scared, if not to die, then to lose our job, or to lose something we value, so we try to hide what we are, to keep others from knowing in order to keep out of trouble. But you can see from Peter's experience:

b. the impossibility of succeeding in his denial: Here's a truth to remember: ***you cannot ultimately deny what you are; it will come out!*** Maybe you can stifle it for a while, but ultimately you will act like what you are. Your nature will show itself and if that nature is the nature of Christ, you'll be discovered as His follower! How did they recognize Peter?

(1) his appearance was scrutinized (67) The girl first glanced and then stopped to stare and scrutinize him closely. People will do that to you and sooner or later they'll see things in you that show you belong to Jesus. Further:

(2) his actions were remembered - John 18:26-27 tells us that one of the guys by the fire was a relative of Malchus, the guy whose ear Peter cut off in the garden, and he said, *"...Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?"* It might have been dark, but the picture of Peter swinging that sword and hitting his cousin wasn't for-

gotten, even if it was too fuzzy to be fully sure. Our actions will be remembered too. People will note how we have acted, how we have stood for Jesus, how we have gone to church or prayed. Our love for Jesus will be found out. And note this:

3) his speech was recognized (70) He talked with a Galilean accent, "How y'all doing?", unlike the rest. And since Jesus and his followers were the only Galileans around that night, he had to be one of them. Even our speech will give us away. We will talk like Jesus. We will act like Jesus. Our life will look like Jesus. We can't help it; it's who we are and sooner or later somebody will notice it! And the longer we're around, the more people will notice it. And so, Peter found that if you keep trying to hide it, you have to keep on trying harder to deny yourself:

c. the escalating intensity of his denial First:

(1) he denied knowing Jesus privately to the servant girl (66-68) He didn't intend to, but I'm sure he thought it would shut her up and serve his purpose, yet it didn't, so he:

(2) he denied it again openly before others (69-70) She talked to the people around and a few of them began to chime in and say, "You're a follower of his". Even shifting his location didn't help. So finally:

(3) he denied it vehemently before all (70-71) He ended up getting really loud about it and cursing and swearing. But let me explain that; it's not cursing and swearing like we think of it. It means he took oaths and curses, for example, "May the Almighty strike me dead if I am a follower of His", "I vow on my mother's grave that this is true". In the ancient world calling a curse on yourself or taking an oath as much as sealed that something was true, because they knew the reality of the spirit world and nobody would invoke death or disaster on themselves! Sometimes you can end up going to some great lengths to deny what you really are.

But in the end, even if you manage to fool others for a while, you end up not being able to hide it from yourself! You just can't deny what you are for too long. You can see that in:

III. Peter's Remorse And Repentance After His Failure (72) You see:

1. Jesus helps us to see our failure for what it is He built a little sign into His warning. "When the rooster crows the second time, Peter, it'll remind you." He never noticed the first rooster he heard crow that early morning. But when he denied knowing the Lord the third time and the rooster crowed immediately, and then, *The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times."* - Luke 22:61. He could see the Lord up there above him and when they both heard the rooster, Jesus turned and looked at him with those knowing eyes and he saw the depths of what he'd done. It all came crashing home. He saw what a failure he was, and he went out alone and broke down and wept bitterly over his sin. Jesus has a way of doing that for us. He holds up the mirror for us. He lets us see ourselves, our failure, our sin and grieve over it. It's painful but necessary. But then:

2. He lovingly restores us when we fail After His resurrection, back in Galilee Jesus took some special time to sit down with Peter by a warm fire over a meal and minister to his heart. In **John 21:15-17** three times Jesus asked, "Do you love Me!" Three times Peter said "Yes" and Jesus didn't say, "Then why did you deny knowing Me?!" He said, "Feed my sheep. Take care of My lambs. Lead My followers. I trust you. I know your heart. I believe you. I forgive you. Go on and serve Me; I have big plans for you!" Oh, once Jesus opens our eyes to see our failure, He doesn't rub our noses in it; He loves on us and restores us and rebuilds us and uses us afresh. In fact:

3. He uses our failure to produce later growth Paul said in **2 Cor. 7:9-11**, *Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.* Oh, once you've come through it, once you're on the other side of failure, God produces all kinds of wonderful things in you, earnestness, sincerity, a sensitivity to what's right and a fresh determination to serve. God redeems that failure later on to produce growth in us.

Just look at Peter. He preached that first sermon at Pentecost. He led the church at Jerusalem for many years. He was the first to be open to reaching the Gentiles and he died a martyr's death, crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as His Lord. Oh, there will be times in your life when you deny who you really are. You may be a failure today and know it. But don't lose hope; Jesus will heal that failure and redeem it. Let me tell you a story to illustrate a truth: *Early in 1993 British police accused two ten-year-old boys of the brutal murder of two-year-old James Bulger. The two boys pleaded innocence. During the two-week trial the young defendants responded to police questioning with noticeable inconsistency. The climax of the trial came when the parents of one of the boys assured him that they would always love him. Confronted with irrefutable evidence linking him with the crime and knowing that he had the as-*

surance of his parents' love, the boy confessed in a soft voice, "I killed James." The miracle of God's love is that he knows all the evil things we have done. He knows how we've denied ourselves and acted like what we're not, how we've denied that we know Him by our words and our actions, yet he loves us still. We are free to face and confess our worst sins to Him, because we are confident that, no matter what we have done or how we have failed, his love will not diminish. Peter is living proof of it.

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Sacrifice: His Condemnation 15:1-15

There are a few persons in history whose infamy has caused their names to live on. Jezebel's name, for instance, has been used as a description of lewd women through the centuries and Judas' name has certainly become a synonym for all traitors ever since. Even Herod the butcher is known by most. But there is one man whose villainy the Christian Church has deliberately chosen to preserve from its earliest times. For 2 millennia Christians have been reciting the Apostles' Creed and confessing his misdeeds, *I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under PONTIUS PILATE, was crucified, dead and buried...* It seems to be a theme. The Creed formulated by representatives from the whole church at the Council of Nicaea in 325 blames him more directly, *I believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ...who for us men and for our salvation...was made man and crucified also for us under PONTIUS PILATE...* Pilate has gained for himself the notorious reputation of the man who crucified Jesus. In our study today we move into Mark 15 and it is here that we meet:

I. The Unjust Judge Before Whom Jesus Stood (1) It was about dawn on Friday morning when the Jewish leaders assembled the full Sanhedrin, declared Jesus worthy of death and sent Him bound like a criminal from Caiaphas' palace to the Fortress of Antonia to put him into the hands of Roman justice, the hands of Pontius Pilate. Now you'll understand this whole story better if we take a moment to look at:

1. the record that Pontius Pilate had Pilate was appointed by Rome to be the fifth governor over the area of Judea in 26 AD, about the very time John the Baptist and Jesus began their public ministry. His title was that of *prefect*, later called *procurator*. You can remember that because his chief responsibility was to "procure" revenue for the Emperor, to collect tribute and taxes for him and pay the Roman troops. But Pilate had more than average authority. He was *cum potestate*, the final authority in military, civil and criminal matters in a third class province like Judea. The four governors before him had no problems with the Jews. They understood the sensitivity of the Jewish people to things that would defile them and their religion and wisely took care not to offend them, but Pilate was different. He hated the Jews whom he ruled, and in times of irritation, freely shed their blood. His residence was at Caesarea and he visited Jerusalem as seldom as possible. On coming to office, he wanted to show the depth of his authority and his contempt for the conquered Jews and their superstitions. The Roman army always carried standards bearing images of its emperor, but his predecessors understood how the Jews despised any type of graven image and felt they were commanded of God not to use or own them and, out of respect, instructed the soldiers not to use the standards, so as not to provoke an uprising. Pilate, however, immediately ordered his soldiers to enter Jerusalem with their standards and place them at night. At dawn when the Jews saw them, they were infuriated. 7,000 people marched to Caesarea and surrounded Pilate's home, demanding and praying for him to remove the image-bearing standards. On the sixth day he relented and told the protestors that he would set up a judgment seat in the city to hear their request. When they assembled in the marketplace Pilate surrounded them with soldiers and told them to desist or they would immediately be killed. Their response surprised even him. Josephus says, "They stretched out their throats to the swords and cried that they were ready to die rather than transgress the laws of their faith". He backed down and removed the standards! They went home. But not long after that, he confiscated some of the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct for Jerusalem. When a mob again began to gather in protest, he ordered his soldiers to dress as civilians and mingle with the crowd. The most vocal leaders were killed with clubs and many Jews died in the incident, as he firmly crushed this rebellion. It could be this or even another incident which was mentioned to Jesus in *Luke 13:1, Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices*. Pilate was no friend of the Jews and no ally of the Jewish leaders. So, then why did they take Jesus to him? For one reason only:

2. the reason they brought Jesus to him - John 18:31 records his initial response of contempt, *Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."* "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected. The only reason they brought Him was because the Roman governor alone held the authority to administer the death penalty. The Jews could scourge and whip and fine and even imprison. But they could not kill, and nothing less than death would satisfy them in regard to Jesus. So, they swallowed their hatred and approached their own worst enemy to make him an ally in their cause.

Now, of course, they knew Pilate could care less about someone claiming to be a Messiah or even God or desecrating the Sabbath or breaking the Jewish law. They needed Roman charges, crimes against the Empire, to rally him to their side and so we have:

II. The Unjust Charges Which Were Brought Against Him (2-5) Luke records for us:

1. the specific criminal charges - Lk. 23:2 says, *And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."* Did you hear the three charges they fabricated? The first was:

a. sedition - creating civil unrest, probably because of the huge crowds that often gathered to Him wherever He went. "He stirs up the people; they follow Him." They knew the distaste that Pilate had for any thought of another uprising. Then they accused Him of:

b. infringement - hindering the payment of taxes A flat out lie. "He tells the people not to pay the imperial taxes; He's hurting the imperial revenues which it is your job to collect!" Even though their attempt to get him to say this earlier in the week hadn't worked, they accused Him of it anyway! And the last offense, the one on which Pilate jumped was:

c. treason - claiming to be a king "He says He's the Messiah and the Messiah is a King. He's rebelling against Rome; He claims to be King of the Jews!" They shouted their logic at him later on when he wanted to release Jesus, ...*"If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."* - **Jn. 19:12**. Unjust charges all. But, just as before the Sanhedrin, we have once again:

2. the Savior's consistent response

a. He would not deny His identity (2) Yes, *I am*. John records His full explanation, ...*"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."* "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, *"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."* "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, *"I find no basis for a charge against him."* - **John 18:36-38**. He would not deny the truth of His identity, but again, as before, you'll notice that:

b. He refused to defend Himself (5) against the charges. He did not enter into justifying Himself and refuting the false charges. Pilate was flatly amazed. Out of contempt for the Jews he would have released Jesus right then and there had circumstances been different. But as it was, Jesus' trial became a one-of-a-kind thing. So, we need to look further at:

III. The Unjust Manner Of His Trial (6-10) Now consider:

1. the dilemma which Pilate faced It is obvious that:

a. he knew the truth that Jesus was innocent (10) He told them so in **Lk. 23:13-16**. But in reality, I doubt that mattered much. Pilate was no fool. Jesus' three years of ministry were not hidden from him. His intense popularity with the people was not unknown to him. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem that past Sunday with hundreds of followers could have hardly occurred without being reported to him. Executing a popular leader like Jesus could stir up quite a bit of trouble for him. Yet at the same time:

b. he knew the danger of violating the Jews' convictions He'd been that route. They told him outright; *The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."* - **John 19:7**. He knew the power of the Jews to stand up and die for their convictions. Thousands of pilgrims were in Jerusalem that morning for the Passover. Every street, every house was crowded. The Temple would soon be packed. The troops were already on the alert because the potential for trouble was great. It wouldn't take much to have a riot if the Jewish leaders were offended.

Pilate was between a rock and a hard place. They wouldn't go away; He knew Jesus was innocent and loved by the people and yet He knew the power of the Jewish leaders. So, he did what we all do; he tried to avoid it:

2. the common methods by which he tried to avoid it He used some really common methods that we resort to, instead of sticking to the truth. First, he tried to:

a. pass the buck: he sent Jesus to Herod - Lk. 23:6-12 tells us he thought, "Hey, wait, Herod is in town. Jesus is from Galilee; that's Herod's turf. Let him have the problem!" We try to hand off the situation to someone else and run away from it. But Herod amused himself by questioning and mocking Jesus and sent him right back to Pilate. He was no fool either! So next Herod tried what you might call:

b. manipulate the adversary: he offered the crowd a biased choice His mind hit on the idea, "Hey wait! This is the day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. I always show my magnanimous nature and schmooze the Jews a bit by releasing a popular prisoner of their choice. I'll set it up. I'll manipulate them into doing what I want. I'll offer them the worst criminal I can think of or Jesus! Hey, I've got Barabbas. He's a murderer and a rebel, the scum of the earth. No self-respecting Jew would ever want him released. They'll have to choose Jesus and then I'm off the hook!" So, looking like Mr. Pompous Generosity, he walked out to the gathered crowd with his can't-refuse-it offer. He never dreamed it wouldn't work! So, when it didn't, Matthew tells us he tried one last thing:

c. shift the blame: he washed his hands in front of them all. **Mt. 27:24-25** says, *When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"* Mr. Purity! But it didn't work! History has still written him down as the man who crucified Christ.

All his coping schemes went up in smoke as they always will when you try to dodge the truth and do what's right. So, Pilate finally sentenced Jesus to death. Why?

IV. The Unjust Basis On Which He Was Condemned (11-15) What were the real reasons? Three, I think:

1. the powerful manipulation of evil enemies (11) The chief priests were able to manipulate the crowd by their power to cry for Jesus' blood, to turn them against Him. By threat, by promise, by fear, we don't know but somehow, they did. The good guys don't always win. Sometimes evil people triumph. Criminals get acquitted and good people get killed. It happens in this world, a lot! The second was:

2. the swelling noise of public outcry (14) The louder they shouted, the more Pilate became afraid of a riot he couldn't control, so he gave them their way. Public pressure, public outcry, often defeats justice and truth! The will of the people is often a stronger force than morality; that's why we have abortion on demand in this country today. The unjust judge responds to the amount of noise people make, rather than what's right and wrong! But the bottom line thing that condemned Jesus was:

3. the cowardice of a judge who pleased men instead of seeking justice (15) Pilate was literally "willing to do enough" or as we put it "to do whatever it takes" for the people. He was a man-pleaser. He pleased himself as often and as far as he could, but when it came to saving his own neck, he would do "whatever it takes" to please his own enemies instead of upholding justice. He was a coward, so rather than setting Jesus free, he sent Him to the cross. Such was the man and such was the scene that Friday morning. But understanding it is not nearly as important as applying it. The writers of Scripture did that and Pilate's name keeps coming up. So, in closing let's look at four:

V. The Important Lessons Which We Can Learn From This Scene First, there is:

1. a lesson about the availability of forgiveness What about those who rejected Jesus and shouted "Crucify Him!"? Well, Peter got to preach to pretty much that same crowd which was gathered again about seven weeks later and this is what he said, **Acts 3:13-15, 17, 19, 26**. "Come on home, believe. Trust in His Name. It is never too late. Whatever you said against the Son of Man can be forgiven!" What about those today who have cursed His name and rejected Him, who have mocked and made fun of Him? Is there any hope for them? Here's a whole crowd who shouted for His blood, the Jewish nation and the first place the Lord sent His messengers to offer forgiveness was right back to them! I don't care what you've done, how you've ridiculed and mocked his Name, how you've tried to stamp out His church like Saul did. There is forgiveness for you! The first thing He said after they drove the nails and hung Him up was, "Father forgive them; they don't know what they're doing...if they did, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory!" There is forgiveness for anyone; even old Pilate could have had it if he'd wanted it. Then secondly, there is in this scene:

2. a lesson about God's sovereignty and injustice Listen to what Peter and John prayed in **Acts 4:27-29**. Paul preached the same thing in **13:27-30**. It looked like evil was winning, like wrong was triumphing and having its own way, like Pilate and the Jews were throwing the plan of God into disarray, when in point of fact, they were all simply fulfilling what God had planned ahead of time to do! Oh, my friend, when you look around you and see injustice everywhere, when you see our brothers and sisters suffering and dying in Liberia or the Sudan, when you see missionaries forced to flee like they are this very week from Albania or a few months ago did from Zaire, when you see a little child kidnapped or a nation sink into sin and degradation, don't let it convince you that God has abdicated His throne and evil is winning. All things still work together for the good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose! They only did what He planned for them to do, to put His Son on the cross and redeem the world. The hymnwriter put it like this, "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways the future and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow keeping watch above His own!" Count on it; He knows what He's doing! Then thirdly, in this scene there is:

3. a lesson about enduring condemnation - 1 Tim. 6:12-15 Stand up, man and be counted. When you're the one on the hot-seat, when the condemnation is coming at you, do like Jesus did before Pilate. Hold to the good confession, stand for the truth, no matter what and don't look for all kinds of unjust ways out of trouble. Persevere, stand firm, no matter what Satan might throw at you, no matter what you're unjustly accused of, no matter if it means your job, no matter if it means your home, no matter if it means your very life. Hold to that good confession you've made in Jesus which brought you eternal life. And finally, there is in this scene the most difficult thing of all:

4. a lesson about our own unjustness It is easy to see evil in Pontius Pilate. He was a man-pleaser who went with the path of least resistance. But it's not so easy for us to see Pontius Pilate in us, to see that sometimes in some situations, we are the unjust ones, that we act just like he did. Look at these warnings. **1 Tim. 5:21** warns us to be literally,

without prejudice [in regard to the facts] and without swaying toward one party or the other. **James 2:1** also warns us to be literally. *without respect of persons.* That is, don't be a man-pleaser who makes your decisions on public opinion or the noise of the crowd. And then he uses the compelling example of how we treat people differently according to how they look. If a guy comes to church in a nice suit, we find him a nice place up front. But if a homeless guy wanders in off the street in rags, we don't know what to do with him and wish he'd leave. We do what Pilate did. We judge people by unjust standards. Other things are often more important to us than truth or justice or even the value of a human life. And there are times when, to our shame, we condemn the innocent, rather than do what we know is right.

Pontius Pilate must have served Rome well. He lasted 10 years in his position governing Judea. But in 36 AD he became involved in another bloody encounter, this time with the Samaritans. They appealed however to his superior, Vitellius, the Roman legate stationed in Syria, who deposed him and ordered him brought to trial before the Emperor. He was sent into exile in the city of Vienne on the Rhone River in Gaul (France). Eusebius, the historian of the early church has this to say, "This same Pilate, who was governor at our Savior's crucifixion...fell into such calamities that he was forced to become his own murderer and the avenger of his own wickedness. Divine justice, it seems, did not long protract his punishment." Alone, in exile, Pilate died in despair by his own hand without hope. 2000 years later his name is still scorned. Yet today, 1 out of every 9 people in the world have become followers of the One whom he condemned and sent to a cross. Whose way would you choose to follow?

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Sacrifice: His Crucifixion 15:16-47

The cross. It has become such a common symbol which we proudly wear around our necks and sing joyfully about in our churches, that we have all but lost its significance. In Jesus' world, the cross held all the horror and the stigma of the hangman's noose or the guillotine in later eras, or the electric chair and the gas chamber in our own. Its very mention struck fear into the hearts of people. It was a method of execution by cruel torture which was never used by the Jews. Its roots go back to the Assyrians and Persians impaling people's live bodies on a single pointed stake. The Greeks added a crossbeam and nailed the victim to it. Alexander the Great hung 2000 of the citizens of Tyre on crosses when he finally conquered the city. But it was the Romans who perfected crucifixion to an art and reserved it as the supreme punishment for rebellious slaves, bandits, and military and political crimes like treason, desertion and sedition. No Roman citizen like Paul could be crucified except in the most extreme case, but the Romans applied it freely to their conquered subjects to strike terror into their hearts. To the Jews who stoned their criminals, it was particularly detestable because Deut. 21:23 said, *Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.* Perhaps now we are ready to appreciate the full impact of what Paul wrote in *Phil 2:8, And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!* Let's enter that experience with Him in Mark 15 today where the first thing we are shown is:

I. His Suffering Before The Cross (16-24) The Romans had developed an entire procedure of crucifixion which was just as painful as the crucifixion itself.

1. it began with a severe flogging (15b) or scourging. Jesus was stripped and his hands tied around a pillar or post. A soldier with a "cat o' nine tails" stood behind Him. It was a leather whip of nine strands. On the end of each one was fastened a sharp piece of bone or metal to tear the flesh. There was no limit to the number of lashes a man could receive and the whipping often continued until the bones and internal organs could be seen through the back. The blood loss was severe and victims sometimes died from the scourging before they even got to the cross. The pain Jesus suffered from this must have been intolerable. But:

2. it was intensified by cruel humiliation (16-19) Let me paint the picture more clearly. Judea was controlled by four Roman legions of 5500 men each, but they were all stationed in Syria. The garrison stationed in Jerusalem was composed of auxiliary troops conscripted from the conquered areas to the north. Only the less-skilled served in infantry units. They had one thing in common; they hated Jews. They took special delight in torturing their prisoners. Most of the 500 of them were gathered in the hall to enjoy the sight. They put Herod's purple robe on the bleeding Jesus. One of them said, "He's a king; he needs a crown" and so they plaited a crown of thorns and shoved it down into His brow. They put a cane in his hand for a scepter and all fell down in mockery shouting, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they rose up in anger and man after man spit in Jesus' face and they took the staff in his hands and took turns beating his head and face with it until he was swollen and marred beyond recognition. And then, as if this agony were not enough:

3. it continued in an agonizing procession (20-22) On that bleeding, torn back they tied the heavy wooden crossbeam and made Him carry it out to the execution site. He could hardly move and barely stumbled along. It was an execution parade. three criminals paraded through the streets for public humiliation before their execution. Outside the wall, He could carry it no longer and stumbled and fell. A terrified bystander was immediately commanded to grab the crossbeam and carry it. His name was Simon and that walk to Calvary changed his life. He became a believer along with his wife, and his two sons became well-known in the early church to whom Mark was writing. Paul later mentions his own closeness to Rufus and his family in Rom. 16:13. But at that moment Simon's forced labor provided a momen-

tary relief to the Savior's agony. But as soon as they arrived at the place of execution, a skull-shaped hill called Golgotha:

4. it culminated in the torture of crucifixion (23-24) How often have you described some pain you've had as *excruciating*. That word literally means *out of the cross*. The words are so painless, *and they crucified Him*. Yet the act was anything but painless. They laid the wooden crossbeam on the ground and stretched Jesus out upon it. Iron spikes were driven with a heavy hammer through His wrists. Then he and it were hoisted up into place and fastened to the upright post. Another spike was then driven through His ankles into the post. It was truly excruciating torture. Dangling from outstretched arms reduced blood flow to the limbs and vital organs. The diaphragm could not function normally because of the stress upon it. Only by pushing up with the impaled legs could the person breathe. He could only talk in short bursts or phrases, thus the seven sayings from the cross. Eventually, blood loss weakened the person who could no longer push up and they died of asphyxiation, but it could sometimes take days. It was designed to stretch out death and make it as painful as possible. This is the torture which our Savior endured. So, now let's investigate more deeply:

II. His Suffering Upon The Cross itself. We are told by comparing two verses:

1. the length of the ordeal (25, 33) He was hung on the cross at the third hour, 9 AM. At noon darkness covered the land and at 3 in the afternoon He died. Six hours of horrible suffering, the worst that man could dish out. That in itself is bad enough, but think about:

2. the significance of the method (26-28) The cross was a method of killing criminals. They nailed a sign to the upright above His head with a charge on it, "King of the Jews". Two common thieves were crucified on either side, putting him right in the middle, making Him one of them. The world was calling the Son of God a criminal worthy of the most torturous death. And it was done beside a public road for all to see. And that's why you have:

3. the mockery of the crowd (29-32) It came from people walking by into the city. It came from the Jewish leaders who followed Him there to rub in their triumph over him as he died. It even came from the dying criminals on either side. "Come down. If you're the Christ, prove it. Liar! Fake! Fraud! Charlatan!" Oh, how he must have been tempted to call those twelve legions of angels! But He didn't; He stayed there! Three hours of suffering and humiliation, but at noon the sky grew dark and Jesus became totally silent. What He suffered for the next three hours no one knew and He could not even express, until afterward when we learn of:

4. the agony of the separation (33-36) No one could see it but it was during that period that the sins of the world were heaped upon Him. It was there where He was made sin, where the Father, from whom He had never known one moment of separation, had withdrawn His Presence that He might be made sin for us!

[My apologies that the rest of this message was lost somehow in disk transfer, but here is an outline of it.]

III. His Death Upon The Cross (37-38)

IV. Reactions To His Death Upon The Cross (39-41)

1. the amazed Centurion who came to believe Him (39)

2. the faithful women who stood by Him (40-41)

V. His Burial After The Cross (42-47)

1. the bold action of Joseph

2. the surprised reaction of Pilate

3. the determination of the women to return and honor Him

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Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

VI. The Resurrection Of The Servant - Ch. 16

His resurrection 16:1-14

The central issue of the Christian faith is an absolute belief in a humanly impossible event. Paul said, *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* - Rom. 10:9. You are not a Christian, not even in the remotest, most general sense, unless you believe that the same Jesus who died a death of cruel torture on Calvary on Friday, rose to life again on Sunday morning in a transformed body and has

remained that way ever since. It goes against everything that is natural. Most of us are so removed from the experience of death that it has, in effect, cheapened our appreciation of the resurrection. We seldom, if ever, see any animal, let alone any person, die and never touch them. But if you should, the one thing that will strike you is how impossible it would be for them to live again. The taxidermist's hand or, in the case of humans, the mortician's hand, does a tremendous job of trying to make that which is dead appear lifelike, but it is only a comforting deception. If you could see the body of Jesus as it came down from the cross like the women did, the back a sea of bloody flesh from the scourging, the head ringed with bleeding punctures from the thorns, the face beaten beyond recognition and swollen black and blue, the wrists and ankles with huge gaping holes, the side with a giant wound oozing blood and fluids, the muscles beginning to stiffen as rigor mortis set in, if you could see that corpse carried lifeless between two men and laid on a stone bench in a tomb of rock and feel the weight of the stone seal it in the darkness, it would be awfully tough to convince you that that body would rise from the dead and that person would live again in a tangible, real, touchable kind of life, not just some ethereal other world somewhere. To believe in the resurrection of Jesus is to believe in the impossible, to stake your eternity on something that defies every human experience before and after, in all of recorded history. Yet the disciples did it; they made it the core of their message and dedicated their lives to spreading the account of it to the uttermost parts of the earth and, in the end, they all died holding to it. Why? To them and to us as well, it is not simply a belief; it is a fact. As Mark takes us to that Sunday morning in chapter 16, we find first of all that:

I. It Is A Fact Attested By Circumstances (1-6) We meet there first of all:

1. the despondent women: *they bought spices to anoint Jesus' body* (1-2) After watching Jesus' burial, they had rested at home on the Sabbath, mourning and weeping. When it ended at sundown Saturday night, they went out and bought spices and ointments to anoint the Savior's body in proper fashion. They had no clue, no inkling, that He could rise from the dead. Early in the morning before dawn, they headed out to the tomb to do the only loving thing that remained to be done for their Lord. But when they got there, they found:

2. the moved stone: *the stone had been rolled away* (3-4) As they walked, they were discussing how they were going to move the stone away. It was very large and normally required at least two men to roll it. How would they ever manage? What they did not seem to know was even worse. On Saturday morning, Matthew tells us, the Chief Priests had persuaded Pilate to place a Roman guard on the tomb and to seal it with the wax seal of Rome to make sure that nobody could go in and take the body and claim He had risen. They were the only ones that seemed to hear His words; even His own disciples didn't remember the promise. So, four soldiers had been standing guard there all day and all night. The stone really didn't matter; they wouldn't be allowed in anyway! But, oh, when they got there! There had been an earthquake. An angel of the Lord had come down and done what they could not do and rolled away the stone and sat on it. The guards were terror-stricken and had already fled the scene. And there it stood, the huge stone rolled away and open. So, they went in, and that's when they saw:

3. the angelic messenger: *a young man dressed in a white robe* (5) Two of them, actually, Luke tells us, and their white robes were dazzling, shining with the glory of God. The women were terrified, but it was the angels that pointed out:

4. the empty tomb: *He is not here; see the place where they laid Him* (6) "Look, no body! There's the place. There's the stone bench where you saw His body laid. He's not here." The tomb was occupied but now it's empty. That is one of the most unique pieces of evidence that we have for the resurrection. Where did the body go? Grave robbers don't take the body; they take the clothes and the things in the tomb and leave the body. Even if they did steal the body, they wouldn't have bothered to unwrap and leave behind the clothes it was wrapped in neatly folded! Who wants to carry a bloody naked corpse! Well, the Jews said, His own disciples came and stole him away while the guards were sleeping. Fat chance. Two men roll away a thousand pound stone and not wake up trained Roman soldiers sleeping inches away, who knew that to fall asleep on duty and let the tomb be entered was punishable by death? I don't think so. But even if they did pull it off just to create a hoax of resurrection, why would they die for a hoax? Why would they go all over the world proclaiming it and then dying and being imprisoned for something they knew wasn't true? The fact that the tomb was empty could only mean one thing, which the angel shared with them:

5. the Good News: *He is risen!* (6-7) "Yes, He was crucified; yes, He was laid here, but He is risen from the dead; He is alive and you will SEE Him. He told you so! The stone was not rolled away to let Him out; it was rolled away to let you in so you could see it's empty and believe!"

That empty tomb still attests to His resurrection. Nobody could produce the body. It was gone and only one explanation makes any sense at all, the fact of His resurrection. But this is not what the early church relied on as proof. Listen to Paul, *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.* - 1Cor 15:3-8. The early church did not say, "It's a fact because the tomb is empty". They said:

II. It Is A Fact Attested By Credible Eyewitnesses (7-14) "He appeared to us and we saw Him." It's hard for us to put all the appearances into order and reconstruct that Resurrection Sunday, but let's just note several of them. First:

1. He appeared to the women (7-8) They were scared and confused and said nothing to anyone as they headed back to town. But that's not the whole story. Matthew picks up where Mark moves on and says, *Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."* - Mat. 28:9-10. They saw Him. They touched Him. They worshipped Him. They were convinced He was alive. And they went back and told the disciples. And then we find that:

2. He appeared to Mary Magdalene (9-11) Perhaps she lagged behind as the others returned, but as she sat nearby weeping, Jesus appeared to her and she thought he was the gardener. She didn't recognize Him until He called her name. Then she too fell at His feet and worshipped Him, convinced He was alive! She ran back to the disciples and told them! Later that same day:

3. He appeared to the two on the Emmaus Road (12-13) Luke tells us the full story of how two of them were walking to Emmaus and Jesus joined them and taught them, but his identity was hidden from them. He continued with them until evening and sat down at the table and revealed Himself to them in the breaking of the bread and they knew Him and rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples. And finally:

4. He appeared to the Eleven (14) At last, that evening He appeared directly in their midst, although only 10 of them were present. Thomas was out somewhere. So, He did it again eight days later when Thomas was there. It's hard to know which instance Mark is referring to, but in any event, they all saw Him, talked with Him and touched Him and were convinced that He indeed was alive.

Our contention that it is a fact that Jesus is alive is based on eye-witness testimony of more than 500 people over a period of 40 days in a variety of locations and every one of them came away convinced enough to die for it, that Jesus is alive! Now if you're really sharp, you noticed something in common about all those appearances we just read. All day long Jesus appeared to people elsewhere and sent them back to tell the disciples. Why didn't He just appear to them straight away and get it over with? There is a great lesson here, I think, that He was teaching them. The resurrection:

III. It Is A Fact We Are Called To Believe Without Seeing By sending witnesses to them all day long:

1. the Eleven were called to believe without seeing Jesus was asking them to believe His Word, His promise and the testimony of those who had already seen. He was calling them to faith in a fact that was certified by others but hadn't been seen with their own eyes. And what do we see was their reaction?

2. they stubbornly refused to believe without seeing Verse 11. They didn't believe Mary. Luke says they didn't believe the other women either and their words seemed to them like idle tales! Verse 13 tells us when the two came back from Emmaus they didn't believe them either. The next day, Thomas, after he was told by the Eleven, would in essence become the spokesman for the whole lesson for posterity, *So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."* - John 20:25. That's how they all felt at first: seeing is believing; you don't believe the impossible unless you see it. But:

3. Jesus rebuked their stubborn refusal to believe Verse 14. He rebuked their stubborn refusal to believe the witnesses He had sent. He told them, "My principle is different. I want you to believe on the basis of My Word and the witnesses I have chosen." He put the capstone on the whole lesson when He addressed Thomas in **John 20:29**, *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* That's the principle Jesus was going to drive home. "My resurrection is a fact that people ever after are going to have to accept by faith on the testimony of the eyewitnesses I send. I'm not going to personally appear to each person all down through the years of history so they can see for themselves and then believe. They will have to believe without seeing on the testimony of others and when they do, they will be blessed with eternal life!" So those failing disciples:

4. they in turn became Jesus' eyewitnesses to us Listen to the Scriptures. Luke says, *In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.* - **Acts 1:1-3**. Once they became convinced, these very apostles became eyewitnesses of the resurrection to spread the Word. Peter said, *We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* - **2 Pet. 1:16**. John wrote, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what*

we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ - 1 Jn. 1:1-3. Just like the women were to eyewitnesses to them to bring them to faith, Jesus ascended to heaven and they became for all time the eyewitnesses of His resurrection. They saw; they believed; they testified to the fact of what they had seen. And:

5. through them we are now called to believe without seeing Peter told us directly, *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. - 1 Pet. 1:8-9.*

This Easter morning, we are filled with a joy that words can't adequately express, a glorious joy. We have not stubbornly refused to believe until we see. We know that our souls are saved and we have eternal life because we have accepted by faith the testimony of those who saw firsthand and we believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead and He is alive! We have not seen Him but we love Him, because we know He's alive. It's not a theory we subscribe to; it's a fact we believe with all our hearts to be true. *For almost three centuries, Christians died because of their stubborn refusal to deny their belief in and loyalty to a living Savior. But eventually, even the Roman Emperor Constantine also accepted the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and Christianity became legal throughout the Empire. His mother Helena also became a devout and pious believer. In the year 326 she made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to see for herself the places associated with Jesus' life and death. She got a native guide who showed her what he felt was "the very spot which witnessed the Savior's sufferings." She was so moved that she ordered a church built on the spot. Eusebius writes, "The emperor now began to rear a monument to the Savior's victory over death with rich and lavish magnificence..." It is called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It has been destroyed by conquerors and rebuilt by the faithful several times in the intervening centuries but you can still go there and find it inside the city of Jerusalem today. The strange thing is that within a few paces in its grotto you can see the supposed site of the crucifixion and also that of the tomb. In 1883 a British general by the name of Charles Gordon was convicted that Helena had picked the wrong spot. He began to search outside the walls and found a rugged hill at a place where two roads converged which from a distance has what looks like eye sockets and gives it the appearance of a skull. But what's more significant is that two archaeologists shortly thereafter located an ancient unused tomb at the base of another hill right next to it. You can go there today too. Outside the tomb is a cistern dating back to the first century which provided water then as it does today for a lush garden in the otherwise dry soil. The huge stone is missing but the track it once rolled in is still there. As you duck to pass through the entrance you find yourself in a weeping chamber where the body was prepared and to your right are two benches hewn out of solid rock where bodies would be placed, one of them still unfinished. Though there is no way to know with certainty and a great many doubt it, it may well be the very spot where the Savior's body lay. At any rate it is a dramatic visual aid for those who go there to see a tomb just like, if not the very tomb Jesus was laid in and to sense firsthand the shock of the women at finding it open and to imagine the angel sitting on the stone bench and hearing, "He is not here, He is risen as He said." And to go away saying, "Look, it's still empty; He must be risen." But that's as close as you can get to seeing. Our acceptance of the fact of His resurrection does not depend on sight, either of the empty tomb or of a direct appearance of the resurrected Christ Himself. It is based on the solid testimony of a multitude of eyewitnesses who were there. Jesus asks us to believe the impossible on the basis of their testimony, without seeing anything for ourselves and, in that believing, promises us eternal life. I put the question to you this morning. Do you believe in your heart the impossible fact that God has raised Jesus from the dead, though you have not seen Him? If your heart answers "No", then do it now. Believe! If your heart answers "Yes", realize how blessed you are.*

Mark: A Portrait Of The Servant

The Servant's Resurrection: His Commission 16:15-20

Focus. It can be an extremely important thing in life. One of the most popular movies of 1995 tells the story of the ill-fated mission of the spacecraft Apollo 13. On Day Six the astronauts needed to make a critical course correction. If they failed, they might never return to earth. To conserve power, the onboard computer that steered the craft had been shut down. Yet the astronauts needed to conduct a thirty-nine-second burn of the main engines in the right direction to correct the course. But how could they steer? Astronaut Jim Lovell determined that if they could keep a fixed point in space in view through their tiny window, they could steer the craft manually. That focal point turned out to be their destination, the earth. For thirty-nine agonizing seconds, Lovell focused on one thing: keeping the earth in view. By not losing sight of that reference point, the three astronauts redeemed their own lives and returned safely to earth.

With this message we complete our study of Mark's Gospel and of Jesus' life on earth. In our text are some of Jesus' last words. This last message to His disciples was repeated five times, in all four Gospels and the Book of Acts. He had shown Himself to them alive. But what were they to do now? Go back to their fishing and their families, to eating and drinking and earning a living as they had before while He went back to heaven? No, Jesus made it plain by repetition that they were now to have a new and singular focus in life. You see:

I. Jesus Left Us With A Mission (15-16) that is to be the passion and focal point of our lives, the very purpose for our time on earth. In comparison with eternity, the years of your life on this earth from the time you're saved until you die phys-

ically is very much like those 39 seconds. They are very brief, but extremely critical, and if you just sit back and enjoy the scenery of salvation instead of focusing on the mission He left us with, they will be essentially lost to the purpose of God. Now look at verse 15 and notice:

1. the enormous scope of that mission (15) Our task, in one sense, is very simple. It is:

a. our task: to announce the good news The word *preach* in Greek means *to announce as a herald*. In ancient times people didn't have much money and they didn't have newspapers or radios, so news was carried by a herald or a crier whose job was to find a gathering of people and announce it for all to hear. The resurrection means we have, not just Good news, but the greatest, most necessary news the world has ever had. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. And on the third day He rose from the dead; He's alive. And any human being anywhere who believes it becomes an instant winner; he or she immediately and with no strings attached receives the free gift of eternal life! What news! But only a handful of human beings in one little spot knew it. So, they in that spot, and we in our little spot, become God's heralds, announcing the Good News to everybody who needs to hear it, which is everybody! The mission in that sense is very simple. We don't convince people of it; we don't argue people into it; we simply tell it by our lives and our words. But what's not so simple is that our target for this mission is enormous:

b. our target: the whole world, the whole race which God has created. Announce it to everyone, everywhere. The mission is so huge that in 2000 years we haven't got it done yet! There are still nearly 3 billion people who've never heard the announcement for the first time and you know how often you have to repeat announcements before anybody listens to them, right? The mission is enormous and it's not done until every last person in every last place in every last place on this earth has heard the Good News of what Jesus did! And let me emphasize something. That was not just *their* mission; that is *your* mission; that is *my* mission; that is *our* mission, the mission of the church of Jesus Christ, of which we're a part, to announce the good news to the whole world. Now, in the next verse, Jesus outlines:

2. the tremendous importance of that mission (16) It can change eternity for everyone who hears it, just like it did for us.

a. those who believe it will be eternally saved If they believe the News, they'll be transported out of the dominion of darkness and death and Satan and an eternal future in hell, straight into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. They'll be transformed from God's Enemies into His Children and Heirs and reign with Him forever. Now let me make a brief disclaimer about this verse: *Warning: Baptism is normal but not necessary to salvation!* It does not teach that you must be baptized to be saved. It just assumes baptism is a normal step that serious believers take. But notice it is not those who are not baptized who are condemned but He says:

b. those who disbelieve it will be eternally condemned If they don't believe what we announce, they'll be condemned forever. Those who heard are lost because they rejected it; they refused it. But those who never hear stand in the same shoes. *John 3:18* says, *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.* The whole race stands condemned now, lost forever, bound for hell. The only way out is to believe the News and they can't hear if we don't tell them.

Do you see what I'm telling you? While we lollygag through our secure lives as believers, thousands upon thousands of Christless souls everywhere perish forever because we fail to focus on our mission and we includes me! Let's get serious; let's get focused; let's announce the Good News to the whole world and let's do it in our generation for the first time in history! What an enormous mission for our lives! It would overwhelm us, except for this next important fact:

II. Jesus Promised That His Power Would Accompany Us (17-18) as we go. In **Acts 1:8** He made the idea clear, *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* It is His power that will do the job of making us witnesses where we are and to the ends of the earth. But in Mark what He's telling us is that:

1. He would provide powerful evidence of the truth of the message Moses had a problem when God told him to go down to Egypt and tell the good news that God was going to save Israel. He said, "They won't believe me!" God said, "They will too; I will give them signs, powerful supernatural evidence that what you're saying is true." Now these verses have gotten a lot of people in trouble because they build a theology around them. Let me point out two cautions:

a. this promise is not individual but corporate It does not say that every individual believer everywhere will speak in tongues, pick up snakes, lay hands on the sick and heal them, and so on. The early church never had healing services and healing lines. They never did snake-handling in church; that was invented in the hills of Kentucky! This is a general statement that the church, believers as a group, those who believe, will find God's power at work with them in marvelous ways like these. And the record shows they did. Secondly:

b. this promise is not universal but discretionary It doesn't say Jesus will ALWAYS protect His followers, or heal the sick. If it did, James and Stephen wouldn't have died as martyrs, the apostles would never have been jailed and Paul would have gotten free of his thorn in the flesh! There were occasions when, at His choosing, He

did things like this. God also testified to it [the salvation announced by the apostles] by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. - **Heb. 2:4**. God picked the times and places for these things in His wisdom; He showed His power when and how it would do the most good. So, the warning is this: **Warning: We are not to seek the signs but to announce the message!** Too many Christians are running around looking for signs and trying to produce them to validate themselves; our job is to announce the message and let God validate it by His power however and whenever He chooses to. What we have here are:

2. some examples of the variety of ways He would display that power For example:

a. at times his followers would visibly defeat demonic forces Paul would turn and cast the demon out of that slave girl at Philippi in Acts 16, but he didn't do it right away, nor everywhere he went, and indeed, it seems he put it off until it was a necessity. *A missionary in Africa tells of a knock on her door in the middle of the night. And there stood a man who said, "I've been a fetish worshipper all my life but recently I noticed that my prayers to the fetishes aren't being answered. Tonight, I decided to get rid of them. I took them to the river and threw them in. But they jumped right out again and fastened themselves onto my back. I was horrified! Then I remembered hearing one of you preach about the power of the name of Jesus. So, I pulled them off my back shouting, "In the name of Jesus get away from me!" I flung them again into the river and this time they sank like stones. Now I want to receive Jesus into my life!"* God still shows His power over demonic forces and validates His message!

b. at times his followers would miraculously speak new languages It happened three times in Acts, at Pentecost, at Cornelius' house, and at Ephesus and it doesn't seem to have continued in anybody's life. Only at Corinth do we hear that it became a problem and there Paul said plainly, "Tongues are a sign for unbelievers..." They were given to validate the Gospel to them. I heard a missionary to China relate years ago how he was called to the bedside of a dying woman and had no one to translate and God enabled him to speak Chinese to her and she came to Christ. He never spoke it before or since. But when God needed to give that gift, He did it!

c. at times his followers would be miraculously protected from harm Paul would reach down and pick up firewood years later on Malta and the snake would bite him and he wouldn't even get sick. But most believers bit by snakes do! Eusebius tells us that Justus Barsabbas mentioned in Acts 1:23, years later drank a deadly poison but experienced nothing injurious through the grace of the Lord, though most believers who drink poison do. But when God needs to, He shows His power in protecting them in miraculous ways, even today. And:

d. at times his followers would miraculously heal sickness Paul laid his hands on Publius' father in Acts 28 and healed him and I'm sure they became believers. But he could never cure himself. Many, if not most, believers have always died through sickness of one sort or another. But God used that gift at that moment to advance the Gospel. I like what Alexander Jones said about signs and miracles, "The infant Church needed them, the adult Church is not without them". There was no written Word, no unchanging standard of truth, their numbers were so small and the task so enormous. The church in its infancy needed the display of God's power desperately to spread through the world, but though the need for that display has lessened, we are not without it today, and any place where the church has yet to make a beachhead, we often find the same thing. Yet Jesus still shows the power of His name everywhere we go, if not in external signs and miracles, always in the constantly repeated and predictable miracle of the new birth for all those who believe. And that too is just as powerful evidence of the truth of the Gospel. The lesson here, really is this:

III. Jesus Works With Us In A Partnership (19-20) We do have in one sense:

1. we have separate spheres of location Where is Jesus?

a. Jesus, now as then, remains bodily seated in heaven (19) After 40 days of repeating His instructions He ascended bodily to heaven and took His rightful place on the throne. Bodily speaking, He's still up there, though through His Holy Spirit He is in us too. He's reigning, ruling, controlling, working all things together for good. And what about us?

b. we, like the disciples, go out and preach everywhere (20a) We're still down here, millions of us and we're scattered now all over the face of the earth, even as far as Glenside! And everywhere we go, we're announcing the Good News that Jesus is alive and there is salvation through believing in His name. So, He's busy ruling up there and we're busy announcing down here, but the grand truth here is that:

2. we work together as one in our mission (20b) The Greek word is *sunergeo*, *to labor together with*. Jesus labors with us in our enormous task, or perhaps more appropriately, we labor together with Him. Maybe we ought to just turn to **2 Cor. 5:18-20** and let Paul say it. You see:

a. He carries His message to the world through us The ministry of carrying the Good News of salvation in Jesus and announcing it is committed to us. But it is Him through us. He through us is calling the world to believe, to receive Him and in turn:

b. He validates His message to the world in power, yes through signs and wonders sometimes and in some places, but always in the power of the drawing men and women and children to Himself and making them brand new creatures. It happens all over the world, everywhere the message is preached.

In Conspiracy of Kindness, Steve Sjogren (pronounced Show-gren) tells the true story of Joe Delaney and his 8-year-old son, Jared, who were playing catch in their backyard in the Cincinnati area. Jared asked, "Dad, is there a God?" Joe replied that he went to church only a few times when he was a kid; he really had no idea. Jared ran into the house. "I'll be right back!" he yelled. Moments later he returned with a helium balloon from the circus, a pen, and an index card. "I'm going to send God an airmail message," Jared explained. "Dear God," wrote Jared, "if you are real, and you are there, send people who know you to Dad and me." God, I hope you're watching, Joe thought, as they watched the balloon and message sail away. Two days later, Joe and Jared pulled into a car wash sponsored by Sjogren's church. When Joe asked, "How much?" he was told, "It's free. No strings attached." "But why are you doing this?" Joe asked. "We just want to show God's love in a practical way," Sjogren answered. "Are you guys Christians, the kind of Christians who believe in God?" Joe asked. Sjogren said, "Yes, we're that kind of Christians." From that encounter, Steve led Joe to faith in Christ. Oh, we have a mission! It's life or death. The world needs to hear or perish and the 39 crucial seconds of our short life are passing fast. He could do it without us, but He chooses not to. Instead He chooses to do it through us. He moves men and women to seek Him. He takes the message to them through us and confirms it by His power as He chooses. We're in a deep partnership in this enormous project. But if it's to be successful, we have to focus on what we're about, on what we're still on earth for, on what our mission is. If all of us, here at GBC and across the world, would just grasp the importance of this, we could get the job done in our generation. I guarantee you there is no more exciting or rewarding way to live. I leave you with the Master's words, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. What are you doing with them?"

Outline: Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

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The Birth Of The Son Of Man - Lk. 1-2

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Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

Introduction and The Conception Of Jesus - Ch. 1

It is my hope that we can study together through the Gospel of Luke in the next few months. Of course, that will mean skipping many passages and hitting only the major points, but I hope you'll find it worthwhile. Let's read the:

I. Introduction To The Gospel Of Luke - 1:1-4 Our New Testament contains four narratives of the life and ministry of Jesus, the four Gospels. Now why would God want us to have four accounts of the same event? Well, first because it's the most important event in all of human history, but secondly, whenever people go through the same experience, each of them is impressed to notice and remember different aspects of it, and what impacts them depends on who they are. I wrote in my Kyrgyzstan journal a couple weeks ago about my trip to Lake Issyk Kul and described how impressed I was with the beauty of God's creation, the majestic mountains, the autumn colors of the trees, the sky blue of the lake. My friend Gulmira who lives in Chicago read my narrative and wrote, *...when you described Issyk-Kul I almost had tears in my eyes...I am missing home so much*. I saw a beautiful place and felt awe; she saw home and felt homesick. Who you are colors what you notice and what you experience. Matthew and John were disciples who walked with Jesus for 3 ½ years. They were Jews, fishermen who lived in Galilee. Luke was a Greek and he came to faith much later; he was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys in Turkey and Greece. And while Matthew was a tax collector

and John a fisherman, Paul says Luke was a doctor. Who Luke was makes a difference in what he recorded, so here are a few of the distinctives of this Gospel. Being a doctor:

1. Luke emphasizes the human nature of Jesus He records things like Jesus' emotions, His compassion and his weeping, the things that make Him truly human just like us. And, being a Greek:

2. Luke emphasizes the universal nature of the Good News He traces the genealogy of Jesus in chapter 3, not back to Abraham which is what interests the Jews, but all the way to Adam, indicating that His salvation is for all mankind. He is writing this to *Theophilus*, a Greek name, possibly that of an important official. He portrays non-Jews in a favorable light, even Samaritans coming to faith and he notices Jesus' interactions with women, children and social outcasts like lepers. In fact:

3. Luke includes much material not found in the other Gospels He is the one who includes all the stories of the birth of John and of Jesus; in fact, most of Luke 10-17 is unique material not recorded by the others. And, of course, as a doctor:

4. Luke is greatly concerned with details and accuracy As he says. He was careful to get his material from eyewitnesses, that is, from the apostles and from Mary, Jesus' mother. He sets out to write an account that is ordered, that proceeds carefully step by step. And the reason, found in verse 4, is that:

5. Luke is writing to give us assurance of what we have been taught He wanted Theophilus, and us, to know that the things we've been told about Jesus are true and accurate and factual so that we might have assurance of our salvation! His attitude is like that of Peter who wrote, *...we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* - 2 Pet. 1:16. The things written in the Gospels aren't just ancient stories, fairy tales or myths people used to believe. They are events that really happened, exactly the way they are recorded, miracles and all. They were verified carefully and attested to by many and you can trust them!

II. The Conception Of Jesus - 1:5-80 Our big focus this morning is obviously the Children's Program, which they are waiting anxiously to present to us. So I'm just going to point out to you **Five Lessons From Mary's Angel Visit**. I've printed the familiar text of the story from the Easy-To-Read Version so you can follow along. It begins like this:

...God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin girl who lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph from the family of David. Her name was Mary. And right there's our first lesson:

1. God uses young people and children to accomplish great things! When God was ready to send His Son into the world, He didn't choose an older, more mature woman; He chose a young girl. Mary was only a teenager, probably 16 or 17. She was engaged but not yet married. She had no experience with pregnancy or having babies or caring for them, yet God chose to use her to give us our Savior! Daniel and his three friends were only teens when they were carried away as captives to Babylon, yet God used them to change the heart of King Nebuchadnezzar! Samuel was only a child when God began to speak to him, but he grew up to lead the nation of Israel. Don't think because you're a kid that God can't use you! He can do great things through you! I'm here today because an 11 year old boy decided to be my friend and invite me to his church! Let's continue:

The angel came to her and said, "Greetings! The Lord is with you; you are very special to him." But Mary was very confused about what the angel said. She wondered, "What does this mean?" The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, because God is very pleased with you. There's lesson number two:

2. You are very special to God and He is with you! Mary was scared and confused. Wouldn't you be if an angel suddenly appeared to you with a message from God? But you don't ever have to be scared of God. He is not some distant holy Being who is waiting to judge you; He is your Father, your Heavenly Father, who loves you more than you can ever comprehend. Those words are not just for Mary; YOU are just as special to Him. He is always with you. In fact, when you asked Jesus to be your Savior, He came to actually live inside of you, so there is never a moment that He is not with you. You don't ever need to be afraid of Him! When my grandson Alex was 3 and his big brother James asked him if he ever has scary dreams when he goes to bed, in his 3 year old voice he said, "No, I just see Jesus and then I'm not scared to go to sleep." He IS with you! Then the angel said:

Listen! You will become pregnant and have a baby boy. You will name him Jesus. He will be great. People will call him the Son of the Most High God, and the Lord God will make him king like his ancestor David. He will rule over the people of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen? I am still a virgin." The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of the Most High God will cover you. The baby will be holy and will be called the Son of God. Lesson number three is:

3. You don't have to understand how God is going to do things! Mary couldn't understand how it could be possible for her to have a baby without a man. It's humanly impossible and everybody knows it. Many times in our lives, we don't see how God could possibly help us or do what we need or get us out of the trouble we're in. But God has ways of working that are not only beyond anything we could think up, but He also sometimes does outright miracles to make His plans happen. You don't have to figure out or understand how He's going to do things; you just have to trust Him and believe what the angel said to Mary next:

... *God can do anything!*" That's lesson four:

4. Believe that God can do anything! Nothing is impossible for Him! He can make a young girl have a baby without a man; even greater, He can have His Son Jesus come to live inside her womb as a baby and be born as a human being! He can part the waters of the Red Sea or dry up the Jordan River for His people to cross. He has the power to do whatever He chooses to do! But the ending of this story is what's most important:

Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let this thing you have said happen to me!" Then the angel went away. - Lk. 1:26-38 ERV. The last lesson is this:

5. Always see yourself as God's servant and obey Him even if it's hard! Be like Mary! Have the attitude she had! She knew it wouldn't be easy for her. She knew nobody would believe her story that an angel had appeared and that she was pregnant with God's son by a miracle! Not even Joseph or her own parents! She knew they would believe she was lying and had been a bad girl who cheated on her fiancé and they would heap shame on her. But none of that mattered. She didn't know what her future would hold now but she trusted God would take care of her somehow and said, "I am Your servant; I am willing to do what you want, to cooperate with whatever you want for my life, no matter how hard it is!" Oh, if only we were all like her! How much God could do with us! I leave you with this poem:

From Mary

By Kathy Lowe Hart

"Really, God? You chose me?

But why?

I'm ordinary, young, uneducated,

Not married.

Why me for such a task?"

Then comes understanding.

Not the answer to WHY, but just THE answer:

"I am not alone in this,

And nothing is impossible with God."

At worst, it's terrifying,

At best, sobering.....

And eventually joy-filled

To be selected for God's service.

We are all Mary.

Accept being chosen,

For nothing is impossible with God.

[\[https://www.centralchurch.us/from-mary-kathy-low-hart/\]](https://www.centralchurch.us/from-mary-kathy-low-hart/)

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Birth Of The Son Of Man - Lk. 1-2

The Birth Of Jesus - 2:1-20

There is no more familiar story to us than that of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2 which we read every Christmas without fail. But before we explore it together, let me summarize for you the drama of events that occurred in the little town of Nazareth in Galilee in Chapter 1. The angel Gabriel had appeared to a virgin girl named Mary to tell her she would become pregnant by the power of the Spirit of God and be the mother of the promised Messiah. She did become pregnant and immediately she left home and went to the hill country to visit her childless older cousin Elizabeth, whom she found now to be 6 months pregnant with a child she would name John [the Baptist]. She stayed there three months until Elizabeth's baby was born and then returned home to Nazareth three months pregnant. Of course, everybody was shocked and didn't believe her story. Matthew tells us that her fiancé Joseph was ready to divorce her for unfaithfulness, but Gabriel appeared to him also and told him her story was true and that he should take her to his home and care for her as his wife. So he did and for six months they continued living in Nazareth, probably enduring the scornful looks of their neighbors, as

Mary's baby grew to term. Everybody, including Mary and Joseph, fully expected the baby to be born there in a normal fashion, but He wasn't! In (1-4) we're told about:

I. The Circumstance Which Caused Jesus To Be Born In Bethlehem The Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, issued a decree that the whole world (by which he meant the whole Roman Empire) should be registered in a census. Of course, that's not because he was interested in population data; this was in preparation for levying taxes and raising money. But regardless of his intent:

1. Caesar's decree forced Joseph to go to Bethlehem People were registered according to their family line so every family was required to go to the home town where their ancestors came from, regardless of where they currently lived. Both Joseph and Mary were descendants of King David and his home town was Bethlehem, so Joseph rather unexpectedly found himself required to show up in Bethlehem to register his name at a rather inconvenient time when Mary had reached full term and was soon to deliver. However, there was another decree, one that every Jewish man or woman knew:

2. God decreed that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem Look with me at **Micah 5:2**. God says plainly that His ruler, His King, His Messiah, would come forth from Bethlehem. Everybody knew that. Now Gabriel had told Mary that her child was to be that promised Messiah, but if so, He absolutely could not be born in Nazareth where they lived; He had to be born in Bethlehem or the Scripture would be unfulfilled. So, what did God do about that? He simply moved a pagan emperor who lived 2500 miles away to issue a decree which arrived in Galilee at just the right time to force Joseph to be in Bethlehem at the exact moment that the baby would be born! Listen, God's timing is always perfect! And He always watches over His Word to fulfill it! You can count on that! After the wise men came and the family spent a brief time in Egypt as refugees, Joseph took his family back to Nazareth. So, Jesus was called a Nazarene. He was known as Jesus of Nazareth or Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth. But He wasn't born there. In fact:

3. there was doubt in later years because people didn't know this - **Jn. 7:41-42** says, *Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"* Nobody wrote down this story that's now so familiar to us. Nobody took note of Jesus' birth and all the things that we read about now in Scripture. Mary kept all these things and shared them years later with His disciples, but the general public didn't know that God had done a miracle, that God had indeed kept His word and sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem just long enough so that Jesus was indeed born there in accord with the Scripture!

God always keeps His Word and He will move heaven and earth to do it! In a moment, we'll see that He had Jesus' birth announced at the very spot He predicted. He had Jesus taken to Egypt to fulfill the Word, *Out of Egypt have I called My Son*. He had him grow up in Nazareth so He would be called a Nazarene in accord with the Scripture. He set Jesus' main ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles to fulfill Isaiah's words about *the people who walked in darkness*. At the cross He had the soldiers gamble for His clothes and a soldier pierce His side because the Scripture said so. He was crucified with thieves, counted with transgressors, and buried in a rich man's tomb because Isaiah said so. And He rose from the dead the third day according to the Scriptures. CBN.com says that *the Old Testament contains over 300 prophecies that Jesus fulfilled through His life, death and resurrection*. Mathematically the odds of one person fulfilling 300 prophecies are roughly 1 chance in 10⁹⁵⁰ power! www1.cbn.com/biblestudy/biblical-prophecies-fulfilled-by-jesus Jesus IS the promised Messiah and Savior of the world and God DOES watch over His Word to fulfill every detail! Hallelujah! Well, let's move on to look at:

II. The Circumstances Of Jesus' Birth (5-7) At this point Mary was too far along for Joseph to risk leaving her, but think about:

1. the difficult journey which Mary endured It's a distance of 80 miles from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea and good Jews never traveled through Samaria which lay in between. Instead, they crossed the Jordan River and traveled down the road on the east side until they crossed back at Jericho and then went steeply up 3000 feet in 18 miles to Jerusalem and another 5 miles beyond it to Bethlehem. I think it meant a minimum of 4 days and maybe as long as a week, camping out along the way. Imagine enduring that when you're ready to deliver a baby, even if you do get to ride on a donkey much of the way! Mary was one tough young chick! But notice:

2. the perfect timing of God He didn't let her have the baby along the way and He didn't hold off the birth until they arrived back home. He wanted Jesus to be born IN Bethlehem and He had Mary there at the exact right time for the delivery! God is never early in the sense that He does things too soon and He is never late. His timing is ALWAYS right on schedule, even in your life! When we moved here in 1979, we had been between churches and without a paycheck for two months and our money was gone; I was going to buy our first groceries on a credit card because I didn't know what else to do, but Jim Campbell, the church treasurer, showed up and said, "I thought you might need your first paycheck in advance!" Boy, did we! And the Lord was right on time; He always is! But back to Mary and Joseph, take note of:

3. the humble lodging which they found The little village was absolutely crowded with pilgrims coming to register. The noted scholar W.F. Albright estimates that it only had about 300 residents at that time so every home had taken in

strangers. It had one little inn, but don't think of some hotel like the Marriott! It was a simple one room shelter where passing travelers could camp overnight on their own, with a stable for their animals, in this case probably a natural cave the "inn" was built against. There was no "innkeeper" of the sort we love to portray and the place was packed out with families crammed into every corner. The only room was in the stable with the animals. And there Mary's baby was born, certainly with Joseph's help and perhaps with the aid of some kind women from the inn. She wrapped him tightly in strips of cloth, *swaddling clothes*, she'd brought along just in case, and instead of a crib, she laid him in a feed rack, a *manger*, on the soft hay. What a contrast that the Creator and King of the universe should enter it in such humble circumstances, worse than anything any of us would ever want to have our baby in! That says something about the character of Jesus, doesn't it? He said, *Come to me...for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* - Mt. 11:28-29. Charles Wesley wrote the old hymn, *Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, Look upon a little child; Pity my simplicity, Suffer me to come to Thee.* Our King is lowly! Our King is humble! Our King came to bring us salvation by dying on a cross! But when He returns, He will come with a rod of iron to judge the nations, so come to Him now! Moving on, thirdly, we have in these verses:

III. The Announcement Of Jesus' Birth (8-20) An event this big, this momentous, needs to be announced to the world! Today an event like this would be in the largest type possible in every newspaper and on every website, carried on every news channel. The announcement would be given to an audience of the most important rank, to presidents and governors, to celebrities and important people of every description. But Jesus' birth wasn't! **(8)**

1. His birth was announced to ordinary shepherds, not in the city before crowds but in lonely fields at night! Why shepherds? Based on false assumptions, many have said that shepherds were despised in Jewish society, when the exact opposite seems to be true. Abraham was a shepherd! Moses was a shepherd! King David was a shepherd and he wrote, *The LORD is my SHEPHERD* and the whole rest of the 23rd Psalm. God describes Himself many times in Scripture as the Shepherd of His people and Jesus later will say, *I am the Good Shepherd!* In fact, when Matthew quotes that birth prediction we read earlier in Micah 5:2, he says, *...from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.* [Source: <https://factsand Trends.net/2015/12/17/christmas-urban-legends-shepherds-as-outcasts/>] God announced the birth of His Great Shepherd of the Sheep to people who understood better than anyone what it meant for a Messiah to be born who was a Shepherd, who would tenderly care for His people and lay down His life to save them! This One who was born was a Savior, One who would rescue His people the way a shepherd leaves the 99 and goes after the lost sheep until he finds it! God saw that Jesus' birth was announced to the *right* people, the people who were most like Him, but not only that:

2. it was announced at the predicted place Just as every Jew knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem; they also knew that His coming would be announced at a specific place. **Micah 4:8** says, *And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.* "Tower of the Flock" in Hebrew is **Migdal Eder** and it was a specific place, an ancient stone tower dating back to Jacob's time about half a mile down the road from Bethlehem toward Jerusalem, that was used by shepherds as a high point to watch over the flocks on the hillside. But these were not just any flocks; the Jewish Mishna tells us that the flocks kept here were the Temple flocks. The lambs born here were destined for the daily sacrifices in the Temple, two every day, morning and evening. Here, at just the right place, the announcement was made that God had sent the Savior at last and He would be, as John said, *the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!* In that place where sacrificial lambs were born and grew up to die, God's Sacrificial Lamb was born, who grew up to die and save us all! Hallelujah! Now His birth:

3. it was announced by a glorious angel (9-11) Can you imagine the scene as a brilliantly shining angel suddenly appears in the dark night sky above you? No wonder the shepherds were terrified! But the angel reassured them and urged them not to be afraid because he was a messenger with Good News. And through him:

a. they were told the Good News of the birth of the Christ, the long-expected Messiah. The angel said, "He was born today right here in Bethlehem!" What Good News! It is a message that would bring great joy, not just to them, but to all the people of Israel and ultimately to all the people of the world! The Savior is born at last, right here, today! What an announcement! And then:

b. they were told how to find Him (12) The angel said, "Go look for yourselves and I'll tell you how to recognize Him; you'll find him wrapped in swaddling cloths, strips of cloth in which Jewish mothers wrap their newborn babies, but He'll be lying in a manger!" Whoa, wait a minute. A manger is a feed rack filled with hay that you find in stable. Who puts their newborn in the barn in a feed rack with animals? Nobody who has a house to stay in, that's for sure! There's only one place where such a thing might happen, at the inn which is crowded with all the strangers who've come to town. So now they knew where to look, but a simple announcement was not enough **(13-14)**. Jesus' birth:

4. it was celebrated by a sky filled with angels Can you imagine it? Suddenly there are hundreds, maybe thousands, of bright shining angels from God's heavenly army all across the night sky. We think of them as singing because that's what we do, but the text says *saying*. I think they were actually shouting, "Glory to God!" And we also think of them doing it in unison like we do when we recite the line in our Christmas play, but what if every one of them was

just shouting that line out with excitement randomly. Can you imagine the ear-splitting symphony, "Glory, glory, glory..." ringing out from all sides! "Glory to God and peace to you!!" What a celebration! Never has an announcement been made as glorious as that one! Then just as suddenly as the angels had appeared, they all went back to heaven, leaving the shepherds in the quiet of the night and:

5. the shepherds became the first witnesses of Jesus' birth (15-16)

a. they ran to Bethlehem as fast as they could and **found Jesus** right away, just as the angel had said. We're not told what happened when they arrived, but I'm sure at the very least they told Mary and Joseph the story of the angels and the announcement on the hillside. That's how we have the story of it to read today; verse 19 says Mary kept the memory of what they shared and she passed it on to the disciples years later! How it must have thrilled Mary and Joseph's hearts to hear them recite what the angel said about their baby being the Savior of the world and the glorious way in which the announcement was made and the prophecies fulfilled! But the real point the text is making is that:

b. they shared the news about Him with all who would listen (17-18) They ran into the inn and shared what had happened. They stopped everyone they met on the street and shared the Good News that the Messiah was born right there in Bethlehem! Maybe they knocked on the doors of some houses! The people they talked to were in shock and marveled at what they were told. Could it really be true? The Christ was born, right here tonight? The shepherds were the first evangelists to share the Good News that God had sent a Savior into the world and peace with God could be had through Him! They were the first to give the invitation to go and see the Christ! Then after they shared with all they saw:

c. they returned to their fields worshipping God (20) Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you spend the rest of the night worshipping and praising God after an experience like that? Or maybe the rest of your life?

But let's not miss the application to ourselves. The shepherds first HEARD the Good News, then they EXPERIENCED the Good News for themselves and their reaction was to SHARE that Good News with everyone who would listen. WE have heard the Good News! WE have experienced the Good News by meeting Christ and having our lives changed. And our reaction should be a passion to SHARE that Good News with anyone who is willing to listen! The shepherds challenge us to have the same passion for sharing Jesus that they did. Two weeks ago, LuAnn and I went to the memorial service for Bernice Givens, the mother of two of our missionaries, Bob and Dave Givens. Bernice was 100 years old, but almost 300 people showed up for the service. All her life Bernice had taught and promoted Good News Clubs and a number testified about the strong passion that she had to share the Good News with children. She had a Wordless Book and used that tool with every child that came near her, even into her last days. On the morning that she died her mind was still lucid and she said to one of her sons, "I'm excited to go to heaven soon, but I still wish I could take a few more with me!" Jesus had changed her life as a young girl and all her days she had a passion to tell others about Him. May her passion and the passion of the shepherds be ours!

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Birth Of The Son Of Man - Lk. 1-2

The Childhood Of Jesus - 2:21-52

The first half of Luke 2 which describes Jesus' birth is among the most often read portions of the Bible, while the second half which describes the rest of His first 30 years, His childhood, youth and young adulthood, is pretty much neglected. The events of Jesus' early life are largely unknown, despite the claims of various cult groups and fancifully invented false writings that are out there about it. The Scripture only records five scenarios from those 30 years and four of them are right here in our text. The first one is:

I. Jesus' First Month In Bethlehem Even though they could only find lodging in a stable that first night, evidently Joseph and Mary soon found real housing in Bethlehem and began to live there. I assume this was their plan from the beginning, as they knew they would need to visit the Temple 30 days after the child was born and it would be difficult to make the trip to and from Nazareth again so soon. So, while they were living in Bethlehem, verse (21). The baby:

1. He was circumcised on the 8th day, exactly as the Law specified, and at that time, as Jewish custom dictated, He was **officially named Jesus**, because that is what they were told by God to name Him. It means "Jehovah or Yahweh is salvation", in the Hebrew *Yehoshua*, like Joshua of old, or *Yeshua* for short. Then, following that:

2. He was presented to the Lord at the Temple at one month old (22-24) This visit to the Temple was required for two reasons. First, the Law said that any woman who gave birth to a male child had to go and offer a sacrifice for her purification from uncleanness and since Joseph and Mary were poor, the sacrifice required of them was two doves or young pigeons, one for a sin offering and one for a burnt offering. But the second reason was that the Law repeatedly said that every firstborn son belongs to the Lord and must be given to Him. So, they would put the child in the arms of

a priest who would then offer two short benedictions or prayers and the couple would pay the redemption price of five silver shekels required by the Law. Notice how devout Mary and Joseph were, how careful they were to obey to the letter everything God told them to do, both in His Word and by His angel, even though it caused them to have to live in a strange town for a month to do it! What an example for us! They're the kind of parents we ought to be! Our genuinely devout example makes a powerful impact on our children. No wonder God was willing to entrust the care of His Son to them! But much more happened on this occasion. This godly old man named Simeon met them as they came into the Temple and:

3. the Holy Spirit confirmed through Simeon that Jesus was the Christ (25-35) The Spirit had told him that he wouldn't die without seeing the Lord's Christ and when He saw the infant Jesus, the Spirit must have spoken to his mind and said, "Here He is!" What joy it brought him personally! Now he could die in peace, having seen the Lord's promise fulfilled! But this "chance" encounter had an even greater purpose. Think of the affirmation it brought to Joseph and Mary to have this godly stranger out of the blue recognize what they already knew, that their baby was indeed the Christ and make prophecies about Him that He would not only be the glory of Israel but a light to all the nations of the earth! Verse 33 says they marveled at what he said! But that's not all that happened. At that very moment as Simeon is declaring all of this, another stranger walks in on it (**36-38**). Anna was a prophetess, a woman through whom God spoke, and when she heard that this was the Christ, the Spirit also confirmed it to her own heart. But she not only began to worship with thanksgiving, what Luke notes about her is that:

4. the prophetess Anna began to tell everyone that He was the Christ She went to announce the news to all the people who were in the Temple courts and maybe in the streets. She went to all the devout people she knew, people who loved the Lord and were waiting for the coming of the Christ and she told them, "He's here! He's born! I saw Him with my own eyes!" First, the shepherds stirred up Bethlehem with the news on the night of His birth and now Anna began to stir up Jerusalem with the same news from that day of His dedication! If you know that God has done something, that He has sent salvation to the world, you want to share it! You don't want to keep it to yourself; you want to tell others!

What a day this must have been for Mary and Joseph as they went back to their little house in Bethlehem! What joy they must have felt! But their joy did not last long. Luke chooses not to record what happened next:

II. The Arrival Of The Wise Men And The Sojourn In Egypt is recorded for us in **Mt. 2:13-23**. These three Persian Magi show up one night soon after, declare that their baby is indeed the newborn King of the Jews. They fall down and worship him and give him these expensive gifts fit for a King! What a shock that must have been, but that very night God warned Joseph to take the baby and flee in the darkness because Herod would try to kill Him. So, off they went on another pilgrimage of at least 50 miles or so to get outside of Judea and into Egyptian territory and Jesus with his family officially becomes a displaced refugee seeking asylum. How long they stayed we are not told exactly, but since Herod died in March of 4 BC, it was probably not much more than a month and when they returned, it was not to Bethlehem where Herod's son now ruled, but all the way home to Nazareth in Galilee, where Luke picks up the story and tells us about:

III. Jesus' Childhood In Nazareth (39-40) Luke simply doesn't mention those events, but focuses again on how devout Joseph and Mary were and moves on to a one verse description of Jesus' life in Nazareth. Now before we examine it more closely, I'd like to look at some theological background that's given to us in the book of Hebrews about what it meant for Jesus to become a true human being. We're told clearly that:

1. Jesus was made like us in every respect - Heb. 2:17 His body didn't just look like ours; it was exactly like ours, except without sin. His mind was like ours. His emotions were like ours. And that means that:

2. He experienced everything the way we experience it - Heb. 4:15 He experienced every temptation, to lie, to cheat, to lust, to become full of rage, everything exactly as we experience it. He experienced all the other things we experience, frustration, discouragement, pain, sorrow, joy, laughter, everything a normal human being experiences. He didn't exempt Himself from all those things. 5:8 says He *learned obedience through what He suffered*. He learned what obedience is like from the human side when it can be painful and costly. That's what makes Him so understanding that we can go to Him for help in any situation we find ourselves in. He gets it; He lived through it just like we do! Now let's go back to verse 40 of Luke 2 where we see this spelled out. As a child, Jesus:

3. He grew naturally just as we do He didn't come to earth in full blown adult form, but in the body of a baby so as the months and years passed:

a. He grew physically in body He had to learn to walk, to learn to talk, to learn to use the outhouse. He was too short to reach things and had to be carried. He had to learn to dress Himself and to play the games the other kids played. He got tired and when He fell or stubbed His toe, it hurt, just like ours does. His body underwent normal human development stage by stage just like ours does. So kids, let me assure you that when you're frustrated by being too little and too young and it's too tough to learn to do things, Jesus understands because He went through it too! His body grew up strong and healthy, but here's an amazing thing:

b. He grew mentally in wisdom How this can be, I don't know, but Jesus didn't start out as a baby knowing everything there is to know! He limited Himself from that in the incarnation so that He would have to learn like we learn! His parents were His first teachers. They read to Him and carefully taught Him the Scriptures, as well as many other life lessons. From the age of 5 or 6 through about 15 He went to school at the synagogue as all Jewish boys did in that day and was taught reading and writing and history and mathematics, as well as the Scriptures. He didn't simply know all these things already but had to learn and memorize like we do. He knows how hard all that can be! Then He also sat at his father Joseph's feet learning the trade of a carpenter. He learned how to use each of the tools, how to pick the wood, how to craft a chair or a table or a cabinet. He chose to put Himself through having to learn all these things just as we do and He grew rapidly in wisdom through the years. Then in the spiritual realm:

4. the Father was at work in His life That word *favor* is literally *grace*. He learned to pray and the Father answered His prayers. He learned to see God do things in His life and other people's lives and cooperate with what God was doing just as we must. I say this with all reverence, but it seems to me that in a very real sense, because of the way that He limited Himself in becoming man, that He actually had to learn to know His Heavenly Father in the same way that we do! And He went every Friday to the synagogue with His family and worshipped and prayed and learned just as we do here. Now the next scenario that comes on the scene is:

IV. Jesus' Visit To The Temple At Twelve (41-50) This is a pretty familiar story, but in studying I learned something about it that I never realized before. This:

1. it appears to have been His first visit to Jerusalem and the Temple (41-42) As I've said, Mary and Joseph were devout and loved the Lord deeply. They kept the Law and went up from Nazareth to Jerusalem every year for the Feast of Passover. But I never thought about the fact that children often didn't go along. At the age of 13 every Jewish boy was to be recognized as a "son of the Torah", a custom Jews continue today as a *bar Mitzvah*. It was a rite of passage to adulthood in a sense. Now the boy was no longer dependent upon his parents' spirituality, but was responsible to God for his own actions and for keeping the Law on his own incentive. He was to take ownership of his own spiritual life, keeping all the ordinances. So, in preparation for that, parents would begin to take their sons along to the Feasts in Jerusalem a year or two earlier and when Jesus was 12 Joseph and Mary took Him along to prepare Him. So, this could have been the very first time that Jesus had seen the Holy City of Jerusalem that He had heard about and read Psalms about and desired to set foot in all His life. And it could have been His first time to see the majestic Temple of God, the Holiest Place on the earth, the place where God had set His Name and said that He should be worshipped. How thrilled His heart must have been! Now most of the time when we read this story we think about things like, "How could his parents not have taken better care and lost him for several days?" or "How could Jesus not have made sure to go home when they left?" But neither of those is the point. Where do they find Jesus? In the Temple! And what is He doing? **(46-47)**. The point is that at the age of 12:

2. He appears to already have a deep desire to learn the Scriptures and a deep understanding of them He's absorbed, so absorbed that He can't break away from it. He's not off playing in the streets with other kids; He's listening to the Rabbis' instruction hour after hour, drinking it in and asking adult level questions beyond His years, so much so that they're all amazed at Him. From His absorbing and memorizing of the Scriptures over His young years, He's asking them questions they don't have answers for. Maybe questions like those He raised later, "In the Psalm David calls the Christ his Lord; how can He then can He be his son?" Or "Why did Moses permit a man to give his wife a writing of divorce when God said in the beginning that the two become one flesh?" When His parents find Him at last, we often think He's being terse or disrespectful in his reply in verse **(49)**. Or as some translations say, *about My Father's business or the things of My Father*. That's significant; He's revealing the depths of what He's come to understand. Again, I say this reverently, treading on holy ground, but here in the Temple at the age of 12:

3. He appears to have come to a full understanding of His life's mission He appears at last to have realized fully who He truly is, the Son of God, and that His whole life going forward is the carrying out of a mission that the Father has sent Him to earth to complete. By the way, so is ours! God birthed us on this earth to carry out a mission that He has designed for us, to accomplish a set of good works that God has prepared beforehand for us specifically to do, according to Eph. 2:10! We're not put in this world to do whatever we want, to seek whatever we fancy, to squander these few years we're given on meaningless frivolities. The Scripture says, *...David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep.* - Acts 13:36. God has a purpose for each one of us in our own generation to accomplish before we die and that's what I want to do! How about you? That sense of mission is what came to Jesus in those days and we see it continuing in the last scenario:

V. Jesus' Youth And Young Adulthood In Nazareth (51-52) Now notice in verse 51 that:

1. He acknowledged the authority of His parents He chose to be submissive to them, to listen to them and to obey them. And he didn't do it like the little boy who was so angry that when his mother told him to sit down, he said, "I'm sitting down but I'm standing up on the inside!" He didn't obey them merely out of a sense of duty or with a resentful attitude. He chose to listen to them and do what they asked because He knew they loved Him and always wanted what was best for Him! *I heard Pete Briscoe share the story of how when he was a boy, one day his father came outside*

and said, "Boys, I don't want you climbing over that wall at the end of the yard." Well, the first thing he and his friend did was to go and jump over the wall, only to find themselves in a pasture with a very large and angry bull. Just as quickly they jumped back only to find Dad standing there and he said, "Boys, when I tell you not to do something, I'm not trying to spoil your fun. It's because I don't want you to get hurt!" He never forgot that lesson. Children, obey your parents, the Scripture says, and that's why! They don't want you to get hurt so be like Jesus and listen to them! But verse 52 tells us another thing, that now Jesus:

2. He took responsibility for His own growth That word *increased* is different from the word *grew* in verse 40. It means to lengthen a piece of metal in a forge by hammering it out so it increases, or to cut a way forward through the brush, to advance. As a child Jesus grew naturally but now, He took responsibility for Himself and took His own steps to increase that growth. Somewhere along the way, His earthly father Joseph died and He, as the oldest son, became the man of the family, having to care for them until His siblings got older. The text says that as these years went by:

a. He furthered Himself mentally in wisdom He deliberately learned all He could, especially the Scriptures and acquired a knowledge of them that was beyond the most learned Rabbi of His day.

b. He furthered Himself physically in stature Of course some of this was natural growth but He took care of His body to increase its strength and health. And:

c. He furthered Himself spiritually in relationship with His Father Again that word *favor* is *grace*. It doesn't mean that God liked Him more and more. It means that He deliberately pursued the grace of the Father to know Him better and experience more and more of Him all the time. And finally:

d. He furthered Himself relationally with other people in the same way. He worked at deepening His human relationships, loving His neighbors more and more.

Jesus worked hard and furthered Himself in every way He could until at the age of 30, the family could survive without Him and His Heavenly Father told Him it was time to begin His years of public ministry to the nation. But what a pattern He set for us even in His young life. What if we would make it our goal to further ourselves, to learn all we can, to care for our bodies, to soak in the Word and bathe ourselves in prayer time to grow deeper with our Father and to love others more and more?! Sounds like a recipe for a vibrant Christian life, for accomplishing the purpose God has for our lives! *Leonard Ravenhill tells a story about a group of tourists who were visiting a picturesque country village. At one point they walked by an old man who was sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked, "Were any great men born in this village?" And the old man replied, "Nope, only babies." What a profound answer! [from The Last Days Newsletter, posted on sermonillustrations.org by William C. Shereos.]* Whether we become a truly great man or woman, and by that, I mean one who accomplishes the purpose for which God has created us, is largely a choice we make. We have a great example in our Savior Jesus who grew wonderfully under the care of His parents, yet very early decided not to rock idly on a porch watching the world go by, but to further Himself in every way that God intended. Will you do the same?

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Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Ministry Of The Son Of Man In Galilee - Lk. 3:1-9:50

The Baptism Of Jesus - Ch. 3

As we enter chapter 3 in our study, Luke begins now to tell us about the ministry of Jesus and he starts by telling us about:

I. The Ministry Of John The Baptist Right away you can see Luke's attention to historical detail in verses **(1-2)**. Of course, these facts are given to establish the historical time frame, probably AD 29, but what I want you to grasp is:

1. the corrupt society in which John began his ministry It was a really evil era in Jewish history. First of all:

a. the Imperial government was corrupt Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, was thoroughly immoral and hated Jews. He made life hard in Judea. And in the end, he was smothered by the men of his own city to rid themselves of him! Then in Judea:

b. the local government was corrupt Pontius Pilate ruled Judea. Among the things to his credit are violence, robbery, persecution, insults, and judicial murders without trial and with cruelty. His chief purpose was to extort money from the Jewish people to serve the purposes of Rome. And even:

c. the religious establishment was corrupt Annas had been High Priest and Rome deposed him, going through four others before they found one named Caiaphas who would cooperate with Roman schemes.

So, these were dark times. The Jews led miserable lives without hope and without spiritual help. People became self-serving and sinful, acting like the society around them. Paul wrote to Timothy, *...in the last days there will come times*

of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, [and so on] ...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. That pretty well describes the time into which Jesus came and it certainly is an apt picture of many eras in later history and of our own time as well. In *The Christian Post*, author Jerry Newcombe writes: *Why is America seemingly sinking into the abyss? We have forgotten God. As a nation, just like as individuals, we reap what we sow. Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian writer and critic of the atheist USSR (who spent years imprisoned in one of Stalin's gulags), once said: "...[W]hile I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened."* The Nobel-prize winning writer went on to say that he had read hundreds of books on the godless Soviet state and talked with many people about the murderous disaster it was, and he said no one provided a better explanation than those simple peasants: *We have forgotten God. Not to the same degree, but something similar could be said about America. We have forgotten God, and are reaping the consequences.* <https://www.christianpost.com/voice/as-a-nation-we-have-forgotten-god.html> The Jewish people had forgotten God and it was into this decadent society that God sent a prophet by the name of John, whom we know as John the Baptist. The purpose for which God sent him is in verses (4-6):

2. the purpose of John's ministry was to level the path for Jesus' coming Whenever a King would travel through the wilderness or the desert where there were no proper roads, he would send an advance party of servants before him to prepare his path. They would fill in the low places and level off the high places, straighten the crooked places and smooth out the rough places. That was John's mission, to prepare the very hearts of the people of Israel who had forgotten God and make them ready to receive the Lord, the King, who was about to come to them. And he did this by crying out in the desert, by preaching in the wilderness along the Jordan River in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. And back in verse 3 we have:

3. the message that John preached (3) First:

a. he called people to repent The Greek word is *metanoia* which means *to change the mind*. We commonly think it means to change our behavior, but real change begins in the mind and the heart, not just in outward actions. He called on people **to change their minds** about themselves and their own behavior **and to seek forgiveness** from God. His message was not, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life!" It was, "You have sinned against God and you are paying the price for it! And unless you change your mind about yourself and the way you're living and turn to God for forgiveness, you will perish!" I guess positive thinking hadn't been invented yet! Seriously, Matthew and Mark tell us that when Jesus Himself began to preach in Galilee that His message was the same, *Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. In his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "You crucified Jesus, the Messiah that God sent to you, but God raised Him up!" and his punchline was, "REPENT!" At Athens Paul declared, *The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent - Acts 17:26*. The call for repentance has been the punchline of the Gospel from the very beginning, yet so often today we leave it out. We say, "Do you want to go to heaven? Do you want to have meaning and purpose in your life?" We emphasize what Jesus can do *for you*, but we leave out, "You have sinned and offended a Holy God; your only hope is to repent, to change your mind and ask for forgiveness!" *In his book I Surrender, Patrick Morley writes that the church's integrity problem is in the misconception "that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. It is a change in belief without a change in behavior."* He goes on to say, "It is revival without reformation, without repentance." [Quoted by C. Swindoll, *John The Baptizer, Bible Study Guide*, p. 16]. John called people to repent and:

b. he called them to be baptized as an outward sign of repentance Now, this was not the same as Christian baptism, which is a declaration of faith in Jesus. This was modeled after the washing which Gentiles who converted to Judaism were required to perform. They were immersed in water in a ritual washing to indicate that all their uncleanness was washed away. So, John called people to make a public statement that they had changed their minds and were sorry for their sins by being immersed in the Jordan River. But it was not just a religious action:

c. he warned strongly that people must display fruits of repentance (7-8a) *You bunch of snakes*, now there's a great way to address an audience! A people-pleaser John was not! But his point was, if you truly change your mind about your life, it will change your life. Your new attitude will bear the fruit of new behavior. And he tailored that message differently for each of the kinds of folks that came to him. For instance:

(1) he said the religious will give up boasting (8-9) Matthew tells us there were a lot of Pharisees and Sadducees in the crowd and John said to them, "Don't think just because you're a Jew, because Abraham is your ancestor, that you are automatically right with God!" Don't think you're right with God because you come from a Christian home, because you go to church, because you say prayers and give money! When you are truly repentant, you realize that God is not impressed with your pedigree or your behavior and realize that all you have to offer Him is a broken and contrite heart! You give up relying on your own religiosity. And then John:

(2) he said the fortunate will give up being selfish (10-11) He told the crowd in general that if you're really repentant, you'll share what you have with others who have less. If you're fortunate enough to have two coats,

you'll give one to someone who has none. If you've got more food than your family needs, you'll share it with those who are hungry. When you are truly repentant, you begin to care for others and their needs and to sacrifice in order to meet them. Then John:

(3) he said the greedy will give up stealing (12-13) Tax collectors worked for the Romans collecting money from their own people, but typically they collected more than they were supposed to and lined their own pockets with it. They were known as greedy people, but when you are truly repentant, you become honest! You don't steal anymore; you don't cheat anymore; you don't take advantage of others anymore and you seek to earn an honest living. And finally, John:

(4) he said the powerful will stop abusing (14) Roman soldiers were feared by everyone. They held the power of life and death in their hands, but could not be touched by the people. It was easy for them to demand money by threatening people outright or by making false accusations against them. But when you are truly repentant, you quit hurting others to get what you want; you stop seeing them as objects to be used but rather as persons to be cared about.

These are the fruits of repentance. A change of mind, turning from sin and turning toward God, produces genuine, recognizable change in a person's life. But then John did one more thing:

b. he called people to have faith in the soon-coming Messiah (15-18) Matthew's record makes it clear that this was all part of the same message, the Good News which John preached. "The long-awaited Messiah will soon be here; in fact, He is already among us. Prepare your hearts now! Believe in Him! Trust in Him! Follow Him! Give your life to Him! Why? Because He's like the guy who winnows the grain on the threshing floor at harvest time:"

(1) He will gather truly repentant people, like the good wheat, into His barn; that is, He'll fill them with His Spirit now and will take them **to heaven** to be **with Him** and belong to Him forever! BUT:

(2) He will burn those who are not repentant, like the wheat chaff, **in unquenchable fire** in a place called hell forever! We don't like to talk about that much anymore either! But Jesus Himself said, "*When I, the Son of Man come in My glory, all the people will be gathered before me and I will say to those on my left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'*" - Mt. 25:41. That, dear friends, is the message! Repent of your sins and give your whole allegiance to King Jesus who died for you and He will keep you with Him forever, but refuse Him and you will suffer for eternity! That message has not changed, even though the second half of it has largely been dismissed as we proclaim it today.

So, for a period of about six months, hundreds of people were coming out of the cities to hear John. Many of them were falling under conviction and their lives were changing AND they were waiting for the Messiah John spoke of to appear. The hearts of the people of Israel were being prepared; the way was being smoothed out for Jesus to begin His own ministry. And then one day He came with the people and was baptized by John:

II. The Baptism Of Jesus (21-22) Now why did Jesus come to be baptized? Well, first of all:

1. it was a sign of His identification with us He needed no repentance; He had no sin to be convicted of, but still He stood *with the people*. He identified Himself as truly one of us, the Son of Man, and in doing this, He gave us an example of how we should come to God. But at the same time:

2. it was a confirmation of His identity as the Son of God When He had come out of the water and was praying, suddenly:

a. the voice of the Father declared it from the heavens *You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased!* That left John, and everyone else who heard it, with little doubt that here in front of them in a body was God's very Son, the long-awaited Messiah, the One they should believe in and follow and give themselves to! And at the same time:

b. the descent of the Spirit displayed it bodily He appeared in the form of a dove coming down from the heavens and lighting upon Jesus and merging into His very body. Not that Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit before this moment, but this was a visual way for God to show that His very Spirit was residing upon and in Jesus so that He truly is the Son of God.

And you know what? In this whole scene there is a beautiful picture of what happens to us! When we come to God, part of the line of sincerely repentant sinners and give ourselves to Jesus, trusting in Him to save us, God does the very same thing for us! He declares that we are His own children, His sons and daughters with whom He is well pleased, and He places His very Spirit inside our bodies as the seal and the guarantee that we truly are! Hallelujah! That is the Good News, but reject it and you suffer forever. Sadly, some refuse to hear it; Herod did and in verses 18-19 he even locked John up in prison for pointing out his particular sin. But hundreds, probably thousands, heard and obeyed John's message and so the way was prepared for Jesus to begin His own 3 ½ years of ministry. God's answer for a decadent society was not better government, a change of rulers or improving social conditions. It was a bold man preaching repentance and

faith which touched and transformed people, one at a time. *Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the famous 19th century Russian novelist, was sentenced to death by firing squad as a young man for his radical political views. As the rifles were being aimed, the order to halt came and the sentence was commuted to 10 years in a Siberian labor camp. Upon his arrival a woman slipped a New Testament into his hand when the guard wasn't looking. There in a bare board building with three inches of ice on the windows and an inch of filth on the floor, Dostoyevsky discovered the parable of the prodigal son. He saw in that camp the pigsty and himself the son. The truth of God's love and willingness to pardon gripped his soul and he repented of sin and turned in faith to Jesus. Years later, when he was on his deathbed, his daughter shares: "He made us come into the room and taking our little hands in his, he begged my mother to read the parable of the prodigal son. He listened with his eyes closed, absorbed in his thoughts. 'My children', he said in his feeble voice, 'never forget what you have just heard. Have absolute faith in God and never despair of His pardon. I love you dearly, but my love is nothing compared with the love of God. Even if you should be so unhappy as to commit some dreadful crime, never despair of God. You are His children; humble yourselves before Him as before your father; implore His pardon, and He will rejoice over your repentance, as the father rejoiced over that of the prodigal son.'"*

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Ministry Of The Son Of Man In Galilee - Lk. 3:1-9:50

The Temptation And Rejection Of Jesus - Ch. 4

In Luke 4 Jesus now begins His 3 ½ years of ministry and there are two events in this chapter I'd like us to focus on. As you know, immediately after His baptism by John in chapter 3:

I. Jesus Was Tempted By The Devil In The Wilderness in verses **(1-13)** Read **(1-2a)**. Now Luke is careful to make it abundantly clear that:

1. this temptation was orchestrated by the Spirit of God God planned for this to happen and for Jesus to go through this. And the first question we may be tempted to ask is, "Why?" Well, the explanation is in **Heb. 4:15-16**, if you'll turn there with me. Notice three things; first:

a. He was tempted exactly like we are Of course, He wasn't tempted to look at pornography on the internet; He didn't face every specific tempting circumstance that we face. Rather He was tempted in every WAY that we are tempted, in every area in which we face temptation. And He experienced it exactly as we do; He felt the same exact human feelings that we feel. In other words, His temptation was real; it was genuine. The desires that Satan tried to stir in Him were actually there. He truly felt hunger and desired food. If what Satan tried to tempt Him with had no appeal to Him, it wouldn't be temptation, would it? In the scene we're about to look at, Jesus may APPEAR nonchalant as we read, but He is engaged in an intense struggle, and because of that:

b. He understands the struggle temptation is for us and is ready to help He knows how hard it is! He has been here; He has struggled through it, just like we do. So, He sympathizes with us in our personal struggles; He literally suffers through it with us, alongside us. And He stands ready, not to condemn us for struggling, but to supply us with His mighty power and strength to help us whenever we need it! And notice those little words, *yet without sin*. He went through a stronger, deeper struggle with temptation than we will ever know and won! So, in that process:

c. He demonstrates for us the way of victory over temptation He shows us how it's done, how to make it through! We can look at the temptation of Jesus and see in it our own selves in our own struggles and learn how to emerge victorious! Now, back in Luke, Satan first tempted Him to turn:

2. stones into bread (2b-4) He was not merely hungry; He was literally emaciated and starving to death after 40 days with no food. His drive to eat must have been intense! And He who created the world could so easily have miraculously created bread to satisfy it, except for one thing. The Father had led Him into this desert and was sustaining Him there all this time. Matthew specifically says Jesus *fasted* 40 days and that word means to choose not to eat as a means of devoting oneself to God. To break the fast at Satan's suggestion and simply to satisfy His own hunger was to disregard the Father in order to meet His physical need. His first temptation was **to wrongly satisfy the physical desire** of His own body; we might call it **lust** and we are tempted to do the same whether it is our drive for food or drink or for sex or simply to escape from pain or to experience pleasure. Satan appeals to us to satisfy these bodily drives in wrong ways. In the garden, Eve was hungry, but chose to satisfy her drive in a way that was disobedient to God, instead of eating from one of the many other trees God had provided! David did likewise with Bathsheba, but Jesus quoted from **Deut. 8:1-3** and declared the truth: **our very life depends completely on God** and not simply on the food we eat! If He says we live, we live, food or not! Therefore, we must never act independently of God! We must never act to satisfy our desires as though our life depends on us and what we do and disregard what He has commanded! Secondly, Satan tempted Jesus by offering Him all the:

3. kingdoms of the world (5-8) They stand now upon a high mountain and in a moment of time, Luke says, Satan brings a vision before Jesus' eyes. I picture it much like the video clips we're used to watching on TV where an unend-

ing collage of images scrolls on and off the screen, hundreds of them, each appearing only long enough to appeal to our senses. All the good things of the world, all the glory of the nations of the earth, all their splendor, all their riches, all their beauty, the whole world on the silver platter of a newsreel vision, that's what Satan offered Jesus. He said, "It's mine; I rule it all. Adam gave it to me way back in the garden and I'll give it to You if you worship me!" The temptation is **to wrongly possess what He saw**, to see something you want and act to get it in a wrong way. Absalom wanted to be king so badly that he betrayed and tried to kill his own father to take his throne. We commonly call it **greed**. But Jesus quoted from **Deut. 6:12-15** and declared the truth: **we must worship only God!** He is the only God, the true God; to place anything above Him, to value anything in this world more than Him, is to forsake Him and worship a false idol. Thirdly, Satan tempted Jesus to:

4. leap from the Temple (9-12) "You're the Son of God; PROVE IT! Jump! The angels will catch you anyway; the Scriptures say so! Claim the worship and loyalty of your people that is rightfully yours!" This was an appeal **to wrongly prove His identity**. Israel would fall at His angel-protected feet and crown Him King on the spot, but that would be to refuse what the Father had planned for Him. So often Satan uses our **pride** to entice us to disobey; he appeals to our drive to prove how powerful or strong or wise or great we are by some wrong act. But Jesus quoted **Deut. 6:16** and declared the truth: **we must never test God!** We must never demand that He prove Himself to us, as though we are somehow more important than He.

Listen, when you are tempted to sin, quote the Scripture like Jesus; declare the truth and tell Satan to get lost! And in case you still don't get why God led Jesus to go through this: *Dr. I. M. Haldeman tells of a scene in New York State among the mountains. A bridge had been constructed across a great chasm hundreds of feet deep. One day he heard the first train on the railroad approaching, and looking out, saw two huge locomotives drawn up on the bridge. There was a sharp challenging whistle, then the brakes crashed down, and the two great machines came to a standstill. There they stood and waited for fully half a day, right in the center of the bridge, with their great tons of iron quivering and beating and the bridge beneath like a great spider's web supporting them. What did it mean? They were there to demonstrate the strength of the bridge, to show there was no weakness in it, to prove that it was able to bear up under the greatest test put on it, and so was worthy of the fullest trust on the part of man. He writes, "All the weight of temptation was crowded on our Lord Jesus Christ in that hour when the Devil met him on the mount. He was 'tempted in all points as we are,' from animal appetites and desires, to the highest reaches of ambition for self-gratification and power. He was tempted and tried and tested at every point to prove and demonstrate to angels and to men that he could not say, "Yes" to the temptation... That we might see Him as the majestic, unbreakable bridge across the deep chasm of sin and death; and so seeing, fling ourselves without reserve, and in unhesitating confidence upon Him as the One and all supreme object of our unfaltering faith and profound adoration."* [From a pamphlet by Haldeman, *Could Our Lord Have Sinned?*] **Verse (13)**. Now what you don't see here is that between verses 13 and 14 there is an:

Interlude that lasted about a year; we call it **Jesus' Year of Obscurity**. Here is an overview of Jesus' ministry. This first year includes His **early Judean ministry** which is **recorded by John** in chapters 1-4, who tells of the meeting of His first disciples, His first miracle at the wedding in Cana, His first cleansing of the Temple, His meeting with Nicodemus, a time of ministering by the Jordan in parallel with John the Baptist, the woman at the well, and many other events which Luke leaves out, but at the end of that year:

II. Jesus Began His Great Ministry In Galilee which lasted about 15 months **(14-15)** Notice that:

1. His method was itinerant teaching in the village synagogues He would go to a village and on the Sabbath when the villagers were gathered at the synagogue, He would exercise the privilege of a visiting Rabbi and be invited to teach the people. This was his entry point for sharing, which He would continue privately through the week and move on to another village. This itinerant moving from village to village was His determined pattern, as you can see in verses **(43-44)**. And as verse 15 indicates:

2. He was received joyously everywhere, as the New Living puts it, *He was praised by everyone*. In many places large crowds gathered; He healed many people and cast out demons and the Galilean public was thrilled with Him, **with one major exception** that Luke records. Early in this period:

III. Jesus Was Rejected In His Home Town Of Nazareth (16) This was the town where Jesus lived for 30 years, where He had served the people as a carpenter. Everybody knew him. So, following His pattern, it was natural for Him to go to the synagogue with the people and He was asked to read the Scripture and share, but look at:

1. the declaration Jesus made about Himself (17-21) He unrolled the Isaiah scroll and read **Is. 61:1** and a little phrase from **58:6** and said, "This prophecy is fulfilled IN ME!" and then He went on to explain it. Everybody knew that passage and knew that it was written about the coming Messiah, but Jesus shocked them all by claiming it for Himself. Through it He made four claims. First:

a. I am the Messiah and this is God's Year of Jubilee That word *anointed* is the verb form of *Messiah*, the *Anointed One*. The *year of the Lord's favor* is the Year of Jubilee. You remember that every 50th year in Israel was to be the Year of Jubilee, the year when all debts were cancelled, when all who were servants were freed, when all who had sold their land returned to their ancestral homes, the year of joy and rejoicing in God's favor and blessing.

Jesus was claiming, "Because I am here, THIS is the year of God's Jubilee, the joyous season of mercy and freedom and release!" And so, secondly:

b. I proclaim good news for the poor, the ones who are suffering the most! As He taught in 6:20, *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God!* "You may be suffering now, you may be hungry now, you may be weeping now, but through faith in Me you belong to the Kingdom of a Heavenly Father who loves you and after this short time of suffering, you will be satisfied forever in every way and filled with joy in His Presence! You may be poor, but you are rich!" As James put it, *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?* - 2:5. And all over the world it is the poor who are responding to the Gospel, by the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands in our day! Come with us to India and see 1000 Yenadi believers, who are among the poorest of the poor in this world, joyously praising Jesus for hours on end, because even though their life in this world is difficult, He gave them an eternal future filled with joy that no one can take from them! If you are poor and struggling today, lift up your head, you have Jesus; He can take care of you here and you'll be with Him forever! Next Jesus said:

c. I proclaim recovery of sight for the blind Indeed, He performed this repeatedly in the physical sense. 7:21 says, *In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.* Blind eyes don't see again. The blind man of John 9 said, *Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind* - 9:32. Nobody can make blind eyes see, but Jesus can bestow the gift of sight; He can heal diseases and restore speech and walking and all the rest, and He often did those things and still does them today to display His glory. But beyond that, I think He was referring to spiritual blindness as well. He told that blind man, *...For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.* -9:39. He called the Pharisees blind repeatedly. Jesus came to open spiritual eyes because *...the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...* - 2 Cor. 4:4. He can unblind them! He can make the scales fall from the eyes of even a terrorist like Saul and transform him into a Paul who gave us most of our New Testament! Listen, there is hope for the blindest among us, the most hopeless case we know! Jesus can give them sight! Keep praying! Then finally Jesus said:

d. I proclaim freedom for the oppressed, the captives, those crushed under their burdens in life. "Those who mourn I am here to comfort. Those who are persecuted and hated and falsely accused, I am here to help and to guarantee that one day, you will be free from all this and great will be your reward in heaven!" All around the world, our brothers and sisters suffer because of their faith and Jesus sustains them. Pastor Andrew Brunson was released from a Turkish prison after two years of unjust incarceration. He testified how Jesus sustained him through reading 2 Timothy, once he was allowed a Bible. In South Africa an addict named Pietie whose wife was praying for him testifies, *One Monday morning, I heard a voice behind me saying: "Pietie, you must convert today." I could not understand what was going on and ignored the voice, I thought I was crazy because I heard the voice and saw no one. Later I heard clearly: "Pietie, you must convert today." I got up and went to the pastor's house and asked him to pray for me. At that moment I was free from my sins, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, gangs, theft, everything. It was 12 years ago and I am still free. We now have a house...I will soon be a pastor....*

[\[www.cad.org.za/testimonies/testimony-pietie/\]](http://www.cad.org.za/testimonies/testimony-pietie/) Listen, if you are crushed and oppressed today, if you are in any sort of prison or bondage, Jesus can deliver you!

Oh, these were big claims, HUGE claims, that Jesus made and they still stand today, but look at:

2. the reaction of the people (22)

a. there was an initial amazement at His words As Mark recorded on His second visit to Nazareth, they said things like, *"Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?"* - 6:2. It amazed them, but at the same time as they listened:

b. there was a growing resentment born of familiarity As Mark adds, *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.* - 6:3. "He's one of us, a man we've known all his life. He's no better than we are! Who does He think He is to claim all these things about himself?!" But instead of trying to calm their objections:

c. Jesus predicted their rejection (23-27) He refused to do a miracle to prove Himself to them and instead, quoted them a proverb, *No prophet is acceptable in his hometown!* Don't be surprised if your own family and neighbors don't want to hear about your faith! Familiarity is often a barrier to people's listening to you and those closest to you may be the very ones to persecute you when you turn to Jesus! But He went on to tell them how both the prophets Elijah and Elisha were not listened to by Israel and God sent them to people of other nations! What He's saying is that, "the way you're treating me is a small picture of the fact that I'm ultimately going to be rejected by the whole nation of Israel, but God will send my followers to the Gentiles, the other nations, and, as Paul put it later, *...this salva-*

tion of God has been sent to the Gentiles [and] they will listen!" - Acts 28:28. Well, that really set off their hostility (28-30). They were so enraged that:

d. they physically attacked Jesus, dragged him out of the synagogue and up the hill to the edge of a cliff to throw Him down and stone Him to death, **but**, miraculously, **He parted the crowd**. At first, He let them drag Him out, but then He walked right through their midst, like the parting of the Red Sea, by His miraculous power **and left** Nazareth, going on to the next village.

Listen, Jesus can sustain you through temptation! Jesus can sustain you in any situation you find yourself in! He's the Messiah and we're living in His age of Jubilee where there is good news and healing and freedom available to all! *Power and Light Partners shared the amazing story of a young woman who was seven months pregnant with twins, a refugee who fled from Syria and made it at last to Europe a short time ago. With a group of others, she travelled on foot for many days and crossed the sea in a small boat. She was arrested at least three times and detained without food for many days. There were days she thought she would die or her unborn babies would die. She walked hundreds of kilometers, many days without water. She slept in prison cells, in bus stops and on the side of the road. And when asked what her thoughts were during those awful days, she said, "All I could think was, 'Jesus can help me! Jesus can help me!'" And He did. She is now safely reunited with her mother and sister; her babies are born and she is waiting for her husband to make the journey.* I don't know what situation you may be facing today, but one thing I do know: Jesus can help you! Jesus can help you! And He will!

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Ministry Of The Son Of Man In Galilee - Lk. 3:1-9:50

The Disciples Of Jesus - Ch. 5

From our earliest days in Sunday School, we remember the story of Jesus calling His first disciples and singing that cute little song, "I will make you fishers of men, if you follow Me..." In reality, the story recorded in Luke 5 is a deep and powerful one and one that impacts our own lives, because we would all describe ourselves as disciples, followers of Jesus, yet we seldom think about what that means.

I. The Call Of Peter, Andrew, James and John that is recorded here in verses (1-11) is also recorded in **Mt. 4:18-22** and **Mk. 1:16-20**, but their record, which is the one more familiar to us, leaves out a number of very important things that Luke and John tell us. First of all, these four men:

1. they had much prior experience with Jesus In fact, John tells us that:

a. they had met and believed in Him a year earlier in Judea - John 1:39-42 when John the Baptist identified Jesus as *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. Andrew and John were both there and spent the day with Jesus. Andrew went and found his brother Peter and said, *We have found the Messiah!* and he brought him to Jesus. Then John tells us that:

b. they had already been with Him on several occasions They were with him at the wedding in Cana of Galilee where He turned the water into wine and 2:11 says, *...His disciples believed in Him*. They were with Him at Passover time when He cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem the first time. They spent time with Him by the Jordan and helped Him baptize new followers and they were with Him as He passed through Samaria on the way back to Galilee and met the woman at the well.

So, it appears that these men had already believed in Jesus as the Messiah, had already spent considerable time with Jesus and had even participated with Jesus in ministry. However, during this year, they had come and gone; they had not followed Jesus 24/7; they had spent time periods of time with Him followed by periods of time at home with their families and pursuing their occupation as fishermen. But now He was about to call these four men to something deeper and Luke is the one who shows us how:

2. Jesus prepared them for the call which He was about to issue to them As He came upon them this day, it was one of those periods when they had been away from Him. They were by the shore of the Sea of Galilee near their homes in Capernaum, having spent all night fishing, now cleaning and mending nets and putting away their gear (1-3). Jesus was being followed by a great crowd right down to the shoreline and He needed a way to create a little space so He could teach them, so He got into Simon's boat, had him push out a few feet and taught the crowd for a long time. But that act also had another purpose. Through it:

a. He demonstrated to them His great purpose to reach multitudes They had been busy trying to catch a few fish to sustain themselves; He was in the business of reaching people by the hundreds and the thousands with the message of eternal life! This was a great object lesson for Peter, Andrew, James and John; He was about to call them to become involved in what He was doing and THIS was it, reaching people! And then He drove the lesson even deeper:

b. He illustrated for them His great power through catching fish (4-7) These guys were fishermen; they knew how to catch fish and they had caught nothing. There were no fish in this area of the lake at the moment, yet when they simply obeyed Jesus and let down their nets, the nets were so full that they began to tear when they tried to lift them into the boat and, even with help from James and John in the second boat, both boats began to tip and take on water as they hauled the catch aboard. It was a Divine miracle, something that only God Himself could cause to happen and that fact was not lost on them:

(1) Peter displayed great conviction (8) He felt himself in the very presence of God and it brought deep conviction of his own sinfulness. He felt completely unworthy to be in Jesus' presence and humbly asked Him to depart. His feeling was much like that of Isaiah when he saw the Lord in the Temple and cried out, *...Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!* - 6:5. And as for the rest of the guys:

(2) all displayed complete amazement plus fear (9-10a) They were all amazed, shocked; their jaws hung open when they saw the great catch because they knew it was a miracle. It was God's doing. And, like Peter, fear rose up in all of them. That's why Jesus had to begin by saying, *Do not be afraid!*

Listen, the first thing any true disciple needs is a sense of the pure holiness and the tremendous power of Jesus and a deep conviction of our own unworthiness! You can't follow Him thinking that you're pretty good, that you're doing Him some kind of favor and He's lucky to have you! That's what creates a Pharisee! *The story is told that a shepherd who had been given a position of great honor by one of Scotland's kings would often go alone to a certain room in the palace. The king became suspicious and thought he was plotting a conspiracy. So he asked to look inside this secret room. To his surprise, all that was there was a chair, a shepherd's crook, and an old plaid scarf. "What does this mean?" asked the king. The nobleman answered, "I was a humble shepherd when your Majesty promoted me. I come to this room to look at the crook and the plaid. They remind me of what I used to be--and that I am nothing but what the grace of the king has made me."* Hallelujah, I stand in the presence of the King of the Universe and I am employed in the service of the King, yet I am NOTHING but what the grace of the King has made me to be! That's what makes a true disciple of Jesus! But having prepared these four men:

3. Jesus now called them to follow Him as full disciples and Luke chooses to leave out the two words that form the familiar invitation which Matthew recorded for us in **Mt. 4:19**, *Follow Me!* Those words seem so simple to us, yet to the Jewish ears of these men they had a far deeper meaning:

a. they understood this as a call to become disciples of Rabbi Jesus Every teacher, every Rabbi, was expected to and did gather around himself a group of pupils, adherents or disciples, men that believed and adhered to his teaching, who followed him about everywhere he went and did their best to imitate and become like him. Jesus was issuing them an invitation to enter His own personal school, to become those He was grooming to replicate His own character and His ministry. First of all, they realized that:

(1) it meant continually following Him about The followers of a Rabbi followed him about absolutely everywhere he went. They walked together, ate together, slept together and worked together. A passage in the Jewish Talmud relates *...how Rabbi Akiva followed his teacher Rabbi Yehoshua into the bathroom (B. Brachot 62a; Derech Eretz 7). After the experience, Rabbi Akiva declared that from observing his master he had learned three lessons about bathroom conduct.* So, later Akiva's disciple followed him into the bathroom to absorb the same lessons! I doubt Jesus took it quite that far, but He was now calling these men to leave everything in their lives and follow Him about, to be with Him 24 hours a day, going wherever He went and doing whatever He did. Secondly, they realized that:

(2) it meant learning and adhering to all His teaching The Rabbis often had their own distinctive interpretations of the Law and the Talmud. As an example, there were two schools of Jewish thought on divorce. Rabbi Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for any and every reason, but Rabbi Shammai taught that divorce was only lawful in the case of adultery, thus the question the Pharisees put to Jesus about divorce. The followers of a Rabbi were expected to learn everything that their master taught on every subject, to adhere to it themselves and to be the ones to pass on his teaching when he was gone. Jesus was calling these men to absorb all of His teachings, to live by them and to be the ones to later pass them on to others (which is exactly what they did, by the way). And finally, they realized that:

(3) it essentially meant becoming completely like Him Jesus said, *It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher...* - Mt. 10:25. That is his goal, to walk like him, talk like him, speak his words, and do his actions. In essence, the Rabbi was literally replicating himself in his followers. Jesus was calling Peter, Andrew, James and John to become what He was, to be molded into His very image. And it is in that spirit that He told them **(10b)**:

b. they would now successfully fish for men instead of fish, just as He had been doing earlier. They would give their lives to fulfilling His purpose, reaching multitudes with the Good News of His Kingdom. And how did they respond?

4. they left everything and followed Him (11) They left the fish, the boats, the nets, even their father whom, Mark says, was also there with some hired servants. They dropped it all on the spot and set off with Him. Now I don't think that means they didn't see their families for three years; they probably did see them frequently as they passed through Capernaum, but now they were full time, genuine disciples of Jesus. But before we move on, let's not forget the fact that this call is not only for them:

5. we are called to BE disciples just like they were. We are called to go together with Him everywhere He takes us every day, to learn and obey everything He has commanded us in His Word, to accomplish His purpose in the world and to become like Him in our character and behavior. In short, **our lives are to be consumed with Him** in the same way theirs were. Look with me at **Jn. 15:5**. If we are continually connected to Christ like a branch is to a vine, if our life is consumed with Him, we will bear much fruit; that is, our lives will be filled with the character and the work of Christ, our parent vine. Now verse **8**. That fruit is what proves, what shows, that we truly are His disciples. A profession of faith with the mouth without any fruit in the life is empty and false. Disciples are people who actually follow Jesus, who place Him and His purpose above everything else in their lives and make it part of everything they do every day of their lives. That's what we're called to be. Moreover:

6. we are called to MAKE disciples You remember **Mt. 28:19**, *Go and make disciples of all nations...* We're not merely to convince people to believe that Jesus is the Savior; we're to make disciples whose lives are consumed with Him and who follow Him every day of their lives by baptizing them and training them to obey everything He commanded us to do!

Chuck Swindoll writes: *"For a number of years after I became a Christian, I messed around with spiritual things. Just messed around. I ran around with church folks, I learned the God-talk, I sang the hymns, I even memorized the verses. I prayed pretty good prayers, I carried my Bible to church Sunday after Sunday, I sang in the choir, and I added to my schedule a Bible class every now and then. But my life was MY life. I did not let all that religious stuff interfere with things like my career, my home, my strong will, my pursuit of things, my determination to go my own way, or my own personal plans. I wasn't a wife beater, or a criminal, or an alcoholic, or some awful notorious sinner. No, I was just a selfish man. I knew how to get what I wanted, and nothing was going to stand in my way...including God. I was a Christian, but certainly not a disciple. Then shortly after joining the Marines (another evidence of my determination to be tough and self-assured), I was transferred overseas. For once I was faced with a major decision I could not change. Alone and lonely, I was forced to entrust my wife to the Lord, since she couldn't go to the Orient with me, and to lean on Him for numerous things I had always been able to handle myself. While overseas I met a man who saw behind my tough mask and was determined to help me come to terms with the Christ I claimed as my Savior. He disciplined me. Month after month, we met together, talked together, played ball together, laughed together, wept and prayed together, studied the Scriptures and witnessed for Christ together. Like Jesus with His men, this man took the time to help me peel off my mask of religion and absorb the authentic message of Christ. I found myself slowly changing down deep inside. I got to the place where I hated the hypocrisy of my former religious lifestyle. I got into the Scriptures on my own, and they became my bread and meat. I even addressed the priorities, the goals, and the objectives of my life. I opened each door of my inner house to let Christ in, room after room. Not suddenly, but slowly. Quietly. 'Things' became less important to me. My stubborn will came under the scrutinizing eye of the Spirit of God. And I began to meet each day with my Lord, asking Him to deal with my ugly selfishness...and did He ever!"* [Strengthening Your Grip by Charles Swindoll. Word, 1982. Pages 123-125.] Does the fruit of your life prove you to be a genuine disciple of Jesus? And is that what you're seeking to have happen in the lives of others? Well, let's go back to Luke and skip ahead to:

II. The Call Of Levi Matthew in verses **(27-32)**. Luke calls him Levi here, but later in chapter 6 and also in Matthew and Mark's Gospels he is Matthew (**Mt. 9:9-13, Mk. 2:13-17**), and that's how we most often refer to him. Perhaps Matthew (which means "gift of God") was bestowed on him by Jesus afterward, as in Simon Peter's case. At any rate it was not uncommon for people to have two names. Verse **(27)**:

1. Matthew was a tax collector, a publican, a man who collected taxes for the Roman oppressors. And he was not just an ordinary publican, a general tax-gatherer, but a customs house official, a *mokhes*, who levied high and unfair taxes on all goods passing through at his whim. This kind of publican was especially despised and regarded as a **"sinner"** by the Jews, hardly capable of repentance. Yet Matthew:

2. he received the same call and responded the same way as the others (28) With his booth so near the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he must have often heard Jesus before and when Jesus extended the invitation to join His band of disciples, Matthew left everything behind, the tax booth, his position, the money, all of it, and followed Him. But what is remarkable about him is that:

3. he immediately sought to introduce Jesus to his fellow "sinners" (29) Right away he brought all of his tax gatherer friends and others with whom he associated together to meet Jesus in his home! He wanted them to meet this Jesus who was willing to receive people like them, whom the entire public rejected! Well, true to form:

4. the religious leaders grumbled at Jesus' interaction with "sinners" (30) The Pharisees and scribes must have been following Jesus about, watching, looking for some scandalous thing they could blame Him for, and here it was. Eating with "sinners"; what righteous Jew would stoop to be made unclean in such a way? And even though they only complained to Jesus' disciples, He heard them **(31-32)**:

5. He declared His passion to call "sinners" to repentance He is like a doctor with an intense drive to find and help sick people who need healing. Reaching sinners and calling them to repentance was the very purpose for which He came to earth and it was not merely His purpose; it was His passion, the driving force of His heart. Matthew includes some words that Luke left out, *Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.* - **Mt. 9:13**. He says to them, "Haven't you read Hosea? God says, 'What I want is love for people, compassion on people who need help, who are in trouble, not the keeping of religious rules and meticulous offering of sacrifices!' Jesus' passion is to rescue and redeem sinners and that includes ALL of us, the entire human race with no exceptions, not even publicans! But before we're too hard on the Pharisees, perhaps we'd better apply those words to ourselves:

6. we must be aware of our own prejudices We all have them. We all have people that we don't want to associate with, people that we despise or consider such wicked sinners that they don't deserve mercy. For the Jews it was Samaritans and Gentiles and publicans. For us it may be those of a different ethnic group or it may be the crowd of drug addicts and alcoholics on the streets of Kensington. Some think of Muslims that way because of 9/11. Every culture around the world has those that they despise, those they would never think to have mercy on and every person has those that they can't stand. And it is so easy for us, even as believers to retain those kinds of deep-seated prejudices, yet as disciples of Jesus, we must **never let our prejudices prevent us from having mercy** on anyone and wanting to see them come to Him! Indeed, we must have His passion to reach those who are most in need.

In her book Lincoln's Daughters of Mercy, Marjorie Greenbie tells about Mary Ann Bickerdyke, affectionately known as Mother Bickerdyke, who was Chief of Nursing under General Ulysses S. Grant during the Civil War. She was responsible for establishing some 300 field hospitals and bringing relief to thousands of wounded and dying Union soldiers. On one occasion when she was giving special attention to a man considered worthless by his comrades, she was asked, "Why do you waste your time on trash like that?" "Because," she replied, "when there's any creature around here so miserable that there's nobody to care for him, he still has two friends in this army. One is God, and the other is me." That, dear friends is the attitude of Jesus and it should be the attitude of every genuine disciple of His.

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Ministry Of The Son Of Man In Galilee - Lk. 3:1-9:50

The Parables Of Jesus - 7:36-8:21

Human beings love stories. From the simplest, most remote oral society to the most sophisticated, high-tech society, and from the youngest children to the oldest among us, we all love to hear stories. It's part of our nature. And I think that's why Jesus so often taught using stories; we call them parables. The word parable simply means "a comparison". A parable is a realistic earthly story that could or does appear in real life (no dragons or frogs turning into princes), but it is told in order to illustrate spiritual truth. It helps the listener to understand the spiritual truth better by comparing it with something familiar. In the section of text we're focusing on this morning, there are two parables I'd like to examine with you. The first is a story we often call:

I. The Parable Of The Two Debtors - 7:36-50 Now when trying to understand any parable, it's important to notice:

1. the occasion of the parable, which often reveals the reason why Jesus told it. **(36-39)** In this scene we meet two very different people. The first is a man named Simon:

a. a self-righteous and critical Pharisee having Jesus to dinner Yes, Jesus ate with publicans and sinners, but He also ate with Pharisees if they asked Him! Jesus wanted to build relationships with anybody that was willing in order that they might be saved. Simon doesn't seem to have been a seeker or even to have been interested in the teaching of Jesus. It appears to me that his motive in having Jesus was more to scrutinize him and find some fault in Him. Then next we meet:

b. a sinful but grateful woman humbly anointing His feet Her name is never mentioned, but she was obviously known and regarded by Simon and others as a "sinful" woman. She heard that Jesus was dining in Simon's house and she came in the open door. Jesus was lying on his left side on a dining cushion, reclining at the low table, with His bare feet stretched outward away from it, and as she stood there she began to weep and she knelt down with her tears falling on Jesus' feet and began to dry them with her hair. Then she broke open this flask of perfume she had brought and poured it on His feet. Even though she didn't say a word, everyone could see that she was showing extreme and unusual gratitude to Jesus for something. But the Pharisee wasn't thinking that at all; he was thinking, "If Jesus is truly a prophet of God, he would know that this is a sinful woman and he would never let her touch

him! She's defiling him and he's letting her!" He didn't say a word either, but Jesus read his mind and told him a parable (40-43). Now let's look at:

2. the story of the parable and its lessons This money lender had two men who owed him money. The first owed him 500 denarii, that is, 500 ordinary days wages in that day. So, to make a comparison, if a man earns \$100 a day today, that is like \$50,000. The second man owed him only 1/10 as much, 50 denarii, the equivalent of \$5,000. Now in the story, the moneylender represents God Himself and, very pointedly, the first debtor represents the sinful woman and the second one, Simon himself. And one of the things Jesus was trying to convey to him was that:

a. all human beings owe a debt because of sin, though in varying degrees Several times Jesus compared sin to a debt that is owed, both in His parables and most notably in the Lord's prayer. In Matthew 6 Jesus told us to pray, *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*, but then two verses later He comments, *for if you forgive others their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will forgive you*. When somebody sins against us, it's like a debt is created. They owe us something! They failed to treat us in the way we deserve to be treated and even if they try to make amends later, they can't undo what they did. They can't make things as if they never happened. Their only way out is for us to release them, to forgive the debt by forgiving what they have done. However, when we sin, it is not merely against people; at the same time, we sin directly against God by doing evil instead of righteousness. So, we owe Him a debt we can never pay; we can't take back our evil behavior or undo it. He either has to punish us for it or forgive it. Now the good news in the parable is that:

b. none can pay it, but God is willing to forgive any debt, large or small This moneylender is not like any financier I ever heard of. Nobody forgives debts of \$50,000 or even \$5,000 outright! But God does! Some of us have done more evil things than others; some of us "owe" God more than others but even the best of us still owes Him a debt we cannot ever pay. All around us people think, "My good deeds are erasing and balancing out my bad ones!" That's simply not true. You can't erase and undo evil! But Jesus did! *James MacDonald said, "Jesus paid a debt He did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay – that's the gospel."* And in this simple story, Jesus is preaching the Gospel, "You owe God a debt you cannot pay, yet He is willing to forgive you for it, no matter how large or how small it is!" Now, when you know that you have owed such a great debt to someone and they have forgiven that debt, what is your natural reaction? You're filled with gratitude and with love for that person, right? And the point He makes to Simon is that:

c. the one with the deepest realization of debt and forgiveness loves Him most, and conversely (47b). Yet He can't simply mean that the amount that is forgiven determines the amount of love. In that case a person who was saved at a young age and grew up in a Christian home could never love God as much as a terrorist or mass murderer who turns to Jesus. But of course, they can! Our love depends upon the *realization* of the depth of our sin and our inability to pay and God's graciousness in forgiving us. It is the depth of that realization that determines the depth of our love for Him and that's what we find in:

3. the application of the parable (44-48) Simon didn't do even the most ordinary things for Jesus that he would normally have done for an invited guest. He gave Him no water to wash the street dust from His feet, no warm kiss of greeting, no anointing oil for his head and Jesus' point was pretty direct:

a. HE showed little love, revealing that his sins must be unforgiven He showed no consciousness of his sin debt (which was probably greater than hers in God's eyes), nor of any sense of gratitude at being forgiven. So, he must not have experienced the grace of forgiveness, but this woman, she wet his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair; she kissed them continually and anointed them with precious perfume. So:

b. SHE showed great love, revealing faith that her sins would be forgiven She had a deep realization of how much she had offended God's righteousness and how much she deserved punishment, and she was filled with gratefulness and love because she knew Jesus would forgive her - and He did!

Well, I'm not sure how the rest of that dinner went after that; it was probably pretty quiet, but we do have:

4. the reaction to the parable in verses (49-50). Some were amazed that Jesus claimed to forgive sins, as was Simon, no doubt. But Jesus simply sent the woman on her way with full assurance of forgiveness and eternal salvation. The question would be, "What's your reaction to the story?" How much you love Jesus and are willing to serve Him is the indication of how deep your realization of being forgiven is. *Titus Hall shares his testimony online: As I think back to September 8, 2004, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what happened to me on that day. It was the day that the God of heaven forgave me of my sin, and changed my life. Though some people who knew me may have considered me to be a good person, I knew in my heart that I was a sinner, and an enemy of God. Being raised in a Christian home, and having been taught the Bible daily, I knew that I didn't need to commit a large crime in society in order to be a guilty sinner in God's eyes. I was born with a sin nature, and the root and motives of all my behaviors were selfishness and pride. In mid-elementary school I came down with a very unique sickness. For the next two years I fought chronic pain and exhaustion throughout my entire body. It got so bad that I could barely walk or even hold a pencil. That was a very difficult time for me, though in retrospect I wouldn't trade it for anything because God used that trial to get my attention. He started to*

reveal my sinful heart and show me my need for a Savior. Before this time, I had heard that Jesus died for my sins, but my sins were never a real burden to me. God used many things, including a challenging email from a long-distance friend of mine, to help me consider my spiritual condition. My friend wrote me, "Sometimes God sends trials and difficulties into one's life to awake them to their condition before God." These words gripped my heart and wouldn't let go. Had God brought this illness into my life to help me turn to Him? Toward the latter part of those difficult years our church held special services. It was God's mercy that allowed the Holy Spirit to prick my heart on Tuesday night of that week. I finally realized that I was living in willful rebellion against a Holy and Righteous God. I also realized the serious consequences of my sin. My attitude changed. My only hope for a purpose in this life and peace for eternity was established that September day when I saw myself for who I truly was, and completely committed my life to Christ. Since then, I have grown in my love for God. I want to please Him, obey His word, and live my life as a testimony of His grace to me.

[\[http://www.lvbaptist.org/thall/\]](http://www.lvbaptist.org/thall/) She who has been forgiven much and realizes it, loves Jesus fully, passionately, completely! She lives for Him! But he who has little sense of being forgiven doesn't really love Jesus very much, but rather lives for himself! That's the moral of the story! Well now, as we turn to chapter 8, Jesus moved on to other villages and told:

II. The Parable Of The Sower - 8:4-15 This is actually the first in a set of seven parables about the Kingdom that is also recorded for us in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. Notice:

1. the occasion of the parable (4) He was on the beach at Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee. A huge crowd had gathered to hear Him and the other gospels tell us that He actually got into a boat and pushed out a little way to teach them. Let's read:

2. the story of the parable (5-8) Sowing, or planting seed, was something so common that everyone knew how it worked. The vast majority of the crowd listening to Jesus had actually participated in it. Around the Sea of Galilee there were many fertile fields and, maybe even at this moment, Jesus could point in the distance to a man sowing seed in his field as He talked. Seed was held in bag around the waste and strewn by hand over the ground. Jesus noted that in this or any field there were four types of soil and He was illustrating the kind of reception that the seed gets in the various kinds of soil.

a. some seed falls on hard soil, like the path on the edge of the field; **it never sprouts and is devoured** by birds. When we spread grass seed in our yard, some always falls on the driveway or the sidewalk where it has no opportunity to grow and the birds eat it or rain washes it away.

b. some seed falls on rocky soil and sprouts but later withers Rocky ground has a thin layer of soil over top of the rock, so the seed can sprout and grow, but it can't really put down roots so in the heat of the sun, so it soon withers and you end up with a bare spot, just like in my front yard where there are tree roots just under the surface and it's easy to end up with bare brown spots. Then:

c. some seed falls on thorny soil and sprouts but is later choked We don't have thorns in our back yard but, despite all our efforts to kill it, we've got a ton of crab grass and clover, so when you plant grass seed it may come up in the spring, but eventually it just gets smothered by the unwanted weeds and disappears. Yet in every yard or field:

d. some seed falls on good soil, grows and yields a hundred-fold harvest The soil is soft and provides the right environment with all the moisture it needs and that one little grain of wheat grows a new plant that may have a hundred kernels or seeds on it. The University of Nebraska says that winter wheat plants, on the average, develop about five heads and that each head, on average, develops about 22 kernels. That is, one individual seed replicates itself 100 times; what an amazing thing if you think about it! And that's where Jesus left it with the crowd, but in private His disciples asked Him:

3. the reason for the parable (9-10) By this point in His ministry, the leaders of Israel had rejected Him multiple times. They had begun plotting to kill Him and, even though they have not gone all the way to nailing Him on the cross yet, their course is sealed by this point. Even though He is still widely popular because of His power to heal, every crowd that gathers also contains many of His enemies. So, He spoke in parables for a twofold purpose. First:

a. to reveal truth to those who followed Him It helped His disciples to understand the truths He was trying to teach through understandable illustrations. But at the same time, He did it:

b. to conceal truth from those who rejected Him He was not going to cast His pearls before swine, to give His truth to those who despised Him and whose hearts weren't open to it. And so, He explained to His disciples:

4. the meaning of the parable (11-15) Whenever Jesus Himself or any of us His followers declare His Word, it's just like sowing a field:

a. some people have hard hearts; they reject and forget the Word Their minds are made up; they don't want to hear it, so it never sinks in at all, just like the seed on the path, and soon Satan makes sure they forget it. Then, as we declare it:

b. some people have shallow hearts; they believe awhile but fall away They appear to believe the message and claim to believe in Christ, but there's never any real depth to them, no genuine transformation of their spirit, no real connection to Christ. So, when their friends or family or their society give them a hard time about having faith, they discard it and move on. Then:

c. some people have thorny hearts; they believe but produce no fruit They say, "Oh yes, I'll believe in Jesus!" but their lives are about making money and having pleasure and doing what they want to do and soon their lives bear no real evidence of being changed by Jesus. They just live like everybody else. There's no fruit. BUT, thank God, every time we declare His Word:

d. some people have receptive hearts They're like good soil. **They believe and produce much fruit.** They don't merely talk about believing. Their character changes; the fruit of the Spirit becomes evident in their lives and they act like Jesus. They grow up like a new plant and soon they have other people hearing the word and believing like they do. One good soil person may result in a hundred others coming to faith, or more!

So, what do we take away from this story? Well, first of all, WE need ears to hear! We need to have a right heart whenever we hear the Word of God or it will do us no good. But second, we can expect these same four responses from all those with whom we share God's truth. They're happening right now. There's at least one person here this morning who hasn't heard a word I've said. You've been playing on your phone or your mind has been elsewhere and you really don't care because your heart is hard. There's probably somebody here who says, "Oh yes, I really want to live for Jesus!" but when you get home or go back to school or work and they begin to give you a hard time about it, you'll soon drop back into your old way of life. And I'm sure there's somebody here who agrees, "Yes, I need to live for Jesus!" but tomorrow you won't be able to resist the greed of making money or the pleasure of sleeping with your girlfriend or boyfriend and you'll keep on living without fruit, just like always. Listen, the bad news in this story is that those three bad soil types of people have NO relationship with Jesus. They're lost. They're people who might call Jesus Lord, but to them He'll say, "Depart from Me; I never knew you!" But praise God, I am confident that most of you are good soil, people who will hear the Word of God and do it, who will go out and really live for Jesus, because you genuinely know Him! But don't get discouraged! There may be many people that you share the message of your Jesus with that won't listen or won't last or will go back to their self-oriented lifestyles, yet be confident that there's good soil out there too! Sooner or later, you'll tell one whose heart is good soil, ready to receive it, and then watch what God will do! Listen, my yard may have hard patches and brown patches and weedy patches in it, but I still plant grass seed because I know that if I keep planting, sooner or later I'll get grass! The farmer plants because, despite all the bad areas in the field, he knows he'll get a crop of wheat! Keep sowing! *Dr. Norman Geisler is a well-known Christian theologian who is now 86. He's helped to found 2 evangelical seminaries and authored more than 90 books and hundreds of articles. His life has touched thousands, probably millions. When he was a child, he went to a Vacation Bible School because he was invited by some neighbor children. He went back to that same church for Sunday School classes for 400 Sundays. Each week he was faithfully picked up by a bus driver. Week after week he attended church, but never made a commitment to Christ. Finally, during his senior year in High School, after being picked up for church over 400 times, he did commit his life to Christ. [Max Lucado, God Came Near, Multnomah Press, 1987, p. 133] What if his bus driver had given up on him? What if his Sunday School teacher had said, "This kid is going nowhere spiritually, why waste any more time on him?" Beloved, Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up!*

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Ministry Of The Son Of Man In Galilee - Lk. 3:1-9:50

The Authority Of Jesus - 8:22-56

In this portion of Chapter 8, Luke records for us four events in a row that display for us the **authority** that Jesus has. Now in our part of the world, when we think of someone having authority, we think of a police officer or a judge, someone who has the **right** to tell us what to do, to control us. But we don't think of that authority as being necessarily legitimate; in other words, they may have it, but may use it unjustly and maybe shouldn't have it. We may even think that authority can be opposed or resisted. However, if you live in North Korea and someone mentioned authority, you would immediately think of your dictator Kim Jong Un and to you, his authority means the unopposable **power** to control everything about you, even whether you live or die, whether it's right or not! In the Bible, the concept of authority contains both those concepts, both the right to control and the power to control. Now look for a moment with me at what **Mt. 28:18** says about Jesus:

I. Jesus Has ALL Authority In Heaven And On Earth That phrase is so familiar to us that we often don't stop to think about what it means. First of all, it means:

1. He has the RIGHT to be in control of everything and everyone The Psalmist says, *Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his... - 100:3.* He made us! He saved us! We are His creations and that makes us His possessions. The same is true of the whole universe! He has the right to control us in any and every way, to do what

He wills with us! And if we don't like it, Paul answers, *But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? - Rom. 9:20-21.* God is God and He has the right to do whatever He wishes with what is His! We may not like it, but we have no right to protest it, any more than a lump of clay can protest to the potter about what he's making it into. And the Father gave all that authority to the Son as well! Jesus has the absolute sovereign right to control everyone and everything! But it is more than just the *right* to control:

2. He has the POWER that actually controls it The whole universe was formed at His command. When He said, "Let there be light!", light erupted into existence! When He commanded the sun to stand still in the sky for Joshua, the sun stood still! Don't ask me how, but it did! Heb. 1:3 says Jesus sustains all things by His powerful word. It is one thing to give a command but entirely another thing for that command to have the power within itself to make the action happen. When I was 16 or so, I had a dog, a yellow lab. He loved to run and he didn't like to be hooked back up to his dogbox. So, when it was time, I would command, "Flint, come here!" And he wouldn't come. I had every right to command him; he was my dog, but no matter how loud or how soft or how often I commanded him to come, he wouldn't come. Now if Jesus had said, "Flint, come here!", His very word would have irresistibly dragged the dog right to His hand. His word has the power within itself to make what He says happen! That's the difference between human authority and Divine authority. So, let's call the authority that Jesus has ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY for lack of a better term and that's what Luke is showing us about Him in our text. He begins by showing that:

II. Jesus Has Absolute Authority Over Nature (22-25) The Sea of Galilee is eight miles wide. That's a couple of hours of sailing or rowing, IF the wind is with you, so Jesus lay down on a cushion in the back of the boat and fell asleep. Somewhere in the middle, this sudden storm came up and the waves were pushing them backwards and breaking over the bow of the boat, dumping water into it. The Sea of Galilee is also 140 feet deep, so there's no swimming to shore. Capsizing could well mean death! And the disciples look and there lies Jesus, still peacefully sleeping. So, in terror these experienced sailors wake Him saying, "Master, we're gonna die!" At least one doubting soul even added, "Don't You care?!", according to Mark! Surely, when Jesus told them to get into the boat and cross to the other side, they didn't expect a storm that would put their lives in danger! So, let's pause for a moment and see an important truth:

1. obeying Jesus may lead us unexpectedly into dangerous and fearful places Like the disciples, we think if Jesus is in our boat nothing bad ought to happen to us! If Jesus is in our lives and we obey Him, He should keep all that bad stuff away from our boat! But He doesn't! We obey Him and He still takes us into all kinds of dangerous waters, and I'm not only talking about accidents or diseases or ordinary dangers. *I just read in Brigada the story of a 27 year old young lady named Kitira who lived in one of the most restricted regions of East Africa. During a mission trip to a very-restricted region of her country in East Africa, she was kidnapped by a radical Muslim group. Even though a person within her team tried to lie on her behalf, saying Kitira was Muslim, she chose to tell the truth that she is a devout follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. In short, she would not sell out, even if it meant her death. She risked her very life to remain faithful.* She also didn't question Jesus, "Lord, where are you in this? Why are You sleeping? Why do You seem to be oblivious to the awful thing that is happening to me?" In the end, Jesus rebuked His disciples for having such little faith, instead of having confidence of the type that she had! At any rate, Jesus awakens, stretches and shouts to the wind, "Stop!" and to the waves, "Be still!" And in the next instant, the howling wind stops and the water goes flat calm! Next time you're at the beach, just try to imagine what that would be like, yelling at the wind and the waves and them instantly going quiet! No rational human being would ever expect that to happen, but it did! No wonder the disciples were afraid! All they could think was, "What kind of man can do this? This is no man; this is God!" By displaying His authority over nature, Jesus not only confirmed to them who He was, but also gave to us a clear:

2. the lesson: No matter what circumstance you're in, no matter how violent the wind or how high the waves, **trust that Jesus is in complete control of your circumstances.** Don't question Him. Don't accuse Him. Trust that He's not asleep, that He's not disinterested, but rather that He is very much concerned for you and in complete control of what's happening and this thing will turn out exactly as He planned it! What about Kitira? *On that day, something amazing happened. The leader of the radical Muslim group turned to the group member who was trying to lie on Kitira's behalf. He told the liar, "We're going to allow her to live, not as a result of your lie, but as a direct result of her courage to tell the truth."* In what was nothing short of a miracle, he then released Kitira and her entire team! Sometimes you get thrown in the furnace but the fire doesn't burn you; another time you may get taken to heaven, but either way you win, because Jesus is right there and He's in absolute control! Well, when the boat lands on the far shore, we see that:

III. Jesus Has Absolute Authority Over Demons (26-39) [Read 26-33] Now I guess the first thing I need to say is that:

1. demons are real beings and they do seek to inhabit people even today Demons are fallen angels who are the active agents of Satan. They exist and they are at work opposing us all the time. If they are given opportunity they love to actually move in and take over control of a person. In Divipalem village, where our India team has been to encourage the believers, there is right now a woman named Bujjamma who claims that she herself is the goddess of the village and is causing much trouble. She's no goddess but has prayed to be filled with the spirit of whatever goddess this village worships and some demon was more than glad to oblige. She's demonized, just like this man. We take people

like this, classify them as having some sort of mental disorder, medicate them and lock them away from society. Jesus commanded the demons to come out and in a moment this man was in his right mind once again! You see:

2. demons recognize Jesus' authority and obey His every command They all know who He is and the authority He has and they know that they have no choice but to obey His every command, that they can't resist Him. Jesus cast out demons like this quite frequently throughout His ministry and the disciples saw Him do it. It proved to them that He has absolute authority, not only in the natural realm, but in the spiritual realm, something of which they were very much afraid. But then look ahead to what Jesus did in **(9:1)**. He gave them that very same authority and sent them out on a preaching tour of the villages and later on He sent out 72 others to do the same and *The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" - 10:17*. So here's:

3. the lesson: If and when you encounter the presence of demons, **do not fear them!** You're probably saying, "Yeah, when will that be?" The truth is that they're at work all around us all the time and while I've seen a few people who were obviously outwardly demonized like those Jesus freed, there have been many times now when I have been with people who actually heard demonic voices speaking to their own minds and knew it and we were able to command them to leave in Jesus' Name! And they left! All of us have evil thoughts that demonic forces just pop into our minds, things we would never choose to think, but there they are. They're not your thoughts! They're demonic and you can say, "Leave right now in Jesus' Name!" and **trust that you have Jesus' authority** and they will go! From those completely demonized to those simply annoyed by the presence of demons, Jesus has absolute authority over them and He's shared it with you! Hallelujah!

Well, it seems the townspeople were so afraid of Jesus and upset over His disruption of their pig business that they asked Him to leave, so He sailed back across to Capernaum and there Luke tells us that:

IV. Jesus Has Absolute Authority Over Disease (40-49) Now one thing is very obvious here:

1. Jesus can heal even the most hopeless cases of disease This woman had been hemorrhaging for 12 years. She was anemic, weak from continual loss of blood. She'd been to every doctor there was in that area and spent every nickel she had on medical bills, but nothing had worked. No one was able to help her or to heal her. Humanly and medically speaking she had no hope. But she had heard that Jesus can heal disease, that He had made the lame to walk and the blind to see and the deaf to hear. Paralyzed people got up and walked and she believed that He could heal her. Her issue of blood made her unclean; she was not allowed to touch anybody! But she thought, "If I just touch the edge of His garment, that will be enough!" And Jesus applauded her faith. Listen, Jesus can heal any disease, cancer, AIDS, you name it. He has absolute authority over disease! I think of a 10 year old boy named Luke, son of friends of mine who lived in Russia at the time. Luke contracted a serious case of leukemia. Treatments didn't help and at last doctors did a bone marrow transplant. Everybody was afraid Luke was going to die, but his mother felt Jesus' assure her that he would be well. She kept writing over and over, "All I know is that Jesus told me he's going to live and I believe Jesus!" He's grown now and cancer free! Now there is an important:

2. the lesson here for us who live in the western world: **we must place our faith in Jesus, and not merely in medicine** I'm thankful for doctors; one just replaced my hip! Jesus uses them, but we tend to think that our healing depends on doctors and medicine and human knowledge; it does not. It depends on Jesus! He uses all of those things to heal us many times, but your body doesn't heal apart from His decree. So, prayer is our **FIRST** resort when there is illness, even if we're on our way to the hospital. Our trust must be in Him completely and fully, but the other thing that's also very clear here is that:

3. Jesus does not choose to heal every person; He allows some to die While this woman was being healed, there was a little 12 year old girl over in Jairus' house. Jesus was on His way to see her, but in that brief interlude she died! That was not without His knowledge or permission either! Later on, His friend Lazarus died and He didn't stop that either. Sometimes Jesus chooses to take us home and heal us that way. Having absolute authority means Jesus has the right and the power to heal us or not to heal us if that is what He wants for us, and that's hard for us to accept, but it leads us to the last scene that Luke brings before us, the one in which he shows us that:

V. Jesus Has Absolute Authority Over Death (49-56) Oh listen:

1. Jesus controls whether we live or die If He wants me to live, then no disease, no accident, no natural disaster, no enemy can take my life. I'm invincible! But if He wants me to die and be with Him, no doctor, no hospital, no medicine can keep me alive! He has absolute authority over when I die, but more than that, in this scene we see that:

2. Jesus has power to raise the dead This little girl became living proof that:

a. He can restore people who have died back to earthly life He did it at Nain with the son of a widow. He did it at Bethany with Lazarus! He told His disciples to do it, to heal the sick and raise the dead! And He still does it today. Some years ago, a man who was a leader in the India Missions Association was visiting here and shared with us that in that year there had been 7 verified cases of people being raised from the dead in India and he had personally met and verified every one! *The Christian Broadcasting Network posted this video testimony on YouTube in*

2010: Jeff Markin was on his way to work, when he suddenly started feeling unwell. His boss told him to go to the hospital, where Jeff collapsed. He had a massive deadly heart attack. For 40 minutes the medical team tried to bring Jeff back to life. They shocked him a dozen times but there was no response. Cardiologist Dr. Crandall declared Jeff dead and a nurse began to prepare his dead body for the mortuary. Dr. Crandall updated the charts and as soon as his note was completed, he walked out through the door to the emergency room, when suddenly he heard a voice speak to him: 'Go back and pray for this man.' Dr. Crandall wanted to ignore that voice, thinking 'How can I pray for that man? He is dead, he is gone, there's no life in him!' But as he kept walking away, he heard the voice again: 'Turn around and pray for that man.' The doctor, who was a Christian, thought: 'I need to honor the Lord' so he went back to the dead body. The nurse looked at him, thinking 'What are you doing here?' Dr. Crandall stood next to the corpse and prayed out loud, "Father God, I cry out for this man's soul. If he does not know you as his Lord and Savior, Father, raise him from the dead now. In Jesus' Name." Another doctor walked in the room and Dr. Crandall said: 'Shock this man one more time.' The doctor refused: 'I can't shock him, he's dead, there's no life in him, he's gone'. Dr. Crandall insisted they shock him one more time. The doctor hesitated, but because Dr. Crandall was loved and respected in this hospital, his request was granted and Jeff was shocked one more time. Instantly his heartbeat came back, a perfect and regular heartbeat, which they'd never seen before. The nurse screamed 'What have you done?' Jeff began breathing and moved his fingers. He was immediately moved to the intensive care unit. Three days later Jeff woke up, with no evidence of brain or organ damage. Dr. Crandall asked Jeff: 'Where were you, that day I prayed for you?' Jeff replied: 'Dr. Crandall, I was in total darkness and I was so disappointed. I was alone for eternity.' So Dr. Crandall encouraged Jeff to open up his heart to God, and he did. To this day he has regular checkups and NO heart problem.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=371&v=Xk22aP1N86U Listen, Jesus demonstrated His power to raise the dead by rising from the dead Himself the third day, proving who He was! Of course, Jesus does not often choose to raise people back to earthly life. Instances like Jeff Markin or this girl are gracious acts which demonstrate His absolute authority over death. But what's even more amazing is the fact that:

b. He will resurrect all people from the dead [The Father] has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. - **Jn. 5:27-29**. One day at His coming Jesus will shout and all of the dead in Christ will rise. The earth and the sea will give up their dead bodies to be reunited with their souls and we shall all live in new, transformed, heavenly bodies like His glorious body forever! Don't ask me how He's going to do it; He says He's going to do it and His Word is enough. He has absolute authority over death!

Dear friends, Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth and it is absolute. And that leaves us with a choice. We can either call Him Lord and voluntarily recognize and cooperate with His authority, trusting Him in faith and obeying His every command. Or we can vainly struggle to resist His authority and live our own way, but even if we do, He's in control anyway. You can't escape it; you can only make your life miserable trying. I've chosen to yield to Jesus; I hope you have!

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Ministry Of The Son Of Man In Galilee - Lk. 3:1-9:50

The Identity Of Jesus - 9:1-50

To this point in our study through Luke, we've talked about Jesus' baptism and temptation, His disciples, His teaching, His miracles, His parables and His authority. But everything that Jesus did in His great Galilean ministry thus far was leading up to a point, the point that we find in Chapter 9. All His teaching, all His mighty works were done with one purpose in mind; they were all preparation for the day when He would clearly reveal to His followers who He was, His identity. Of course, in that day, just as in our own, there are:

I. The Various Opinions About Who Jesus Is and I want to look at some of them, beginning in verses (7-9). The Twelve were out on a preaching tour, healing and casting out demons everywhere. It raised quite a stir in Galilee and even caught the attention of the Roman governor, Herod Antipas. When the Twelve returned, Jesus fed the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish and then privately He brought the subject of His identity up to them in (18-19). They simply repeated the popular suppositions that they had heard. To some, especially to those like Herod who were not religious, He was:

1. a mystery: He was some kind of **mystical being with extraordinary powers** Herod theorized that He was John the Baptist risen from the dead and that's how He got His mighty power. Of course, the reason he theorized this was that he himself had beheaded John to please his wife and her daughter, knowing it was wrong, and he was half afraid John had come back! But even today there are many who believe similar superstitious things; they want to explain Jesus by fitting Him into their self-invented belief system. The founder of the Hare Krishna movement said, "'Christ' is another way of saying Krsta and Krsta is another way of pronouncing Krishna, the name of God...the general name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, whose specific name is Krishna. Therefore, whether you call God 'Christ', 'Krsta', or 'Krishna', ultimately you are addressing the same Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Dalai Lama said,

Jesus Christ also lived previous lives, so, you see, he reached a high state, either as a Bodhisattva, or an enlightened person, through Buddhist practice or something like that. Then, at a certain period, a certain era, he appeared as a new master, and then because of circumstances, he taught certain views different from Buddhism, but he also taught the same religious values as I mentioned earlier. What foolishness to think that you can "explain" Jesus by your own ideas! Then the God-fearing Jewish public saw Jesus as:

2. a prophet: a holy man sent from and empowered by God like Elijah or Elisha or one of the mighty prophets of old. In fact, since Elijah was taken up to heaven without dying and Malachi said God would send him back again, some believed he actually was Elijah, with a new name. The 1.8 billion Muslims of the world believe Jesus was a prophet, mighty in word and deed, but that's as far as they will go. He was certainly not more than a man used by God and there are many who hold that same view today. Of course, the Pharisees and religious leaders of the Jews saw Jesus as:

3. a fraud: a Satanically empowered man with evil intent On several occasions ...*the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."* - **Mt. 9:34**. They felt He was an agent of Satan sent to undermine the religious system they dominated and they plotted to kill Him. But in later centuries, many people have come to regard Jesus pretty much as:

4. a legend: a religious leader and gifted teacher deified by his followers His followers invented all these incredible things about him like his miracles and his resurrection and made him into a god. Thomas Jefferson said, *the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter. But may we hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away with this artificial scaffolding, and restore to us the primitive and genuine doctrines of this most venerated reformer of human errors.* [Source: <http://www.leaderu.com/articles/opinions-about-Jesus.html>] So many people view Jesus as a great teacher and a tremendous example but they never seriously read what He said or take seriously what He did!

But saddest of all are those who have never heard of Jesus and have no idea who He is. I told you about the Kyrgyz leader who visited a remote mountain village in northwest China and asked someone, "Have you ever heard of Jesus?" And the man replied, "Jesus, what is that, some kind of new food?" How sad! But at any rate, popular opinion about Jesus is terribly mistaken and the most important question is the one that Jesus asked His disciples next in verse (20). Peter spoke on behalf of them all as those who had listened to Him and watched Him for many months and made:

II. The Bold Declaration Of Who Jesus Really Is Matthew (**Mt. 16:16**) gives us the full wording of his statement: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*. This is what Jesus has been wanting them to understand all along and He replied, ...*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven*. You'll never figure out who Jesus is from the popular opinions of men; God has to reveal the truth of His identity to your heart! First of all, Peter said that:

1. He is the Christ (the Messiah) whom God promised to send as King Beginning way back in Genesis God began making promises that one day a Messiah, a Savior would come. He would be the promised Seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head, the Star who would come out of Jacob and the Scepter who would rise out of Israel, the son of a virgin who would be the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace and Emmanuel, God with us! As the years went by the promises mounted and all God's people were looking for the Messiah who would one day set up the Kingdom of God and rule the world! That's who Jesus is, the Messiah, the rightful King of the world who will reign forever and ever! Secondly, Peter said that:

2. He is the Son of God Now in human terms we would normally think of a son as being different from, but being generated by a father. However, in Jewish thinking, the phrase *Son of God* meant much more. **John 5:18** says, *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God*. And **10:33** says, *The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."* To say, "I am the Son of God" or to say "God is my Father" was a claim to be **of equal status with and united with God**, to actually be God! And that's what Jesus wanted His disciples to grasp from all of His miracles and all His teaching, that:

3. He is God come to earth in a human body Look with me at **Phil. 2:6-7**. Jesus was equal with God; He was God. To paraphrase John 1:1, *In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and [Jesus] was with God, and [Jesus] was God*. But He didn't see His identity as something to be used selfishly for His own gratification. Rather He emptied Himself; He let go of all the outward trappings and privileges of being God to become incarnate, to take to Himself the body of a human being just like ours, so that He could die for us and save us! So, as He was standing there before His disciples that day, they realized at last what Paul says in **Col. 2:9**, ...*in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body*. There, standing before them, was God in a human body; that's who Jesus is! Any view that makes Him less than that is a lie, a myth and a deception of the evil one! He is not merely a great teacher to learn from, nor a miracle worker with special powers, nor a tremendous example for us to follow; He is *very God of very God* as the Nicene creed says

and we should bow before Him in worship and adoration and obey His every command! The big question still is, *Who do YOU say I am?* If your Jesus is less than that, He's not the Jesus of the Bible; He's another Jesus, a false Jesus and one day when you die and stand before the REAL Jesus, He'll say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you!" Well, now that the disciples grasped Jesus' true identity at last, I want you to notice:

4. the new message that Jesus began to emphasize from that point on and repeat to them over and over again. First of all, He began to tell them:

a. that He must die and rise again in order to save us (21-22) What a strange new twist this was for them! Nobody ever conceived that the Messiah, once He came, would suffer and die! But that was the true purpose of His incarnation, of His coming in a body. It was to die as a true human being for our sins in order to save us and then rise the third day. His ruling the world would come later; He would come again, a second time, to rule and reign. But this time He came to die, to give His life a ransom for many, and to rise again. Sadly, no matter how often He repeated this to try to prepare them for it, the disciples never seemed to hear Him. It went in one ear and out the other. But there was also a second part to His new message, which was:

b. that we must die to ourselves and follow Him (23-24) David Guzik says: *Everybody knew what Jesus meant when He said take up his cross. Everyone knew what the cross was: an unrelenting instrument of nothing but death. The cross wasn't about religious ceremonies; it wasn't about traditions and spiritual feelings. The cross was a way to execute people. We have sanitized and ritualized the cross in these twenty centuries after Jesus. How would we receive it if Jesus said, "walk down death row daily and follow Me"? Taking up your cross wasn't a journey; it was a one-way trip. There was no return ticketing; it was never a round trip. Jesus makes deny himself equal with take up his cross. The two phrases express the same idea. The cross wasn't about self-promotion or self-affirmation. The person carrying a cross knew they couldn't save themselves, and that self was destined to die. Denying yourself means to live as an others-centered person. Jesus was the only person to do this perfectly, but we are to follow in His steps. Jesus makes it clear that He is speaking spiritually when He adds the word daily. No one could be crucified literally every day. But they can have the same attitude as Jesus daily. Jesus was saying, "Following Me means dying to you! Dying to what you want, to your plans, your rights, utterly surrendering control over your life, losing your life to Me and My purposes and My orders and My way of living every single day, even as I chose to lose My life for you!" As C.T. Studd put it, If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him. That's what it means to follow Jesus and it's a heavy message! Do you still want in?*

Now Luke goes on to record the ultimate proof of Jesus' identity:

III. The Visible Demonstration Of Who Jesus Is in verses (28-36) We call it The Transfiguration, but it really was:

1. the revealing of Jesus' glory (28-29, 32) Now I want you to notice a few things. Matthew and Mark make the point that it was a *high* mountain. The only high mountain near Caesarea, where they were at the time, is Mt. Hermon on the modern border between Syria and Lebanon. It is some 9,200 feet high and its three peaks remain snow covered most of the year, so climbing the path up to near the top was an exhausting all day process. Jesus took Peter, John and James up there with Him to pray, but in fact, when they get there, night is falling and the weary disciples can't stay awake and pray with Him, just like the situation in Gethsemane later on. But as He prays Jesus begins to shine, to radiate bright light like lightning from His face and from His clothing, like a brilliant LED sign in the darkness. Luke says it woke the disciples and what they saw was His glory. Guzik comments, *This was not a new miracle, but the temporary pause of an ongoing miracle. The real miracle was that Jesus, most of the time, could keep from displaying His glory!* When John saw Him in Revelation, he was *...clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.* - 1:13-15. That's His glory, His normal radiance as God that He laid aside while on this earth, except for this one moment. Then, added to the brilliance of the scene was:

2. the appearance of Moses and Elijah (30-31) Two men were there talking with Jesus and they were shining with glory too! And somehow the disciples innately recognized them as Moses and Elijah, the Deliverer of Israel and the greatest of the Prophets. There they were, alive and well and having a discussion with Jesus about His coming *exodus*, literally, His departure from this world for heaven which He was going to accomplish through His cross and resurrection in Jerusalem! Wouldn't you have like to overheard that conversation?! It is almost irreverent to try to imagine it, but perhaps they were there to remind Him of that joy that was set before Him, encouraging Him to endure the cross and despise the shame so that He would sit down at the right hand of the Father in glory and bring all of us with Him! (Heb. 12:2). Perhaps they appeared to strengthen Him in answer to prayer as He struggled, just as the angels came and ministered to Him in the garden of Gethsemane as He prayed in His great struggle there! At any rate, as Moses and Elijah were taking leave of Him, we see:

3. the reaction of the disciples (33) Mark says they were terrified, but Peter somehow didn't want the moment to end; He didn't want the glory to go away. He wanted things to stay this way, to have the glory visible and real and not go

back down to the world of men with its suffering and death. We always want to stay on the mountaintop in the glory moment, though this life doesn't work that way. Peter didn't want to let it go, so he rashly offered to make three little shelters where they could stay, not being able to think of anything better to say. But God had something better to say! In **(34-35)** we have:

4. the affirmation of the Father Matthew says it was a bright cloud, a glory cloud, like the shekinah glory cloud that covered the children of Israel at night. And the Father's voice spoke out of that cloud, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.* Peter had declared it below; he had said "This is what I believe: You are the Son of God!" But now God Himself declares it definitively, *This IS My Son! I love Him and I am completely pleased with Him. LISTEN to Him!! Obey Him!* If there was any doubt still left about Jesus' identity, it was gone now! They had seen His glory and heard the Father's voice. Jesus was indeed the very Son of God! But, oh my, were they terrified now. They needed:

5. the reassurance of the Savior - Mat. 17:6-7 says, *When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."* Jesus is God but there's no need to be afraid of Him; He loves us! In verse **(36)** Luke tells us that Jesus was now alone and the experience was all over, but they were so shaken by it they didn't tell anyone what they had seen until much later.

However, the assurance they received there on the mountain was not lost and Peter took special care to pass it on to us before he died, if you'll turn with me to **2 Pet. 1:15-18**. Peter says, "Listen folks, Jesus IS who He said He is! He IS God the Son! I saw His glory up on that mountain with my own eyes! I heard the voice of the Father from heaven with my own ears from the majestic glory cloud! We're not following some myth, some made up story. Jesus is real and He's reigning in glory right now and one day He's coming again as He promised! And that's what gives me confidence as I face my own departure, my own exodus to join Him in glory! And that same confidence is for you!" *Charles Haddon Spurgeon is known as the "Prince of Preachers"; he preached to almost 10 million people over the course of his life. In 1854 at the age of 19 he was called to pastor New Park Street Chapel, the largest Baptist congregation in London, at the time numbering 200. It grew so much that a new building was built to seat 5,000 and in March, 1861 the congregation moved into the new Metropolitan Tabernacle. I want you to hear what Spurgeon preached in his first sermon that day, "I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist, ...I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist. ...but if I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply: "It is Jesus Christ." My venerable predecessor, Dr. Gill, has left a body of divinity admirable and excellent in its way; but the body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself for ever, God helping me, is not his system of divinity or any other human treatise, but Christ Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the gospel; who is in himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life. I don't know about you, but I'm with Peter and I'm with Spurgeon; I am staking my all on the very Person of Jesus Christ my Lord.*

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Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Journey Of The Son Of Man To Jerusalem - Lk. 9:51-19:27

The Enemies Of Jesus - Ch. 11

Luke 9:51 is a turning point in Luke's Gospel. Up to this point the majority of Jesus' ministry had been in Galilee where He was wildly received by huge crowds. But from this moment on His face is looking steadfastly toward Jerusalem and the cross that awaited Him there and He begins to work in other areas. In chapter 10 He began to point out to His disciples the cost, as well as the joy, of following Him. Now in chapter 11, Luke focuses on His conflict with His enemies. Most of us realize that:

I. Jesus Had Numerous Religious Enemies Who Opposed His Ministry It is noteworthy that it was not the pagan Romans who wanted to get rid of Jesus, even though He was constantly attracting large crowds. Nor was it the common ordinary people; they flocked to Him and regarded Him as a prophet of God. Strangely, it was the religious elite, the religious leaders of the country, who became His fierce enemies, who tried to discredit Him and plotted to murder Him. But why? Even Pontius Pilate knew that it was out of envy they wanted Him crucified. They were jealous that so many people were following after Him instead of them. He was a threat to the privileged status in which they were regarded and to their power and control over the people. So, they hated Him instead of listening to Him. It's a phenomenon that has been repeated down through history. Whenever the church becomes a powerful organizational establishment with control over people, its leaders end up persecuting those who truly want to follow Jesus. Luther, Calvin and the other reformers were hated and persecuted by the established Roman church of their day. John Huss was burned at the stake. The Pilgrims came to this country fleeing persecution by the English state church. The Anabaptists (who, incidentally, are the line from which we come as a church) were heavily persecuted in Europe by both the Catholic and other Protestant churches. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the greatest enemy the new growing churches had was the ancient established

Russian Orthodox Church. In Central Asia, the Orthodox would even align themselves with the Muslims to influence government against the new followers of Jesus! History should serve as a warning to us! Whenever the people of God become powerful and influential and entwined with political control over the masses, its very leaders inevitably become the enemies of those who truly seek to follow Jesus. Now, Jesus' enemies belonged three groups. The:

1. Pharisees (mentioned in verse 37) were a **sect committed to Law keeping, tradition and ritual purity**. Their name means *separated ones* and their goal was to separate themselves from everything and everyone unclean and unholy. They not only were careful to keep the instructions of the law, but also to follow the whole body of religious traditions that had grown up around it by the instructions of the rabbis over the centuries. Mark comments, *(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)* - 7:3-4. Their lives were filled with the observance of hundreds of little rules, but they were the most popular party in the land at the time, holding great influence over the people with their ways. So, because Jesus refused to endorse their rules, they opposed Him. Another group was the:

2. lawyers (mentioned in verse 45) who were also known as and elsewhere called **scribes**. This was an occupation, not a religious party. They were **professional students and teachers of the Law**. They were also the ones who wrote by hand meticulous **copies** of the Scriptures with painstaking carefulness on scrolls. They knew its every line, every phrase, every word and so they were called upon to teach it, especially to the youth. They were THE authorities on what the Scriptures said and what they meant, so when Jesus challenged their traditional interpretations, and by that their authority, they opposed Him. And finally, there was a third group known as:

3. Sadducees (mentioned by Luke later in 20:27) They were a **liberal sect** of the Jews, **mostly composed of important leaders**, including many of the Temple priests and the Elders or Sanhedrin. They **accepted only the Torah**, the 5 books of Moses, as binding and refused to believe anything not mentioned specifically in them. They didn't believe in heaven or hell, a resurrection or an afterlife, but were more concerned with the survival and well-being of the Jewish people and the sacrificial system of the Temple which they controlled. They feared that the massive crowds drawn by Jesus would cause the Romans to destroy the Temple and crush the Jews even more brutally, so they also opposed Him.

And who opposes us today? On one hand are the ultra-separatists who have lots of little rules about how to dress, what you can drink or play or attend, what you can sing or even what Bible you can read. On the other are the educated students of religion, the theologians who have come to make learning and reason their god and have abandoned the idea of simple faith in Jesus for salvation. Still others are the liberal leaders who control many of today's mainline denominations, who have abandoned the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God and believe only what they choose to believe, much of which is drawn from the culture around us. We who simply love Jesus and regard the Bible as our only authority are often accused of bigotry and hatred toward others, or at least of regarding ourselves as superior to them. We're portrayed as being archaic and ignorant, refusing to accept what everybody knows is true, holding to some ancient, outdated manmade book that nobody believes any more. Paul wrote: *We appeal gently when evil things are said about us. Yet we are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash—right up to the present moment.* - 1 Cor. 4:13 NLT. And that's how true followers of Jesus are often seen and treated around the world today. I say, even so, sign me up! Count me in! Amen? Well, throughout His ministry, but particularly now toward its latter end:

II. Jesus Was Often Attacked By His Religious Enemies and in chapter 11 we have two of the attacks that were often brought against Him. One is in (14-15). He had just cast a demon out of a man who couldn't talk and suddenly the man could speak again freely, and right away:

1. they accused Him of being an agent of Satan In that day Beelzebul was regarded as the chief of the demons and the name was really a synonym for Satan himself. Matthew and Luke tell us it was the Pharisees and scribes, the religious types, that usually made this accusation, "Jesus, the power you use to do these things is from the devil! WE serve God; you serve Satan!" How many times have believers been called, and still are called today, agents of Satan! But look how Jesus responded (17-18). He said:

a. Satan would never work against his own troops It doesn't make any sense. What general would go into battle and shoot his own soldiers? He would soon lose the battle and the kingdom he was trying to establish would fall! No, Satan would never do that; in fact:

b. only the power of God can expel demons (19-20) "You yourselves have followers who try to cast out demons and sometimes it actually works? Why does it work? You give the credit and the power to God because you know only God can drive out Satan. So, what power do you think must be at work in Me?" Furthermore, think about this (21-22):

c. only one more powerful than Satan could take his property "If a strong well-armed man is guarding his property, the only way to take it away from him is to be stronger and better armed and defeat him and remove his pow-

er; THEN you can take his property! To take away Satan's property, to drive out his emissary who operates by his power, it's obvious to anyone with eyes to see that I am stronger than he is!" And:

d. therefore I demand your allegiance (23) "You've got a choice; you are either for Me or you are against Me! There is no middle ground; you can't back off and say, 'OK, well I don't know, I'm not sure.' I am the agent of the Spirit of God and I demand your allegiance!" I think Jesus shouted this to the whole crowd that was standing by marveling at the miracle, yet listening to the accusation of the Pharisees.

Listen, the whole world is divided by that statement into two parts, those who follow Jesus, who are FOR Him, and those who don't. And those who don't follow Him are not neutral; they are actually against Him, opposed to Him! They are part of the enemy camp, captives controlled by him and serving him, whether they realize it or not, and like this mute man, they need set free! Listen to what Paul said, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.* - Eph. 2:1-3. That's who I was before I gave myself to Christ! That's who you are if you haven't given yourself to Christ! And that's who your neighbors, your friends, your coworkers, and even your loved ones are if they haven't given themselves to Christ! Pray for them! Ask for ways to share Jesus with them! Now the second attack against Jesus actually came on the heels of the first back in verse (16). Others in that same crowd:

2. they demanded that He give them a sign from God Wait a moment, hadn't He just done that? But the casting out of a demon or the healing of a sick person wasn't big enough for them. Satan could cause those things! They wanted a sign *from heaven*, a sign so big, so powerful, so undeniable, that it had to be from God; they sought a miracle like God did for Moses, the glory cloud in the sky, the voice from heaven, the parting of the Red Sea or the manna. Like many skeptics today, they wanted undeniable proof of the presence of God - on demand! But Jesus answered (29-30). He said:

a. I Myself will be the sign God has given you God doesn't produce signs on demand to suit your whim! I AM the sign. Just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish and came out alive and that was God's sign to the people of Nineveh, so I'm going to die and be buried and rise again on the third day as God's once-for-all-forever sign to you that I am the Son of God!" Then He went on to say that:

b. even pagans recognize God's Presence at work (31-32) The Queen of Sheba saw God's presence in Solomon and went home believing. The pagan Ninevites saw God's presence in Jonah and believed. But now Someone greater than either one of them is here and you can't believe it! Why not?" (33-36):

c. God has shined His light on you but your eyes are blind "He's put his Lamp up on a stand and it's shining brightly; it isn't hidden. The problem is not with lack of a sign to see; it's with your seeing! Your eyes are blind! You don't really want to see! You've let all these blinders of your religious ways make you miss seeing the very Light God has sent you in Me!"

Listen, Jesus still does signs aplenty for His people, especially where the darkness is the deepest and people don't know who He is. He heals people and casts out demons and gives people visions and dreams and all kinds of marvelous things to give light to people who have none at all. He does it all the time in India among the poor! And even all around us He has done the miracle of transforming the lives of people when they trust in Him. I'm one of them and so are most of you! His problem is with those to whom no amount of small miracles will matter, because they don't really want to see. To them He says, "My Resurrection proves who I am once for all; you must choose whether to believe it or not, but I'm alive to prove it!" Now in the last portion of the chapter:

II. Jesus Strongly Condemned His Religious Enemies and He did it on the occasion of being invited, while He was saying all these things, to what we'd call brunch (37-38). Jesus didn't hesitate to eat, even with one who opposed Him, but please understand, this Pharisee didn't invite Jesus in order to learn from Him or because He was His friend. He probably did it to argue with Jesus in the company of the others of his type that he had also invited, away from the crowd, specifically to find some fault in Him and he didn't have to wait long, because Jesus ignored the traditional ceremonial washing of hands before reclining to eat, which shocked him. Jesus must have read the astonishment on his face and launched into a lengthy condemnation of the Pharisees and scribes, and by way of personal application, this is a list of things that we ourselves have to beware of, because it is easy to allow them to creep into our lives, just as the Pharisees had. First of all, Jesus condemned them:

1. for externalism: concern with outward appearance over character (39-41) Elsewhere Jesus accused them of foreclosing on widows' houses and for a pretense making long prayers to give the appearance of caring. Do we care that the inside of our cup is as clean as the outside or is appearance as far as it goes? Second, He condemned them:

2. for legalism: and by that, I mean **majoring on minor things and neglecting major things (42)** They were meticulous about the command to tithe, down to every little herb that grew in their gardens, but when it came to really important matters like justice, they were willing to turn an innocent man over to the Roman governor and demand that He

be crucified on false charges! Do we let ourselves focus on picky little things that are pretty trivial or is what matters most to us doing what's right and loving people? Third, He condemned them:

3. for pride: that is, for **seeking recognition from people (43)** They did all kinds of things so people would praise them, like choosing to stand on a street corner to pray so the public would notice how religious they were. Do we look for the pat on the back, the applause of the crowd, being told how great we are or do we sincerely strive to please God and have His approval? Then Jesus condemned them:

4. for hypocrisy in all its many forms. He condemned them:

a. for hiding their inner corruption (44) Do we hide who we really are and put on an outer mask to deceive others? He condemned them:

b. for laying burdens on others that they wouldn't assume (45-46) Do we demand or expect things of others that we ourselves aren't willing to do? He condemned them:

c. for pretending to honor the very prophets they disobey (47-48) This is a little harder to understand, but Jesus is saying that their forefathers disobeyed, persecuted and even killed the prophets that God sent them. Now this generation was outwardly rebuilding and embellishing their tombs to honor them but, in their hearts, they were still disobeying them in the same manner their ancestors did! So, do we pretend to honor the Word of God and speak highly of it with our mouths, yet deliberately disobey it in our lives? And finally, He condemned them:

d. for misleading others while pretending to help them (52) In essence He accused them of being false teachers who lead people astray instead of leading them to the real truth. Is the example of our lives one that leads people TO Jesus and the life He intends for them to live or is it one that keeps them from it?

The Jewish sect of the Pharisees fizzled out in the second or third century AD. So, they're gone. If we read this chapter and only think about how bad they were, it will do us no good. It was almost 40 years ago that I first heard this phrase used as a title for a sermon series: *The Pharisee In Me*. It has stuck with me. What Jesus is really after is for His followers NOT to allow these same things to creep into our lives. Yet they do. They may look a little different, but they do. On his website Frank Powell suggests *Twelve Signs You Are A Modern-Day Pharisee*

<http://frankpowell.me/12-signs-you-are-modern-day-pharisee/>

1. *You believe showing up for worship every Sunday makes you right with God.*
2. *You spend more time talking about what you are against, not what you are for.*
3. *You believe God actually needs you.*
4. *You don't repent of sin...you don't have any "serious" sin to repent of.*
5. *You make every issue black and white.*
6. *You would never condone homosexuality or fornication...but have no problem watching movies that do.*
7. *Your salvation is based on your works, not on Jesus.*
8. *You read the Bible to substantiate your convictions, not to be shaped into God's image.*
9. *You believe outsiders should conform to a certain lifestyle before they are accepted as "Christian."*
10. *You don't know the difference between a convert and a transfer.*
11. *All of your Christian friends look and act just like you do.*
12. *If someone tries to rebuke you, you get angry and offended.*

Truth be told, there's a little bit of the Pharisee in all of us and God forbid that we would want to harbor anything that makes us like the enemies who opposed Jesus. Let's ask Jesus to root it out and make us pleasing to Him.

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Journey Of The Son Of Man To Jerusalem - Lk. 9:51-19:27

The Sermon Of Jesus - Ch. 12

In Luke's Gospel, chapters 10 through the middle of 18 contain material that is only recorded by Luke from the latter part of Jesus' ministry, though in a few verses He does repeat things He had taught on earlier occasions. Any good teacher does that! Chapters 12 through 16 are lumped together as one extended block of teaching given on different occasions through that period. However, chapters 12 and 13 are one message that Jesus delivered all together, one sermon, if you will, given on one particular day. In this message Jesus addresses a number of different issues and we don't have time to examine the whole thing so today we're going to look at the middle section of chapter 12 which focuses on one specific subject. But before we do, notice:

I. The Occasion On Which Jesus Gave This Teaching (1) When Jesus left the Pharisee's house after denouncing His enemies during brunch, a crowd of them followed Him trying to press Him to speak about many things, so they could trap Him into saying something wrong. But in the process, more and more people began to gather until at last:

1. He spoke to a crowd of literally thousands that had gathered. We can hardly picture this. There were so many that there was pushing and shoving to get near Him and people were trampling on each other! He began by talking to His disciples first, warning them against listening to the scribes and Pharisees, but eventually at some point He began speaking loudly to the whole crowd and as He did, He was interrupted **(13-14)**. So, in the block of teaching we're going to study, Jesus:

2. He was responding to the outburst of a greedy man This man was evidently one of a pair of brothers, whose father had recently died. Now the established law among the Jews was to obey God's command in Deut. 21:17 that the firstborn son was to receive a double portion of the inheritance, his father's land and his possessions. So, in this case his brother evidently was oldest and got 2/3 of the inheritance, while he only got 1/3 and he was not satisfied with that. So, he appealed to Jesus as a well-known Rabbi to settle this dispute in his favor and command his brother to share equally. This Jesus refused to do, saying, "I'm not a judge or a mediator whose job is to preside over such legal matters and decide cases! There are legitimate officials in place for that to whom you can bring your case. What concerns Me is the attitude of your heart which is so obvious. You're covetous!"

And with that Jesus launches into an entire discourse to the crowd, which is a blessing for us, because here we have in one unit much of:

II. The Teaching Of Jesus Concerning Material Things in verses **(15-34)**. In **(15a)** He begins by warning us that:

1. we must carefully guard ourselves against covetousness That's not a word we use much anymore; we would call it greed. Covetousness is *the intense selfish desire to have more* of something, be it money or possessions or power, or *to have something that is not legitimately ours*. The tenth commandment forbids us to covet anything that belongs to our neighbor, whether it's his spouse or any of his possessions. If you remember, in the parable of the sower, Jesus warned us that *the deceitfulness of riches* can choke out the Word of God in a person's life and make them unfruitful, which means it can destroy their relationship with the Lord. Greed is insidious; it's deceitful. It creeps quietly into our lives through some situation that arises, like this inheritance issue which still creates plenty of family disputes today, and the next thing you know, there it is full blown and we're acting greedy, intensely desiring something that's not legally ours or intensely craving more of what we have, loving money more than we love God. Paul warned us that, *...the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* - 1 Tim. 1:10. That's why Jesus warned us that we must diligently watch for greed in whatever form it takes, in whatever area of our lives it begins to appear, and deliberately put a stop to it immediately before it can grow. And He went on to tell us several things to remember that will help us do that, like **(15b)**:

a. life is not measured by the amount of our possessions Decades ago, billionaire publisher Malcolm Forbes is reputed to have originated the saying, *He who dies with the most toys wins*. And even if we laugh and think it's ludicrous, it pretty well embodies the materialism that has embedded itself in our western culture. We always have to have a bigger, better house, a newer, faster car, more and better clothes, or to have more money, as though these things are how our lives are somehow measured. That's not true. Scripture says, *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for [God] has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* - Heb. 13:5. The most important thing in our lives is not how much we have; it is that we have a Heavenly Father who will never leave us nor forsake us! Jesus went on to tell a story to make His point **(16-20)**. What's the point of the story? There's no use in hoarding earthly goods because:

b. death will strip each of us of all our possessions *He who dies with the most toys* still dies and leaves it all behind to belong to somebody else. There are no U-Haul trailers behind hearses going to the cemetery because *You can't take it with you!* The Egyptian Pharaohs thought you could and were buried with all kinds of valuables but all their possessions are still here today in our museums! And we could die at any moment! Tomorrow is not guaranteed. We all know someone who died suddenly in an accident or found out they had cancer and died in a month. Tomorrow that could be you or me. So, if the focus of our lives becomes accumulating things, God calls us fools! One day our souls will stand before God and it won't matter how rich we were **(21)**:

c. what matters is to be rich toward God, rich in the way God counts riches. Later on, Jesus told the rich, young ruler, *...Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.* (18:22) Use whatever you have to help others in need and to reach others with the Gospel. Paul said we're *...to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share* - 1 Tim. 6:18. The world says that you get rich by getting and by keeping. God says that you get rich by giving, by using all that you have, your time, talents and possessions to serve Him by helping others and reaching them with the Gospel.

You know who came to mind as I was thinking about a spiritually rich man? Dear Elwin Palmer whom many of you remember. He had hardly a penny to his name but was always giving of the few dollars he had. He spent much of his life caring for a handicapped wife day after day but prayed for hours for people he knew and for this church and for the work of God all over the world. He died a rich man toward God! Our partner David Dayasagar in India somehow lives on his wife's salary of \$450 a month, but every day from 5 AM prayer time until most nights 11 PM when he gets home, he is going to this village and that village, in this meeting and that meeting, preaching, baptizing, encouraging

and helping the evangelists that God has raised up and out of that more than 2,000 Yenadi people have come to Christ! He lives in a simple 5 room house but he is a rich man toward God! Being covetous makes you spiritually poor! Now the next principle Jesus gives us is in (22):

2. do not be anxious about material needs For most of us living where we do, we take the basic things of life for granted, but for many believers throughout history and around the world today, concern for food, clothing, shelter and other simple necessities are daily concerns. Many millions of people only eat tonight if they have work today and have nothing to sustain them if there is a medical event or accident or the loss of work. Yet even right here, the question of how we're going to pay our rent or buy food or get our kids clothes for school is a very real issue to many, even to some of our body! But Jesus says to us as His followers and God's children, "Don't be anxious, don't be troubled and live in fear of not having those basic things you need to sustain life!" Why not? Well, for one thing (23):

a. life is more than material things Martin Luther said, *You turn it exactly round; food is meant to serve life, but life forsooth serves food; clothes are to serve the body, but the body forsooth must serve the clothing, and so blind is the world that it sees not this.* If you spend your life and use your body to focus on seeking food and clothing, you miss the very purpose for which God has given you the precious gift of life and a body! That's not what you're here for! And for another thing, Jesus says:

b. consider God's provision in nature (24, 27-28) God feeds the ravens and all the little birds you see all winter long; they don't store up food ahead to make sure they have enough! God cares for them every day. And He clothes the flowers and the grasses of the field with incredible beauty every year, without them having to work hard to make their own garments. Elsewhere the Bible says God cares for every creature in nature and gives them their food in season. He's arranged for everything to be fed and appropriately clothed; why would He do less for you when you are of far more value to Him than any of them? And beyond that, Jesus says:

c. worrying cannot change even the smallest thing (25-26) Let's say you live 70 years; that's 613,200 hours. Wouldn't it be a small thing to add just one day or even one hour to your life span? But will worrying about it accomplish that? Being anxious accomplishes nothing; it changes nothing. Paul said, "Be anxious for nothing; rather pray about everything! Make your requests known to God!" He's the One who provides, who heals, who determines whether we have or have not, whether we live or die! It all hangs on Him, not on you, so, Jesus says thirdly:

3. focus instead on advancing God's Kingdom (29-31) Always:

a. remember that God is your Father! Fathers take care of their children! Fathers put their children and their needs first above their own. Fathers lay down their lives for their children. And your Father is a good, good Father! The best Father! **You are not like the rest of the world!** They don't have a father to care for them and provide for them. They're on their own! They have to get their living for themselves, even though God is often gracious to them and gives them sun and rain and all the means to live. But they have no promise of it, no one taking responsibility for their care. When you worry inordinately about all these things, you forget who you are; you forget who your Father is and act like a pagan! Further:

b. remember that He is omniscient and knows your needs There are days when you might be tempted to think that He has overlooked your need somehow or that He just doesn't know exactly what you think you need. But He knows everything, everything there is to know! He knows exactly what you need and when you need it and how dependent you are and how upset you are when you can't see a way for your need to be met! So, rather than worrying like the rest of the world, act like you have a Heavenly Father and:

c. trust Him to care for your needs as you serve His purpose Now, I'm not saying that you shouldn't work or that you shouldn't work hard. Paul commanded the Thessalonians, *...If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.* - 2 Thes. 3:10. God doesn't intend for us to lay idly around, expecting God to drop manna from heaven. In fact, He most often provides for us by giving us work! Yet even though we work, we don't trust in our own hands, in our own abilities, in our own capacity to find opportunities to work. We trust in Him to care for us, refuse to worry about how He will do it and proceed to focus our energy and our prayers on the things He's called and commanded us to do, the things that will bring other people to faith and maturity in Jesus Christ! That's called advancing His Kingdom, increasing His rule and reign over the lives of people He's given us to minister to. There is an anecdotal story which says that *Queen Elizabeth once sent an ambassador far away on important and difficult business. He objected, saying to the queen, "But what will become of my business and my family?" The queen replied, "You take care of my business and I will take care of yours." And she did.* That is exactly what our Heavenly Father has said to us, "You focus on My Kingdom, on My purposes, on following My calling and obeying what I ask you to do, and I will personally make sure that all these other things you need are added to you! You focus on taking care of My business and I will take care of yours!" Hallelujah, what a promise! And not merely that, Jesus went on to say:

d. remember that He has given you an eternal Kingdom (32) "Don't be afraid that you won't have what you need. Don't be afraid because you're little and small and there aren't many of you and life in this world seems

tough. One day the Son of Man will come in all His glory and all the nations of the earth will be gathered before Him and He, the King, will say to the little flock of sheep on His right, *'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'*. Your Father loves you. Your Father saved you at great cost! And your Father has prepared for you an eternal Kingdom where you will walk with Him forever and enjoy all the things that eye has not seen and ear has not heard, things that have never even entered the heart of man to imagine! And He doesn't HAVE to do it; He WANTS to do it! He is pleased to do it! It gives Him great joy to have you with Him forever! Focus on THAT and all the worries of this life will fade into insignificance!" Amen? So rather than worrying about what you'll have:

e. share what He has given you instead of hoarding it (33a) The rich man in Jesus' story had enough goods to take care of him for many years, way more than he would ever need. But instead of sharing his bounty with the poor and needy who were struggling, he wanted to build bigger barns to hoard it for himself, so he would feel secure. That's the attitude that Jesus is confronting. He's not saying, "Sell everything you have and take a vow of poverty." He's saying, "Instead of keeping everything you have to make yourself feel secure, look at the need of the poor, look at the need of those unreached with the Gospel around the world, and sell off what you don't need to live to meet the crying needs around you and advance My Kingdom!" That's what we read about in the early church in Acts, *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.* - 4:32, 34-35. They didn't sell the houses they lived in and become a commune, or the field that gave their livelihood, but those who were wealthier and had extra houses and fields sold them and gave to meet the needs of others who didn't have enough. This is so foreign to our culture. We're told that to be secure in our old age we ought to literally have a million dollars or probably even more in our retirement investments so the interest can sustain us. Listen, I'm not against saving for retirement, but if you die with a million dollars in the bank do you realize how many missionaries could have been sent out, how many thousands of people could hear the Gospel for the first time, how many villages could have had clean water to drink, how many families could have their ruined homes rebuilt after a typhoon or earthquake, if you would give even a portion of it away?!!! At least leave it to the church when you die so we can do all those things with it for you! Jesus' point was not that we should have nothing; He said our Father would see that we have all we need and that means having something! His point was the attitude we should have **(33b-34)**. His point is that we should:

f. treasure heavenly things, not earthly things, that what we should value most and what should be most important to us are the things that eternal, the things that last forever, like people, people becoming part of God's Kingdom and Jesus having more and more to worship Him and spend eternity with Him. If we treasure these things and live for them first, our Father will see that we have all we need to live today! What we value, what we treasure, shows what our heart is truly like, what it really loves!

John Piper is one of my favorite authors and theologians and he calls living like this "living a wartime lifestyle". He says, *The aim of wartime living is not that we go without, [rather, that] We are able to accomplish more things by a reallocation of resources from self-gratification to mission penetration... It began with Ralph Winter, one of my favorite missionary heroes who is now with the Lord. He was great statesman in his day... He pointed out that in the Second World War the luxury ocean liner, Queen Mary, was transformed into a troop transport. This was wartime use of a luxury liner, and he described in detail the dramatic changes. How so many people slept in a room — like twelve instead of three. The kind of utensils that were used in the now-called mess hall instead of the [elegant silver and china] of the beautiful dining room. On and on he goes, creating a sense for us that during World War II there were changes. Life didn't just go on as usual. He stressed that God's people, in a prosperous land like America, simply cannot live as though there were not thousands of unreached people groups who are under enemy control. We have from our commander in chief a commission to go. We have the most powerful liberating bomb in the world called the gospel. Therefore, to just carry on our lives in this country as though it were peacetime shows how out of touch we are with biblical reality.*

[\[https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-wartime-living-the-same-as-minimalism\]](https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-wartime-living-the-same-as-minimalism) Jesus said, guard yourself against covetousness. It's insidious; it creeps into our lives and we don't realize it. Don't worry and be anxious about your material needs; your Heavenly Father loves you and He'll take care of you! Instead, use everything you've got to advance God's Kingdom; that's why you're on earth! Set your heart on treasures in heaven.

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Journey Of The Son Of Man To Jerusalem - Lk. 9:51-19:27

The Warning Of Jesus - Ch. 13

The sermon that Jesus gave to the huge crowd in chapter 12 continues through the first nine verses of chapter 13. Then He teaches in a synagogue in verse 10 and then goes on teaching and traveling on His journey toward Jerusalem in verse 22. But even though the locations are different, the theme that unites this chapter is that all through it, Jesus is giving a

very strong warning, both specifically to Israel and to all people on earth. We love to think and talk of the sweet side of Jesus, how He loves us and cares for us and carries us through all our sufferings. But there is another side to His character and to His message, one we don't like to think about. Acts 17:31 says, *...[God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.* Jesus is the Judge of all the earth. He himself said, *The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son - John 5:22.* Today, Jesus lovingly and mercifully makes Himself available to be the Savior of all who will believe, but on that day, He will be the Judge who passes the sentence of eternal death on those who will not. This theme runs through four sections of teaching in this chapter and each has a slightly different emphasis. In the first section Jesus emphasizes:

I. The Need Of Repentance (1-5) [Read 1] As Jesus winds up His sermon, some in the crowd had evidently been watching CNN that day and reported to Him the news of a fresh atrocity that Pontius Pilate had committed. A group of people from Galilee, perhaps followers of Judas the Galilean mentioned in Acts 5:37 who had tried to foment a rebellion against Rome, were in the Temple offering sacrifices to God, when Pilate sent a detachment of soldiers and ruthlessly slaughtered them, so that their own blood was mingled with that of the animals they sacrificed. However, it seems they mentioned this to Him, not to condemn Pilate for his heinous act, but to somehow imply that these Galileans deserved what they got. Note Jesus' reply **(2-5)**. He said, those Galileans weren't killed because they were worse sinners than everybody else, nor were the 18 men who were killed in the recent collapse of a stone tower in Jerusalem worse sinners than others (You see, Jesus read the news too!). And before we point the finger at them, let's remember that sometimes we think like that.

1. we may think God is punishing others for their sins through catastrophes like these. If a guy gets drunk and gets into his car and takes off and smashes into a telephone pole and dies, instead of having pity for the poor man and his family, there's a part of us that justifies ourselves and thinks, "He got what he deserved! We're better than him so that won't happen to us!" If a prostitute in Kensington is kidnapped and murdered, instead of having pity for the suffering of the poor woman, there's a part of us that thinks, "Oh well, she lived a wicked lifestyle so something like that was inevitable. I'm glad I'm not like her; that won't happen to me!" But Jesus said, "No! That's not true. Those people are no worse sinners than you or anyone else. Human beings are ALL sinners before God and the size of our crimes is irrelevant! You're taking the wrong lesson out of this."

2. catastrophes serve to remind us that worse judgment will fall on us all if we do not repent of our sins Tragic deaths remind us that we're all going to die, and if we die without repenting of our sins and turning to Jesus for salvation, we will truly perish and that will be a great tragedy! Now in the immediate sense:

a. this was true of Israel nationally Jesus was saying, "Unless you Israelites ALL repent of your sins before God and follow Me as your Messiah and Savior, your whole nation is going to perish in a tragedy just like this! And it did. Less than 40 years later, a Roman general named Titus laid siege to the city of Jerusalem and destroyed it and the Temple. Thousands of Jews were slaughtered outright and thousands more were enslaved and sent to toil in the mines of Egypt or dispersed to arenas throughout the Empire to be butchered for the amusement of the public. On the one hand, Jesus was saying to the Jews, "This tragedy is just a little picture of the tremendous calamity that is going to happen to all of you if you don't change the attitude of your hearts and turn to Me! You will all perish!" On the other hand:

b. His words are true of all of US personally Does that word *perish* remind you of anything? Flip over with me to **John 3:16-18**. How many times have we said our favorite verse but lingering on the word *love* and quickly passing by the word *perish*? Jesus said that every human being stands condemned already, condemned by the sins they have committed. They will perish; they will die not just physically, but eternally, unless they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their only way of salvation! That is true of every one of us personally. That is true of everyone in our family. That is true of everyone in our neighborhood, in our community, of everyone we work with or go to school with or know in any way. They will all *likewise perish* if they do not repent of their sins and believe in Jesus. Now immediately Jesus goes on to teach about:

II. The Patience Of God (6-9) A tree that never bears fruit takes up space that could be used to grow productive plants and it uses up resources that could be better used by other fruitful trees, yet the caretaker says, "I know it's been three years and the fig tree should be bearing fruit, but please let's give it another year and I'll fertilize it really well. Let's give it one more chance to bear fruit!" That's the attitude of Jesus and that's the attitude of our Heavenly Father. Now, the fig tree has always been a symbol of the nation of Israel; every Jew knew that, so Jesus was teaching that:

1. despite His patience with and goodness to Israel, she did not bear fruit He had already been preaching all over the land in public ministry for three years and, even though some believed, as a nation she was still not turning her heart back to God. And even now He was willing to enter another year with her and give His utmost to reach her, even allowing Himself to be crucified and raised from the dead! He went to great lengths to save her, but if she refused, eventually she would have to be cut down, which she was, and even that was nearly 40 years later! God is patient! And likewise:

2. He is patient with us because He does not want any to perish The reason Jesus hasn't returned yet to judge the world is given us by Peter, *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* - **2 Pet. 3:9**. Did you hear that? God does not wish anyone to perish! He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked! He did not create human beings to see them destroyed; He wants to save them all and have them spend eternity with Him! So, He is patient, holding off His judgment, giving opportunity after opportunity after opportunity, yet never forcing them to believe against their will. Just this past week, we found out that an elderly man of 90+ for whom we've been praying in the hospital and rehab center, has finally come to place his trust in Jesus as his Savior! Hallelujah! Heaven is rejoicing and we should too! How many times over the years have we seen people, even at the very end of their lives, finally come to faith! Why? Because God is patient with us and not only that:

3. He is kind to us to lead us to repentance - Rom. 2:4 in the NLT says, *Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?* God is kind to us; He is good to us. He showers us with blessings that we don't deserve, from His provision for our daily lives, to our family, to many kind and good things that He sends into our lives. Yet we so often fail to see that they are from His hand and turn to Him! We take them for granted or think they come by chance or that we deserve them somehow, but in these things, God is fertilizing the tree of our lives, giving us tender care so that it will bear fruit and we'll turn to Him and believe! And yet so many just can't see it or refuse to believe it. And that takes us to the third section in this chapter where Jesus teaches about:

III. The Narrow Door Of The Gospel (22-28) Now, why a person in the crowd would have asked this question randomly we don't really know, except that there seems to have been some debate among the Jews in Jesus' day as to whether all Jews would have a part in the Kingdom or whether only a select few of the best would enter it, as only Joshua and Caleb got to go into the Promised Land in their generation. So maybe this man was trying to get Jesus to settle the debate, but Jesus was really clear and forceful in His answer, not to settle a theological question, but to give a strong warning that applied then as it does now. He said the way to heaven is a *narrow door*. In other words:

1. comparatively few people will be saved and enter the Kingdom Earlier, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the same figure even more plainly. Turn with me to **Mt. 7:13-14**. The way to heaven is a narrow door, a narrow gate; the path that leads there is narrow and hard to find. When you consider the huge mass of mankind on the earth, only a few find it! The road to destruction is a 12 lane highway that is entered by massively wide gate; it's easy to find and easy to follow and the vast majority of people are traveling it! We don't like to think like that. We'd love to assume that everybody is OK, that most people are going to wind up in heaven somehow, unless they're murderers or criminals or something like that. But that's not how it works! Jesus said, *I AM the Way... NO ONE comes to the Father except through Me!* Only those who come to Jesus and give their lives to Him receive His eternal life and enter His Kingdom! Yes, our number has grown from a tiny mustard seed into a huge tree of hundreds of millions of believers and it has permeated the world pretty thoroughly, just like a pinch of yeast permeates a whole huge chunk of bread dough. But despite all that growth still literally 90% of the people in the world are on the broad road to destruction and a similar percentage of the people you see and interact with every day are also on that broad road. Now, unlike other places, where we live it's likely that most or all of those have at least heard about Christ and quite a few of them, if asked, might even say that they are Christian because they have some vague connection to a church or give mental assent to some Christian beliefs, however, Jesus went on to strongly emphasize that:

2. the majority of people will be barred from entering the Kingdom, even if they are acquainted with Christ He said, "When time's over and the door is shut, many 12-lane folks are going to bang on it and beg for it to be opened. They'll say, 'But we ate and drank in Your presence; You taught in our streets! We know about You!! We belonged to a church. We said the Creed!' But it will be too late." While you're in Matthew, look at **Mt. 7:21-23**. Only those who KNOW Christ, who have a living personal relationship and union with Him, get to go in. It doesn't matter how often they went to church, how many prayers they said or even if they served in ministry or did mighty things using His Name! They'll have to depart from Him because they don't belong to Him. They don't KNOW Him personally. And where will they go? Jesus said: *In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth...*

3. they will suffer eternal punishment Flip over with me to **Mt. 13:49-50**. Yes, there IS a hell, a place of fire and suffering and Jesus warned about being thrown into it in 10 separate verses in the Gospels and He mentioned being cast into eternal fire in 11 verses! We so easily want to believe there's a heaven, but Jesus reiterated over and over again that there is a hell and the vast majority of people are on the road to it, to suffering that is eternal, that never ends! And then people around us cry, "But how could a loving God send anyone to hell!" It's obvious that they don't know:

IV. The Heart Of Jesus which is revealed to us in our last section in Luke 13 This is not some teaching, some lecture being given to a crowd; this is an expression that welled up out of Jesus' heart as He pressed on toward Jerusalem (**34-35**). Notice five things about Jesus in this cry, first hear:

1. the longing of His heart for people Hear Him sigh as He says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! O religious but rebellious wicked people, I really, really wanted to gather you to Myself!" The NIV says, *I have LONGED to gather you!* Jesus'

heart longs for people, it yearns for people to know Him, to belong to Him, even for those who are hypocrites and do the worst things imaginable to the very people He's sent to invite them. Next notice:

2. the tenderness of His heart toward people "I want to gather you the way a mother hen wants to tenderly sweep all of her chicks under the strong protection of her wings so they are safe." There is nothing mechanical about Jesus saving us. He is loving toward us, compassionate, tender, like a mother toward her children. He tenderly cares for people. Third, notice:

3. the patience of His heart with people "How often would I have gathered you to Myself! I've wanted to do this, I've tried to do this time and time again, over and over. I sent people to tell you. I warned you. I begged and pleaded with you to come to me." Jesus doesn't give up easily. He is patient with us. He gives us opportunity after opportunity, speaking to us in this way and that way and another way. But also notice:

4. the obstinance of people to refuse Him What sad words, *and you were not willing!* Rather than repent of sins and turn to Jesus, people would rather shoot the messenger or simply ignore the message. And God gives us all that freedom to say, "No!" He will not drag anyone into the Kingdom screaming and kicking against their will! He will pursue and woo and call and persuade, but He will not force people to come to Him. And so, in verse 35 notice:

5. the justice He must eventually give to people In Israel's case, their Temple would soon be vacated; God would no longer be present there and Jesus would soon be gone, not to return for many centuries. Their opportunity would be past and a just destruction lay ahead. When, despite all of Jesus' efforts to draw people to Himself, they will not come, there is nothing left when they die or He returns, but to be cast into hell because of their sins. That is Jesus' stern warning. Those who will not respond to love will suffer justice.

So how does that warning impact us who believe. Well, we could wipe our brows and say, "Phew, I'm glad that's not me!" Or we could have the same heart Jesus has and join Him in loving people! Amy Carmichael was a missionary to India for some 50 years, mostly rescuing young Hindu girls from being forced into temple prostitution. Though she died in 1951, her writings have inspired many to join God in reaching people. One night Amy had a vision; she writes: *The tom-toms thumped straight on all night, and the darkness shuddered round me like a living, feeling thing. I could not go to sleep, so I lay awake and looked; and I saw, as it seemed, this: That I stood on a grassy sward, and at my feet a precipice broke sheer down into infinite space. I looked, but saw no bottom; only cloud shapes, black furiously coiled, and great shadow-shrouded hollows, and unfathomable depths. Back I drew, dizzy at the depth. Then I saw forms of people moving single file along the grass. They were making for the edge. There was a woman with a baby in her arms and another with a little child holding on to her dress. She was on the very verge. Then I saw that she was blind. She lifted her foot for the next step ...it trod air. She was over, and the children over with her. Oh, the cry as they went over! Then I saw more streams of people flowing from all quarters. All were blind, stone blind; all made straight for the precipice edge. There were shrieks as they suddenly knew themselves falling, and a tossing up of helpless arms, catching, clutching at empty air. But some went over quietly, and fell without a sound. Then I wondered, with a wonder that was simply agony, why no one stopped them at the edge. I could not. I was glued to the ground, and I could not call; though I strained and tried, only a whisper would come. Then I saw that along the edge there were sentries set at intervals. But the intervals were far too great; there were wide, unguarded gaps between. And over these gaps the people fell in their blindness, quite unwarned; and the green grass seemed blood-red to me, and the gulf yawned like the mouth of hell.*

Then I saw, like a little picture of peace, a group of people under some trees, with their backs turned towards the gulf. They were making daisy chains. Sometimes when a piercing shriek cut the quiet air and reached them, it disturbed them, and they thought it a rather vulgar noise. And if one of their number started up and wanted to go and do something to help, then all the others would pull that one down. "Why should you get so excited about it? You must wait for a definite call to go! You have not finished your daisy chain yet. It would be really selfish," they said, "to leave us to finish the work alone."... Once a girl stood alone in her place, waving the people back; but her mother and other relations called and reminded her that her furlough was due; she must not break the rules. And being tired and needing a change, she had to go and rest for a while; but no one was sent to guard her gap, and over and over the people fell, like a waterfall of souls. Once...the girl who longed to be back in her gap thought she heard a little one cry, and she sprang up and wanted to go; at which they reproved her, reminding her that no one is necessary anywhere; the gap would be well taken care of, they knew. And then they sang a hymn.

*Then through the hymn came another sound like the pain of a million broken hearts wrung out in one full drop, one sob. And a horror of great darkness was upon me, for I knew what it was — the Cry of the Blood. Then thundered a Voice, the Voice of the Lord: And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brothers' blood cries unto Me from the ground." Then the vision was over and Amy says, The tom-toms still beat heavily, the darkness still shuddered and shivered about me ...What does it matter, after all? It has gone on for years; it will go on for years. Why make such a fuss about it? God forgive us! God arouse us! Shame us out of our callousness! Shame us out of our sin! [Amy Carmichael, taken from *Things as They Are: Mission Work in Southern India*] That night Amy Carmichael heard the heart of Jesus; will we?*

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Journey Of The Son Of Man To Jerusalem - Lk. 9:51-19:27

The Banquet Of Jesus - Ch. 14

It seems to be a universal fact that human beings love to eat together; they love to have a big meal and enjoy one another's company. I'm guessing a number of us had special Superbowl parties Sunday with all the appropriate foods, wings and pizza and hoagies, because it's no fun to watch and eat alone. So many of our special events in life are built around food; eating together builds a bond of relationship. Well, in Luke 14 we find Jesus once again going to a dinner **(1)**. It seems like, in spite of His stinging remarks to them, the Pharisees kept on inviting Jesus to dinner, though their motive was never truly friendly. They only wanted to scrutinize Him to find some fault or weakness, but He kept on going to their houses just the same. He ate even with His enemies! But this time it becomes an occasion for Jesus to teach four great lessons which Luke has recorded for us. The first is:

I. A Lesson About Legalism in verses **(2-6)** Read **(2)**. Now notice:

1. the occasion As Jesus is entering the Pharisee's house a **man with dropsy** steps in front of Him. Now, dropsy is the archaic term for what we call **edema**, a condition where the person retains water and it causes the tissues to swell, particularly in their legs, arms and even face, and this man must have had a noticeably bad case of it. Whether this guy was planted there by the Pharisees or just happened to come at that moment, we don't know, but either way, Jesus used his appearance to pose to the Pharisees and lawyers (scribes):

2. the question of whether healing is working on the Sabbath and breaking the fourth Commandment **(3)** Of course, we know what they thought from other occasions where Jesus healed people on the Sabbath and they objected strenuously to it. In fact, in the last chapter Jesus healed a woman who had been bent over for 18 years on the Sabbath in one of the synagogues. Look at **13:14**. "Yes, it's working and no, it's not lawful!" was in their minds this day also but they didn't say it **(4)**. He healed the man anyway and then politely sent him on so He could continue reproving His hosts **(5-6)**. Do you get:

3. Jesus' lesson? If your child or even your animal falls into a well and it happens to be the Sabbath day, what do you naturally do? You pull them out; you don't even think about it or hesitate! Why? Because God never meant the Sabbath rest law to prevent you from saving someone's life or protecting them from danger; it was meant to provide mankind with a day of rest from his normal labor and teach him dependence on God to supply instead of his own hands. Yet the Jews had made keeping the letter of the law more important than its intent. In fact, centuries later, Rabbis gave their own rule to cover this exact situation, probably in response to this very example that Jesus proposed: *If a beast fall into a ditch, or a pool of water, if food can be given it, where it is, they feed it till the going out of the sabbath; but if not, bolsters and pillows may be brought, and put under it, and if it can come out: it may come out.* [Gill's commentary on Mt. 12:11]. So, if it's the Sabbath, you don't pull your cow out of the ditch, you drop some grain in and let it suffer there until tomorrow. I wonder how that works if it's your son, "It's OK son, just stay down there in that well and I'll drop you a sandwich and some pillows and pull you up tomorrow! We can't break the Sabbath rule!" What if ambulance drivers wouldn't work on the Sabbath? "Just lay there on the highway tonight and we'll get you some blankets; tomorrow we'll take you to the hospital!" How ridiculous! Everybody except the Pharisees knows that **genuine love trumps superficial obedience** and rule-keeping. In 1940 Corrie Ten Boom began to hide Jews in a safe room in her house. She lied to the Nazis, stole ration cards and forged documents, all to save them from capture and the concentration camps. It bothered her conscience because it went against everything she valued to lie and steal, but she knew loving them by saving their lives was more important than shallowly obeying the letter of God's law! And even when it's not so serious as that, we need to keep the same thing in mind. *The story was told some years ago of a pastor who found the roads blocked one winter Sunday morning and was forced to skate on the river to get to church, which he did. When he arrived, the elders of the church were horrified that their preacher had skated on the Lord's Day. After the service they held a meeting where the pastor explained that it was either skate to church or not go at all. Finally, one elder asked, "Did you enjoy it?" When the preacher answered, "No," the board decided it was all right!* [Today in the Word, December, 1989, p. 12]. We laugh at the absurdity, but how often do we insist that people, especially our children, blindly follow rules that we've invented or interpretations that we have imposed upon the scriptures, rather than seeking the heart of God about what He would have them to do.

So, Jesus goes on into the banquet in the Pharisee's house and finds a place to be seated and as He does, He gives to the invited guests:

II. A Lesson About Humility **(7-11)** Read **(7)** As He watched the guests finding their places:

1. He saw people seeking places of honor for themselves Now keep in mind that guests did not sit on chairs at a table to eat like we do. They reclined at table. The table was made by three low tables placed so as to form three sides of a square with a clear space in the middle. Around these tables were placed cushions called *triclinia*, each capable of containing three or more persons on which the guests lay and leaned on their left side, with their feet extended from the table. The most important place was the middle one on each couch and likewise, all the groups of three tables

were arranged so that the middle group in the room was the most important, so the most honored guests were in the middle group in the middle of the room and so on down from there. So, Jesus noticed that all the guests were trying to get the middle seats for themselves and trying to be closest to the center of the room; obviously, they were doing it so that they would be honored above the others by their seating, and it bothered Jesus enough to address them all **(8)**. He said, "If you take the best seat:

2. someone more worthy may deserve the honor and you're essentially taking it from them! Someone older, someone more to be respected than you may be coming and, in trying to honor yourself, you're occupying their rightful place. That's not right and what's more **(9)**. You'll get asked to move and make room for them and it'll be embarrassing to you:

3. self-exultation often results in shame When we get puffed up and try to make much of ourselves, we very often get cut down to size, don't we? When we boast how great we are at something, somebody better often comes along and we feel ashamed of how we boasted. You see:

4. honor is meant to come to us from others, not ourselves (10) Honor is a gift to be recognized and bestowed by others; it exists in their eyes, not our own, so Jesus' advice is always, "Take the lowest seat! Assume the role and the position of a servant. Be humble and don't think more highly of yourself than of others. If there is honoring to be done, don't seek it, but let others take the initiative to honor you so it is genuine." And then Jesus turns to the Scripture reinforce His:

5: Jesus' lesson (11) There is God's Kingdom principle, not just in banquet seating, but in life itself: if you exalt yourself, you will eventually be humbled, but if you humble yourself, if you continually act in humility, you will eventually be exalted! Why is that? Look with me at **1 Pet. 5:5b**, *God humbles the proud but exalts the lowly!* God is the One who does it! He makes it happen. *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall - Prov. 16:18*. Why? Because God makes it so! He opposes the proud! Those who seek glory for themselves are trying to steal it from Him and He will not have it! But He gives grace to the humble! He is near to the meek and the poor and the oppressed, to those who seek Him and need Him! Jesus is saying, "Decide whether you want God with you or against you!" I read a paraphrase of this verse that said, "God pickles the proud and preserves the foolish!" So, do you want to get pickled or preserved?! Even in the small things like where we choose to sit, Paul tells us, *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* - Phil. 2:3. And then Jesus turned from the guests to the host and gave a third lesson:

III. A Lesson About Generosity (12-14) Now, obviously, Jesus is not saying that we should absolutely never have a gathering with our friends. He's speaking in the same manner that He did down in verse 26 where He says to be His disciple you must hate your parents and your wife and children. That's in direct contradiction, not only to the fifth commandment, but to every directive concerning family in Scripture. He doesn't mean it literally; He means that we must love Him MORE than any other human being and be willing to choose Him over them if it comes to that (and it does in many places in the world, like India!) Here He's not being literal either; He's saying:

1. do not ONLY be generous with those who will naturally return the favor All the guests that day were well to do Pharisees and Scribes and this was more than tonight's supper. It was a rather lavish banquet, something the host and his friends often did with each other. Jesus is addressing another form of selfishness, using your wealth and the blessings God has given you to benefit only yourself and those just like you, especially those who will turn around and do the same to you. He's saying that we should:

2. intentionally consider and include those who are in genuine need and invite them to enjoy our blessings with us. Sometimes that means literally inviting people to come and eat and share in your feast along with you, like we do down at Cast Your Cares each month serving breakfast to the homeless. Other times it may mean directly giving to those who are struggling. A number of you helped us to bless one of our Nursery School families from the community. They just had their sixth child and couldn't afford the tuition for their two children any longer. Altogether you shared \$2100 to fully meet this family's need for the year and bless their children! That's inviting people you don't even know to share your banquet! You don't know it, but through your generosity to our Elders Fund you paid the majority of this month's rent for one of our number who's struggling right now. They're enjoying the banquet with the others of us! That's what Jesus is trying to cultivate in us; as Paul put it, *Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.* - Phil. 2:4. Moreover, Jesus said that:

3. God will reward this kind of generosity to the needy On that day when those of us who believe in Jesus stand in our new bodies before the judgment seat of Christ to receive rewards for the things done in this life, He will not forget even such a small act of kindness as giving a cup of cold water in His Name to someone who is thirsty! Jesus said, *you will certainly not lose your reward!* - Mt. 10:42. However your motive can never be to GET something for yourself; it must always be true generosity born out of love and care for others.

Well, Jesus' mention of a banquet and of eternal reward moved one of the men reclining at His table (15). This became the opportunity to tell another parable in which He gives:

IV. A Lesson About Audacity in verses (16-24). The Jews expected that when Messiah would come and set up his Kingdom that God would prepare a great banquet, a great feast for His people to celebrate. Jesus Himself taught that:

1. God is preparing a great banquet in His Kingdom He said that *many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*. In Revelation, John called it the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Jesus told several parables depicting the Kingdom of God as a great feast prepared for His people and this is one of them (16). The *certain man* is God Himself and the banquet is life in the Kingdom with Himself; it's an eternal forever feast, a time of great joy. (17) Like any host:

2. He sent His Servant to call those who were invited to come and in this story, the Servant is **Jesus** Himself. For more than three years He had been traveling about Galilee and visiting Jerusalem, calling the people of God to come to the banquet by believing in Him. He, the Messiah, was here and it was time for God's banquet. Oh, by the way, you're invited too! Jesus says, "Come to Me that you might have life and life more abundant! We'll have a forever party with all of God's people! Do you want to come?" The invitation is still open, but in that day, there was a problem:

3. those who were invited (and by that Jesus was pointing directly to the **Jewish leaders**, the very people present in the room and lying around the table with Him) **didn't want to come and made flimsy excuses (18a)**.

a. some used business as an excuse (18b-19) Now tell me, who buys a field without seeing it first? And who would go out to see a field or to begin plowing a field with oxen at supper time when the sun is going down? It's obvious that these are simply polite ways of saying, "I don't want to come! I refuse to come!" You know, people still use their business as an excuse not to follow Jesus in all kinds of ways. They're focused on making money; they give all their time and attention to their job because material things are what matter to them. They don't have time or interest in the things Jesus has to offer them; they don't even want to hear it, even though they might make polite excuses when you try to reach into their lives and invite them. Then others:

b. some used family as an excuse (20) That sounds familiar; how many times do guys say, "I'd love to go but my wife won't let me!" He probably meant something more like, "I just got married and according to Deut. 24:5 I am officially excused from all public duties so I won't come!" But then why would you have agreed to come in the first place?! It's a flimsy excuse. But people use family as an excuse not to follow Jesus all the time, "My wife wouldn't approve; my parents wouldn't approve; they'll disown me." Of course, some places in the world that's a really serious issue; their family will actually throw them out or beat them or literally try to kill them if they follow Jesus. But here it's a pretty low key excuse that basically says, "I don't want to".

Do you see the audacity that the Jewish leaders displayed? They who knew and professed to believe the Scriptures should have been the first to recognize and follow Jesus to the banquet. Yet they stubbornly, openly and even vehemently refused to come! What an insult to God! So, what did He do? (21). When the leaders wouldn't come:

4. God invited the nearby poor (by which Jesus meant the **Jewish masses**) **and they gladly came**. The poor and the sick and the needy in Israel flocked to Jesus by the hundreds and the thousands all over Galilee during His ministry. They were thrilled to hear that God cared about them and wanted them in His Kingdom and they believed. But that was still not enough for God. His banquet hall was still not full (22-23). Here the parable moves to the future and:

5. now God is in the process of sending His servant (who is now **the Church**) **to those who are far away**, out of the "city" of Israel, who live out in the country lanes and behind the hedges, out in the rest of the world. He means, of course, the **Gentiles**, the other nations of the world. And He says, "When you find people there, **urge them strongly to come in!** Make your invitation compelling, "Our Master loves you and has prepared a great banquet for you to enjoy. Please, oh PLEASE, come to it! Believe in Jesus, the Savior of the world and come to His banquet!" That's what the church has been doing the last 2000 years, though we haven't done a very thorough job of it. That's what the church is doing today, what we're doing today, taking the Good News of a great eternal Banquet that has been prepared for all who will believe in God's Son Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and saying, "Come, oh, please come to Jesus! The Father has a full banquet prepared and a half full house. You are not only welcome; you are WANTED!" You see:

6. God WILL have His house filled It will happen! Read the end of the book and there at the feast in heaven in the Father's house you'll find some from every tribe, language, people and nation, from every country lane and behind every hedge to the very ends of the earth! Hallelujah! God will not rest until His great banquet hall is filled, until He has worshippers from every people to join Him in His forever celebration. But the stinging point is verse (24). **Those who were initially invited are excluded!** He's saying to all the Jewish leaders in the room, "Because of your audacity in rejecting Me and My invitation, YOU will never enter the Kingdom of God!" Oh, what a harsh sentence! I don't know whether Jesus got to stay for the rest of the meal or not! But it is still true today:

Those who have the audacity to refuse the invitation to God's feast will not enter His Kingdom. How rude it is when somebody has gone to great lengths to prepare a meal or provide something for you here on earth and you snub your nose and say, "I'm not coming!" or "I don't want it!" But oh, how much more rude it is, (and that's not a strong enough word) how much more insulting, disrespectful, impertinent, impudent, ungracious it is, when God Himself has given everything, when He has given His very Son to die on a cross and shed His precious blood and prepared His eternal Banquet for you, yet you say, "I will not come!" Come quickly! But most of us have already come and in this story we're the servant out among the nations inviting people to the banquet. The Master has sent us to do an extremely important job. The banquet is ready and His house must be filled. The very purpose of our life is to seek out and invite others everywhere. It takes just as much audacity for us to say, "I won't! I can't!", to make flimsy excuses and devote our lives to other things, ignoring His urgent directive to us. I leave you with two quotes from the great missionary C.T. Studd, He said, *"If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."* *"Let us not glide through this world and then slip quietly into heaven, without having blown the trumpet loud and long for our Redeemer, Jesus Christ."* Amen!

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Journey Of The Son Of Man To Jerusalem - Lk. 9:51-19:27

The Heart Of Jesus - Ch. 15

As Jesus continues on His journey to Jerusalem from Luke 9 on, we see Him often in conflict with the Jewish leaders who opposed Him and He has many strong words to say to them. But in chapter 15, Jesus takes a different approach. In this chapter, in response to their complaining, He reveals to them His heart, His:

I. Jesus' Passion For Lost People (1-2) Notice:

1. the people Jesus was attracting It was not the religious, synagogue-going, Temple-visiting crowd that you might expect, but **sinners!** That term in Jewish society referred to people who practiced certain outward vices and crimes. Being a publican or tax collector was one of them. Rome granted locals the right to collect import and export taxes, that is, customs, on goods that traders brought in and out. They bought the office and then gouged people for all they could get. So, they were seen as being traitors and thieves at the same time. Another group of people classed as sinners were the harlots, prostitutes, or at least women known to have loose morals. The heathen were included also, those who were not Israelites and didn't worship the God of Israel. In cultural terms, people like these were **the UN-righteous**, people who made no attempt at pretending to obey or follow God. Yet they seemed to flock to Jesus. Isn't that unusual? I wonder why? Maybe it was because He would actually sit down and eat with them and talk to them when nobody else would! But then notice:

2. the people Jesus was offending Who were they? The Pharisees were an elite religious party that was dominant in Israel; they were the leaders of the people, the movers and shakers of their society who influenced what their culture thought. Their very name means *the separated ones*. They prided themselves on keeping the Law and along with it all the traditions of the elders that had been passed down to them. It wouldn't have been so bad if their hearts simply wanted to please God, but the truth is that they were very proud. They believed that their personal holiness made them better than everyone else. They were **the SELF-righteous** who believed that their merit earned them a privileged status before God, so no wonder they muttered against Jesus! How could any righteous person, any religious teacher, associate and eat with UNrighteous people like Jesus did. And notice:

3. the process that was offensive Jesus ATE with these UNrighteous people! In that culture to eat with someone was an act of acceptance, an act of companionship. It was an offer of friendship and support and caring. It established a bond between the parties. In effect, to be invited to eat with someone and to accept it created a bond of fellowship. No Pharisee would ever sit at a publican's table or let a sinful woman wash his feet like Jesus did. They loathed sinners; they detested them. In fact, one Pharisaic writing literally says, *There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world!* In other words, "God would rather see them all dead and gone and so would I!" They could not imagine that God would ever want people like that or that any religious teacher would build a following of disciples out of people like that! So, to these self-righteous Pharisees, Jesus tells three stories to speak out against that attitude of pride and show them what God's heart is really like. He tells them:

II. Three Parables Revealing God's Passion For Lost People They are stories about loss, about losing things. They relate three common experiences of human loss to which even the Pharisees could easily relate in their everyday experience. But they are not really stories about human loss. They are stories Jesus told to explain:

1. the great loss which God experiences In the first story Jesus says:

a. He is like a shepherd who has lost a sheep (3-4) There was nothing more common in Israel than shepherds with their flocks out on the hills. The whole nation started out in Egypt as a nation of shepherds; their greatest King was a shepherd and their scriptures had long declared that the LORD is Israel's Shepherd. The image of a shepherd could not fail to relate to them and Jesus poses to them a simple thought, "Well, some of you are shepherds; what do you do when one of your sheep is lost?" To understand the answer, you have to understand what it means

for a sheep to be lost. First of all, the sheep are the shepherd's livelihood. They are his investment, his wealth, his money in the bank, his means of survival, not his beloved pets, and taking care of them is hard work! They must be constantly watched because they are continually getting lost, following their noses in whatever direction the grass looks greener, wandering off to fill their bellies with no thought at all to the danger they may be in. It's interesting that the word *lost* in Greek is the word *destroyed*, because that's what will happen to them if they are not found. They are incapable of finding their own food and water, of protecting themselves or of finding their way back. Tim Keller quotes a former shepherd who says, "A sheep is a stupid animal. It loses its directions continually in a way that a cat or dog never does and even when you find a lost sheep, the sheep rushes to and fro and will not follow you home. So, when you find it, you must seize it, throw it to the ground, tie its forelegs and hind legs together, put it over your shoulders and carry it home. That's the only way to save a lost sheep." A shepherd knows that a lost sheep will die, and soon, unless he finds it, so when he discovers one is lost it's an emergency to him. And God is like a shepherd who has lost one of His precious sheep! But then in the second story, Jesus says that:

b. He is like a woman who has lost a coin (8) The Greek word is for a specific coin, a *drachma*, a day's wage. In today's money, let's say a hundred dollar coin. Now she had 10 of them and some interpreters suggest that this was probably her dowry and that it was common for a woman to actually wear such coins as jewelry. So, these coins could have had the emotional value that we might attach to, say, an engagement ring, but they also represent security to the woman. Her husband had no control over these; they were not his, so if he were to die or to divorce her, she would have these to give her a start. So, if she loses one, if it falls out of her hair or off her necklace and she doesn't notice until later, when she discovers it's missing, that to her is a big deal. Now remember, the floors in most houses in Israel in that day were simply dirt floors. Frequently they were covered with rushes or reeds to make a softer and cleaner mat to walk on and, since these would only be changed at rare intervals, they would no doubt collect a vast amount of dust and debris down among them and a coin could easily slip into this padded mess. Finding it would be no easy task, especially since houses were constructed to keep OUT the light and heat of the sun, so they were always dark. To find something as small as a coin would mean lighting a lamp and carefully moving the rushes and sweeping up and sifting through dirt. Without all this effort, the woman knows the coin will stay lost for good; she becomes frantic to find it. And God is like a woman who has lost that precious coin. Then Jesus went on to add a third story to say that:

c. ultimately, He is like a Father who has lost a son (11-13) It is not really sheep or coins that God is truly interested in; it is children. He's like a man who's lost one of His sons who greedily demanded his father's money and ran off. How that son must have broken His father's heart! What anguish that father must have felt to see his son, not only act in such an ungrateful manner, but then to despair of ever seeing him again! And that son was lost by becoming an unrighteous "sinner", just like those who were flocking to Jesus. Now let's go back and look at:

2. the great search which God makes to recover a lost person

a. like the shepherd, He seeks the lost one and never gives up The shepherd has 99 other sheep who are safely in the fold. He could easily say, "Oh well, what's one sheep when I have 99!" But he doesn't! The instant he realizes that one sheep is missing, he springs into action. He pens up the 99 and leaves them with someone and he goes after the lost one. He follows it. He actually tracks it if he can and if he can't, he looks around every hill and in every ravine, ever-widening his search. Oh, God is like that! He is never content to simply sit and enjoy fellowship with His found children; His heart is with the lost ones, the ones who haven't been brought home yet, who are in grave danger! They are His priority; they are the cry of His heart! And that shepherd doesn't come back until he finds the sheep, alive or dead. He doesn't put in a couple of hours and say, "That's enough; a sheep isn't worth more than this!" No, he keeps on looking until dark and gets up the next day and starts again and never stops until he finds it. I'm so glad that God never gives up on us! He never says, "I wanted you, but not that bad. Enough is enough." All the days of our lives He keeps on seeking us, keeps on doing everything in His power to bring us home. Only, unlike the sheep, it is not a matter of God not knowing where we are; it is mostly a matter of us not wanting to be brought home! Unlike the sheep, He gives sinners a choice; but He is always wooing them, always working to send news of His love to them, so they will let Him bring them home, until the day they die and He can do no more. Then, switching images:

b. like the woman, He searches everywhere with utmost care To find her lost coin she lights a lamp so she can see clearly in the darkness of the house. She gets out her broom to sweep away the dust. She gets out everything she has that will help and brings it to bear on finding that coin. Oh, the lengths that God will go to, the resources that God will use, to recover one of us! She sweeps the whole house. She looks in every nook and cranny, picks up everything on the floor. And God comes after us no matter where we may run or hide. He will turn the world upside down to see that we are brought back. Just picture that woman down on her knees moving those reeds one or two at a time, carefully sifting through the dust and dirt with her fingers, not wanting to bury the coin further. Oh, the great care which God takes in recovering us for Himself! The great pains which He takes to see that we hear that He wants us in just the right way, so that our hearts will respond and we won't be driven further into the darkness. And, moving on to the third story:

c. like the father, He always loves and looks for His son (20) How would the father see him a long way off, except that all the time, every day, the father was staring down the lane watching for his son? Why? Because he loved that son and hoped against hope that one day he would look up and there in the distance would be the figure of his son coming back and he would run to him and throw his arms around him!

Oh, do you see the point Jesus is making? God is not anything like the Pharisees conceived Him to be. He is a God who values lost people as precious and goes to great lengths to seek after them. And if you truly want to know the length to which He will go to get us, just look at the cross! His seeking for us meant sending His own Son to die on a cross to bring us back home! That's what God is really like! But then go back and look at:

3. the great joy God has when a lost person is found Like the shepherd:

a. He experiences great personal joy (5) Now me, I'd be thinking, "Oh great! Now I have to lug this stupid 75 pound sheep 2 miles back home on my shoulders! DUMB sheep!" But I'm not the shepherd! The shepherd rejoices with it on his shoulders the whole way home! He is so glad to have it back that the sacrifice that was required to find it and the work required to carry it back is totally lost in the joy of the finding. I'm reminded of Heb. 12:2 which says, *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame...* What was that joy set before Him? WE were that joy! For the joy of having us back, He endured everything that was necessary to carry us home. The pain and the shame of the cross paled in comparison to the joy of having us back! That's the heart that our God and Shepherd has! He rejoices over us with great joy, though we were lost dumb stupid sheep, sinners who rebelled against His leading and went our own way! But here's where this shepherd, being of eastern culture, probably differs a bit from the way we react to such things:

b. He expects His community of people to share His joy (6) He lives in a village, a little rural community where people's lives are all part of one another. The women go draw water together at the well every day. The men visit at the gate. They help each other bring in the harvest of their fields and shear each other's sheep in the spring. His entire life is wrapped up in a community, a closely knit community, whose lives are shared in so many aspects. It is the most natural thing when he comes home full of joy with the found sheep on his shoulders, that he calls together all his friends and his neighbors and he says, "I'm so full of joy! Rejoice with me! I have found my lost sheep!" and they all rejoice with him. Verse (9). The woman calls all her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her that she has found her lost coin and they do! And look at the father:

c. He holds a great celebration to express His joy (22-24) A fattened calf is a yearling cow that's been fed and fattened up for maybe a whole year so it's young and tender, but there's a lot of it. You don't kill one for supper for your family; you invite the whole village and they all eat it. This father is throwing a huge party, something like we would do with a wedding reception meal. He throws a great feast for the whole village because his son was found! They feast and they eat and they laugh and they dance with one another. And Jesus said:

d. this joy of God shapes the whole value system of heaven (7, 10) This is His response to the Pharisees' muttering about eating with "sinners". He says, "Well, let me tell you what it's like up in heaven. You see, I've been there; I came from there, and I know what it's like there. And it's not at all like what you think! It's not a community where all the people sit around in glory and happiness enjoying their own perfect righteousness and look down in disdain at earth and loathe these awful people! Not at all! In fact, every time God shares the joyous news that another one of His lost sinful sheep has been found, the place goes wild! It erupts in joy and throws a party every time one of these sinners repents!" All of heaven treasures the redemption of sinners! Hallelujah! But:

III. Self-Righteous People Get Angry At Grace Shown To "Sinners" (25-28) Here comes the older son who's been out in the field working all day and he says, "What's all this?" And when they tell him, he won't go in! He won't join the party. He humiliates his father on what he knows is the greatest day of his father's life; he knows how his father has been longing and longing for this lost brother to come home. But he doesn't care. His tail is in a knot; he's mad. Why? **(29-30)** Because the father is spending a small fortune, HIS fortune. What's wrong with him? Wouldn't cheeseburgers and fries do? You see, at the bottom line, he loves the father's things more than he loves the father, just like the other boy! He loves the father's money and property and status and all that he's going to get, more than he loves the father! Self-righteous people:

1. they obey the Father to be rewarded for doing what pleases him This boy had every virtue that we extol. He was extremely hard working. He was honest. He listened to what his father told him to do and managed everything the way he said. He never thought to say, "No, father, I won't!". But in the end, he did it all for himself! He did it so that he would get all the blessings the father had for him! And when he comes home and sees the party, it finally pushes his buttons and he blows up and the real truth comes out! He doesn't love the father any more than his brother. He just wants the father's things! Listen, we have people today who are exactly like him; they are lost by being good! That is, they are very fervent in doing all the right things that they are sure God approves of, but they do them out of the wrong motive; they do them because they want something from God. They pray. They go to church. They give money. Why? Because they want God to protect them when they're in trouble. They want Him to heal them when they're sick. They want him to prosper them in their business and they certainly want Him to take them to heaven when they die. So they

work hard to please Him in order to get these blessings for themselves! Jesus was showing the Pharisees exactly what they were doing at that very moment by telling them this story! They were the “good boys” who had worked so hard to get stuff from God and now they were mad that He, God, was forgiving the “bad boys”. He was making an eye-opening radical point **(31-32)**. You see:

2. the younger brother, [who represents the sinners] was found; but the older brother, [who represents the Pharisees] remained truly lost! He was alienated from the father all along and in the end, Jesus cut the story off like a cliff-hanger. It has no ending. We like stories that have endings, don't we? But Jesus chose not to end it: He left the older brother standing out there all mad listening to the father's appeal. Why? To show the Pharisees that they get to write their own ending! The story is really about them and they get to choose how it ends by how they react to Him! Now let's apply this to ourselves.

3. as genuine believers, we must guard ourselves against becoming self-righteous It is all too easy for us who are busy obeying God to develop a case of “older-brotheritis”, to avoid “sinners”, to feel disdain and despise younger brother types who are involved in immorality and drunkenness and drugs and all the things we would never do, even to get angry when they repent and come into the church and everybody gets all excited over them. We've been here all along and working hard and it hasn't always been easy and nobody ever gets excited over us, so it is all too easy to let that sense of superiority grow in us. We have to consciously guard ourselves against it. In fact, children who truly love their Father and have their heart entwined with His in a real relationship, do what Jesus did. They seek out and **intentionally involve themselves in broken lives**. Instead of feeling superior, they are moved with compassion when they see people who have suffered so much because they have messed up their lives so royally, and they want to give them a hand and pull them out of the mire and have a celebration!

Years ago, Penny Hood wrote this in WEC International's WEC.GO magazine: *When we were on vacation a few years ago, someone broke into our car during the night. From the looks of the inside of the car, it appeared that the person either slept in it or used it for other liberties. I was livid, and I turned to my husband, Brian, and said, “People like that make me sick!” Without missing a beat, Brian, who was rescued by God from a life of crime and drugs, responded with a message that was loud and clear: “You are looking at people like that. That is how I used to live my life. People like that need Jesus.” I was stunned. How did I get to be so proud? How had I forgotten that, compared to the holiness of God, no matter how many good-little-girl rules I may have followed, I was one of the people like that who God should turn His back on. But no! He didn't turn His back or even spit out nasty words about me. He gave His only Son to come and struggle with every aspect of living life as a man and then die an agonizing death so that I could have a blessed life and an eternity in heaven. God really spoke to me that day, and has been speaking ever since, reminding me that I am no better than anyone else. I just happened to have been blessed with some better circumstances. Whoever broke into our car that night did a great service for me. That day God put deep within my heart the desire to reach out to the least of these, and to in some way be a part of His work in restoring more people like that.* That, dear ones, is what Jesus is wanting to do through these simple stories, to put deep within our hearts the desire of God's heart, a passionate love for those who are lost.

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Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Passion Of The Son Of Man - Lk. 19:28-24:53

The Triumphal Entry Of Jesus - 19:28-20:47

Since Easter is fast approaching, we are unfortunately going to have to fly past 3 ½ chapters in our study through Luke's Gospel and land at the beginning of Passion Week. The word *Passion* in this context does not have its ordinary meaning of zeal or excitement. It comes from the Greek word *pascho* which means *suffering*. This is the week of Christ's suffering and it begins with the well-known scene of His Triumphal Entry into the city of Jerusalem. We've been taught about it from childhood; we've seen it portrayed in every Jesus movie ever made, the crowds yelling, Jesus riding the donkey, the palm branches being thrown on the road before Him. But what we often fail to understand is:

I. The Glorious Offer Of God To Israel On Palm Sunday (19:28-44) It was more than just a crowd of people spontaneously cheering for Jesus. It was an event that was carefully planned and orchestrated by Jesus to send a message to the whole nation of Israel. His first step in the process was:

1. the procuring of the donkey by the disciples (28-35) That Sunday Jesus arrived at the tiny village of Bethphage on the Mt. of Olives, about a mile and half from Jerusalem, and the first thing He did was to tell two of His disciples to go into the village and borrow a donkey. That in itself should catch our attention, as I'm sure it did theirs, since He had just walked the entire 18 miles steeply uphill from Jericho and the little bit of road left was all downhill! Three of the Gospel writers felt this little incident of finding the donkey was important enough to include and so do I, for three reasons. First:

a. Jesus' omniscience was displayed in finding it Notice in verse **(32)** they found the donkey standing there tied as soon as they entered the village, just as He had said. The owners questioned them, just as He said they would.

And when they replied what He told them to, they let them take it, just as He said they would! So, even though He can't see it, He knows the donkey is standing there, knows the owners are nearby and knows how they will react! How? Remember years earlier when Philip found his friend Nathanael and brought him to Jesus, Jesus said to him, *Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.* And his immediate reaction was, *Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!* - Jn. 1:47-48. Only God can see things nobody else can see and know things nobody else can know! The faith of the disciples in Him was surely strengthened once again by this little display of His omniscience before their eyes! And listen, you can be assured of this for yourself also; Jesus sees what nobody can see and He knows what nobody can know about your life! Aren't you glad?! Furthermore, wherever He sends you and whatever He tells you to do, it's all part of the greater plan of what He is doing to get glory to Himself, so don't say, "Hey, I'm tired! I just walked 17 miles uphill! Let somebody else do it!" You'll miss seeing the miracle of Him at work! So, they bring the donkey to Jesus and now notice a second thing:

b. Jesus' power was displayed in mounting it Matthew tells us that there were actually two donkeys there, a mother and her young colt, which verse (30b) tells us had never been ridden. And when they brought them to Jesus, verse (35) says they threw a couple of cloaks over the back of this unbroken colt and it carried Him all the way into Jerusalem. You may not think anything of that, but we had ponies when I was growing up and they had colts and let me assure you, you don't just throw something on the back of a young colt and plop your 180 pounds on its little back and have somebody lead you placidly around, especially not in the midst of hundreds of shouting people throwing things in front of its feet! It pulls this way and that trying to get away and sits down on its backside to resist being pulled forward and balks at every object thrown in its path. But not this colt! It behaves perfectly as if it had been ridden for years! Why? I'm sure the disciples caught this: because its Creator and Master is sitting on its back and His mighty power is completely in control of all things! And aren't you glad it is?! Hebrews says God left nothing outside of His control, even though we don't always see it at the moment (2:8)! But the most important point about the donkey is that:

c. Jesus' identity was revealed in riding it Turn with me to **Zech. 9:9**. Five hundred years earlier God made a promise through His prophet Zechariah, a promise everybody knew. "When I send you your true King, the Messiah, He will come to you riding [*specifically*] on a donkey's colt! Not a war horse at the head of an army, but humbly on a donkey and when I send Him you will rejoice greatly!" Matthew tells us that all of this was done to fulfill Zechariah's prophecy; Jesus did it on purpose to make a statement, a declaration. He was revealing who He was, Israel's promised King and Messiah, and so, His act of riding into Jerusalem in this fashion was, in fact:

2. the public offer of Jesus to Israel as their Messiah God was saying to His ancient people, "Here He is! At last! Your King and Your Messiah! Receive Him and follow Him!" And, for the moment, at least, it seemed as if they did (**36-38**). A crowd of people was following with Jesus as He was headed for the city and John tells us that in the city people heard that He was coming and went out to meet Him. So, hundreds of people were with Him as He began to descend the Mount of Olives and they sure seemed to understand the offer that was being made, didn't they?

a. the crowd honored Him by spreading their garments on the road They took off their outer cloaks and spread them in the path of the donkey for Jesus to ride over and smash in the dirt. It was their version of rolling out the red carpet; you don't do that for just anyone. You do that to honor a king! The other Gospels tell us that others broke leafy fronds from the many date palm trees growing on the mount and spread them before Him as a mat for His donkey's feet. And as they went down the mountain Luke says:

b. they praised God for the mighty works they had seen Him do Some of them had been with Him when He raised Lazarus from the dead not long before. Then as He passed through Jericho on His way up the day before He had given sight to two blind men. But many of the crowd were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and surely there were many from Galilee who remembered miracle after miracle of healing sickness and casting out demons. These things they regarded as evidence of who He was; only the Messiah could do these things! And as part of their cheering and shouting:

c. they proclaimed Him God's King and Messiah in a very bold and direct fashion. They shouted portions of **Ps. 118:26**. "Hosanna!", that means "Save us!" They were saying "Our Savior is here!" They shouted, "Blessed be the KING!" John adds, "the KING of Israel!" The promised King from David's line, the Messiah! They were announcing His entry to the city, even using the very words the angels from heaven had used at His birth, His entry into the world, *Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!* Make no mistake, anybody listening to this and seeing this KNEW who Jesus is! And I say IS, present tense, because He still IS God's King and Messiah, His only means of salvation! *...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* - Acts 4:12. One day *...at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* - Phil. 2:10-11. God makes that same offer to the whole world; He makes it to every one of us today: "Jesus is My King; He is My Savior; He has provided salvation for you. Bow the knee before Him. Fall before Him and give Him your life. Spread everything you have before His feet and crown Him Lord and King of your life now, because one day I'm going to

send Him back and the whole world will be forced to bow before Him then, when it is too late!" Of course, the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders, refusing to believe in Him, were greatly upset by this obvious declaration **(39-40)**. They wanted Him to stop His followers from what was to them such obvious blasphemy, but He said, "If they stop, the very rocks will cry out My praise!" He's revealing:

3. God's determination that this offer must be given to Israel "It MUST be done! I MUST be presented as King and Messiah! My people Israel MUST be offered their King and Messiah and it MUST be now!" Everything in Jesus' life and ministry was preparation for this moment! But even as it was happening, Jesus knew the reception He was receiving would be short-lived **(41-44)**. As the city came into view, Jesus actually paused and wept in tears over it. Why? Because, as I said, Jesus knows the future!

4. Jesus' sadness came from knowing Israel would reject the offer and it would result in their destruction by the Romans forty years later. He knew that, as a people, they did not recognize this amazing day when God came riding into the city to offer Himself to them as their Messiah. As John put it, *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. - 1:11*. But the good news is in the next verse for us, *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, - 1:12*. Regardless of what Israel did, when we, any one of us, believe that He truly is God the Son come to save us and we receive Him with open hearts, He gives us the privilege of becoming the very children of God Himself! Somebody say Hallelujah! What an offer! But despite the joyous reaction of the crowd on Sunday, as the next few days unfold, we see:

II. The Unyielding Rejection Of The Jewish Leaders Throughout Passion Week Luke goes on to record five events of conflict with them that occurred between Monday and Wednesday and with each one, instead of grasping who He is, they increased their rejection. We don't have time to look at them in depth; I just want you to see the escalating conflict. On Monday Jesus provoked them by:

1. the cleansing of the Temple in verses **(45-48)**. He went into the Court of the Gentiles and drove out all the animals being sold for sacrifice and their vendors and all the moneychangers saying, "You've made God's house a den of thieves!" And notice:

- **the determination of the leaders to destroy Him (47-48)** They came to see that the only way to stop Him was to kill Him and were now actually plotting how to murder Him. But He was always around crowds of people who loved Him and they couldn't risk arresting Him for fear of starting a riot. So, in public they tried to challenge Him. Next Luke records:

2. the challenge of the leaders concerning His authority in **(20:1-19)** Read **(1-8)**. When they challenged Him:
a. He turned the challenge back on them He put them on the spot. He knew they couldn't publicly deny that John the Baptist was sent by God; the people would turn against them. So, they refused to answer and so did He, but in not answering, everyone listening knew what that meant! He got His authority the same place John did, from God! But then He went further:

b. in a parable He told them God was going to destroy them in verses **(9-18)**. He told them a story about a man who owned a vineyard and let it out to tenants and how those tenants repeatedly denied giving him his due share of the crop and how they beat his servants and killed them and at last they killed his son. And in the punch line to the story he asked, "What will the owner do to those wicked tenants? He'll destroy them and give his vineyard to others!" And basically, He implied, "If the shoe fits, wear it! This is what YOU'VE done and God will destroy YOU!" Well, they got it alright and:

c. they wanted to seize Him immediately but were afraid (19) They were so angry that they would have grabbed Him and hauled Him off right then and there, if there hadn't been crowds of people all around listening. See how their fervor against Him is growing and growing. So, now they came up with another idea **(20)**. They decided to try to use the civil authority, the Roman governor, to arrest Him instead of doing it themselves. So, Luke records:

3. the trap of the leaders concerning paying of taxes (21-25) They hoped that He would either discredit Himself with the people who hated their Roman oppressors by saying, "Pay taxes!" or that He could be charged with a crime of rebellion by saying, "Don't pay!" What a marvelous answer Jesus gave! Nobody, not even His enemies, could have dreamed He could get out of answering their question without harming Himself somehow, but He did. "Give the government the money it demands but give God the primary allegiance He demands!" His enemies were dumbstruck!

- **they were frustrated and silenced (26)** Even THEY marveled at His answer and couldn't refute it. They were reduced to silence for fear He would embarrass them further in the eyes of the people! So next another group of leaders decides to take a turn and Luke records:

4. the challenge of the Sadducees concerning resurrection in verses **(27-40)** They don't believe in life after death or anything spiritual so they tell him that Moses said that a man's brother is to marry his widow and they cook up this ridiculous example about a woman who was married seven times to seven brothers and ask which one she'd be mar-

ried to in the resurrection. Like many today they wanted to show how ludicrous it is to believe in a heavenly afterlife. But Jesus challenged their obvious lack of Bible knowledge saying, "Nobody is married in the next life! The Bible doesn't teach that! We all relate directly to God like the angels do! And besides, God says *I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!*, not 'I WAS their God!' They're still alive! He is the God of dead people, but of the living; they're all still alive even after they die!" What could the Sadducees say? **(39-40)** So now, like the Pharisees:

- **they were humiliated and silenced** They gave up trying for fear of embarrassing themselves further and losing even more respect in the eyes of the people. So once again Jesus turns the tables and Luke records:

5. Jesus' challenge to them concerning the Messiah in verses **(41-47)** It's directed primarily to the scribes, the ones who know the Scriptures best of all. "If David calls the Christ 'My Lord' in Ps. 110, as you well know, how can He be David's son, that is, descendant?" How could He be both things?" Well, we know the answer, that Jesus was literally the Son of David, born of David's line through Mary according the flesh, but at the same time He was the eternal Son of God come down from heaven in a human body, but they couldn't answer Him. And in Jesus' final words you see:

- **His condemnation of the leaders (45-47)** He calls them out as pure hypocrites in front of all the people and declares that God will actually judge them severely; they'll be lost and banished from Him forever when they die!

Kevin DeYoung writes: The Jewish leaders disliked, and eventually grew to hate, Jesus for many reasons... They were angry with him for upsetting their traditions and some of their scruples about the law. They looked down on him for eating with sinners and associating with those deemed unclean or unworthy. But most of all, they hated Jesus because he claimed to be from God, and as time went on, dared to make himself equal to God. That's why they hated him; that's why the crowds turn on him; that's why Jesus was put to death. The Jewish leaders could not recognize Christ's divine authority and identity. Jealousy was no doubt part of it... but deeper than that, they simply did not have the eyes to see or the faith to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. That's why in all four gospels, when the opposition against him reaches its climax, Jesus is not charged with being too welcoming to outsiders, but with being a false king, a false prophet, and a false Messiah... www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/why-did-they-hate-jesus-2/ And that's why people hate Jesus today, around the world or even in our own society here. You can talk in general terms about God and that is tolerated, but when you talk about Jesus Christ, many people become angry and some violently angry. Why? Because Jesus claims to be the rightful King of this world and He demands that we worship and follow Him and Him alone or be lost forever! He faces us with a choice! Like the crowds coming down the Mount of Olives, we proclaim Him King of our lives, give Him our allegiance and worship Him or, like the Jewish leaders in the city, we reject Him, declare that His claims are false, become angry and grow to hate Him the more we hear of Him. Jesus makes to us the same offer He made to Israel; will we bow before Him or reject Him?

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Passion Of The Son Of Man - Lk. 19:28-24:53

The Last Supper Of Jesus - 22:1-46

Now we come in our study of Luke's Gospel to Thursday of Passion Week, the day on which all Israel celebrated the Passover meal in the evening, a meal which became for Jesus and His disciples, His Last Supper. For three and a half years He's been preparing them to understand who He is and what He has come to do and these are His last hours with them, His last opportunity to prepare them for the awful events that are about to happen. Luke begins chapter 22 by telling us about something that happened a day or two earlier and that is:

I. Jesus' Betrayal By Judas (1-6) We talked last time about the intense hatred which the Jewish leaders had developed toward Jesus and how desperate they were to kill Him, yet how frustrated they were because He was always in the middle of large crowds. Imagine their joy when one of Jesus' own Twelve shows up and offers to betray Him to them in a private setting! But we often wonder how he could do such a thing. Well:

1. the motive of Judas appears to be greed from **Mt. 26:15**, where it is recorded that he asked them, *What will you give me if I deliver Him to you?* He went asking for money and, if you remember the story of Mary pouring a precious vial of perfume on Jesus at Bethany a few days before, Judas was the one who complained that it was wasted. But John comments, *He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.* - **Jn. 12:6**. So Judas was a greedy man and, perhaps seeing that it was inevitable that Jesus was going to end up getting arrested, he wants a way to both get out of danger and make money. Matthew says they agreed to pay him *30 pieces of silver*. It's hard to know how much that was. If the silver coin was a *denarius* that would be equivalent to 30 days wages, so in buying power it might have been equivalent to as much as \$3,000 today. At any rate we know it was enough that the Jews later bought a field for a burial place with it, so it must have at least have had value enough to significantly tempt Judas. But Luke tells us something deeper in verse 3:

2. his indwelling by Satan *Then Satan entered into Judas...* His greed opened the door for Satan to enter his life and, at this point, it was no longer just by suggesting evil thoughts. He had opened the door so far that Satan actually entered and took control of him. **Jn. 13:27** says the same thing of him in the very middle of the Supper, when Jesus

handed him the piece of bread to identify him as the betrayer, ...*after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him...* and he left the meal to go and get the soldiers. At this point Satan had so much control of him that he could come and go as he wished and control him at will.

Now I know that this is before the Holy Spirit came to indwell every believer at Pentecost, but there is still a dire warning here for all and even for us. When you begin to open the door to Satan by obeying him instead of God and practicing sin, he pushes the door open wider and wider. A greedy thought turns into greedy words which leads to stealing which leads to more and pretty soon you're not in control of yourself and Satan is using you to do his bidding. A lustful thought leads to flirting which leads to immorality or adultery and you're not in control anymore and disaster follows. Judas' example shouts to us, "Don't open the door! See what awful things it can lead to!" But back to Thursday and:

II. Jesus' Last Supper With His Disciples (7-38) That morning:

1. He again displayed His omniscience in preparing for the Passover meal (7-13) Again, Jesus knew they'd meet this man, knew what he'd be carrying, knew the house where he would lead them and knew that the owner would have a room all ready for them and it all happened just as He said! He knows what we can't know; our part is simply to obey and do what He tells us. If we don't, we'll miss the miracle of seeing His plan fulfilled! Now in those several evening hours Jesus had together with His disciples, a number of things happened, but Luke mentions perhaps the most important of them first:

2. He instituted the Lord's Supper as an ordinance for His disciples in verses (14-20). During the Passover meal a piece of *matzoh*, unleavened bread, was broken and shared among them. So, Jesus took that piece of bread and gave it a new meaning (19). He said that ever after:

a. they were to eat bread to remember His body given for them And let me just point out the obvious: when He held up a piece of bread to them and said, *This is My body...*, He could not possibly have meant it literally as some segments of Christianity believe. His body was standing there holding it! He was saying, when you break this bread, let it always be a symbol to remind you of how My body was given for you as a sacrifice. Of course, they didn't understand what He was talking about just yet, but they did soon after, and the breaking of bread to remember Jesus became a regular practice among believers wherever they went, first as part of a whole meal together, a love feast, and later as an act all by itself during worship as we do it now. Jesus commanded us to do it so that we would never forget the agony of the awful sacrifice that He made in His body on the cross, bearing our sins. Then (20). He took the last cup of wine shared at the Passover meal and gave it special meaning also:

b. they were to drink wine to remember the New Covenant procured by His blood The red of the wine was to remind them of His blood which was poured out at the cross, His very life poured out to death as the sacrifice which paid for our sins. And through that sacrifice God made a New Covenant with us, that all who will participate in this sacrifice by taking it as their own, by believing that Jesus' death was for their sins, have their sins forgiven completely and forever and are taken by God into His own family as His children. And so, we Christians have done it ever after. Jesus commanded us to do it as a perpetual reminder that it is His precious blood that saved us, that He was our perfect spotless lamb who died in our place, that HE is our salvation. Oh, it is so important that we never forget that! *When he was a boy, Roger Rose and his family lived on a farm alongside a dirt road. Only on rare occasions would an automobile pass by. But one day as Roger's young brother was crossing the road on his bicycle, a car came roaring down a nearby hill, struck the boy, and killed him. Roger said, "Later, when my father picked up the mangled, twisted bike, I heard him sob out loud for the first time in my life. He carried it to the barn and placed it in a spot we seldom used. Father's terrible sorrow eased with the passing of time, but for many years whenever he saw that bike, tears began streaming down his face." Roger continued, "Since then I have often prayed, 'Lord, keep the memory of Your death as fresh as that to me! Every time I partake of Your memorial supper, let my heart be stirred as though You died only yesterday. Never let the communion service become a mere formality, but always a tender and touching experience.'"* The Lord's Supper should never be a dull, routine, ceremonial act; it should be a heart touching reminder that the One whom we love the most died a horrible death to save us! But it also has a brighter aspect (15-18). He told them that as they did this:

c. they were to look forward with Him to God's future Kingdom And notice how He said it twice to strongly emphasize it! This supper was to be a reminder to them and to us that one day Jesus is coming back to set up God's Kingdom on this earth and when He does, there will be a great feast with all of us together, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb described in Rev. 19! Paul said, *...as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes!* - 1 Cor. 11:26. It's a reminder that He's coming, a reminder that one day the Kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and in that day we shall all celebrate our union with Him as His bride! Hallelujah!

That's one reason He so fervently desired to have this Last Supper with them, to leave them and us with a lasting way to remember His suffering and continually look forward to the glory we will share with Him! Now Luke mentions another thing that happened at the Supper:

3. He quelled His disciples' argument about greatness (24) It's very hard to determine the exact order of what happened during these several hours. It's possible this verse is a flashback to the beginning of the meal and gives the reason that Jesus got up and washed the disciples' feet, but regardless of when this argument occurred, Jesus immediately put a stop to it (25-27).

a. He extolled the principle of servant leadership among His followers. In Jesus' value system, greatness is not measured by how many people are under you whom you can order around. That's how the world measures greatness, by power and authority over others. Rather Jesus measures greatness by humility and willingness to serve others. And He pointed to Himself as an example. "I, even though I am the Son of God, am among you as one who serves; see how I have washed your feet! I have done what only the youngest child or the household servant who is a nobody would do. You all as leaders must be the ones most willing to serve those you lead." In the church, those who lead are called to serve others. *Dr. Vernon Grounds, former president of Denver Seminary, challenged the graduating class one year with Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet. He told the graduates that he was going to give them each a tangible symbol that could help them in their future ministries. As they filed quietly to the front, they wondered what it could be. To their surprise, it was a small square of white terry cloth. One graduate, who later served as an overseas missionary, says, "We were commissioned to go into the world as servants. That small piece of towel, frayed and grubby from years in my wallet, is a constant reminder of that moving moment and of our basic call to serve."* That's what Jesus was trying to impress upon the leaders He had prepared to begin His church, but even as He did so:

b. He promised them a glorious future reward for their faithfulness (28-30) This prophetic promise was specifically for the twelve disciples. When Jesus comes and sets up His millennial Kingdom on this earth they will always eat at His table and they will each rule one of the tribes of restored and rebuilt Israel. Those who were faithful as servants here will rule there! And we too are promised that we will rule and reign with Christ. I am reminded of the words of the King in Jesus' parable of the pounds back in chapter 19, ...*"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'* - Lk. 19:17. If we are faithful to fulfill our calling as servants, the King will have a whole world full of places for us to rule and reign over in His Kingdom but we'll always be at His table! Our reward is not to be found here; it is to be received there! Now one of the last things Jesus did near the end of the Supper is that:

4. He prepared Peter for what was about to happen (31-34) He singled out Peter in particular, the one who was to become the leader of the group after He was gone, and gave him a special promise. First:

a. He warned him that Satan would test his faith He would be the specific object of Satan's attack that very night as Jesus was arrested. He would be shaken the way a man violently shakes wheat in a sieve to separate out all the chaff. It would feel like he had fallen through the sieve to crash upon the floor below. And that's exactly how he must have felt after he denied Jesus mere hours later, yet at the same time Jesus:

b. He assured him that his faith would not fail He said, *I have prayed for you!* And if Jesus has prayed, you KNOW it will happen. Peter's faith wavered but it did not fail. He did not give up and turn away like Judas. And even though badly shaken, he was to be the one to strengthen the others! Of course, at that moment, Peter had no idea what would happen and how he would act. He was still positive that his faith was so strong that he'd be willing to go to prison or even die for Jesus on the spot. But Jesus:

c. He predicted that his self-reliance would be stripped away, that he would deny ever knowing Him three times before the rooster crowed early the next morning. And when it did, these very words came back to haunt him and all of his high estimation of himself and his misplaced confidence in his own spiritual strength were blown away like the chaff, so that he knew that his continuing faith was only due to Jesus and not to himself.

The other Gospels add that he told the whole group of disciples that they would all fall away from Him and be scattered that very night. All of them would go through this same crisis of faith brought on by His arrest and crucifixion, but He would see them again after He rose from the dead. Their faith would not fail either. And indeed, we all go through events in life when our faith is tested severely, when the enemy sifts us like wheat trying to shake us and tear us away from trusting in Jesus. There will be times when we like Peter feel that we have fallen and failed miserably, but Jesus has prayed for us! Just after the Supper, Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17 and He said, *I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ...Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.* - Jn. 17:20, 24. Jesus has prayed for us that OUR faith will not fail and that we will be with Him in glory forever and so we will! Listen, when Satan throws circumstances and suffering at you that try you sorely, when you've questioned the Lord crying, "Where are you Jesus? Why won't you help me?", when you've said, "I've had it! I can't take any more!" and are ready to throw in the towel, or when you've sinned and fallen and ruined your testimony and you feel like you're worthless and Jesus could never use you any more, remember that Satan may be sifting you like wheat, but Jesus has prayed for you! Your faith will not fail! He will restore you and you will be with Him! And when your heart is turned back again and your faith is renewed, you'll see that through it all God has stripped away your self-reliance, your pride in who you are and what

you can do and helped you to see that your very continuing to believe is only due to His grace! Oh, the Last Supper is a place of assurance for all of us who follow Jesus. No matter what we've done or how unfaithful we have been, we can come to His table, take a place beside the Savior, find forgiveness and assurance of our future, bask in His love and be set free. Listen to this song:

Come to the Table by Sidewalk Prophets

[Listen/view at <https://youtu.be/DXXxLwxfo0U>]

*We all start on the outside
The outside looking in
This is where grace begins
We were hungry, we were thirsty
With nothing left to give
Oh the shape that we were in
Just when all hope seemed lost
Love opened the door for us*

*He said come to the table
Come join the sinners who have been redeemed
Take your place beside the Savior now
Sit down and be set free
Come to the table*

*Come meet this motley crew of misfits
These liars and these thieves
There's no one unwelcome here, no
So that sin and shame that you brought with you
You can leave it at the door
And let mercy draw you near*

*Just come to the table
Come join the sinners, you have been redeemed
Take your place beside the Savior now
Sit down and be set free
Come to the table
Just come to the table
To the thief, to the doubter
To the hero and the coward
To the prisoner and the soldier
To the young, to the older
All who hunger, all who thirst
All the last, all the first
All the paupers and the princes
All who fail you've been forgiven
All who dream, all who suffer
All who loved and lost another
All the chained, all the free
All who follow, all who lead
Anyone who's been let down
All the lost you have been found
All who've been labeled right or wrong
Everyone who hears this song*

*Just Come, come to the table
Oh eh, come join the sinners you have been redeemed
Take your place beside the Savior
Just sit down and be set free
Oh come on
Just sit down and be set free
Come to the table
Come on now
Come to the table
You're welcome here.*

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Passion Of The Son Of Man - Lk. 19:28-24:53

The Arrest And Trial Of Jesus - 22:47-23:25

In our study of Luke, we've been following Jesus through Passion Week. We left Him on Thursday night. Having had the Last Supper with His disciples, He led them outside of Jerusalem across the brook Kidron onto the lower slope of the Mount of Olives into a garden to pray. It was very late and they were tired, but their sleep was suddenly interrupted (47-48):

I. Jesus Was Arrested In The Garden Of Gethsemane (22:47-53) The Jewish leaders had been looking for a moment exactly like this when Jesus was alone in private away from people and, having already paid Judas to find them such an opportunity, when he arrived, they gladly supplied him with a band of soldiers and some officers, John says. Indeed, they themselves went along and the other three Gospels note that it was not just a few people; it was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs. So:

1. Judas led the mob to the garden and identified Him in the dark by greeting Him with a kiss, as though he were a familiar friend. And Jesus drove home to him the irony of it, that he would use a greeting of friendship as an act of betrayal! At first the disciples seemed ready to defend him (49-50). Impetuous as always:

2. Peter tried to defend Him by swinging his sword at the head of nearest man, a servant of the high priest named Malchus, who turned his head and ended up with only his ear getting sliced off. But immediately, before the soldiers could react:

3. Jesus stopped the violence and healed the injured man (51-53) I'm sure that quick miracle prevented them all from being slaughtered on the spot. It gave the soldiers pause long enough for Jesus to address them in a calm manner indicating that He was not going to resist and questioning why they had come with all kinds of weapons, as though they were some outlaw gang when they could have arrested Him peacefully at any moment in the Temple all week long.

But notice the important lesson that Jesus was teaching them and us: the way to deal with persecution is not to mount an army and fight the persecutors! Jesus had warned them clearly just hours before, that they would be hated and persecuted by the world because they were His followers. He told them, *They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.* - Jn. 16:2. And now He was showing them how to react, not to fight, but rather to *pray for those who persecute you*, even as He did from the cross. That was a tremendous lesson because for the next 250 years the early church was seriously persecuted by the Roman Empire in wave after wave of violence and never did they band together to fight their attackers. Down through history followers of Jesus have been persecuted and they still are in many countries of the world today. A few months ago, in Kyrgyzstan a young man named Eldos was so severely beaten by Muslim villagers that he had to have his jaw wired shut for weeks, because he was singing a Christian song. In recent months, China has cracked down on house church leaders and believers once again, especially in the northeast, imprisoning them or sending them to labor camps. So, what should believers in those places do, band together and fight? No, band together and pray! Well, the rest of the disciples fled into the night, however (54):

II. Peter Followed Jesus To The High Priest's House But Denied Him (54-62) John was known, somehow, to the High Priest's staff and he and Peter both got into the house, but Peter:

1. he denied knowing Jesus three times (55-60a) What a different man we see here! All Peter's boldness has drained away to the extent that when he was confronted the third time, Matthew tells us that he began to literally invoke a curse on himself and to swear with an oath that he did not know Jesus. That was a serious thing to do in the ancient world! What could change a man who was willing to fight a mob of soldiers to save Jesus into a coward who was willing to swear he'd never known Him? The answer is fear! And Satan knows how to use it; in Job's case he told God, *...All that a man has he will give for his life.* - 2:4. The fear of dying will often make a person, even one as bold as Peter, do things he or she would NEVER do under normal circumstances. Sadly, for us it often doesn't even take the fear of dying. Sometimes the simple fear of what someone else will think of us is enough to make us deny Jesus by keeping quiet and hiding the fact that we know Him! At any rate, Peter spent a long, miserable night riddled with guilt and at dawn:

2. the crowing of the rooster brought him great remorse (60b-62) When Jesus looked across the courtyard at him, he remembered Jesus' prediction and it broke his heart. He ran out and it all came sweeping over him, as he realized that he was practically in the same category as Judas, that he had deserted the One he loved in His hour of need! I bet he wondered if he could ever be forgiven!

You know, the early church wrestled seriously with this question and there were whole segments of it which held that people who had "lapsed" under persecution and denied their faith by offering sacrifice to the Emperor could never be forgiven and readmitted to the fellowship of the church. I'm glad Jesus didn't think like that! He restored Peter and used him to lead the church and to win thousands of people to faith in Acts. Listen, if you've done something of which you're now

totally ashamed, some serious thing in which you disobeyed or denied the Lord, something which has held you in the bondage of guilt, you can be free, no matter how bad it was! Just come back to Him as Peter did; just ask forgiveness and know it is yours! God will use you again! Well, in the High Priest's house early that Friday morning:

III. Jesus Was Tried Before The Jews (63-71) At first, as He was being held there:

1. they abused Him (63-65) Most of us have been fortunate enough never to have actually seen somebody be beaten and kicked and punched, except on TV, where we somehow know it's not real. THIS was real! And as they did it, the Jews mocked and laughed. How cruel religious men can sometimes be! But soon the Sanhedrin, the whole ruling council of 70 elders, had been awakened and called together to try Him officially and:

2. Jesus affirmed His identity before the Council (66-70) He answered "Yes, I am the Son of God, the Christ, and one day soon I'll be seated at the right hand of God reigning in glory!" Of course:

3. they were convinced He was blaspheming (71) They believed His claim was false, that He was a mere man claiming to be God and that is blasphemy of the worst sort, an offense worthy of death.

Yet it's only blasphemy if it's not true. If His claim is true then it is His very accusers who are blaspheming, calling God a mere man! But through the centuries, like His accusers, people have often seen the weakness and the suffering and the death of Jesus as evidence that He was merely a man and not God as He claimed to be. To all those skeptics, Jesus says, "Just wait and you will see! Just wait until you die and see whose feet you'll fall before! Just wait until I come again and see who really rules this world!" Paul told the skeptical Athenians, *...[God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.* - Acts 17:31. We don't base our belief in Jesus on blind faith; we base it on the over-and-over verified fact that God raised Him from the dead! That's our once-for-all proof that Jesus is who He said He is! And if people decide to ignore that proof, they do so to their own peril! Well, the Jews condemned Jesus but they did not have the power of capital punishment, so at the earliest possible hour on Friday:

IV. Jesus Was Brought Before Pilate (23:1-5) Of course, in order to make a worthy case against Him:

1. the Jews falsely accused Him of crimes against the state (1-2) These are charges of crimes against Rome, fomenting rebellion, hindering tax revenues, claiming to be a King. And none of them were true in the sense that they were stated. Now, Pontius Pilate was no just governor. Easton's Dictionary says he was *...pleasure-loving, imperious, and corrupt. He hated the Jews whom he ruled, and in times of irritation freely shed their blood. They returned his hatred with cordiality, and accused him of every crime, maladministration, cruelty, and robbery. He visited Jerusalem as seldom as possible...* But even wicked:

2. Pilate examined Him and found Him not guilty of a crime (3-5) John fills in some of the missing dialogue that Luke doesn't record. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world or my servants would fight. But I AM a king!" Pilate wasn't stupid. He knew Jesus was not leading some rebellion against Rome and trying to make Himself king. He knew the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him because they were jealous of Him and he, no doubt, wanted to irk them even further by refusing to comply with their request and declaring, "I don't find Him guilty of anything!" And wow, did that set them off. But in their shouts of complaint, he caught the notion that Jesus was from Galilee and he saw a way out of the situation. So next:

V. Jesus Was Examined By Herod (8-12) You see:

1. Pilate vainly hoped to avoid responsibility (6-7) Galilee was Herod's jurisdiction, not his, and since Herod happened to be visiting in Jerusalem, he sent Jesus over to him. He hoped he would not have to deal with the situation and with these stubborn Jewish leaders any further. But it was a vain hope. On the other hand:

2. Herod shallowly hoped to see a sideshow (8-9) He had long desired to see Him, ever since he put John the Baptist to death years earlier according to 9:9. He wanted to see Jesus heal some paralytic or grow back a missing limb, the way that spectators want to see a magician do amazing tricks. He had no spiritual interest at all and years later died after an angel of God struck him down for his pride in letting people praise him as a god in Acts 12. Jesus wouldn't give him even the respect that He showed to Pilate; to such a base man He wouldn't say a word. So:

3. Herod mocked Him and sent Him back to Pilate (11-12) "Not my problem!" He wasn't about to try to resist the fury of the Jews. So back Jesus went and His accusers with Him and ultimately:

VI. Pilate Yielded To The Crowd And Condemned Jesus (13-23a) Notice that Pilate:

1. he tried three times to release Jesus, declaring Him innocent The last time, Matthew tells us he even took a basin and washed his hands of the matter, saying *I am innocent of this man's blood* - Mt. 27:24. He knew Jesus was not guilty of anything, but:

2. the crowd vehemently demanded His death each time They shouted, *Crucify Him* and *give us Barabbas!* Over and over, louder and louder they shouted until their tumult grew almost into a full-blown riot. And eventually:

3. the pressure of the crowd overpowered justice in Pilate's mind (23b) Listen to that phrase again, "The voices of the crowd prevailed!" What a lesson for us! To Pilate it ceased being a matter of right and wrong and it became a matter of, "How am I going to handle this crowd?" We are often faced with a decision whether to do what is right or to listen to the voices of the crowd, of our family, of our friends, of our colleagues, of our society. We know what the right thing is; we know what God demands that we do. But the people around us in our lives don't see that and they urge us more and more strongly to do what's convenient, to do what the culture says, what is in our own self-interest. We try to find ways to get out of having to make the decision, even passing it off on someone else, but that doesn't really work and, in the end, we have to choose. Will we do what we know is right or let the voices of the crowd prevail? There are many examples of this kind of pressure in our society. *Colleen was 18 and entering college when she became pregnant by a boyfriend her parents disapproved of. The doctor said, "Such a shame, but it can be taken care of" and gave her a card to an abortion clinic. She felt it was wrong but she asked several teachers for advice. One said she'd had several abortions and it was nothing and she didn't need this trouble in her life. Another was a nun and even she said it was the best thing for her. When she broke down and told her parents it was wrong, they threatened to kick her out of the house if she didn't do it! So the voices of the crowd prevailed and she did abort the baby. But she says, "In the end, the abortion did not 'solve all my problems' as everyone had promised. My parents still kicked me out. I had to quit school. I married the boyfriend. It didn't work out. He became an alcoholic and a drug addict. He beat me up and brought other women into our bed."* Today Colleen has 3 children, pickets abortion clinics and does all she can to fight abortion because it is wrong and it ruins lives! [\[www.afterabortion.org/case_co.html\]](http://www.afterabortion.org/case_co.html) Abortion is a common crowd-voice issue. So is the acceptance of homosexuality and gay marriage. God loves all people regardless of what they do but He clearly says in His Word that the practice of homosexuality is wrong and immoral just like sex without marriage or adultery is. We know this but the voices of our teachers and professors and the media and society and now even the government say, "Homosexuality has equal status with heterosexuality and MUST be recognized as legitimate!" The pressure is intense but will we let the voices of the crowd shape our thinking? Another issue that is epidemic in our day is divorce. How many of our teens in Youth Group or Pioneer Club kids have issues from broken homes? A person may be unhappy in their marriage. They know God says divorce is wrong but the voices all around them, their friends, the media, the culture says, "You need to be happy! Think about yourself! Your kids will adjust! Find someone else who is right for you." And the person has to decide whether they will do what's right or let the voices of the crowd prevail over God's voice. Whatever our situation, we always have that same choice to make, but Pilate let the voices of the crowd prevail and in the end:

4. he sentenced Jesus to die and released Barabbas (24-25) He released a murderer and condemned an innocent man in order to pacify a crowd and save his own hide.

That is pretty much how many of the rulers of this world work. Pilate and Herod are just two of a class of people who have managed to claw their way to power over masses of people for their own purposes and throw justice to the winds. Even today nations are ruled by men like them. I need only mention names we know like Hugo Chavez or Fidel Castro or Kim Jong Un or Vladimir Putin or Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi, similar figures from our own lifetimes. Godless rulers still oppress millions, make use of violent men and persecute innocent believers at their own whim as they always have. But here's what they didn't know. Not many months later in Acts 4, the apostles *...lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said [in Psalm 2] by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed"— for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.* - Acts 4:24-28. Pilate and Herod and the Jewish leaders all joined together to put Jesus to death, but they were unknowingly doing what God had planned and predestined so that Jesus would die for our sins and rise again! Even though this whole drama of arrest and trial looks like Satan is winning, God was in charge the whole time accomplishing His purpose! Hallelujah! Listen, whenever it is the hour of evil men and it seems like the power of darkness is winning and prevailing all around us, God is still on the throne **working all things together for good**, for His ultimate good purpose, **Rom. 8:28!** *I'm told that the ancient Chinese sometimes used a unique mechanism for presenting their plays. They would present a play on a two-level stage. On the upper stage, the resolution of the drama would be acted out at the same time as the story unfolded below. So as tension and mystery were building on the first level, the audience watching the resolution of the plot would yell to the people on the first level, "Hang in there! Do not give up! If you only knew!" What inspired that hope? It was the knowledge of what was happening on the second level.* Friends, we KNOW there is a second level, that God is in charge working ALL things together for good, so hang in there! Don't give up! Jesus knew what God was doing and that He was in control, so He trusted Him and yielded to His will. We must do the same!

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Passion Of The Son Of Man - Lk. 19:28-24:53

The Crucifixion Of Jesus - 23:26-56

We have followed Jesus through Passion Week. From His Triumphal Entry on Sunday through His Last Supper and His arrest on Thursday night to His trials before both the Jewish leaders and the Roman governor early on Friday morning. And now it is time to take our shoes off spiritually because we have come to holy ground. John Piper writes, *Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain. What was once foolishness to us—a crucified God—must become our wisdom and our power and our only boast in this world.*” [Don’t Waste Your Life]. Centuries ago, Thomas à Kempis wrote, *In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is life; in the Cross is protection against our enemies; in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the Cross is strength of mind; in the Cross is joy of spirit; in the Cross is excellence of virtue; in the Cross is perfection of holiness. There is no salvation of soul, nor hope of eternal life, save in the Cross.*” [The Inner Life]. It is the central act, the pinnacle, of all human history. And yet, as we read the story of it, it seems like the lowest thing that human beings have ever stooped to do. First Luke tells us of:

I. The Way To The Cross in verses (26-32). It is known as the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Suffering, the winding path westward from the Fortress of Antonia on the wall of Jerusalem to the hill called Golgotha, the place of execution. The distance was less than half a mile but Jesus was so weak from the severe scourging He received and the loss of blood that the soldiers feared He would not make it and so at their demand:

1. Jesus was helped by Simon from Cyrene who carried His cross (26) Cyrene was a Roman city in North Africa, modern Libya, and Simon was a Jew who had probably come to Jerusalem for Passover. Him the soldiers randomly forced into service to lift the heavy wooden crossbeam on his shoulder and carry it for Jesus. And though he probably did not know Jesus, this brief walk left him standing before the cross and touched his heart to its very depths, for Mark tells us that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus who became leaders in the early church. Simon evidently came to faith somehow through that experience and remained faithful! His life was changed forever by his experience of the cross, just as yours and mine have been! A second thing Luke mentions on the way is that:

2. Jesus warned the crowd of the future suffering coming upon Israel (27-31) A large crowd was following this procession, I imagine to see the spectacle of a crucifixion, similar to the way that public hangings in the Old West always drew a crowd of townsfolk. Somehow people seem to like to watch other people die, yet among them were many women who were deeply moved by suffering of Jesus as He stumbled along, barely able to walk, bloody and wearing a crown of thorns. They were weeping and wailing and somewhere along the path, Jesus paused for a moment and said essentially, “Don’t weep for Me; weep for yourselves and your children! There’s a day coming when you’ll wish you never had them so they wouldn’t have to suffer, when you’ll be desperate to hide but will have no place to hide from the Romans! If they’re doing this awful thing to Me now, imagine what they will do to you! And all because you as a nation rejected Me!” Forty years later Israel was brutally destroyed by Rome and the Jewish nation ceased to exist. Crosses by the hundreds lined the roads everywhere. Rejecting Jesus has dire consequences, whether that was national punishment 2000 years ago, or the personal eternal punishment a person who rejects Him will experience today! Then, notice the tiny line in verse (32):

3. Jesus was led away with criminals as one of them The soldiers marched in front with the charge against the condemned written on a sign, clearly sending the message, “This is what happens to those who defy Rome!” And Jesus was not regarded as any different from the other two; to them He was just another criminal who deserved to die. 750 years earlier the Prophet Isaiah said of Him, *...he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.* - 53:12. He was counted a criminal, though the crime He was paying for was not His, but ours! Our sins were laid on Him and the penalty He endured was ours.

Well, as the procession arrived at Golgotha, Luke now gives his version of:

II. The Crucifixion Of Jesus in verses (33-43) It is such a simple statement (33). But it tells us that Jesus:

1. He underwent the awful suffering of being crucified It is one of the most diabolical methods of torture ever invented and the Romans perfected it to a tee. Let me read you a brief description: *Once the victim arrived at the execution site, the patibulum [or crosspiece] was put on the ground and the victim was forced to lie upon it. Spikes about 7 inches long and 3/8 of an inch in diameter were driven into the wrists. The spikes would hit the area of the median nerve, causing shocks of pain up the arms to the shoulders and neck. Already standing at the crucifixion site would be the 7-foot-tall post, called a stipes.... The patibulum was then lifted on to the stipes, and the victim’s body was awkwardly turned on the seat so that the feet could be nailed to the stipes. At this point, there was tremendous strain put on the wrists, arms and shoulders, resulting in a dislocation of the shoulder and elbow joints. The position of the nailed body held the victim’s rib cage in a fixed position, which made it extremely difficult to exhale, and impossible to take a full breath. Ultimately, the mechanism of death in crucifixion was suffocation. To breathe, the victim was forced to push*

up on his feet to allow for inflation of the lungs. As the body weakened and pain in the feet and legs became unbearable, the victim was forced to trade breathing for pain and exhaustion. Eventually, the victim would succumb in this way, becoming utterly exhausted or lapsing into unconsciousness so that he could no longer lift his body off the stipes and inflate his lungs. [<https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/crucifixion.htm>] That's what Jesus endured for us! For 6 hours, from 9 AM to 3 PM, our Savior hung there in excruciating agony struggling to breathe. Yet even as they hoisted Him up:

2. He prayed for the forgiveness of His enemies (34a) In this first cry, He meant the Romans, the Jews, and ultimately the whole world, "Father forgive them!" In one sense they knew exactly what they were doing, yet Paul comments in 1 Cor. 2:8, *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.* They had no idea who He was, no idea that they were crucifying God the Son, the very Lord of glory, that they were committing the ultimate treason against the Creator of the Universe! Jesus pleads ignorance on their behalf and on ours. I didn't know either! The song says, *How deep the Father's love for us, How vast beyond all measure, That He should give His only Son, To make a wretch His treasure. It was my sin that held Him there, Until it was accomplished, His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished.* It was not nails that held Jesus on that cross; He could have called ten thousand angels to set Him free! It was MY sins that kept Him on that tree, and yours! But, like the soldiers and the crowd, I had no idea what was happening. And, as if the physical agony of being crucified and the eternal agony of bearing our sins was not enough:

3. He was surrounded by a mocking crowd (34b-39) As they stood watching:

a. the Jewish people and their leaders shouted insults (35) "Save yourself, O Christ!" At his feet:

b. the soldiers gambled for His clothes (34b) It didn't matter at all to them! It was just another day, another pesty Jew, another crucifixion and their entertainment of the day was to throw dice for His blood-stained garments. **They even mocked Him just like the Jews (36-38).** "Come on, King! Save yourself!" And:

c. even the thief beside Him mocked Him (39) What a wicked man! Even as he hung in agony, hours from death, he still joined in cruelly mocking the man beside him!

No wonder David prophesied the very feelings of Jesus in Psalm 22 when he wrote, *All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" ...Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.* Even though He pled with the Father for their forgiveness, how painful it must have been for Him to hear and see the awful crowd around Him. Yet in the very midst of it all, something wonderful happened **(40-43)**. The thief on the other side had an "Aha!" moment! Now, this man was no better than the rest. He was a criminal, a malefactor, a man sentenced to die for serious crimes, yet in that moment as he stared his own death in the face, God revealed to Him somehow that Jesus was without sin and that He was the Christ, the Son of God that everyone else was denying and he cried out, "Jesus, remember me! Even me, sinful though I am and deserving of this awful death as I am!" And in the midst of it all, Jesus:

4. He promised immediate salvation to the repentant thief TODAY you'll be with Me in paradise! What a marvelous thing! He woke up, came to his senses, realized he was a sinner deserving of eternal punishment, cried out to Jesus for mercy and got it, instantly! That's what happened to me! I knew about Jesus being crucified and all, but when I was 15, I had an "Aha!" moment! It all came crashing in on me that I was a sinner and I was lost and that Jesus had died that awful death for ME! So, I cried out to Him for forgiveness and suddenly I KNEW that I was His, that I belonged to Him and that I would be with Him in heaven when I died! Have YOU had that moment? You may have been raised in the church and known all about Jesus all your life, but have you had that moment where it dawned on you that it was YOUR sins that nailed Him there and you cried out to Him for forgiveness and asked Him to save you? If you have, then, just like this repentant thief, YOU will be with Him in paradise! That's what the cross is about; that's why Jesus was nailed there, to save you and to save me.

Well as we get to noon, Luke begins to record for us the actual:

III. The Death Of Jesus in verses (44-49). First of all, he notes that:

1. it was accompanied by miraculous signs (44-45) At noon the sky went dark. The Roman historian Phlegon was probably describing this very event when he wrote: *"In the fourth year, however, of Olympiad 202 [which includes AD 33 in our dating system], an eclipse of the sun happened, greater and more excellent than any that had happened before it; at the sixth hour, day turned into dark night, so that the stars were seen in the sky, and an earthquake in Bithynia toppled many buildings of the city of Nicaea."* [<http://creationanswers.net/biblical/crucifixiondate.htm>]. However, it could not have been a normal solar eclipse, because Passover occurs at full moon when the moon is in the exact op-

posite position from where it would need to be. It was an act of God the Father blotting out the sun for three solid hours, steeping the land in the darkness of night, showing in nature itself the seriousness of the dying of His Son. Meanwhile, in the city of Jerusalem in the Temple of God the great curtain that separated the Holy Place where the priests stood ministering, from the Holy of Holies which no man could enter, suddenly began to tear in two, from the top to the bottom, as Matthew notes, and there was a great earthquake at the same time. It was as though God Himself tore the veil apart from heaven with His two hands, showing that the way into the Holy Place was now opened through the death of His Son and today, we can go right into His Presence! Hallelujah! Well, then Luke describes the very act of Jesus' dying itself (46). Crucifixion did not kill Him! He dismissed His Spirit from His body, He sent it away to the Father and His body stopped breathing, which is exactly what happens to us when we die, but in His case, Luke is pointing out that:

2. it was His own choice He said it clearly; look with me at **John 10:17-18**. They didn't take His life from Him; you can't kill God! He chose to lay it down of His own accord and He laid it down for us because He loved us! Then He chose to take it up again on the third day! At the bottom line, this was not human beings killing Him; it was Him killing Himself for human beings so that we might have eternal life! Well, this whole scene, the darkness, the earthquake, the torn veil, the words, had an impact:

3. it had an impact upon the Centurion who nailed Him there (47) In fact, he said more than that. **Mark 15:39**, *...when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"* Whether he understood what that meant or not, he had an "Aha!" moment, just as the thief had. In that moment He saw clearly that this was no ordinary man, this man was indeed innocent and that He was connected to God Himself. I like to think he believed and it's just possible that you'll meet this Roman soldier in heaven one day! But at the same time:

4. it had an impact upon the crowd (48-49) The gawking, mocking crowd was silenced by the darkness and the earthquake and went home beating their fists against their chests in mourning, in sadness, recognizing that an awful, terrible thing had just transpired, that God Himself was displeased with what had happened and they had been part of it.

Like that crowd, many, even today, are saddened by the death of Jesus as a cruel, awful thing that should never have happened to such an innocent man. But oh, for the few who, like the centurion, have their eyes opened and say, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" and fall on their faces and worship Him! Well, lastly Luke records:

IV. The Burial Of Jesus (50-56) A man named:

1. Joseph of Arimathea came and laid Him in his own tomb (50-53) How brave he was to go to Pilate and ask for the body and how generous for him to bury Jesus in his own tomb. Not all the Jewish leaders agreed with condemning Him; Matthew and John both say that Joseph was a disciple. He had believed and evidently was later part of the early church. Nicodemus, another Jewish elder, also came and helped him. Meanwhile:

2. believing women watched His burial and prepared to bring spices (54-56) This is important because they saw where and how quickly He was buried. They went home to prepare and come back early Sunday morning to make it proper and right. But, and I love verse 1 of chapter 24, when they returned early at dawn, the spices weren't needed anymore! Jesus had risen!

John Newton was a captain of slave ships, a man as cruel as any who were there that day. He himself says, "I sinned with a high hand!". Yet one day during a terrible storm at sea he gave his life to Jesus Christ and was forever changed. You know him for writing probably the most famous hymn of all time, "Amazing Grace." He meant what he wrote. But he also wrote a poem that describes his own "Aha" moment and I'd like to share it with you:

*In evil long I took delight, Unawed by shame or fear,
Till a new object struck my sight, And stopp'd my wild career:
I saw One hanging on a Tree In agonies and blood,
Who fix'd His languid eyes on me. As near His Cross I stood.*

*Sure never till my latest breath, Can I forget that look:
It seem'd to charge me with His death, Though not a word He spoke:
My conscience felt and own'd the guilt, And plunged me in despair:
I saw my sins His Blood had spilt, And help'd to nail Him there.*

*Alas! I knew not what I did! But now my tears are vain:
Where shall my trembling soul be hid? For I the Lord have slain!
A second look He gave, which said, "I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid; I die that thou may'st live."*

*Thus, while His death my sin displays In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of grace, It seals my pardon too.
With pleasing grief, and mournful joy, My spirit now is fill'd,
That I should such a life destroy, Yet live by Him I kill'd!*

[John Newton, 1725-1807]

Jesus, The Son Of Man - The Gospel Of Luke

The Passion Of The Son Of Man - Lk. 19:28-24:53

The Resurrection Of Jesus - Ch. 24

Luke ends his Gospel and we end our study through it, of course, with his account of the Resurrection of Jesus. John MacArthur writes, *The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single greatest event in the history of the world. It is so foundational to Christianity that no one who denies it can be a true Christian. Without resurrection there is no Christian faith, no salvation, and no hope.... A person who believes in a Christ who was not raised believes in a powerless Christ, a dead Christ. If Christ did not rise from the dead, then no redemption was accomplished at the cross and 'your faith is worthless,' Paul goes on to say... [MacArthur New Testament Commentary].* Luke gives us the record of three events that form the very basis of our core conviction that Jesus rose from the dead and He is alive today. The first is the account of:

I. The Empty Tomb (1-12) On Friday, the women who believed in Jesus had faithfully stood by the cross and watched Him be buried in Joseph's tomb. They planned to return early Sunday morning after the Sabbath with spices to properly care for His body, but when they arrived:

1. the women found the tomb empty (1-3) Imagine their fear and apprehension when they saw the soldiers gone, the heavy stone rolled back and the tomb standing open! And then to go in and find His body missing! Their hearts must have sunk, as they could only assume His very body had been removed and desecrated. But **(4-8)**. Two men in brilliant, shining clothes suddenly appeared right next to them and as they fell to the ground in fear, these:

2. angels told them He had risen! Nobody expected that! Especially not after seeing His horrible death on Friday! But the angels clearly declared, "He is alive! Risen from the dead!" **And then they reminded them of His words.** Many months earlier, Peter so clearly confessed, *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!* and Mt. 16:21 says, *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* How many times must He have told them He would die and rise again, over and over! By the way, if He predicted that many times that He would rise again and then didn't do it, He'd be a liar or a crazy man and why would we ever follow Him? Yet somehow His words never sank in; they never really heard Him. But in that moment, suddenly it all came back to them; they remembered! And oh, what joy it must have brought them if they dared to believe it! At any rate, I'm sure they ran all the way back to the city to share the news, yet sadly:

3. the women told the Eleven disciples but they did not believe them (9-11) *Idle tales* means foolish talk, pure nonsense! Like a fairy tale where a frog turns into a prince! "How could such a thing possibly be? No sane person would believe this!" And that's what much of the world still thinks of the story of Jesus' resurrection today! It's an archaic religious legend, a sacred myth held by Christians to honor Jesus' life that couldn't possibly be real. That's exactly what my religion professor in college taught and I'm sure many of his students accepted! Jesus is with us in spirit, but His body didn't really rise! Well, let me ask, if that's so, where did His body go? It was in a sealed tomb guarded by four Roman soldiers who would find themselves under the penalty of death if it disappeared! The Romans wanted His body to stay in there. The Jews wanted it to stay in there; they asked for the guard! So, you mean to tell me that some brave believer frightened the guards away, opened the tomb, stole the body and created the myth that Jesus is alive? That, to me sounds more like an idle tale than the women's story! By the way, I just got an alumni letter saying they're closing down the religion department at that university. Small wonder and great idea! Listen, Jesus lives! And His empty tomb stands as the first evidence of it! Well, even though they didn't believe it, it was really disturbing to the Eleven and:

4. Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself (12) Jn. 20:2-10 tells us John ran with him and when he went in and saw it for himself, he believed! But even the empty tomb and the linen cloths lying in place as though the body had just evaporated right through them and the face cloth folded up neatly and laid aside didn't fully convince Peter; he left, marveling at it all, yet still not believing. But that's alright because evidently:

5. Jesus appeared to Peter later that day, maybe even on his way back to the city because look what the apostles say that same evening **(34)**! And Paul confirms in **1 Cor. 15:5** that He appeared to Peter that same day before the rest! And Peter wrote, *...we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* - 2 Pet. 1:16. The second evidence that Jesus is alive is

dozens, yea hundreds, of trustworthy eyewitnesses that saw Him alive over the next 40 days! Peter was one and we're about to meet two more of them who were traveling that day on:

II. The Road To Emmaus in verses (13-35). Read (13-24). Notice:

1. the confusion of the two disciples over all that had happened They're leaving town, disillusioned by the events of the weekend. After all the miracles they had seen Jesus do, they believed He was the promised Messiah who would save Israel, but then He was arrested and crucified. So, He couldn't be. And to top it off, this morning these women came saying the tomb was empty and told some tale about seeing angels who told them Jesus was alive - but they didn't actually see Him. They're confused. It doesn't make sense. They don't know what to think. And God has supernaturally kept them from seeing that it is actually JESUS they're telling all this to! What irony! They're telling Jesus He must still be dead! Now if it was me, I'd magically open their eyes and watch them fall on their faces crying, "We're sorry Lord, what fools we are!" But fortunately, Jesus is much more patient than I am and instead of "wowing" their socks off, notice:

2. the explanation of Jesus from the Scriptures (25-27) In verse 32 they describe it by saying *...He opened to us the Scriptures*. It's the Greek verb *diagnoio* from which we get *diagnose*; it means to open something up fully or explain something thoroughly. He showed them what was written there all along in the Scriptures of the Old Testament that they had never seen before. And notice it says He showed them in *all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*. No doubt, He started in Gen. 3:15 with the Seed of the Woman and said, "That's Me!" And later He showed them that when Isaiah said, *...it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied (53:10-11)*, it was talking about His death and resurrection! Passage after passage after passage He opened to them, one after the other, until the afternoon was far spent. Oh, wouldn't you have loved to be there with them for that Sunday School lesson! You'd never forget it, nor should you, because that is a third evidence of Jesus' resurrection. God predicted it repeatedly centuries in advance and God can't lie! Well, by now it was getting late **(28-31)**. Notice at last:

3. the recognition of Jesus in the breaking of the bread When He took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them, it was a *deja vu* moment, bringing to mind Thursday night at the Last Supper! They'd lived through this before and suddenly they saw Him for who He was! Let's not miss the point of that. Jesus gave us the command that we should frequently remember Him by the Lord's Supper, by taking the bread and the cup. But here we see that it is not only His death for our sins that we are remembering! By taking it, Paul says, *we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes!* So even as we remember His death, we are declaring that He's alive and He's coming again! The Lord's Supper is our continual reminder that Jesus is alive and we're waiting for Him! We too recognize that He is alive in the breaking of the bread! Hallelujah! And what an impact it had **(32-35)**. They must have shouted with joy back and forth to each other as they ran the quarter marathon all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the Apostles, "We've seen Jesus!" But when they burst in with their news, the Apostles say, "Peter has seen Jesus too!" And then suddenly, there He stood, right in their midst in Luke's third scene:

III. The Upper Room (36-49) Read (36-37):

1. Jesus appeared to the Eleven, frightening them Wouldn't you be frightened? You're behind closed and locked doors. It's night and the room is lit only by candles and oil lamps and suddenly there HE stands, right in the middle of all of you! Surely you would jump back in fright! You'd say, "Am I seeing things? Can this be real? Is this the spirit of our dead Jesus saying one last goodbye, like Samuel coming up from the grave to visit Saul of old?" But Jesus remembered that we are only made of dust and He was patient with them **(38-40)**. Now notice that Jesus proved His resurrection to them in two ways. First:

a. He showed them His body He urged them to look closely at it, to examine His wrists and see the awful holes where the nails had been driven through and the hole in His feet where the cruel spike had held them to the cross. The holes were still there! The spear wound in His side that pierced his lungs and His heart was still there! He said, *Touch me! See that I am real flesh and bones as I always was! It's ME!* John testifies to us in his first letter, *We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. - 1 Jn. 1:1-2 NLT*. They saw Him, they touched Him and it changed their lives forever! And to reinforce the impact even further:

b. He ate food before them (41-43) And when He ate the fish, He held it with His hand, chewed it with His teeth and swallowed it into His body and it didn't fall through on the floor somewhere! Spirits don't eat! Jesus' BODY rose from the dead, not just His spirit! And so will ours! Paul wrote, *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. - 1 Cor. 15:22-23*. He said, *...we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body... - Phil. 3:20-21*. We're not going to be disembodied spirits floating around heaven for eternity; we're go-

ing to have bodies, bodies like His, bodies as real as this body we have now, only made perfect just like His glorious body, in which we will serve Him forever! Hallelujah!
And then look what He did:

2. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (44-45) Notice that to the two on the Emmaus road, verse 32 says, He opened the Scriptures. And verse 27 states that He thoroughly explained them. But here He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures! Thayer says that word *understand* in the Greek means *to join together in the mind*. They already knew the Scriptures; they'd been hearing and reading them since childhood; but now Jesus enabled them to perceive, to comprehend the meaning of what they'd known with what they'd just experienced! I don't think He gave them a repeat of the afternoon's lecture; I believe he entrusted those two disciples to repeat and transmit the lesson He'd given them in the days to come. Rather He did something supernatural; He enabled them to suddenly grasp what He'd been telling them about Himself for months, that the Scriptures concerning Him must be completely fulfilled, which included being killed and rising again! So that instead of saying, "This must never be!" like they had at first, they now were overwhelmed thinking, "Praise the Lord, Hallelujah! You died and rose exactly as God said! How amazing is that!" I think it was the kind of moment that Paul was describing in 2 Cor. 4:6 when he wrote, *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*. You see, our minds were blinded. I had heard often about Jesus dying and rising, but I didn't get it. I didn't grasp the significance of it. I didn't comprehend that Jesus did it for ME, to pay for my sins and that in it lay my only hope of salvation. But, praise God, one day He opened my mind to SEE it! He enabled me to get it, to grasp it, to apply it and to know it! He does that for everyone who comes to faith; He opens our minds to comprehend and to believe the Gospel and that's the next evidence that Jesus is alive! He still shines His light into people's dark hearts so that suddenly they see and believe beyond a doubt! *Jim Hall attended mass regularly with his mother as a child but when he went off to college, he lost all interest in religion and even doubted the existence of God. Years later he got engaged to a special girl named Gina. She was attending a Bible study and Jim asked to go with her because he was curious. He had never been encouraged to study the Bible and thought it was just a book of stories, but found it interesting. Then, sometime later his father had a heart attack and nearly died and he was so shaken up that he prayed to God earnestly and became involved in a 10 week Bible study which pointed out lots of things that were not right in his life. He and Gina changed a lot as they began to follow things the Bible said, but Jim was still not at peace and had inward struggles. Finally, he says, "I determined to diligently search the Scriptures to see if my salvation experience was real. The Lord showed me that my prayer 10 years before lacked the repentance and faith described in the Scriptures. On February 23, 1997, the Lord opened my heart as I wept over my sin, and I put myself at the foot of Calvary, realizing that it was for me that Jesus died. God was doing a work in my life, and I knew I needed to repent and surrender and, by faith, accept Jesus as Lord. Since that day, I have the assurance that the Holy Spirit is doing a work in my life."* [www.lvbaptist.org/jhall/] Listen, Jesus still opens minds to understand the Scriptures and opens hearts to believe them! If all you've got is head knowledge, ask Him; He'll open your mind and heart! Well, then Jesus did two more important things. First:

3. He commissioned them to reach all peoples with the Message (46-48) He appointed them His ambassadors; He told them to go in His Name, on His behalf, and proclaim the need for repentance and the offer of forgiveness through Him, not just to Israel, but to ALL the peoples of the world! What a tall order! What an assignment! A mere handful of men and women are to go and reach the whole world! But then Jesus told them how this would be accomplished:

4. He promised them the Holy Spirit (49) To do such a thing they needed power beyond their own strength. Multiple times during the Last Supper on Thursday night, Jesus had told them, *...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth...he lives with you and will be in you.... the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.... When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.* -

Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26-27. Now He says, "Wait until the Spirit comes and He will give you power to do it! Jesus reiterated this again in **Acts 1:8**, *...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

And, dear friends, that assignment was not just for them; it was for all of us who follow Jesus. We are to complete God's plan of the ages by taking the Good News of forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death and resurrection to every people on earth. That's our purpose; that's why Jesus has saved us! And how can we do such a thing? Through the power of the Holy Spirit who now lives in us! In His power we can go to places like Greece and India and Kyrgyzstan and Kensington. In His power we can send workers to dark places all over the earth and next door to bring His light. In His power we can pray effectiveness into their work and give to supply their needs. How are YOU involved in fulfilling His commission? As He closes His Gospel, Luke now skips ahead 40 days to one last event:

IV. The Ascension (50-53) He gives it only a brief mention because he knows he's going to write in detail about it in **Acts 1:1-10**. Here he says only two things. First, Jesus:

1. He returned to heaven (50-51) He's now seated at the right hand of the Father, reigning on high over all things. But His disciples:

2. they returned to worship (52-53) Because Jesus is alive, because He is reigning as Lord, they were full of joy and worshipped Him continually.

And that should be our reaction today! *One night during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Ruth Dillow was at her home in Kansas when she received a telegram from the Pentagon that her son had stepped on a landmine in Kuwait and was dead. It was, of course, a terrible shock. Three days later, however, Mrs. Dillow got a telephone call. The voice on the other end said, "Hi, Mom! I'm alive." At first, Mrs. Dillow couldn't believe her ears--it was the voice of her 21-year-old son whom she had been mourning for three days. She said, "I jumped up and down. I was so overjoyed!" [Clergy Journal, Mar 1992. Page 17.]* Brothers and sisters, our beloved Jesus was dead. He was crucified and laid in a tomb behind a stone to be sealed away forever. But on the third day, contrary to all expectations, He showed up ALIVE! And now He's seated on heaven's throne and will never die again! No wonder they were filled with joy and worshipped Him! And it's the same joy we feel in our hearts today. Our Jesus is alive! He lives! He's reigning! And we'll see Him and be with Him some day and stay with Him forever! Hallelujah!

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Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke

The Helpless - 5:17-26

I want you to take an imaginary trip with me for a moment. The year is 1864. The place is Gettysburg. The largest and most costly battle of the Civil War was fought just yesterday, the one that turned the tide of the Confederacy and set the course of America toward freedom for all men. As you walk onto the battlefield today, what do you see? All around you, of course, are the bodies of dead soldiers both blue and grey, lying where they have fallen. But the thing that really catches your eye is the wounded. Everywhere you look there is movement. Some moan and cry out for help. Others, barely able to move, struggle to lift a hand in the air to attract attention. Some hobble about holding an injured leg or arm. Some are being taken prisoner; others are being treated cruelly out of hate. Many just lie there bleeding. What is your response? Do you find yourself able to walk coldly through the battlefield and move on to the next fray? No, there is one drive you cannot escape: care for the wounded. They're hurt. They're suffering. Without you they will die. Care for the wounded. Now hold that picture and that feeling and let me paint you another one. My friend, you live in just such a place every day of your life. This world is a battlefield. Satan and his forces attack the human race to kill and hurt and destroy as many as they can, generation after generation. And as you pass through life, all around you every day lie the wounded, those who have been hurt and maimed and crippled in the battle. Some are the down and out, can't-move wounded, unable to function at all by themselves in life. But thousands of others are "walking wounded" who are able to somehow hobble along, wound and all, and live a semblance of life, though every step is fraught with pain. Some of them are your own family.

Some of them are your brothers and sisters in Christ. Some of them are complete strangers to you. Some are even enemy soldiers who fought for the other side. Wounded are everywhere. Now with that picture, you're ready to think about:

I. The Mission Of Jesus Christ I want you to look at what He himself said about to the people of His own hometown about the focal point of His ministry.

1. His focus: ministry to the wounded - Luke 4:18-19 Look at those to whom God sent Him: to the wounded of the human race, to the poor, to the prisoners, to the blind, to the oppressed. If you stop and think about the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, what was He always doing? He was stopping to heal a leper whom nobody else would touch or even come near, or a blind person whose only means of living was to sit at a gate and beg for a few coins. You find him caring for a widow whose only remaining joy had been snuffed out by the death of her son, feeding a crowd of people who were hungry and had nothing to eat, forgiving some fallen woman who was despised by the religious people of her town and would never find forgiveness, teaching somebody who didn't understand and opening their eyes. Jesus' whole ministry on earth was not taken up with "normal", have-it-all-together, people without a sense of need. It was taken up with people who had been wounded in life, people who hurt, people who needed to be cared for and nobody else seemed to want to care for. It was to the wounded that He was sent to be a Savior. And then look at:

2. His heart: the heart of a doctor - Luke 5:30-32 The religious people of His day couldn't understand why Jesus was so taken up with wounded people, with tax collectors and sinners. And Jesus said, "I'm a doctor! Sick people need a doctor and sinful people need a Savior! I didn't come to a world full of righteous people to pat them on the back; I came to a world full of wounded, sinful people to call them to repentance, to find forgiveness and healing and wholeness in Me!" That's Jesus' heart, the heart of a doctor that sees a world full of wounded people and wants to heal them. And here's:

3. His manner: gentle caring - Mt. 12:18 A crushed reed that's been broken down and trampled needs to be handled extremely gently or it will break off altogether instead of being straightened. A lamp wick that is smoldering with the flame gone and only a slight glow and some smoke needs to be gently nursed back to open flame or it will be snuffed out. It's almost an impossible task; it's so delicate. Wounded people have to be moved carefully and lovingly. They have to be treated with special and gentle care and isn't that how He treated them. He had time for the little children everyone else was chasing away. He stopped to touch the blind man everyone else was telling to shut up and go away. He spoke gently to the woman taken in adultery instead of casting a stone like the rest wanted to do. He exercised gentle caring for the world full of wounded people that surrounded Him.

And so must we. *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.* - 1 Jn. 2:6. Christ's mission is not done. Now that He is living in us, He is living it out through us. And if He's in control of us, then we will walk as He did, our hearts will be broken for the wounded all around us and driven to care for them as his was. And that's what this series of messages is all about. Now in Lk. 5:12-26 we read the account of how Jesus met a helpless man. This man was a paralytic. He was paralyzed. He couldn't move. We'd probably call him a quadriplegic. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't sit up, he couldn't stand, he couldn't walk, nothing. He was helpless. It took four of his friends to carry him anywhere. We're not told why, whether he'd had an accident or a stroke or whatever. All we know is that life had wounded him and left him lying on the battlefield helpless. And he's not the only one. There are people all around us every day whom the circumstances of life have left helpless. Now the first part of:

II. Understanding The Wound Of The Helpless is taking a look at:

1. who they are Most obvious are:

a. the physically helpless: the ill, elderly, young All you need do is stop in five minutes from here at Abington hospital. It is full of helpless people. People reduced to helplessness by disease, by accident, by cancer, to where they cannot take care of themselves, where they are to one degree or another unable to do anything. Stop by the Edgehill Nursing Home the other direction and see some of the elderly who have become basically helpless. Old age has sapped them of their strength and some of them of their reasoning and cast them on the mercy of others to care for them and there isn't a thing they can do about it. Spend five minutes in front of the TV news and it won't take you long to realize how helpless children are and some of them are trapped in horrible situations with parents who abuse them or neglect them and there isn't a thing they can do about it. Then there are:

b. the situationally helpless: the poor, the trapped Suppose you were born in Ethiopia instead of Pennsylvania. You might live in a hut and cook over an open fire. You might go hungry many nights and watch loved ones around you die of malnutrition. And there would be no ladder to climb, no job to get. Helpless. Or what if you lived in Rwanda just now. You might have no choice but to flee for your life and leave everything you have behind. You might be trapped in a refugee camp with no food and no future. Around the world thousands of people live around garbage dumps and survive by going through the garbage. And for most of them it has not been their choice. Life has trapped them and made them helpless. And then there is the biggest group of all:

c. the spiritually helpless: the lost (which included us all!) Now please don't think that this man was paralyzed because of his sins, but you'll notice that Jesus is pretty obvious about forgiving the man's sins right off. Why? Well,

besides the fact that He was proving His divinity to His skeptical onlookers, there's a very clear symbolic lesson here right off. In relationship to the forgiveness of sins, all of us, before we come to Jesus, are paralyzed people, utterly helpless, without anything we can do to get forgiveness. We could no more procure our own forgiveness than a paralyzed man can walk. We were lost, spiritually helpless, and so are many, many of the people around you every day.

Who do you know, my friend, that's helpless? Who do you know that's ill or elderly or trapped in their circumstances? Who do you know that's lost and struggling to procure forgiveness in vain by being religious, but they're helpless? Get someone, maybe more than one specific person in your mind right now. And let's take a moment to think about:

2. what they feel Imagine what it would be like to be that paralyzed man. I know a person or two like that and maybe you do too, unable to get out of bed or dress themselves or do the simplest things that you and I take for granted. First, that man knew:

a. the frustration born of powerlessness: *What can I do?* Think of young children trying to do something they just are too weak to do and how frustrated and mad they get. When our daughter Jennifer was young, she liked to hang up her swimsuit on the clothesline herself. Of course, she couldn't reach it so she tried to throw it up and hope it would hang. She would get so mad that she threw it down and would get all mad at me if I tried to help. But she was no different than all of us. Our flesh gets frustrated by being powerless. When you can do nothing, the question always on your mind is, "What can I do?" And the answer "Nothing" drives us crazy. Then there is the sense of:

b. the uselessness born of inability: *What good am I?* "What purpose do I serve? I'm not good for anything because I can't do anything. Here I am, a burden on society, a burden on my children. Others have to take care of me, I'm so helpless. I'm better off dead." You've heard people say those things, haven't you? They're real. And then they feel:

c. the fear born of vulnerability: *What will happen to me?* If I can't help myself, I can't control what happens to me. I can't protect myself. I'm vulnerable. What will happen to me?

Maybe some of you have been there and you know what it's like to be helpless. Maybe you have someone you know who's been wounded in life and left helpless and feels the pain of it. Maybe you're there yourself right now, even as a Christian, in some way, helpless. Well, you know:

III. The World's Reaction To The Helpless (19a) - Mk. 2:2 says, *So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door...* There was a big crowd and they wouldn't let him through. The simplest common courtesy would be to at least allow the helpless person to pass through. But they kept their backs turned to him and never even noticed he was there. They wanted Jesus and what He offered for themselves. What a picture. Out in the world, people rob the helpless. They mug the elderly and shoot the defenseless for the sheer joy of watching them die. They steal helpless children and abuse and kill them. That's the world we live in. Even the line at McDonald's is sometimes a push-your-way-to-the-front operation where the helpless wait forever. But these are religious people hanging out the door with their backs to the helpless man. What an indictment on the Church. So many times that is us, all gathered happily and snugly listening to the Word be taught, forgetting all about the helpless people right beside us, the lost, the needy, and the trapped. But there were four men who did care and whose attitude displays what ought to be:

IV. Our Reaction To The Helpless (18-20a) This man had four friends. God bless them. We don't know who they were. But they put this man on a mat and carried him all the way from his home to where Jesus was. And that's what we must do for the helpless:

1. we must carry them - it is *our responsibility to care* Carrying your helpless friend may be as simple as going to visit or encouraging and demonstrating love. It may take a practical form like doing for them something they cannot do physically, like bringing a meal or mowing the lawn or driving them to the store or the doctor. But above all, like these men:

2. we must bring them to Jesus Notice that when they got there and couldn't get in, these men wouldn't be stopped. Most homes in those days were flat-roofed and usually had an outside stairway to go up on the roof where there might be a little open-air chamber. These men figured out where Jesus was standing, carried their friend up the steps onto the roof, dug through the layer of dirt and thatch that covered it and removed the tiles which held it up so they could lower their friend down between the rafters in front of Jesus. And Jesus looked up and saw the man being lowered down and verse 20 says something interesting, *He saw their faith*. The reason they were so doggedly determined to get him to Jesus was because they believed Jesus could help him! My friend, we must bring the helpless around us to Jesus. He's the One who can help them. Four men can only do so much for a person. But Jesus can not only help that person spiritually, He can provide for them what we can't, what our resources are too small for. He can provide not only for their physical needs, but for their emotional peace and well-being. The determination that we have to bring the helpless to Jesus is the measure of ***our confidence in His ability*** And look at:

V. Jesus' Caring For The Helpless (20-25) Notice two things:

1. He meets the spiritual need first The man, along with his friends, obviously had faith to want desperately to be in Jesus' presence and Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven." You know, we always assume that the reason the man was so desperate to get to Jesus was that he wanted to be healed that badly. But we don't really know that, do we? Jesus might have been looking deep inside the man and have seen that what the man really was worried about was being forgiven of sins, rather than being made well. In any event, Jesus clearly indicated that this was his greatest need! And Jesus met it tenderly and willingly. He didn't say, "Perhaps I can find the grace in my heart to forgive you..." He said "I forgive you". Oh, wasn't it wonderful the day He did that for you? The day He looked into your helpless pleading eyes as you came to Him and said, "I forgive you!" Jesus does that for helpless people. It's why He came. He'll do it for every one you bring. But notice that:

2. He provides for the physical need as well He doesn't say, "Go now, you're forgiven, be warmed and filled". He healed the man of his paralysis with a word. Now, He doesn't always do that. Some wounds Jesus doesn't take away, but He heals them by giving His grace to get through life with them and accept them. When you bring the helpless to Jesus you can rest assured that He will take care of them tenderly and lovingly, even as you do!

My friend, you live in a world full of wounded helpless people. Is your heart moved to tenderly care for them and to carry them and to bring them to Jesus?

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke

The Bereaved - 7:11-17

Let me take a few minutes for:

I. A Review Of Jesus' Ministry And Ours I shared with you last time that:

1. He focused on ministry to the wounded - *The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed...* (Luke 4:18) If you read the Gospel accounts, Jesus did not spend the majority of His time railing against the wicked, denouncing the Pharisees or seeking to meet his personal needs. He was always with hurting wounded people: touching the sick, releasing the demon-possessed, feeding the hungry, teaching the poor and the simple who wanted to know. And God did not put you on His green earth to go through life getting your own needs met or to enjoy a good time with your friends. He put you here to care for the multitude of wounded hurting people that are strewn everywhere about you on the battlefield of life. They are wounded in all kinds of ways. Some are helpless; some are bereaved; some are trapped in sin; some are victimized; others are out-cast or dying themselves; all are wounded and hurting. Some of them are outside of Christ and through your compassion and caring will be brought to trust in Him. Others are already brothers and sisters in Christ, still wounded, who need you to care for them as you make your way through the battlefield together and go home. But remember how Jesus treated those hurting people:

2. He treated them with tremendous compassion - *...a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out...* (Mt. 12:20) His heart is the heart of a doctor and His bedside manner is one of gentleness and tenderness, of understanding the pain his wounded patient is in and feeling the hurt and working His healing ministry with as little hurt as possible. And that is how we're to treat the wounded around us, with the same gentle compassion Jesus did.

Now today we come to the familiar story in Luke 7 where Jesus and his disciples were walking on the road headed toward a town called Nain and they met a funeral procession coming toward them. **Read 7:11-17.** Bereavement is the one wound that none of us can escape. Sooner or later somebody you love will die. All around you, everywhere you go in the procession of life, you meet bereaved people: widows and widowers who have lost their life partners of many years, children both young and old whose mother or father has been taken from them, parents who have seen death claim their children, brothers and sisters separated once and for all and friends whose hearts are buried with their companions. Many of you have been in the place of this woman of Nain at one time or another in your life. Some of you may be there right now. But all of us, before too much time goes by, will meet some bereaved person on the road of life like Jesus did, to whom God expects us to minister. Now, if we're to do that, we must begin by:

II. Understanding The Wound Of The Bereaved (12-13) First, let's look at this widow and consider:

1. what has happened to them Three things:

a. they have been separated with finality from someone they love This woman was walking in front of a funeral procession. The dead body of her son was on a bier or carrying platform of wicker following behind. She was about to lay him in a tomb and shut the door. *A woman whose little boy had terminal leukemia was sitting in the waiting room of a doctor's office when a believer tried to quietly share a word of comfort. She replied, "If I could only believe that...but I don't. When he dies, I'll just have to cover him up with dirt and forget I ever had him..." (View From A Hearse, p. 13).* That's a pessimistic view, but it points out what everybody knows. Death is so final. In our culture we have gone to great lengths to hide dying. People die in hospitals, not at home anymore. Their loved ones are ushered out of the room. We don't even see dead animals like other generations have. Our meat comes prepacked

from the store in clean wrapped packages. But once touch the body of someone who has died or pick up a dead animal and you'll sense just how final it is. There's no getting them back. This widow's son, the child born of her own body, was about to be placed in a cold stone tomb forever. Secondly:

b. the entire framework of their life has been suddenly disrupted Jesus called this boy in verse 14 a young man. The Greek word indicates a young boy or a youth. Let's guess that he might have been 11 or 12. And he was an only son. You can imagine what her life had been about up until now. He was the center of her universe. She worked hard to provide a home and food for him. She taught him. She sang to him. And now, whether with or without warning, from the moment of his death nothing will ever be the same. Not her daily routine, the activities of her life, nothing. It's all disrupted and broken. Death of a loved one changes our lives like nothing else. You can change houses and make it OK; you change locations and climates and jobs and schools and whatever and as long as you have your loved ones, it's OK. But lose one of them and life is not the same, forever. And finally:

c. it has created a tremendous unfilled vacuum in their life There's a hole where that person had been. There's no one to love or to receive it from. The person in whom you invested your life is gone. This lady was particularly affected by this because she had lost her husband already and only had one son and now, he was gone. He was her life's purpose and joy and dream. To see him raised and happily married and established in life was her goal. Now there was nothing, no purpose, nothing to devote herself to, nothing to really live for.

These are the things that have happened to the bereaved people you meet. Death is a major, major thing. And because it is, here are:

2. the array of feelings they may experience First, a bereaved person is in:

a. emotional pain (grief, loss, etc.) - I hurt... Jesus told the woman not to weep. There are many words for crying in the Greek New Testament, but this one means to cry as a child. You've heard the expression "bawling like a baby". I've seen it in action! She had such a sense of grief and sorrow and loss that she openly and loudly cried like a child cries when he is hurt. Death causes emotional pain. And emotional pain is every bit as real as physical pain. Call it grief, sorrow, a sense of loss, or whatever you like. The bereaved person is hurting on the inside and hurting deeply. And coupled with that is the feeling of:

b. loneliness - I miss him... Do you think this widow was lonely? I should say. She missed him more than we can know. When someone has been part of your life for years and is now gone, you miss them. When you meet a bereaved person, almost certainly there is a loneliness inside. And then there may be some feelings of:

c. guilt - If only I... We're not told why this boy died. Perhaps he got sick. Can't you see this poor mother wondering whether she could have done something to prevent it? Blaming herself for it or at least wishing she'd have taken better care of him or been kinder to him? Death often fills us with regrets and remorse. We get a case of the "if only's". Or there may be:

d. anger - I don't want this to be happening... Pain often evokes anger. Bereaved people may be angry at God, angry at the doctors or at relatives, but in reality, they're just plain angry at death. They're feeling, "I don't want this to be happening to me!!"

Now, not all bereaved people have all of these feelings and hurts and it is likely that some of these will come and go at various times. But when you're dealing with a bereaved person, you're dealing with a bruised reed, with someone who is hurting and lonely and maybe guilty and/or angry, somebody that needs handled with special treatment. Before we move on let's consider:

3. some reactions they may exhibit The best one is a:

a. healthy expression of grief and gradually moving on with life For all their problems, the Jews had one thing right. They encouraged weeping and mourning even in public. Emotional pain needs to be expressed, needs to be told and shared for it to go away. It's proper, indeed necessary, to cry and be sad and over time the hurt grows less and the person is able gradually to make changes and go on with life. That's how God meant for it to be. But some people react by:

b. repression of grief that results in denial of feelings They pretend they're alright, that they can handle it. They won't cry, won't even admit that they're all broken up. Or they won't let you talk about it. They hide from dealing with it by refusing to think about the death. They try to make the hurt go away by ignoring it. But when you bury hurt, it always works to the surface later and resurrects. Others react by:

c. obsession with grief that results in withdrawal or depression They just can't get over the loss, can't return to normal. They withdraw from people and things they used to be involved in. They think about the person and how much they hurt all the time. They are depressed and can't function. They never quite move on with life. And then some practice an:

d. elusion of grief that results in unhealthy means of escape Some try to elude the pain they feel through alcohol or drugs. Some throw themselves into a romantic relationship with another person. Others try suicide. So, the bereaved person you meet not only has a mixed bag of intense feelings, but may or may not be reacting in a healthy fashion to the trauma of bereavement. Now how do you minister to somebody like that? Maybe you know somebody right now that needs you and can put a name on this sermon. Maybe you're just gathering info that you'll use soon enough. Either way, what should be:

III. Our Reaction To The Bereaved (12b-13) Well first:

1. we must be deeply touched by their pain When Jesus saw her his *heart* went out to her. The Greek expression refers to the bowels. We would say that it was gut-wrenching. In other words, he did not merely have a surface pity for her sorrow. He understood what it meant that she was a widow and this her only son. He was deeply touched by her pain. In other words, He hurt for her because she hurt. Is. 63:9 says of Israel, *In all their afflictions He was afflicted...* God feels all our feelings; Jesus is a High Priest who *is* touched with the feeling of our infirmities. When we hurt, He hurts. That needs to happen to us. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to control us in such a way as to allow us to be deeply touched by the pain they feel and to feel it as He does our own. Now being deeply touched means that:

a. we must let them react as they need to, not as we need them to Often times, we'll tell a hurting person to stop crying. Why? Because we can't bear it! Jesus did it here, but not for that reason; he was about to actually give her son back. We can't do that. We have to let the person express their hurt. Maybe they're angry and shouting "Why did God let this happen?!" And our need is to defend God and make them stop being blasphemous. But their need is just to express their anger, to let somebody know. The biggest part of reacting genuinely is:

b. we must listen to what they tell us, not hasten to tell them The last thing a person who has just buried their infant son needs is for you to rush over with an explanation of how God picks the choicest flowers to be in his own garden! They don't want an explanation; they want their little boy! Very often I'm lucky enough to be the first one on the scene after somebody dies. I've learned the best thing you can do for grieving people is to sit and listen, to put an arm around, to cry, and to pray when it's appropriate. You see, the real way we can help to heal this wound is:

2. we must go with them through their grieving process The Jews had a great sense of community. They mourned their dead together. The whole community was with this widow enroute to the grave. They went with her through her difficult hours. We must go *with* our bereaved friends and loved ones through their grieving process. That means:

a. we must share in their feelings and let them experience it Rom.12:15 says, *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* Mourn yourself. And mourn with them. Hug them. Cry with them. Talk about it with them as they want to talk about it. Mourning with them helps to carry their burden, to lighten their pain. Wounded feelings only heal through expression and as you enter into it together you can help in that healing process. Then:

b. we must provide practical help they need The framework of their life has fallen apart. They need help weaving a new one together. They may need help with funeral arrangements, insurances, doing the finances, getting a job, and a myriad of other things. They need somebody to lean on for a while to help them get their life arranged again. Be there for them in those practical ways. And then:

c. we must provide long-term companionship Typically we remember bereaved people for about a week after the funeral and then life goes back to normal for us, but for them there is a hole in their lives that won't go away. They're lonely. They need companionship to help fill that vacuum. Being deeply touched means being willing to be there as a long-term friend, someone who won't forget, but who will re-orient his own life to make time to include the hurting one.

These are the things that bring about healing. These and one thing more. I'd be remiss if we didn't examine in this passage the:

IV. A Message Of Hope For The Bereaved (14-15) Jesus did what you can't do. He took her hurt away once and for all by raising her son. But there's a spiritual message here for all of us when we face the wound of death:

1. there is victory ...Jesus touched the coffin Why? None of the other Jews would do that except those that carried it. Death was defiling. They were afraid of it. But not Jesus. He touched that bier as Lord. He was not afraid of death because He knew He had victory over it. So do we, "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" - 1 Cor. 15:55-57. Jesus paid for our sins at the cross. Death can't hold us. Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. To die is to be with Him and for our loved ones to die is for them to be with Him. Death cannot separate us from them forever because:

2. there is resurrection ...the dead man sat up Jesus said to the dead boy, "Arise!" Jesus also said, *a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out-- those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.* - John 5:28-29. The one you bury under the dirt will have that

body raised from the sleep of death. They will not just be a scary shadow or ghost. The cherished body you lay to rest will rise again at the last trumpet and be transformed like His glorious body. And listen to this:

3. there is reunion ...Jesus gave him back to his mother - 1 Thes. 4:13-14 tells us, *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.* And then it says we'll rise together with them to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we (all of us) ever be with the Lord. There's a reunion coming. Death is not final. We shall be with our loved ones who know Christ again.

And as time passes, the reality of that message, the reality of our faith, begins to gradually overshadow the emotional pain of grieving and our hurt gives way to joyous anticipation. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope. We have a firm hope and it turns our sorrow into joy. I'll never forget the words of one young widow standing by the casket of her husband in his 40s at a viewing. I walked up and made the usual idiotic comment that people make because they don't know what else to say, "He looks good, doesn't he?" And with the tears in her eyes, she said to me, "That's not Ray. I realized that the first thing when I walked in tonight and touched his body and it was cold. He's not there anymore. He's in heaven with the Lord." Oh, she had it right. She was grieving and sad and missed him like anything, but in her heart, she knew the hope on which their life was grounded, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it gave her comfort in the midst of her suffering. What a difference from, "When he dies, I'll just cover him up with dirt and forget I ever had him!" You can make that difference in the lives of the bereaved. You can help them get through the pain and bitterness and anger and gradually see the hope and find comfort. You can make that difference if, instead of avoiding the bereaved because it's awkward and emotional and you don't know what to say, you decide to put aside your own problems and allow yourself to feel their pain and go with them through their grieving process. I challenge you to do it as God puts wounded bereaved people into your path.

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke **Those Coming Out Of A Sinful Life - 7:36-50**

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

Of all the types of wounded, hurting people that Jesus cared for during His ministry, the most controversial is the type of person the general public calls a "sinner". He himself repeated what He was being called by others in verse 34 *...a friend of tax collectors and sinners*. What a thing to be known as, a friend of sinners. Not a title we'd seek, is it? But one which I think He was proud to bear. This was brought home in a very clear way one day quite unexpectedly as He was eating supper. Let's read the story in **Luke 7:36-50**. It must have been quite a scene. A woman came in quietly through the door. We don't know who she was and there is no reason to say she was Mary Magdalene as people commonly do, nor to confuse this woman early in his ministry with Mary who came and anointed His head shortly before His death. But everybody in the room knew who she was. She had a reputation in that town. She was known by all to be a "sinner". The term in this context can scarcely mean anything other than that she had a reputation for immorality. Perhaps she was a prostitute or at the least a woman who was known to be loose and easy or who switched partners with regularity. Perhaps she was someone who hung out in the taverns of that day or ran visibly with the wrong crowd. Whatever the case, her lifestyle had been one that was openly sinful. Even Jesus admitted that her sins were many! At any rate she came quietly and humbly through the door. When she saw Jesus reclining on a dining couch next to the table, she went and stood at his feet and instantly began to weep aloud, to cry like a child. The tears fell on His feet and she knelt down and wiped them dry, dust, dirt, and all, with her hair and began spontaneously to kiss them. At last, she took a small vial of perfume which she carried and broke its seal and poured it out on his feet. What a scene it must have been, surely one the guests had never seen the like of. But Jesus knew what they were thinking, "I wouldn't let that woman touch me. I know who she is. She's rotten and no good. What's she doing here? And why does Jesus let this travesty go on?" You know the type of person she was, or at least someone like her! They're all around you. You live near them. You work with them. I did. I worked for some years in a machine shop and almost every one of the guys there spent time in the bars after work and tried to pick up a woman for a fast and pleasurable sexual encounter. They come in varying degrees of polish; some are finely dressed and work in corporate offices; others look as seedy as their lives are. But whether you understand it or not, these are wounded, hurting people, people whose lives are full of pain. Now let's focus for a few moments on:

I. Understanding The Wound Of Those From A Sinful Lifestyle (36-38) Something had obviously happened in this woman's life. There is none of the arrogance and pride that often accompany such a lifestyle. She is broken and weeping, humble, obviously repentant in her heart. Now one of the things it will be really helpful to understand is:

1. the stages of people who have been ensnared by a sinful lifestyle You see, there are:

a. those who willfully continue in it They sin and don't care, or at least don't seem to. That's how this woman was at one time and probably had been for years. It's what got her her reputation. This kind of person who is involved in a lifestyle of practicing obvious sin might well be termed a **sinner** as the Pharisees did. It's easy to walk away and dissociate yourself from them, isn't it? But let me just jog your thinking on this one point. How did this woman get to be the kind of woman she was? Let's assume she was a prostitute for a minute. Do you think it was her goal and

life-dream from little on up? How did she get there? Well, maybe she was orphaned and left without parents and found no way to support herself. Or maybe her father died and her mother remarried and she was mistreated and ran away from home. Or maybe she was abused and treated shamefully by her parents and sought escape. Or maybe she was forced into it by someone to whom she owed money or who threatened or terrified her. What just happened in your mind? You began to pity her, didn't you? You see, sin ensnares people and takes them captive. A sinful lifestyle begins somewhere, either by being introduced to it or forced into it, but sin is a master. It controls you. People living a sinful lifestyle are bound; the Bible calls them slaves. And before you look too far down your nose, let me point out that the Bible says that that includes you too, even if you're the most goody-two-shoes that ever was! We all at one time in our lives were slaves to sin before we came to Christ! So, there should still be plenty of pity and compassion left in our hearts for sinners! Except for the grace of God there is no difference between us. Then there are:

b. those who want out and are struggling to let go of it Someone comes along and witnesses to this person. They read or hear or see the Gospel somewhere. The Spirit of God begins to work in their lives and they begin to wake up spiritually. They begin to realize the wrongness of the lifestyle they're involved in. And they begin to want to get out. But it's not easy. Sin is a snare and it doesn't unravel easily. Sometimes it holds onto you; there are relationships and associations that pressure and force you to continue. At the same time, you hold onto it! Because sin has become your known way of life and it's a real struggle to turn loose the things that have been so much a part of your life and the habits you've developed and give your life to Christ, no matter how much you want to. It's a struggle. Can you empathize with that at all? Was it hard for *you* to come to Christ? When a person gets to this stage, they could rightly be called a **seeker**. And then finally they come to Christ and give themselves to Him and they find themselves in a third category:

c. those who are out, but striving not to return to it They find the battle is not done. They have found Christ and found forgiveness, but they find they are still tempted to return to and practice the lifestyle they want so badly to leave. They want in their hearts to do the good and put away the evil, but they find themselves doing just the opposite because sin is still in their body and it is still trying to be their master. This is what I think this woman was, a **struggling saint**. She had determined before she ever came into the room that she loved Jesus and she wanted to show it, that she would no longer be "a woman who was a sinner", but I honestly don't believe she walked out of the room to never be tempted to that sinful life again. You see, nobody just gets up one day and walks out of sin and that's the end of it. You didn't either. But:

Today, I'm concerned primarily about how we care for seekers and struggling saints. They are wounded, hurting people, bruised reeds that we must be careful not to break. Just think about:

2. what has happened to them First:

a. they have undergone a serious change of heart We call it very lightly, conviction. But what is conviction? It means a turning upside down of life. Think of this woman. Everything she thought of positively, finding another man, making some money, taking care of herself, enjoying escaping through drunkenness, suddenly she sees it's all wrong and bad! Everything she has devoted her time and energy to in life is all wrong. Her life is suddenly a waste, indeed a travesty! She, who might have with pride lured in a man, now sees herself for what she really is before God. And she is devastated. She can only wail and cry with sorrow over her life. Now, on top of that, this person:

b. they have lost their usual means of coping with life In their sinful lifestyle they had a whole set of rules and props which they used. If they wanted to escape pain, they got drunk. If they had a problem and needed money, they'd steal it. If they were in trouble, they'd lie their way out of it. But those things are all off limits. Their coping mechanisms are all pulled out from under them. This woman had to find honest work and start to live in brand new ways she had never lived in before. And what makes it worse:

c. they have no one to support them You see how popular she was, how many were just waiting with open arms to say, "Welcome sister, come on in!" Before, their support came from people who were like them. Now, those people would only jeer at them for trying to leave that life. But there are so very few on the other side of the fence extending a hand. Good people, even Christian people have a hard time with "a woman who was a sinner!" So, they are left alone with no one turn to. And here's:

3. the array of feelings they may experience First, they have a load of:

a. guilt and regret before God The Holy Spirit has done his work. They see their sins which are many and they feel guilty. Oh, how they wish they hadn't spent their lives the way they did. How they wish they'd said no. They're filled with sorrow. This woman's tears were the sign of her remorse. She wept aloud at the sin she'd committed and how wrong she'd been. People like her need not only to academically know about forgiveness, **they need to experience forgiveness** from God. They need to know the slate is wiped clean. But they also feel:

b. shame before people Imagine her walking into this Pharisee's home. She knew every eye was on her, that every one of these people knew all that she had done and despised her for it. She was full of shame. Everybody else in the room was "better than she was". Oh, people coming out of sin, **they need to experience acceptance** from people. They need to know that people are willing to wipe the slate clean too and let them start over. Then they feel:

c. unworthiness John the Baptist, holy man that he was, felt this in Jesus' presence. "I am not worthy to untie His shoes..." This woman would not even speak to him, would not presume to move closer to anoint his head as was the custom. She had already come to love Him; He said so. But she felt so unworthy even to touch the hem of his garment, fit only to kiss his feet. People like her, **they need to comprehend their identity**. They have become something brand new! They have been made worthy in Christ. And finally, they feel:

d. fear I bet she was afraid to come in. Those Pharisees might have picked up stones. Coming out of sin always has its consequences. She was probably afraid to let go of the life she knew. She may have been afraid to come to Jesus for fear that He might turn her away, though she didn't think so. People coming out are afraid and the antidote for it is this, **they need to experience love**. Perfect love casts out fear and the more complete and full the love, the more completely the fear goes. Most people coming from a sinful life have never been loved with an unconditional sacrificial love. And they need to experience it from you. So, let's consider:

II. Our Reaction To Those From A Sinful Lifestyle Oh, the Pharisees had one instantly:

1. the Pharisaic reaction ...don't touch me! (39) We've all reacted that way to somebody, haven't we? "This person, whether they've already come to Christ or are only seeking, is a sinner and I don't want anything to do with them!" We may not have said it, but we've felt it in our hearts! It's the way our sanctified Christianized form of flesh reacts to people who wear black leather and have tattoos and long hair when they want to come to church! First, this mindset:

a. denies that a person can change - it categorizes people Once a sinner, always a sinner. She's lived a sinful life; she always will. And it lumps people in all the stages we mentioned earlier into the same category. Whether they want out or not, or whether they are already out like this woman, but have been struggling not to fall back in, they are all the same, sinners, not righteous like me. And that's not fair. The very heart of Christianity says that Christ can and does change people! But it also:

b. places change before acceptance - it demands performance "I'll accept you when you're completely like me for a long time! I'll accept you after you perform awhile, after you prove yourself. Change first and then I'll care for you!" But without caring, people don't change! You see, it:

c. offers no help to change - it withdraws self-centeredly The Pharisee in me would rather protect myself so I don't get hurt or defiled than lend a hand to the other who needs help to get out of the sin that has enslaved them. It would rather pass by on the other side than pick the wounded man up out of the ditch. In essence, it says, "Go pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. You should be able to do it." And how many times I've seen it or even felt it myself. But oh, how different Jesus was:

2. the Christlike reaction (47-50) First:

a. He accepted her actions as genuine After the whole scene, wailing and all, He didn't even speak to the woman at first. He read Simon's mind and said to him, **...she loved [Me] much**. He let her touch him, let her kiss his feet, let her anoint him. He saw in her a genuine love for Him and a sorrow for her sins. When someone is repentant, when they say they want to turn to Christ and away from their sins, our first job is to believe them and accept it as true and be ready to let them come into our lives. When they say they have trusted in Him and they love Him, we are not to doubt them and reject them every time they fail or fall into sin. This person needs desperately to know that you will not turn them away, that you will care, that you will not reject them the way everybody else has. It may be that nobody in all their life has ever genuinely loved them. But Christ does and you must. Then:

b. He assured her of forgiveness He declared, **...your sins are forgiven**. Now she pretty well already knew she would be forgiven or she wouldn't have risked coming there. In fact, from the little story Jesus told, the point is that her great love grew out of being greatly forgiven. She knew or at least knew about forgiveness before she came; that produced her great love for Him. But He reassured her of it. And that's what people who come out of a sinful lifestyle need. Satan is the accuser and even after you come to Christ and find forgiveness, he is constantly trying to re-accuse you to yourself, to bring your sins up all over again and rub your nose in them. And people don't help either. It is so hard for us to forget people's past and let it go. Our minds work like that Pharisee's did; we tend to categorize people and see them as sinners still after they have found forgiveness. Instead, we need to be reassuring them over and over and over that their sins are gone, removed as far as the east is from the west. They are remembered no more. And beyond that:

c. He helped her gain a new identity He said, *...your faith has saved you*. You are not who you were. By trusting in me, you have been delivered once and for all. It is finished and completed. You are saved. You may still be tempted to sin, but you are now a saint who is tempted to sin, no longer a sinner trying not to. And there is a big difference! Identity. Who you are and knowing it, affects every area of how you live. A person coming out of a sinful lifestyle needs to know that. And you can share it with them and reinforce it for them, instead of still seeing them as they used to be. And then:

d. He removed all her fears He said simply, *...go in peace*. There was no ultimatum, no stern warning, no list of rules to create that fear that she might fall again. He simply bid her to go on her journey of life in peace, knowing that all was well between them. And we can help people coming out of this background to have peace. We can encourage them that in Jesus there is victory and they need not fear. The struggle they know now will get better and ultimately Jesus will give them victory. We can be living examples of it by sharing openly and honestly with them our own journey. After all, we were all sinners and Christ did it for us.

It's time to close but just in case there's anyone here who finds themselves in the place of this woman either a seeker or a struggling saint, let me just point out that in this story there is a wonderful:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those From A Sinful Lifestyle It is three-fold:

- 1. Christ accepts you when you come to Him - *you are welcome***
- 2. Christ changes you when you come to Him - *you are not who you were***
- 3. Christ will free you as you learn to live in Him - *you can have victory***

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the famous 19th century Russian novelist, was sentenced to death by firing squad as a young man for his radical political views. As the rifles were being aimed, the order to halt came and the sentence was commuted to 10 years in a Siberian labor camp. Upon his arrival a woman slipped a New Testament into his hand when the guard wasn't looking. There in a bare board building with 3 inches of ice on the windows and an inch of filth on the floor, Dostoyevsky discovered the parable of the prodigal son. He saw in that camp the pigsty and himself the son and the truth of God's love and willingness to pardon gripped his soul. Years later, on his deathbed, his daughter describes it thus: "He made us come into the room and taking our little hands in his, he begged my mother to read the parable of the prodigal son. He listened with his eyes closed, absorbed in his thoughts. 'My children', he said in his feeble voice, 'never forget what you have just heard. Have absolute faith in God and never despair of His pardon. I love you dearly, but my love is nothing compared with the love of God. Even if you should be so unhappy as to commit some dreadful crime, never despair of God. You are His children; humble yourselves before Him as before your father; implore His pardon, and He will rejoice over your repentance, as the father rejoiced over that of the prodigal son.'" My friend, Jesus has His arms open wide for you. He wants you, no matter what has been in your life in the past. Come to Him. Bask in His love. And go on your way in peace. Your faith has saved you.

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke The Controlled - 8:26-37

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

Jesus said about His own ministry that His commission was to proclaim freedom or release for the prisoners, the captives, literally those taken captive by the spear. In those days when there was a war, the losers were often carried off as slaves and had to live under the oppressive control of their new masters. Certainly, there are those who are physical captives but 2 Tim. 2:26 mentions those that Satan has ensnared and taken captive at his will. Around us in life are people who are wounded and hurting. Some are helpless; some are bereaved; some are caught up in a sinful lifestyle. But some are captives who are under the control of forces which have grabbed hold of their lives and they live a life of slavery to those forces. But Jesus came to set them free. One of the most dynamic illustrations of this is found in the familiar story of Jesus' brief stop at Gerasa where he freed a man enslaved by a legion of demons, **Luke 8:26-39**. Usually when we study this story, we make much over the demons and the pigs and perhaps the ungrateful townspeople who sent Jesus away. I want to make much over the man, because I believe Jesus did. Here is a man whose life was absolutely controlled. Now what does that mean?

I. Understanding The Plight Of Those Who Are Controlled Let me give you:

- 1. the definition of control: the loss of ability to choose one's thoughts and actions and the assuming of that ability by an outside power** When the natural God-given ability to choose your own thoughts or actions is taken away from you and some other thing or person makes your choices for you and forces you to carry them out, you are controlled. You are possessed, if you will, a puppet, and living a life of slavery. Now a person can be taken captive and controlled by many things:

2. the sources of control He can be subject, as this man was, to:

a. demonization I call it that because that is what the New Testament Greek calls it. We argue in English about demon possession versus oppression, but the Bible says a person was *demonized*, that demons had gained entrance to him and control over him. Now let me just say that this is not some myth; demons are real spiritual beings, as real as the angels or as God Himself. And they did not go away after Bible times. They are still real and still controlling people even today. Cases of demon control abound on the mission field where people have given themselves to worship idols and spirits. It has been reported all over the world from Africa to China to Islamic culture in the Middle East. For example, I saw a National Geographic special a few years ago where at a particular shrine in Haiti people came to seek to be entered by a loa or spirit and they would lose all consciousness and writhe out of control, sometimes for days. It occurs here in the USA where people are involved in Satanic worship and the occult. It is real and it is ugly. The demon takes over control of the person's consciousness for periods of time, sometimes short, sometimes, like this man, continually. It uses his body to move and speak and act and tortures him in the process. I would dare to say it is more common than you think. But in this case, control is assumed by an actual spiritual being which enters the person. Yet control can also come through:

b. mental manipulation Did you ever hear of brainwashing, where another person can assume control of your mind? It happens. Remember Jim Jones and the hundreds who followed him to Guyana only to die a suicidal death at his command in the jungle? Remember Waco Texas where again people came under the absolute control of a false prophet who manipulated every aspect of their lives and their deaths. All the cults use it to some degree or another, programming minds so that the person's ability to think and choose for themselves is taken away. And it doesn't only happen there. It happens in families where sick parents bind the minds of their children into believing terrible things or a wicked husband will control his wife until she becomes a robot to do his will. There are controlling people and controlled people around us! And some are controlled by:

c. chemical addictions Instead of a demon invading their body, it is alcohol or an addictive drug, a narcotic, or even a prescription drug like valium. They begin by enjoying what the chemical does for them, but something happens in their bodies and the chemical takes control and causes their bodies to crave more of it. It modifies their behavior and removes their ability to think until they only live for the chemical, until their very lives are controlled by the drive for and the effects of the chemical. Some, of course, are more controlled than others but you don't have to look far to find people controlled this way. And then some are controlled by:

d. compulsive behaviors Chemicals are not the only things that can be addictive. Some people become addicted, for instance, to gambling to where they cannot control their drive to gamble. For others it may be eating or the opposite, controlling their body weight, people we would say have anorexia or bulimia, sometimes so severely they will kill themselves by it. Then there are sexual addictions of various sorts. All of these are behaviors which the person engages in at first which then turn around and take over control of the person, remove their freedom of thought and their choice of behavior.

There are controlled people around you in your life! You may not see very many demonized people, but this passage has something to say to far more than demonized people. It says something to all who are controlled! And, by the way, not all controlled people are unsaved people. Many are. But even genuine children of God can get into a place where they are trapped in the controlling influence of other people or in compulsive behaviors or even in addictions. Many of God's own children who are part of His Church, even this church, need to be set free from some of these things, as well as the unsaved people all around you daily who are controlled. Now let's mention:

3. some symptoms of control Not all controlled persons will have all these symptoms nor will all have them to the same degree. But this guy had them all and bad! First, the person may have:

a. inability to function normally (27b) This guy hadn't worn clothes or even lived in a house. He had abandoned all normal routines. Controlled people can't hold it together. Often their marriages fall apart. They may lose their jobs because of inability to function. Many times, they end up in financial trouble. Sometimes the inability to function is total and complete, sometimes only partial. Then, controlled people often have:

b. anti-social tendencies - Mk. 5:5 says *Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones*. He lived out in the wilderness, in the hills in caves where often the poor buried their dead. He withdrew from people. Often, controlled people do that. They may become loners, draw into a shell of their own. They may drop out of friendships and relationships they've had, or begin to be only around other controlled people like themselves. Then they may display:

c. self-destructive behavior - Mk. 5:5 says he would cry out and the Greek means to cry out harshly, to scream or holler in anguish and he would cut himself. He would try to hurt himself, whether because the demons made him for their own pleasure, or because in moments of coherence, he couldn't stand living this way anymore. Controlled

people are often self-destructive; they don't like themselves and the way they live and so try to hurt themselves or even to end their lives. And sometimes controlled people display:

d. violent behavior (29) - Mt. 8:28 says he was so violent that no one could pass that way. On a news show the other night I saw little kids living on the street in Brazil and their chief pastime was sniffing nail polish and how violent they became toward each other and passers-by. People controlled by the wrong thing can lose all regard for others and become dangerous and violent!

These are just a few of the things which controlled people may display. And they come in different degrees. Some people are totally controlled, while others are only marginally controlled. But remember, at this point, they can't help it. Though it may or may not have been choices they made which got them into this bondage, at this stage some other force has taken them over and they no longer have freedom to reason it out or to choose whether they want to act that way. But what's more important is:

II. Our Reaction To Those Who Are Controlled More than likely, when we know someone who is controlled, we usually display one of several:

1. normal unproductive reactions

a. we may try to control the controlled person (29) The townspeople there did. They chained him up and guarded him. They tried to exercise greater control to defeat the control already there. And sometimes that has to be done for the person's own good and the protection of other people. But in this man's case it didn't work physically. And it never works spiritually. It is not enough to tell the person to stop acting that way. They can't. They're controlled. It is not enough to try to force them to change, to physically keep them from the alcohol or drugs or kidnap them from the cult or make them eat when they refuse. That's just an additional bondage. They need freedom on the inside. Or:

b. we may be afraid of the controlled person (35) These people were afraid to go near him when he lived in the tombs; now they were still afraid of him and of the One who had such power as to change him, even after he was clothed and sitting in his right mind! Oftentimes our reaction to people like this is fear, fear for ourselves and how we might be affected and so:

c. we may try to avoid the controlled person - Mt. 8:28 They just didn't go near him. We do the same. We recognize the forces at work in them and we just stay away, avoid them, work them out of our lives. Even those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ and desperately need our help to be free! But I want you to notice:

2. Jesus' caring for the controlled person Controlled people are people too. They are people in deep trouble, people who need rescued, people who need someone to set them free. Let me just point out two things:

a. the deliberateness of His choice to go help him (22) If you check the context, you'll find that this was one of the busiest days in Jesus' life. He taught all day. He was opposed by his enemies. As evening approached, He was tired, so tired that as they sailed across the lake of Galilee, He fell into such a dead sleep that even a severe storm didn't wake Him! Yet it was He in verse 22 who chose to say, "Let's go over to the other side!" What for? It was still night when He set foot on shore and was met by the demoniac. By morning He was sent away and left and never went back. There was no ministry, no teaching at Gergesa. There were no crowds and no converts. Just an overnight stop with a 5 1/2 mile trip by rowboat in each direction. Why did He say, "Let's go over!"? It seems obvious to me: He cared about one demonized man living a life of torture among the tombs and came to set him free! He knew all things! And I believe He deliberately chose to go, just to set him free. And then notice:

b. the urgency of His command to free him (29) Evidently the first thing Jesus had said upon meeting the man was, "Come out of him". The whole dialog with the demons begging not to be sent to the Abyss but to be allowed to go into the pigs, came afterwards. Jesus in no uncertain terms told them He wanted the man free! And when they begged to go into the swine, Matthew says Jesus' response was simply the imperative, "GO!"

Jesus cared about that man and wanted him free. it was what He came for. He was touched by a human being created in God's image reduced to such a sorry state of misery and wanted him out of it as soon as possible. So how should we react to a person like this?

3. our caring for the controlled person

a. we must understand the pain and damage being done to the person This person, whether it's through a demon, a controlling person, a chemical, or a compulsive behavior, is being hurt, damaged, perhaps tortured, forced to do things they have no control over. They are reduced to a state of slavery and like Jesus we must make a deliberate choice to care about them and their pain and to want to see them free. We must get an urgency which says, "This must stop and it must stop now!" Being afraid, avoiding them or trying to force them into right behavior is simply looking out for ourselves. God grant us the depth of the love of Jesus Christ who died for a race enslaved to sin to set us free! First, we must care enough to be involved. Then:

b. we must believe Jesus can set them free - Mt. 17:19-20 tells of another demonized person where the disciples had tried unsuccessfully to drive the demon out. *Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."* They didn't really believe Jesus could set him free down deep and with all their hearts. They tried it to see if it would work and when it didn't work immediately, they abandoned the case as a failure and complained! So many times, we make some feeble effort at helping someone like this and it doesn't work and we give up and write them off. But let me remind you, with God nothing is impossible. If a demoniac who comes to Jesus can be found clothed and sitting in his right mind, then so can anyone you care about who will come to Him, first for salvation, and then as a believer to draw upon the resources of His power. You must believe that; the controlled person can't believe it for themselves. It must start with you. Consequently:

c. we must commit ourselves to pray for deliverance On that same occasion, **Mk. 9:28-29** says, *After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer (some manuscripts add "and fasting")."* The implication was they could have, but it would have taken tenacious believing and commitment to a long siege of praying for the demonized boy. There are seldom any quick and easy deliverances for controlled people. Often it requires weeks, months, and even years of believing prayer. It's a long haul. There no easy answers, no quick fixes. And you're not going to stick with it and keep believing and praying if you don't genuinely love and care about the person.

Controlled people are wounded, hurting people. They need Jesus' power in their lives and they need you to believe for them and pray for their deliverance and to do everything you can to help them come to Him. Will you care enough to do it? And listen, just in case there is someone here this morning who is struggling under the control of something in your life, whether it be an addiction or a way of thinking forced on you by your past or a compulsive behavior you're trapped in, this text leaves you:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Who Are Controlled

1. Jesus wants to set you free He came to set the captives free, to proclaim deliverance, liberty for you. He wants you to be free from all that controls you so that you can choose freely to give your life to Him and, with your own will, allow Him to live through you and make your life one of love and joy and peace. He didn't make you to be this way; He didn't save you to be this way. He wants you free. And:

2. Jesus can set you free If Jesus had power to free a Galilean demoniac from a legion of demons, then He has power to set you free from whatever is controlling your life. Even if you can't imagine being free, the truth still is that nothing is impossible with Jesus. His power can break the deepest bondage. Come to Him. Get help to come to Him. Find someone who can lead you deeply into the knowledge of Him. Gal. 5:1 says, *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.* Believe it and seek help. And then know this:

3. Jesus wants to use you after you're free (38-39) Jesus told the man to go home and tell others how he'd been set free, so they could be set free. Jesus has a ministry for you. He has other captives who must be set free and you just might be His means to do it!

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke The Chronically Ill - 8:42-48

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

The battlefield of life that we're passing through contains casualties of many kinds, wounded people with all types of wounds. One of the most common wounds that people bear in life is sickness. There's not a person in this room who hasn't experienced it from time to time. For many of us, there has been at least a time or two when we felt so sick we wanted to die or thought we would, but we got better eventually. That's how sickness works many times. But what about those who never get better and who are never going to get better, the chronically ill. Some of them may be terminally ill, dying, but we'll save the concept of facing death for a special message all its own later. Today I'd like to think about those who face life, life with an illness or a handicap that will never get better, those who face months and months and years and years of dealing with something that won't go away. Jesus met a woman like that. It was unintentional. He was on His way to Jairus' house. Jairus' little daughter lay dying and He was hurrying there to raise her from the dead. She was a bystander in the crowd around him and this is what happened, **Luke 8:42b-48**. The scene lasted only moments; the record is brief; the woman is nameless. But she stands for a whole class of people who suffer the pain of chronic illness and her interaction with Jesus is both a challenge to us and a message of hope for those who suffer. First, let's give ourselves to:

I. Understanding The Wound Of Those Who Are Chronically Ill Let's try to imagine from the brief record we have and what we know of life then and now, what this woman's life was like and indeed some of the things that all chronic sufferers may have experienced:

1. what they may have experienced (43) - Mk. 5:25-26, Lk. 8:43 This woman had what we assume was some kind of gynecological problem where she experienced perpetual bleeding. So, the first thing she definitely experienced was:

a. the shame of uncleanness Listen to Lev.15:25-27, *When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. Whoever touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.* To her culture, this woman was unclean. Nobody could touch her without becoming ceremonially unclean. She couldn't go to anybody's house and sit down or invite people to her own or they'd be unclean. By rights, she couldn't even rub shoulders in a crowd. Even though it appears she was still functional and earning a living; in her culture she bore the shame and stigma of uncleanness almost like a leper. While our culture does not treat sick people the same way, they may still experience a great deal of shame. Depending on what they have, people may still be afraid to touch them or get close to them. Their illness may have rendered them awkward in movements or slurred in speech or treatments may have caused hair loss. No matter how you educate, there is still shame to be felt in not being normal, not being like everybody else, at a body that is not whole like others'. And then on top of that, comes the special shame that the more seriously sick people get to endure, where others have to examine their bodies and bathe them and help them go to the bathroom. It's humiliating and a person often feels ashamed of themselves. Then this woman surely knew:

b. the frustration of weakness She sustained blood loss over an extended time. And more than just a little or she wouldn't have gone to such great lengths to cure it. Blood loss means weakness, tiredness, fatigue. It means not being able to do as much and having to rest. And that's frustrating when it drags on awhile. Chronically sick people often can't do what they used to, can't work, can't do the housework, can't stand up long or walk far, can't get out to things. You know what I mean, don't you? Then, we're told this woman knew:

c. the misery of treatment Mark 5:26 says, *She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors...* My apologies to any doctors and nurses present, but somehow, I sense that some of you can relate to that. In many cases the treatment for illness causes as much pain or damage as the illness itself! Especially in those days. One leaf of the Jewish Talmud lists 11 remedies for this malady. 6 of them we would call ointments to put on or elixirs to drink and the rest pure superstition, for example, *the ashes of an ostrich egg carried in summer in a linen, in winter in a cotton rag, or a barleycorn found in the dung of a white female donkey!* [Edersheim] How'd you like a prescription like that! Oh, we're much more scientific now, but sick people now endure tests upon tests, needles upon needles, enemas, X rays, not to mention radiation and chemotherapy. And for chronically ill people the round never ends. And what's worse this woman knew:

d. the dashing of expectations For all her attempts and all her doctors, no one could heal her. Mark says, *instead of getting better, she grew worse.* You know what that is. She went to the first and he told her, "This will do it" and her hopes were high but it didn't. Then the second told her that, but it failed again, then the third and so on every year. And little by little hope died. Chronically ill people have suffered the loss of hope. They have to resign themselves to the fact of their continued illness, but usually it only comes through having hopes dashed time after time. And if all that were not bad enough, this woman suffered through her illness:

e. the drain of finances Mark says, *She had spent all she had;* in the margin Luke says, *all her living* in the Greek. She had spent any and all savings she had long already and she had even spent the money she needed to live on. She couldn't eat because of her medical bills! Sound familiar. The whole medical industry, as you know, has gone sky-high with charges. But it seems as though it was so then too. What a shame that the people who can earn the least have to spend the most!

Now please understand, I'm not knocking medicine, nor the many fine doctors and nurses that we entrust our care and our lives to. I'm just pointing out that people who are constantly sick may have had to face a whole round of continuing terrible experiences that the rest of us have managed to avoid for the most part. And because of that, we need to think about:

2. how they may feel They may react in different ways. Like this woman, some of them:

a. they may have a poor view of themselves They may feel ashamed, useless, good-for-nothing. They may feel unclean and shameful. They may come to hate themselves or their own bodies for being the way they are. They may blame themselves or even become suicidal. Or they may go another route:

b. they may be deeply angry They may be angry at the doctors for not curing them or for hurting them further. They may be angry at their circumstances and at life in general. They may be angry at God and blame Him for not

healing them. Some sick people become angry people, and they have a lot of good reason for it. And then some may simply:

c. they may feel despair, give up all hope and fall into depression or become morbid and cynical. They may give up on life and just go on in a miserable drone-like existence.

The sick people around us have had all kinds of experiences that have wounded them and they may have reacted in all kinds of different ways to those experiences. But what's more important is:

II. Our Reaction To Those Who Are Chronically Ill There are:

1. some common wrong reactions which we should avoid First:

a. we may easily ignore and forget them I'm sure that's what society did to this woman 12 years ago. When she became sick and therefore unclean and therefore much more homebound, one by one her friends probably went on with their own lives and gradually forgot to visit, forgot to help, and finally forgot to care. Out of sight IS often out of mind. And what's worse, it's out of heart! A person has an emergency and lands in the hospital and everybody is right there to visit. If the stay lasts a month visitors dwindle off considerably and if it turns into a nursing home care situation, it becomes usually your spouse and maybe one or two of your children! Often times chronically ill people suffer their burdens pretty much alone! We ignore and forget unintentionally; we get too busy. But then:

b. we may give up on them deliberately. We may say, "I can't take any more of this; it's too much for me to handle." and walk out of their lives on purpose, either because we can't stand to see them suffer or because we just can't bring ourselves to continue to invest the effort that is needed to visit and to help and to care for them. So, we walk out. Or instead of walking out, we may stay and:

c. we may become bitter under the burden of caring for them We may be the care-giver for a chronically ill person. Some of you know what that's like. And we're committed to it. We start out being loving and compassionate, but gradually it becomes an awful lot of work and it keeps us from a lot of things. We find ourselves trapped and imprisoned under a burden which is only getting heavier and that makes us angry and we turn it toward the person and blame them and become bitter in our hearts and sour in our dispositions. It happens!

None of these reactions is good, none is helpful, and none considers the hurt of the sick person. We must be careful to avoid them. Rather, let's look at:

2. Jesus' reaction which we should imitate (45-48) Notice carefully a few things Jesus did. First:

a. He knew her and her need and her faith - Mk. 5:30-32 says, *At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, "Who touched me?" But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.* This is one of those places the NIV doesn't do justice to the Greek which says *to see **her** who had done it; the NAS says to see **the woman** who had done it!* He wasn't looking for *who*; He was looking for *her*! He already knew who had touched Him and why she had touched Him and what had happened when she touched Him. She had shrunk back into the crowd immediately to hide. He couldn't see her so He looked for her. He sought her out. Why? He was in a hurry. A child was dying; actually, she had just died, as we find out in a verse or two. Yet He stopped to look for this woman. Why? Because He didn't want her to slink away in the crowd, always wondering if she had stolen a blessing that He didn't want her to have. He didn't want her to leave without knowing that He knew about her and He cared about her and the agony she'd been through. And that's where we start imitating Him. We need to stop in the middle of the busyness of our lives and take time to reach out and touch those of our friends and loved ones who are chronically ill. We need to give them some time and let them know that we know they are hurting and that we care. They need to become in our own minds real people, wounded, hurting people who need us, instead of burdens to bear or objects to forget. Then:

b. He encouraged her to declare her faith in Him That's why He asked, "Who touched Me?" He already knew and He knew the great faith she had in Him, that if she would but touch the hem of His garment, she would be healed. But He wanted her to come forward openly and share that faith with the unbelieving crowd. He wanted her illness and her faith and His power to become an opportunity to touch the lives of others. We who are physically whole can encourage our ill friends who are not getting any better to let their illness be a means of declaring the glory of God. I think of so many of our dear saints here who have radiated God's glory in hospital rooms to nurses and doctors. I think of dear Charles Modricker and how he used to ask God for opportunities to share in the midst of suffering himself for years with kidney problems and dialysis. We can help them to see what their circumstances might otherwise blind them to, that they are valuable and that God can use their illness to serve Him.

c. He comforted her with His manner He called her not "Lady..." or "Ma'am" but "Daughter". I'm sure she didn't know whether He was angry or upset. But His first word brought her comfort... *Daughter*, "My child", "My Dear," would carry similar impact in English. It conveyed love and affection. Matthew mentions that His next words were *Be of good cheer* or *Take heart*. That is, don't worry; don't be afraid. She was on her knees and trembling before

Him. But His manner toward her was kind and gentle and reassuring. Chronically ill people often are people who live with fear, the fear of what's going to happen to them, the fear of people deserting them, the fear of what they may yet have to endure. We can be God's means of comfort for those who are in affliction by the words we speak and the hug we give, the reassuring touch. Then:

d. He commended her faith He made note of it and the wonderful work it had done in bringing her healing. Sick people don't get a lot of pats on the back, a lot of commendation. Many of them are brave souls who fight a battle every day and who trust God moment by moment for strength and endurance. They are valiant warriors fighting a losing battle with their bodies, but hopefully are triumphing over their illness and growing spiritually. They need reinforcement. They need us to commend them. They need us to marvel at them and envy their close walk with the Lord. And finally:

e. He reinforced her hope *You are whole; go in peace.* And Mark adds, *be freed from your suffering.* From the moment she touched His hem, she believed she was healed. She felt it inside herself. But she had bled for 12 years without hope. At the moment, her whole hope hung on what she had told herself what would happen and on what she felt inwardly in that moment. Now she had Jesus' word, *you are whole; you are free; it's real!* Every sick person who knows Christ has a future hope that is real. They will be healed; they will be free. God has guaranteed them a brand new body which will not know any suffering or limitations. They will be made every whit whole. We all will. We should not give them false hope, that if they just have enough faith they will be healed right here and now. That's just not true. Not everyone who is able to convince themselves, "if I can just touch the hem of His garment, I'll be healed" is going to get healed. But every one of us *will* get healed! We will be made whole when we see Jesus one day and, as it were, touch the hem of His garment in person. That gets hard to remember and hard to believe after months and years of pain and difficulty. We need to reinforce their hope, help them to fix their eyes on what will be one day, believe together with them that one day Jesus will give them what they've longed after for years, a new body without pain.

Oh, chronically ill people need us. They need our compassion and our kindness and our encouragement and our reinforcement. They've suffered so much already. Let's care for them as Jesus did. And in case you may be like this woman, a person who has a sickness or a handicap that just doesn't get better, there is in this story:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Who Are Chronically Ill

1. Jesus knows your situation just like He did hers! He hasn't forgotten you. Does He care? *Oh, yes He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with your grief!* and:

2. Jesus wants you to trust Him in your situation He wants you to have faith, not that He's going to make you well, but faith in Him, trust that He's going to be with you and be your strength in the midst of weakness, that His grace is sufficient, that it is enough for you, that it is all you need to make it through even cancer or heart disease or paralysis or stroke. Trust Him and know this:

3. your faith in Him will ultimately make you whole Joni Eareckson Tada became a quadriplegic as a teenager in a diving accident. She writes, *God became incredibly close to me. I felt myself being transformed by the persistent love of my friends and family. And eventually I began to understand that, yes, God too loved me. Few of us have the luxury — it took me forever to think of it as that — to come to ground zero with God. Before the accident, my questions had always been, "How will God fit into this situation? How will he affect my dating life? My career plans? The things I enjoy?" Many of those options were now gone. I had only a helpless body, and God. Maybe that's the kind of state the mystics strive for; I got mine unwillingly. I had no other identity but God, and gradually he became enough. I became overwhelmed with the phenomenal possibility of a personal God, the same God who created the universe, living in my life. Perhaps he could make me attractive and worthwhile. I knew I could not do it without him. The first months, even years, I was obsessed with the question of what God was trying to teach me. Secretly, I probably hoped that by figuring out God's ideas, I could learn my lesson and then he'd heal me. I suppose every Christian with a similar experience goes back to the book of Job for answers. Here was a righteous man who suffered more than even I could imagine. But strangely, I could not find answers to the "Why?" of tragedies anywhere in the book of Job. What I found was that Job clung to God regardless, and God rewarded him. "Is that what God wants?" I wondered. My focus changed from demanding an explanation from God to humbly depending on him. Okay, I am paralyzed. It's terrible. I don't like it. But can God still use me, paralyzed? Can I, paralyzed, still worship God and love him? He began to teach me that I could. Maybe God's gift to me is dependence. I will never reach a place of self-sufficiency that crowds God out. I am aware of his grace every moment. My need for help is obvious every day when I wake up, flat on my back, waiting for someone to come dress me. I can't even comb my hair or blow my nose alone! But I do have friends who care. I have the beauty of the scenery I paint. I can even support myself financially — the dream of every disabled person. Peace is internal, and God has lavished me with that peace. There's one more thing. I have hope for the future now. The Bible speaks of our bodies being "glorified" in heaven. In high school that always seemed a hazy, foreign concept to me. But I now realize that I will be healed. I haven't been cheated out of being a complete person — I'm just going through a forty- or fifty-year delay, and God stays with me even through that. I now know the meaning of being "glorified." It's the*

time, after my death here, when I'll be on my feet dancing. ["Where is God When It Hurts" p. 129-30]. My friend, you'll be on your feet dancing too! Your trust in Christ guarantees it. Be encouraged and wait patiently. He will not forget!

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke

The Hungry - 9:10-17

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

Jesus said openly that He had come as Messiah to preach good news to a whole class of wounded hurting people, the poor. There are two words in the Greek New Testament translated *poor*. The first means to live from hand to mouth, to have so little as to survive today on what you earn today. The second and more common word is derived from the root which means *to beg*. It means to not have enough to live on and so be reduced to having to ask others for help. In the culture in which Jesus lived, both types of poor people were everywhere. There were plenty of people who had only barely enough and also a good many who didn't have anything. And they are still everywhere today in our world too. And Jesus came to bring good news to them. Now, poor people are hungry people, people with a great and growing desire for what they don't have and can't get, for food, for shelter, for the basic necessities of life. There was a particular incident in Jesus' ministry where Jesus dealt with hungry people which is so helpful to us in this regard, **Luke 9:10-17**. This happening was so important in the minds of the disciples that it is the first event recorded by all four Gospels. About 5,000 men plus many of their wives and children, maybe 10 or 15,000 people had followed Jesus on foot about five miles from Capernaum to Bethsaida on the northeast shore of Galilee where he had gone by boat. They had to go out of the way a mile or two north to ford the Jordan River. They were tired, but they sat all day and listened to Jesus until late afternoon as evening approached. They had brought nothing with them. Most were poor to one degree or another and probably had little to bring with them. One little boy had brought a lunch, five loaves of bread Jewish bread was a flat, round loaf about as thick as your thumb. And it was barley bread according to John, not wheat, the poorest, coarsest variety. And with it, he had two little fishes, like our sardines or anchovies, to be eaten whole to give flavor to the bread! It was a poor child's lunch and the rest didn't even have that. They were hungry people. Now in:

I. Understanding The Wound Of Those Who Are Hungry, let's think carefully about:

1. the types of hungry people These people were hungry in more than one way and for more than one reason. And the hungry people around you in life probably fall into one of three categories:

a. those who are spiritually hungry: *the lost* - **Mk. 6:34** says about this mass of people, *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.* They were spiritually hungry. They were like lost sheep who didn't know where to find pasture and water and were bleating for a shepherd to lead them. They were spiritually lost. They had no peace, no joy, no security, no personal knowledge of God and were seeking Jesus to drink in His words. Around you, my friend, every day there are people who may have a Rolls Royce in the driveway but are spiritually hungry, impoverished in their souls, sheep with no one to lead them to the truth which will satisfy their longings. Then there are:

b. those who are momentarily hungry: *the lacking* That's what most of these people were. They were caught in an emergency situation that they didn't expect to be in and so were not prepared. Many of them were not hungry every day, but today they were, because they were lacking what was needed at the moment. There are lots of people, and indeed many of us, who are like that. We get laid off, we have a sudden bill, we get injured and suddenly we don't have enough to pay the rent, the bills, to put food on the table. We meet people like this, people in trouble, stranded, stuck without what they need. But the saddest of the lot are:

c. those who are chronically hungry: *the impoverished*, those who live constantly without what they need. They never have enough to eat, never have their most basic needs met. They live in poverty, begging, sorting through trash for leftover scraps, some of them stealing out of desperation, others simply starving. There were a few of these in that crowd. And there are a few of them not far from you. Glenside may have a couple, Philadelphia has many, but the world is filled with them. Thousands, even millions, in third world countries go to sleep hungry every night. Many starve to death or die of disease. This is the world we live in, a hungry world! Try to imagine it! We have to, because few of us actually know:

2. the pain of hunger Obviously there is:

a. the physical pain of an empty stomach. I start to experience that between breakfast and lunch; what's it like when you eat one meal a day, and that, a handful of rice? It hurts to not have food, to not have clothes, to not have a place to live. It's cold or maybe hot, depending on where you live. It's dark a lot. There's often sickness, but no medicine. A toothache or an infection goes on and on without treatment. Sores come but don't heal. But with the physical pain goes:

b. the emotional anguish and this applies to all types of hungry people, even those who are spiritually lost or temporarily lacking, not just to those who live in abject poverty. These are feelings that some of us know from experience.

(1) they may have feelings of insecurity and helplessness The poor are powerless. They can't provide for themselves and have no idea how they're going to survive or what's going to happen to them. They have no means to protect themselves. And those who are temporarily lacking fall into the same boat. Helpless, insecure, worried. Lost people may feel this too, even if they have no material need. Often their world will crumble around them and they have nothing to hang onto, no security for eternity, and feel the sense of drifting helplessly through life with no way to control or change it. Or:

(2) they may have feelings of inadequacy, failure, and self-blame, particularly those who have come to a time in their lives where they're lacking. They may blame themselves, feel like they have failed in life, like they have failed to take care of their family, like they are totally inadequate as people. Or:

(3) they may have feelings of anger, injustice, and jealousy They may be angry at the forces that keep them in poverty, that have put them in this position. They may see the injustice of it all, that somebody else's kids have their own room and TV and an allowance that is more money than they see in a month while their own kids cry to sleep from hunger every night. They may be jealous or angry at them or even at God for allowing it to be this way. Or:

(4) they may have feelings of despair and hopelessness They may feel there is no help and no hope for them and just give up on life.

Well, with feelings like these, it's not unusual to see:

3. some effects of hunger in the lives of people

a. they are often easily led astray in their thinking or values People who are spiritually lost and hungry to have real food for their souls, are often easily led to try to find what they need in cults, in false religions or ideologies that promise them what they want. People who lack or live in poverty are often led into flight or to an uprising or to war, simply to get their needs met. They may be willing to change all their values and do things they would never do, like stealing or selling drugs. And the reason is:

b. they are often desperate to find relief They will do anything to get out of their situation, risk everything to fill their belly. The impoverished will cast themselves adrift on the ocean in a tiny unsafe boat and risk their own lives trying to make it to another country because they are so desperate. They may sell their own bodies for daily bread. Those who lack will sometimes cheat, steal, gamble, leave their families and run away or abandon all their values, just to find relief and escape the crisis. The lost may try anything from religion to sex and drugs to escape the hunger in their souls.

Hungry people are desperately hurting people, people who have sustained a deep wound in life that refuses to heal, but just hurts and bleeds more every day until that hunger is satisfied. And we should know what it's like. Paul said there were times when he was hungry, when he felt the pain of lacking daily needs. Many of us remember times when we've been needy in our lives, spiritually and physically; maybe some of us are there right now. It ought to be a wound we can identify with and have compassion for, yet we often don't:

II. Our Reaction To Those Who Are Hungry

1. the two wrong reactions our flesh may have are voiced for us in the reaction of Jesus' own disciples. First, they said:

a. the problem is not mine - the issue of personal responsibility (12) The disciples didn't see any need to try to care for the crowd. They may have felt a little bad that it was supper time and nobody had brought lunch, but after all, these people had come all this way and stayed this long; they should have come prepared or at least, surely, they all brought lunch money. At any rate, it's not our problem; I'm not responsible for them so:

(1) let them take care of themselves ...send them away Let them go find something on their own. Let them find a job. Or:

(2) let somebody else take care of them ...the surrounding villages There are shops out there to buy in. There are homes out there to lodge in. There's a system out there to take care of them. Let Bethsaida handle 10,000 extra people tonight. Isn't that how we react? Isn't there a welfare system? Aren't there shelters for people like that? I'm not responsible; it's not my problem. Somebody will take care of them; let them do it. But look at:

Jesus' answer: YOU give them to eat (13) Turn to James, while I read you **1 Jn. 3:16**, *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.* Now read **Jas. 2:15-16**, *Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? You're not going to get*

by with that "it's not my problem" stuff, are you? Cain tried that on God about Abel, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God's answer is obviously, YES! It is my problem. And whether it's a brother in Christ who's lacking or a neighbor who's poor or lost, it is MY problem. Next to loving God, Jesus said the second most important thing the law taught was that I must love my neighbor as myself. I must care about his needs and his hunger! Now the next line of reasoning the flesh retreats to is:

b. the problem is too big - the issue of personal inadequacy (13) This is a big problem and:

(1) I don't have enough to help ...we have only 5 loaves They looked around at the size of the crowd and the size of the lunch and it was obvious that it wouldn't even make a dent. Their resources were obviously inadequate to solve the whole problem. Now, I find that, on one hand, for many of us that problem may be relative. The early church was so committed to the principle of loving and caring for one another and for the poor that many of them sold possessions and houses and lands to meet the needs of others. Many times, on a personal level, it isn't that we can't help someone but that we refuse to sacrifice enough to do so. Yet on the other hand, for most of us, no matter how much we sacrifice, it's still not enough and so they said:

(2) it won't make a difference ...what are they among so many "What's the use. We might as well eat it ourselves, at least that way we might get a bite. If we share it only a few will get even a morsel. It won't matter in the least." One international relief organization, recognizing the immensity of the need in the world, has a motto something like this, "They die one at a time; we feed them one at a time!" *A young man, walking along the beach at dawn, noticed an old man ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Catching up with the man, the youth asked what he was doing. The answer was that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun. "But the beach goes on for miles, and there are millions of starfish," countered the young man. "How can your effort make any difference?" The old man looked at the starfish in his hand, and then threw it to safety in the waves. "It makes a big difference to this one," he said.*

No, the church can't feed the world any more than it can save the world. But Jesus still gave us a commission to go to the ends of the earth. We will save some! And we can't meet everybody's need, but we can still help the ones Jesus puts in our path with what we have. Look at:

Jesus' answer: Bring them here to Me!, He said in **Mt. 14:18**. Give the little you have, not to them, but to Me. It is not your job to meet the need; I don't expect you to give what you don't have; it's your job to give what you have to Me and let Me meet the need with it the way I choose. And you know the miracle that happened. Jesus took the 5 loaves and 2 fishes and broke them and they multiplied in His hands and then in the hands of his disciples as they distributed them. Oh, Jesus has a way of doing that when we give what we have to Him. He multiplies it and merges it with that of others and uses it in just the right time and amount to meet needs. Turn to **Phil. 4:14-19** and listen to Paul's story. The Philippians had sent him a gift in prison to meet his needs and he says, *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* Again and again, they had sent Paul gifts and God timed them and used them at specific times when Paul was in need. They gave what they had to God and God used it to meet Paul's need and he made them a promise: when you give and are willing to care and to sacrifice for others, God will see that all your needs are met and He is well able! The disciples, who would have only each gotten a bite if they'd kept it for themselves, each ate until they were full and picked up 12 baskets of leftovers for later. Each came with nothing and left with a basket of food! Their needs were met in meeting the needs of others and so will yours be. You see, what God wants to develop in us is:

2. Jesus' attitude toward those who are hungry When the disciples saw the crowd, they thought about themselves; when Jesus saw the crowd:

a. He was deeply moved by them - Mk. 6:34, *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.* His gut was touched; his heart was moved. He saw there was no one to care for these lost sheep. How do you see the people around you? They're lost sheep; they don't know where to find eternal life and peace like you have and for most of them there is nobody in their lives to tell them but you. Some of them are lacking and maybe even poor and they have nobody else to turn to but you. If the Spirit of God is in control of your life as it was His, you will care. You will be moved and you'll do what He did:

b. He welcomed them (11) The Greek word means to take with the hand. He put His arms out to them figuratively. It was not grudging, not "Oh no, not again, what an intrusion on my time; I'm trying to get away and rest with my

disciples." He welcomed them openly because He saw them spiritually. They were sheep with no shepherd to take care of them, nobody to help them. Sheep who would die without Him. And so:

c. He met their need (17) He taught them all day. He met their spiritual hunger. He taught them what the Kingdom of God was like and how they could be part of it. And He met their physical need too. *They all ate and were satisfied.*

My friend, will you be like Him? We have salvation. We have a God who meets our needs. We have brothers and sisters who care for us. Will you be touched by the hungry people around you, by the lost who so desperately need Christ and by the lacking who are in the emergency and may not make it through without you and by the impoverished who never have enough and whose hope is gone apart from you? Will you welcome these people as part of your life instead of sending them away? And will you give what you have to Jesus, your words, your time, your money, your possessions, so He can multiply them and meet their needs one at a time in His own way?

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke

The Victimized - 10:30-37

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

One might actually subtitle this series, "Dealing with Bruised Reeds", and one by one we've been looking at different kinds of people who are bruised reeds, people who have been seriously wounded and scarred in life and who need our compassion and caring. There is a whole class of hurting people for whom I chose the label, "The Victimized". You'll meet quite a number of them every night on the evening news. They have been victims of ill treatment by other people. Some of them are the victims of cruelty in war, like the refugees in Greece. Some of them are victims of crime; they've been shot, mugged, robbed, cheated, beaten, or raped. Some are victims of abuse; they've been physically abused or sexually abused, often by their own parents or other members of their family. Victims come in many varieties, but two things are for sure. 1) There are a lot of them; they are all around us; in fact, more than a few of us have been victims at some point in our lives. Somewhere I read that 38% of the people in America have experienced sexual abuse; add to that those who have been victimized in other ways and you probably have a majority, not a minority. And 2) they are really hurting people. Jesus told a story about one such man, a man who was victimized, **Luke 10:30-37**. Jesus never said this was a parable, a story that He made up to make a point. I'd prefer to think it was an actual case of a man He knew of. At any rate, the details of it are very real. A certain man, a Jew, was traveling down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho by the Jordan about five miles away. This stretch of road was lonely and steep and dangerous. Robbers had lots of rocks and hills to hide in and lots of money-laden victims passing by to the Temple in Jerusalem. A band of them caught this man unaware, nearly killed him and left him for dead by the roadside. Let this man stand as a representative of all those who have been victimized and it will help you in:

I. Understanding The Wound Of Those Who Have Been Victimized (30) Let's try to project ourselves, to put ourselves in this man's shoes on the road that day. If we can imagine that, we'll better understand:

1. what has happened to them First of all:

a. they may have been terrified How do you think that man felt from the moment the first robber appeared and through the whole process. I can remember as an elementary kid walking home one winter day being picked on and shoved into a snow bank by some high school boys laughing and having some "fun". I remember being afraid. That was kind of low-level fear, but a person who is seriously victimized is usually afraid and is very often terrified. And it's not a fear you just get over. It's a fear that deeply roots itself down inside and affects your whole way of living, your whole personality thereafter. I can't imagine the terror that comes when you wake up and an intruder is standing over your bed with a gun; I can't imagine the terror a woman must feel when she is suddenly grabbed and drug into a dark alley. I can't imagine the terror a child must feel when a drunken father picks up a board and comes after them in a rage. But I imagine it's enough to make a person never feel safe again, apart from God's healing! On top of that:

b. they may have been personally degraded Notice it says they stripped him of his clothes and then beat him. They had a little fun. They took his clothes off and called him names and humiliated him while they beat him. And he, all the while, was too weak or too outnumbered to fight back. Maybe he didn't even try. How degrading that must have been. It says to the victim, "You're not a person; you're an object and I'm going to use you for my pleasure". That's what abuse or victimization does. It removes or reduces the victim's sense of personhood, of worth, of value and can have serious consequences. On top of that:

c. they may have suffered a tragic loss I don't know how much money this man was carrying or whether he lost anything more than just his clothes and maybe a donkey, if he was riding one. But lots of people have. Some people have had tremendously valuable things taken from them, have lost all they had. How many black people in the

60's in Mississippi and Alabama had their homes burned at night by men in white hoods trying to terrorize them and keep them subjugated in fear. How many have had a loved one ripped away from them by a drunken driver who never even stopped or had their little child disappear on the way home from school, never to be seen again. Victims often have had things of great value or people they love taken away. On top of that:

d. they may have experienced physical/emotional pain They beat the man. Have you ever been beaten? How about screamed at, cursed at, called all kinds of horrible things? How about being made to watch while someone else you love was being hurt? It hurts; it all hurts terribly. And finally:

e. their life may have been in danger They left him half-dead the text says. If he'd lain there a long while without help, he would have died. You can imagine that he realized "they're going to kill me," as they beat his body. Have you ever been in a situation where your life was in immediate danger, where the gun was at your head? We don't have any idea what that does to people.

You see, victimized people have been traumatized and if it was serious or repeated, often that trauma is deep and affects their whole lives and many times they don't even recognize it. For instance, let's think about:

2. how they may feel because of what has happened

a. they may feel vulnerable and afraid I wonder if that man ever traveled anywhere alone again. Fear has nine lives. You can bury it through activity but it keeps rearing its ugly head again. Part of the trauma of being a victim is feeling vulnerable, unable to protect yourself, powerless. It's a horrible feeling no one ever wants to feel. And the fear of feeling like that again can really take over a person. Or:

b. they may feel shame and guilt I wonder how many times that man asked himself "Why didn't I travel with somebody; why didn't I take another road; why didn't I take a weapon?" People blame themselves for things and particularly if they didn't fight hard enough or resist hard enough because they were too scared at the moment. There's a whole group of victimized people who blame themselves and feel total shame and guilt; it has transformed their whole view of themselves. And some:

c. they may feel depressed and hopeless Their emotions may turn inward and they become depressed and find no way of getting better. Or it may go the other way and:

d. they may feel anger and hatred They may lash out at the one who victimized them. Victimized people may become obsessed with the thought of revenge on their abuser or on someone who represents him, like Absalom who waited two years to avenge his sister by killing the brother, Amnon, who raped her. An abused woman may come to hate men in general and try to compete with them or control them or victimize them in retaliation for what was done to her.

The point is that any person who has been seriously abused, especially if it was repeated or continued over a period of time, has been affected far more seriously and deeply than the physical wounds they show. Their personality has been wounded and they may not even know it. They may be able to function normally and live a fairly normal life but underneath all the time are these feelings. How can we help people like this?

II. Our Reaction Toward Those Who Are Victimized Well, one thing Jesus made perfectly clear was:

1. the selfish reaction we must avoid - ...he passed by (31-32) Here's this man lying in the ditch with no clothes, half dead and two people come along. Both are religious, one a priest, the other a Levite. And both stop, look over the scene for a second, and take off running down the other side of the road. Sounds like something that might happen in Philadelphia! A whole crowd can stand around and watch somebody get beaten or shot and nobody does anything about it. The sad part is that it doesn't only happen at that time; for victimized people, it happens all the rest of their lives. People come upon them with all the horrible feelings buried inside and they get a glimpse that the person is hurting but they don't stop to get involved; they pass by on the other side. And it's not just "they"; it's "we"! How many times have you and I chosen deliberately to pass on by somebody that we know is hurting seriously and needs our attention? Why do we do it? Why did they? Well, maybe:

a. we worry about the personal relationship involved Maybe the priest thought, "I don't know the man; it's not my problem. After all, I can't be taking care of everyone I meet, can I?" The third man to come along was a Samaritan. Now, you know about the Jews and the Samaritans. They hated each other, wouldn't have anything to do with each other. Maybe he thought at first, "He's a Jew; I'm not going to help him; I don't like Jews." or maybe he thought, "I'm a Samaritan; he's not going to want my help; he won't want me to touch him; I'll just pass by!" You see, we worry about whether a person will like us and want our help or how they'll react. We worry about how we feel about the person rather than about how they feel. Or:

b. we worry about the personal risk involved The Levite thought, "Those robbers are around here somewhere. Every second I stay puts me in danger. If I help him, they might come back and get me. I've got to get out of here!" And off he went down the road. If I help that person, what's it going to do to me? That's why the crowd stands

around and watches you bleed to death! If there's any thought that helping a victim may put us at risk somehow, we're torn. And at the same time:

c. we worry about the personal cost involved The Priest thought, "If I help this guy, it's going to mean a lot of work. He can't walk. I'll have to carry him or drag him or load him on my donkey. I'll have to go and take care of him or find somebody else to. And I'll have to buy medicine or pay for a doctor; after all he has nothing. Besides, I'll be late for the 11 o'clock sacrifice. Better let somebody else do it!" And off he ran down the road. Isn't that like us? We find a hurting person and we worry about how much it's going to cost, how much time it's going to take, how much it'll hinder our lifestyle and we're tempted to pass by.

You see, who were the priest and the Levite thinking about? Themselves! That's how human flesh is. We see a dying man and worry about our own safety instead of his. We see a hurting person and worry about our own feelings instead of theirs. But not Jesus. He always stooped down to minister to hurting people. He told about the Good Samaritan who came along in order to emphasize:

2. the loving reaction we must imitate The Samaritan, of all people, stopped and ministered to the man and the punchline of the story is **...go and do likewise (33-37)**. This is the reaction Jesus wants us to have. He wants us to have:

a. a caring heart - ...he took pity on him There's that bowel-word again. His guts were wrenched; he was deeply touched by him lying there naked and bleeding. My friend, if you sit there when somebody tells you how they were hurt and don't cry, at least on the inside, there's something wrong with you and you'd better figure out what it is pretty quick! If you can brush off people's hurt and pain and pass by without caring, you'd better ask yourself whether the love of God really does dwell in you! Ask God to give you a caring heart! Then notice the Samaritan had:

b. a gentle initiative - ...he went to him He didn't stand at a distance and yell, "Are you all right?". The man couldn't talk; he was probably unconscious. The Samaritan approached him as he lay there. To help victimized people you're going to have to approach them. Gently, kindly, softly, so as not to startle them, you're going to have to take the steps that bring you close to them so you can help. You may have to take the initiative to get to know them, to invite them over, to offer to help rather than saying, "If you need it, call". And along with that goes:

c. a tender manner - ...he bandaged his wounds He carefully wiped away the blood. He gingerly used some of the wine in his flask as an antiseptic to cleanse the dirt from the wounds. And then he poured on some olive oil as a healing agent and wrapped the wounds, probably in strips torn from his own clothing! Can you see the tenderness? And then he gently lifted him onto his donkey so he could be carried. People that have been wounded by other people, have been treated harshly. They need tenderness, gentleness. They need touched a little at a time. They need to talk a little at a time and tell their story. Sometimes the people who set out to help them are as harsh as the people who victimized them, only in a more "legitimate" way. By not understanding, by blaming them, by expecting them to do what they can't, the hurt can be made worse. Then notice he had:

d. a personal involvement - ...he took care of him He got him to the inn which was probably little more than a shelter for people and animals out of the elements, certainly not the Holiday! And that first night he himself took care of him. He sat up with him and wiped his brow and gave him water and fed him a little soup or whatever. If you're going to help someone who's been a victim, you can't do it from a distance. You have to get involved in their lives. You have to spend time with them. You have to talk to them. You have to listen to them. You have to hug them and hold them. You have to get close to them and that's going to take a lot of time and effort and it also means:

e. a long-term commitment - The Samaritan's business was urgent and he had to continue on but he told the innkeeper **...look after him...[until] I return** and left money for two days care. That probably meant he had been on his way UP to Jerusalem so now he would go up and tomorrow he would pass back by and stop again. He wanted to see him through all the way to health, until he could travel home. Helping victimized, abused people is a long-term process. They don't heal quickly and the mental wounds continue to ooze long after the physical ones heal up. You've got to be in there for the long haul, to come back to them again and again, listen again and again, love them again and again, until they are every whit whole.

Victims are special people. They have special needs. The Samaritan was an ordinary person with an extraordinary heart that put others first. He probably didn't even like the Jew he found lying on the road. The whole reason Jesus told this story was that some self-righteous Pharisaical person wanted to justify himself in selectively loving only those he chose. Jesus' punchline was, *Go and do likewise*. That is, love those who have needs whether you like them or not, whether it's convenient or not, whether it's costly or not. Love and care for any poor hurting victim God puts in your path. He is your neighbor. And then, because I know many of you have been victimized in your lives, let me just share:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Who've Been Victimized from this story. First, please realize that:

1. Jesus was victimized; He understands your pain Listen to this, *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.* - *Is. 53:3-7.* They mocked Him, they stripped Him, they beat Him, and at last they killed Him. He knows what it feels like to be a victim! He knows your pain! And so:

2. Jesus will tenderly care for you and help you heal You see, Jesus is the real Good Samaritan. You may be lying there in the agony and pain because of all that has happened to you, even if it happened long ago. But Jesus has come along the path of your life. He has come to you where you are and He is tenderly approaching you. He wants to gently bandage your wounds and carry you to a safe place and tend to you Himself as you heal. For some of us He's already done it. But He will do it for you. You may have been a Christian for years but still suffer from the agony in your soul because you were victimized somehow, somewhere. Jesus wants to heal the pain, take away the fear, drain away the anger and replace it with His love and peace. He wants to carry you home like an injured child and hold you in His bosom and make you better and He will, if you will let Him. And then, understand this:

3. Jesus will love you through His people He's not going to come to you in some ethereal vision. He's going to come in flesh and blood through the hands and the hearts of the people in whom He lives, who are obeying His command to go and do likewise, through close Christian friends who will stand by you and love you and prop you up each day as you learn to walk all over again, perhaps a Christian counselor who can guide you through the process, pastors and elders and a church who will be there for you as much and as often as you need them. They're right here. You don't have to lie there helpless and alone, unless you push them away.

My friend, what will you do the next time you're walking down the road of your life and come across somebody who's been badly hurt, victimized by some bully in life? I don't know who it will be. But you'll know when you see them. Will you let them lie there? Or will you pick them up in your arms and carry them safely home?

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke

Those Who Have Been Rebellious - 15:11-31

The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20

There is another type of wounded, hurting person whom we don't often think about but whom we meet all around us. In chapter 7 we looked at those coming out of a sinful life, those who come to Christ whose lives have been full of sin, and the special tender care which they need. But what about the Christian who has "backslidden", the person who has already come to Christ, but who has rebelled against His love and His will and chosen instead to go into a life of sin for a period. Most of us can relate to that. For some, there was a time when we did it, when we put Christ out of sight and out of mind and did what we pleased, but He brought us back to Himself. For others, somewhere along the line we've been involved with someone close to us who's done it. It may have been our spouse who's drifted away from their walk with the Lord; it may have been a good friend or a church leader who went astray. And how many of us can relate to the heartache of having one of our own children grow up in the faith and then decide to put it all aside, perhaps for years before finally deciding to come home to Jesus. Those who have been rebellious are all around us. But what about when they come back? What about when the Holy Spirit finally gets hold of the strings of their heart and it turns toward home again? One would think that coming back would be the easiest thing in the world, but it isn't. The reception isn't always very good. The church often has a hard time with it. Someone has said that Christians are the only army that often kill their wounded. Those who have succumbed to Satan in the heat of the battle often have a hard time coming back to their own camp and suffer as great damage at the hands of their own kind as they did in enemy territory. They are bruised reeds and need loving tender care. Jesus told a story about one such young man in Luke 15. The story of the prodigal son is an evangelistic story about the love of God for lost sinners and, of course, its most frequent use is to encourage lost people to get out of the pigpen and come to Christ. But if you'll indulge my interpretation this morning, it is also the story of a loving father whose son rebelled against him and stormed away, but then came back. It is aimed at the Jews, God's people, some of whom ran away from Him and became publicans and sinners and some of whom pretended to be close to Him and became Pharisees. And if you check the context, its design is to teach Pharisaical children how to react when their publican brothers come home to God. So why not let it teach us how to care for our brothers and sisters who rebel and then want to come home. **Luke 15:14-20.** We must begin by:

I. Understanding The Wound Of Those Who Have Been Rebellious (14-20) When one of God's children chooses to rebel and to go out into sin, we have to remember:

1. what has happened to them First:

a. they have suffered a great deal through their sin (16) Put yourself in this boy's place. Young Mr. High and Mighty grew up in a good home with a loving dad, a wealthy home where his needs were always met. But his picture of life under dad was slavery and he wanted freedom. So, he stood up to his father and demanded it, and he got it. And he went far off where nobody could hinder him and did what he wanted. At first, it seemed like heaven. He had all he wanted, food, friends, women, whatever. He didn't have to work. But as his money ran out, things changed. It was soon all gone. And there were no jobs. By begging, he got the only job he could find, feeding pigs, but it didn't give him enough to survive on. He became hungry, so hungry that he was tempted to eat the carob pods he fed the pigs. For a long while he suffered greatly. The fun was gone; the good times, the pleasure, now even the ability to survive by his own resources. All gone. It was a painful process to lose everything he had and had counted on. The ancient Jews had a saying, "When Israel is reduced to the carob tree, they become repentant!" It worked for this Jewish son. When God's children rebel and go their own way, it is a painful way. Solomon said, "The way of the transgressor is hard". Very often there is a great deal of suffering out there on their own before they come home. The world is not kind, it is not nice, and as enticing as it may be, if you give yourself to loving it, it will take all you have, beat you, and leave you for dead most times. So, rebellious children coming home have often had a great deal of pain and suffering. In fact, that has often been the very thing that produced their repentance. Now secondly:

b. they have had a change of heart and mind (17) The son literally came to himself. He came back to who he really was, the son of his father. He'd been acting like somebody else. He'd been thinking like somebody else other than who he really was. But God worked in him and he remembered; he woke up; he had a tremendous change of heart and mind about himself and when he did, he realized what he'd done. But he was no longer the same person who enjoyed life in the far country. Now he found himself a son stuck in a pigpen in a far country wanting nothing more than to go home. This is what happens to a rebellious child of God out there in sin. At some point many of them wake up; they return to who they are and want to come home. But:

c. they find themselves alone (16) He was alone. Nobody cared about him where he was and he didn't know whether anybody cared about him at home either. But certainly, nobody was there in the far country to help him. He found himself all alone, not fitting in, with nobody to care. Oftentimes that's where rebellious children end up, all alone, realizing the mess they've made of their lives and not knowing what to do and so, think about:

2. how they feel because of what has happened First of all:

a. they feel ashamed of what they have done (17) It all seemed so stupid now. "The hired hands back home are better off than I am now. I had it so good. Why didn't I listen when dad pleaded with me not to go? Why didn't I stay? Why did I ever do this? And now look at me, I took all that money from dad and I blew it all. It's gone. And I hurt him deeply. Oh, what a fool I was!" Rebellious children who wake up know shame. I saw on a news show an interview with a father who had become frantic over his bills and inability to provide and had deserted his wife and kids when they were young and ran off. With tears running down his eyes, he said, "I made horrible choices and I don't know why. I have no excuse. I'm so ashamed of what I did. I would do anything to change it if I could!" And with that, his two grown children came into the room and all of them stood there and cried. It was a really happy ending for a change. But oh, the shame. And when a rebellious child wakes up, there is a great deal of shame about what they've done and how they've lived and the life they've wasted. And on top of the shame:

b. they feel guilty before God (18) *I have sinned against heaven...* that is, against God. How can I ever be forgiven for what I've done? How can He take me back? I have dishonored and hurt Him so. And then:

c. they feel unworthy of their place in the family (19) *I'm not worthy to be called a son...* "I'll just be a servant." Because of their sin they often feel unworthy, not only to resume their place in their earthly family but also in God's family, in the church. They feel like they are less than everyone else who hasn't done what they've done, who remained faithful while they threw it all away. And:

d. they may feel reluctant to return (20) He'd done a despicable thing. He didn't know whether there was a welcome for him there or not. He could envision himself crawling home and begging forgiveness. Rebellious children often have this feeling they've burned their bridges to go back and have no other place to go. This boy got up and went anyway. Some don't. Some are too afraid, afraid of what their earthly family or their church family is going to think or do when they come back. And they have good reason to feel that reluctance, as we'll see in a second.

But the point is that a child of God who has been in rebellion and now has come to himself and wants to come home is a really hurting person, a bruised reed. He's loaded down with shame and guilt and worthlessness and fear. How are we going to react to this kind of person? How are we going to receive them? That's the whole point of the story:

II. Our Reaction Toward Those Who Have Been Rebellious When the boy came home, he actually got two reactions and we're going to look at them in reverse order. You already know how the father received him with open arms and threw a great celebration. So, let's consider:

1. the self-centered reaction of the older brother (25-31) First of all:

a. he was angry at his father for receiving him (28) His brother had hurt him deeply too. He had taken a third of the family's belongings. He had broken the family's heart. He had left the older one to care for all the work. The older boy became bitter and angry. He didn't want the younger to come home or if he did, only so he could pay him back for all he'd done and reject him in turn. None of that may ever have been said. It may have all been kept inside. But then when he showed up and Dad took him back so easily and threw a party, all of that anger turned toward Dad, "How could you...?" The Pharisees had a hard time seeing publicans and sinners who were repentant be forgiven and accepted by Christ. And sometimes we have a hard time with our brothers and sisters who have fallen away. We're angry down underneath somewhere. Instead of being happy they're alive and have been found, we find we'd rather have them dead and lost. At least we want to make it hard on them to come back! We look at them and think, "What are they doing in church? How could they dare show their faces after what they did? But notice something about this older boy:

(1) he had an underlying disrespectful attitude He says, "Now look here, dad!" He thought the father was dumb all along for having given the kid the inheritance in the first place, but now the attitude comes out. He did not really respect his father's principles or his heart and:

(2) he had been serving with wrong motives "I've been slaving for you for years and haven't ever gotten anything out of it!" Now it comes out. All these years he had been performing for reward, pulling the faithful routine, so that in the end he would be rewarded. And so:

b. he was jealous of his brother for being received (30) He should have been made to come back like a dog with his tail between his legs, if at all. Instead, look at all the attention he's been getting and all the hoopla over him. "He doesn't deserve it. I do. I'm the faithful one, remember!"

It's sad to say but that's not just the attitude of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. There's a lot of Pharisee in all of us, in our flesh. And we see some brother in Christ who's gone astray want to come back and we're angry, we're even jealous sometimes. And do you know why? Because we're thinking about ourselves. We've been serving God to get something and feel like we've accomplished something and we should be rewarded, not that person! His return takes something away from us! You'll note that when the prodigal was out in the pigpen, the other son did not say, "I will arise and go to my brother!" He knew what would happen if he did! Maybe that's what kept him in the pigpen so long. This isn't what God's children returning from rebellion need; they need:

2. the loving reaction of the father (20-24)

a. he loved the son even while he was in rebellion (20) You can tell by his reaction when he saw him. He was moved with compassion. It's that bowel word again. His guts were moved. Deep inside he cared. And that says to me that he had cared all the way along. He loved the boy when he left and all the while he was gone. The older brother despised him the whole time. But God loves rebellious children and so must we, even in the midst of their sin. Now, that doesn't mean we send them care packages and enable them to stay in their sin. The father didn't send any checks to the hog pen address to say, "Here, this will help you stay longer". You don't enable the sin. But you love the rebellious one all the same. God does. Then:

b. he looked for the rebellious son to return Notice it doesn't say that when he was a long way off, the son saw the father working in the field. That would have been natural. But the father saw HIM coming a long way off. He was looking! How many times he had lifted his gaze eastward toward Jordan the way he had left, hoping that one time he would see him come back. That was his goal. He wanted to see him come home. The brother wanted to see him get what he deserved. The father wanted him back. Which attitude do we have? Then:

c. he welcomed the rebellious son He grabbed him and threw his arms around him and kissed him. He didn't even wait for the full apology the son planned. He cut him off in mid-stream. He made him feel wanted and welcome and more than that:

d. he restored the rebellious son (22) The son thought he would come back as second-class, as a hired servant, no longer a son. But the father put the best robe on him and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet and said, *Rejoice... this my SON...* These were all marks of sonship not servanthood. He was fully restored. Oh sure, he didn't get another share of the family's inheritance. There were some unerasable consequences that couldn't be undone. But he was restored as a full first-class son, because that's who he was to the father all along! And that's how we should be towards those who come back. We should welcome them with open arms and restore them! They don't come back as less than us somehow. We shouldn't rub their nose in their sin, but should restore them equally. We are all sinners who've been elevated to saints by God's grace. And our grace needs to extend toward others. But notice also the Father's grace:

e. he reached out equally to the "non-rebellious" son (31) He came out and pleaded with him to change his attitude and come in too. He loved the son who stayed as much as the son who came back. There was nothing to be jealous of. And here you may be, serving faithfully, a little self-righteous and proud of the way you've been faithful.

Well, God loves you too and wants you to change your attitude and to love rebellious bruised reeds!

Oh my friend, who is the rebellious one in your life? Who is it that has turned his back on you and on Christ and broken your heart? Who is it that is out there somewhere feeding swine and maybe wants to come home? How will you treat them when they come? It all depends on your attitude right now. When they come, they will be hurt, crushed, bruised reeds, smoldering wicks. Will you straighten them tenderly, carefully, lovingly or break them altogether? Will you gently blow the embers into flame or snuff them out forever? The choice is yours. And just in case there may be some among us this morning who know what this is all about by experience and may be still out there somewhere, but you've turned from God and you know it, there is in this story:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Who Are Being Rebellious Listen:

1. your Father loves you and is waiting for you to return The Father in this story is really a picture of your Heavenly Father. You may have turned your back on Him, but He's never turned His back on you. He's watching for you every day, waiting, hoping, longing for you to come home to Him so He can just walk with you and be an active part of your life again. He doesn't care about what He can get from you or what you can do for Him. He just wants YOU because He loves you and it pains Him to watch you suffer and hurt yourself in rebellion. Come home, won't you? And when you do:

2. your Father will restore you to all He has for you You won't be a second-class Christian, the kind who messed up. He will fully restore you to every thing and every plan He has for you. Oh, there are some things He may not be able to fix. It may be too late for the marriage that was ruined or the opportunity that was missed or some other things. But God still has so much more for you. He has plans for you, to love you and walk with you through life together and live out His life through you and know this:

3. your Father will rejoice over you and defend you to others There are going to be some older brothers around with self-centered attitudes who won't understand or receive you. You can't prevent that. But do know that your Father will defend you and take care of you. Don't fear. Don't worry. Don't let the fear of others keep you in the pigpen. God will go out and plead with His other children for you; that's His business. Just come home to Him. Come today! I used this illustration earlier in this series, but I have to repeat it again because it is so appropriate:

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the famous 19th century Russian novelist, was sentenced to death by firing squad as a young man for his radical political views. As the rifles were being aimed, the order to halt came and the sentence was commuted to 10 years in a Siberian labor camp. Upon his arrival a woman slipped a New Testament into his hand when the guard wasn't looking. There in a bare board building with 3 inches of ice on the windows and an inch of filth on the floor, Dostoyevsky discovered the parable of the prodigal son. He saw in that camp the pigsty and himself the son and the truth of God's love and willingness to pardon gripped his soul. Years later, on his deathbed, his daughter describes it thus: "He made us come into the room and taking our little hands in his, he begged my mother to read the parable of the prodigal son. He listened with his eyes closed, absorbed in his thoughts. 'My children', he said in his feeble voice, 'never forget what you have just heard. Have absolute faith in God and never despair of His pardon. I love you dearly, but my love is nothing compared with the love of God. Even if you should be so unhappy as to commit some dreadful crime, never despair of God. You are His children; humble yourselves before Him as before your father; implore His pardon, and He will rejoice over your repentance, as the father rejoiced over that of the prodigal son.'"

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke

The Outcast - 17:11-19

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

There are no people you will meet in life who are quite so deeply wounded as those who are outcast. My dictionary said an outcast is one who is cast out by society. Most every society has its outcasts of one type or another. The Jews of Jesus' day would have put Samaritans and Gentiles who lived among them in that category. But the most outcast of all were the lepers. The disease of leprosy mentioned in the Old Testament probably is a general term covering a variety of infectious skin-diseases which we have come to identify in modern terms as psoriasis, infections, dermatitis, herpes, and a host of other maladies, even including mildew and fungi on inanimate objects, but certainly also including the actual disease we have come to identify as true leprosy or Hansen's disease. Leprosy as such has been around since 600 BC in India and 400 BC in Europe. It is a particular bacterial infection which enters the body through the skin and destroys the nerves in the body a little at a time, starting in the extremities and working up to the main nerves. Thus, the gradual loss of feeling leads to damage to the fingers and toes and gradually the person loses parts of the limbs, wastes away and be-

comes deformed. Until 1940 there was no cure and the world knew it. With so little knowledge of how disease spread and fear of catching it, leprosy victims were for millennia the worst of outcasts and the most ill-treated of people. They have been often persecuted or even murdered; some were even buried alive (as late as 1937). Those who weren't were often banished to a horrible existence outside of society. Many banded together to live as nomads, as beggars, or even as thieves and to care for one another. It was a group of 10 such outcasts, lepers, who came to Jesus one day as He was somewhere on the border between Samaria and Galilee, **Luke 17:11-19**. Here were 10 bruised reeds, 10 smoldering wicks, 10 outcasts, and Jesus made them whole. Now in:

I. Understanding The Wound Of Those Who Are Outcast we need to bring this home to our day. Though there are still 15 million lepers in the world, you've probably never met one. Most leprosy is confined to the third world where conditions for them haven't changed much since Jesus' day. The need to minister to them is obvious and some organizations are doing that. But lepers are not the only kind of outcasts. Let's talk about:

1. the variety of those who are often outcast that maybe you DO meet. People who have been virtually cast out by society because of either diseases they have or other characteristics they have, and often not of their own choosing. First, let's mention:

a. those who may have AIDS or similar diseases AIDS is the leprosy of the modern world. There is no true cure. When you get it, without treatment you die, a long slow agonizing death. There is a tremendous fear of it. And it is transmitted sexually so there is a tremendous stigma associated with it, even if you got it through a blood transfusion! In much of the world, those who have it are often outcasts; nobody wants to help them, to be around them, to touch them, to care for them. But they are not alone. What about:

b. those who may be physically handicapped or disfigured How people stare at a person in a wheelchair or a person missing a limb or a person who's been burned and their face is disfigured. I remember seeing a young man on TV a time or two who had cerebral palsy. He was disfigured and couldn't talk. His mother was the only one who loved him and she died. He ended up living under a bridge. But he met Jesus and Jesus loved him and today the boy who was outcast is an itinerant evangelist and is married and has children. But oh, how many more are like him. They're ugly, they're disfigured, they're missing an arm or leg or they're all curled up. And what do we do? Shy away and stare. And many times, treat them as though they're mentally retarded on top of it! Or what about:

c. those who may be mentally handicapped One of the sweetest people I ever knew was a young lady in our first church who was born with Down's Syndrome. Fortunately, she was born into a loving family who protected her and cared for her, but how many aren't. And how they get made fun of and taken advantage of, as though they're sort of inhuman. But outcasts don't have to have a disease or a handicap of some sort; they may simply be:

d. those who may be "different" from the culture around them They may be a Samaritan living in Jewish Jerusalem or today a black person living in a white neighborhood or a white person living in a black neighborhood. They may be a Jew living in Germany in 1937 or a Serb living in Croatian territory in 1994. Anybody who is different, who looks different, talks different, dresses different from the majority around him, finds himself in some measure an outcast and the butt of jokes, and even attacks and persecution. It's even true of:

e. those who may have a "colored" past. What does the word ex-convict bring to your thoughts if I tell you that one moved in next door to you? In certain areas a person who has had a baby out of wedlock or who has gotten a divorce may feel the same kind of rejection. There are persons who find themselves cast out by the people around them because of things in their past that they can't go back and change no matter how hard they try.

Oh, outcasts are around. Some of them you'll find lying on a steam grate by the Mission at 5th and Girard. Some are lying alone in a room over at Abington hospital struggling to breathe. Some may be right next door to you. Now think about:

2. what they have experienced - Just imagine what it would be like if you had been one of these 10 lepers. Turn with me to the law of leprosy in **Lev. 13:45-46**. Now, realizing that this law was God's gracious provision to prevent epidemics of infectious disease from spreading, still think about what it meant. The person could not dress normally. He had to wear torn clothes and keep his head uncovered. He had to veil the lower part of his face. He could not act normally. Everywhere he went he had to say "unclean" and stay away from people. He could not live in town. He had to live outside the camp or the city, alone and all by himself. Now, that might have been alright, had there been a general attitude of love and pity and caring for lepers as sick brethren, but in fact the reverse was true. The Jewish rabbis developed an entire code of tradition concerning it. They declared it openly to have a moral cause. It was seen as a punishment from God. Any room a leper entered, even if he stuck his head in the door, became unclean. No one was to salute him and a minimum distance must be kept from him, unless the wind was blowing from that direction in which case a hundred cubits were not enough. One rabbi would not eat an egg purchased in a street where there was a leper. Another boasted that he always threw stones at them to keep them away. So instead of the special love and care they needed, lepers got, and still often get, the opposite and so do outcast people of all stripes. In many, many cases:

a. they have experienced social rejection Society has placed a stigma on them. They are not seen as real people or as equally human in a complete sense. Can you imagine how many times a person with a mental or physical handicap has been made fun of and teased? Simply going to school may be a nightmare many times. People avoid you or deliberately walk past and ignore you. Or they talk to the "normal" person who's with you instead of to you, as though you can't think or talk for yourself. Imagine what years of that would do to you!

b. they have often been denied human contact People feel awkward in talking to you and so they avoid it. They avoid touching you if they can. They don't invite you to dinner or to a movie and they don't want to be your friends. If you're fortunate, you may find a few people who really understand and care, but they are likely to be people in your same situation only. But some never find anybody at all.

c. they have often been denied normal affection Nobody hugs you. Nobody kisses you. Nobody tells you how much they care for you. Nobody would even think of going out with you or marrying you. Nobody prays for you and nobody holds you close and says, "I'm here". Outcast people are often unloved, many times even by their own parents. Now think about:

3. how they may feel because of that experience

a. they may feel ashamed or worthless If they come to believe any of the stigma that society has put on them, they may hate themselves and the way they are. They may be ashamed of themselves, the way they look, the way they talk. They may try to hide or isolate themselves. They may feel utterly worthless, less than other people, of no value. Or:

b. they may feel angry at their plight or at people They may get mad and ask, "Why am I like this?"; they may be mad at God. They may be angry at the way they're treated and the people who hurt them and the barriers that stand in their way to a normal life. Certainly:

c. they may feel intensely lonely They may just be longing for human friendship and compassion and kindness and feeling like nobody will ever love them! And:

d. they may feel utterly hopeless, like nothing will ever change. They will always be different from everybody else; they will always be treated badly; they will never amount to anything or do anything. There is no hope and so they may be depressed or resort to escape tactics like alcohol or drugs to drown the pain or even become suicidal. Outcast people are bruised reeds, almost broken. They are smoldering wicks almost snuffed out. The 10 lepers stood at a distance. They wouldn't approach Him. They begged Him to have pity on them, to have mercy on them, to understand their plight and their pain and to help however He could. Most outcast people are not so vocal about it, but they are still quietly standing at a distance pleading in their hearts with us to have pity on them. How will you react:

II. Our Reaction Toward Those Who Are Outcast Well, let's consider Jesus' reaction to these outcast lepers. And at the same time let's turn and compare a similar incident with another leper earlier in His ministry in **5:12-14**. In both of these instances, you can see Jesus interacting with lepers. First, consider his attitude and what ought to be:

1. your attitude toward them It would be easy to just adopt the attitude of everybody else around you, but as a Christian:

a. you need an attitude of mercy and compassion The 10 begged for mercy, for somebody to notice their pain and care. **Mk. 1:41** says about that leper that knelt at His feet that, *He was moved with compassion*. It's that bow-wow word again. His guts were wrenched. His heart was moved. He not only pitied the outcast, but he cared that he was hurting. What does your heart say when you see a handicapped person, when you find out someone has AIDS, when you hear that someone has been in jail or is an unwed mother? One time our Nursery School Director and her family were hit broadside by a lady who was driving drunk and fled the scene. The lady was picked up later and had to be taken to the hospital, had no insurance and the whole bit. My first thought toward that lady wasn't very good. My wife's first thought was, "Oh, that poor lady must really have a messed-up life; she really needs help". The flesh thinks of self, the flesh withdraws, the flesh puts itself a notch above the other. The Spirit sees with eyes of mercy and has compassion on those who hurt. At the bottom line there is a choice:

b. you need an attitude of willingness to "make them clean" The leper hit it right on the head. He said, *If you are willing, you can make me clean*. Jesus said, *I am willing!* Of course, you can't heal lepers' physical problems like Jesus could. You can't cure a person's AIDS or take away their deformity or heal their brain. You can't erase their past. But you can make them "clean" to you. Instead of choosing to see them as an outcast and withdrawing yourself, you can willingly choose to treat them as a clean, touchable, lovable person and jump into their lives. You can give them the acceptance and the contact and relationship and the affection and the love they so desperately need. How can you do that?

2. your actions toward them Well:

a. you can speak to them instead of passing by Jesus stopped. He spoke to the man. He spoke to the 10. That was already 100% more than anybody else did. Deny that urge to withdraw and avoid. Make a point to greet them, to sit beside them, to talk to them, to treat them as you would any other person. And when it's appropriate:

b. you can initiate normal physical contact - Lk. 5:13 Jesus did something for this leper no one had ever willingly done. He reached out his hand and touched the man! Just a touch, a holding of the hand, a hug, simply showing them that you don't feel like they're "contaminated" or "ugly" or "awful" often means so much. It can be the most healing thing in the world. And don't underestimate the power of words, of saying "I care; you matter to me". Then:

c. you can participate in their spiritual "healing" What they need most of all is Jesus and a genuine relationship with him. Where else will they find full acceptance and love and a father who loves them unconditionally and declares them to be full children of his and qualifies them for a worthy vocation? Where else will they find the power to live the life they're stuck with? You can model Jesus before them. You can love them into knowing Him. They need a spiritual family where they will be accepted and loved. You can introduce them to the church. And believe me, this kind of healing which you can bring will do them far more good in the long run than healing their bodies or changing their pasts. And:

d. you can help them to be accepted as "clean" by others Jesus told the lepers to go and show themselves to the priests so that they would be declared publicly clean and could put away the marks of uncleanness. He wanted them to be accepted by others. You could go a long way in that department. By your example and your encouragement, you could help others to love and care for that outcast person the way you have learned to. You could be their advocate and just maybe, change their world.

Now, quickly let me say that, in case you find yourself in this category this morning, for whatever reason, there is here:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Who Are Outcast First, know that:

1. Jesus understands what it is to be outcast Listen to **Is. 53:2-3**, *He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not...* Jesus was an outcast. His own did not receive Him. He was hated and mocked and teased. He was hurt and at last crucified. He understands rejection. He knows what you feel in your heart and, my friend:

2. Jesus will never turn you away Jesus said in **Jn. 6:37**, *Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.* The KJV says, *never cast out.* Everybody in the world may turn you away and cast you out and reject you, but He never will. He wants you; He loves you; He made you just for the pleasure of knowing you for all eternity. It is no false hope. If you come to Him, He will not drive you away. And then know this:

3. you who were a "no people" will be one of "His people" - 1 Pet. 2:10 says, *Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* You were not part of anybody or anything. You had nobody to belong to. To many you were a nobody, not even a person. But if you come to Jesus, you are one of the people of God, the people He has chosen out of all the world for Himself. You become His child and His heir. You become **SOMEbody** in Him.

Well folks, there are way more than 10 outcasts standing out there at a distance silently pleading for you to notice them, to take pity on them, to consider them people and minister to them. The outcasts cry out to us to have mercy and most of the time we just sit in church and sing louder so we can't hear them. God forgive us and make us willing to do whatever we can to bring-in those who are out-cast. What will you do?

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke The Young - 18:15-17

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

We seldom stop to think about it, but a large percentage of the wounded, hurting people in the world are children. And because they grow up to become adults, it is safe to say that a great many of the wounded, hurting adults in the world were wounded as children. The Bible has a lot to say about children but there is no incident more touching than the familiar story of Jesus and the children, **Luke 18:15-17**. At this place, parents were bringing their babies and infants, small children, to Jesus so He could touch them, so he could hold them and pray for them, Matthew adds that His disciples rebuked them and tried to chase them away. Why? Because they were mean nasty men who hated kids? No, probably because they were zealous disciples who wanted to protect their Master from being overwhelmed and because frankly, com-

ing from their culture and perspective, they didn't think it nearly as important to get the children blessed as to speak to the multitudes. But their zealous "stay away" could have done some real damage if Jesus had not overheard it and corrected them. The whole incident, while relatively minor in one sense, became to Jesus a platform on which to stand for the children of the world. And I'd like to make it ours as well. Let's begin by:

I. Understanding The Plight Of Those Who Are Young You see, every child coming into the world needs:

1. what they need Two primary things beyond food and shelter. They need:

a. an environment where they are loved and feel worth Human beings are born with the need for love. In the animal kingdom, some creatures hatch and are on their own from birth or shortly after. God could have done the same for human beings with a few minor changes. But God chose to have babies born into the family unit of a mother and father, so that from moment one they would be in a relationship where they would feel and experience love and as they grow up, where they would have a sense of value and worth because they were loved and it would prepare them to know the infinite love of God for them one day. A baby who grows up without love grows up very often to be a human being with serious emotional and behavioral problems! Love in those early years is so much needed. What's more, they need:

b. an environment where they feel safe and protected Security. We need it so and especially when we are young. The world we are born into is a cruel and fearful world fraught with danger. In the animal kingdom the young are always the first to die. Were it not for God's provision of the family to provide safety and security, it would be so with us too. A child who grows up without that safety and security lives in fear or else becomes tough and develops the drive to step on everybody else to protect themselves. Security is so important to every little child. They need it, just as they need love. But:

2. what they have all too often experienced is exactly the opposite. Human society, including our own, has tragically denied children the very things they should have. In the world we live in, millions of children grow up in poverty without proper nourishment, children are forced to work in sweatshops and factories, sold into human trafficking or abandoned and forced to live on the streets if they are unwanted. And though we are more civilized here in the good old USA, the way we treat young people is often only a shade better or only better hidden. For instance, we don't shoot unwanted children on the street; we just kill them with a needle or a loop knife or a suction tube in the womb before they're born. Nice, neat, tidy and you can't hear them cry, but just as barbaric. Historically, children:

a. they have been neglected In later Greek and Roman society unwanted children were simply abandoned at birth to die of exposure. But how many children in Philadelphia and even in Glenside have parents who don't care about them because they're on drugs or just didn't want them in the first place. They're left to roam and to wander and to survive the best they can with only minimal supervision. The degrees vary, but I see it right in this neighborhood, kids whose parents could really care less about them as long as they're out of sight and mind. Instead of the love and protection they need, they're being thrown into a hostile world on their own. On top of that, many children:

b. they have been abused Children are forced into prostitution overseas, but it happens here too. An unimaginable number of children are being abused either physically or even sexually right in their own homes. You don't know it right away, but they turn up later in adulthood talking to pastors like me or counselors and sharing the horror. The parents and relatives that God has given to nurture and care for them are beating them (and I don't mean legitimate spanking in a controlled and reasonable fashion; I mean beating), burning them, locking them up for days, depriving them of food or even raping them and using their own bodies for their own pleasure. It happens right here. I just heard about a man I once knew who raped his teenage daughter and had a child by her. Can you imagine what these things do to the innocent mind of a small child? And then, often children:

c. they have been exploited, used and taken advantage of. Though there are child labor laws here, it is not so in the rest of the world. Yet even here many times children are seen as property, objects to be fought over and used in custody battles and divorce settlements, used as a means to hurt the spouse or ex-spouse. Parents often use their children to live out their own dreams and push them to achieve in various areas of life by controlling and manipulating them. Our ways are more subtle, but we still neglect, abuse, and exploit children. Why? It is because:

d. they have no power to protect themselves They are small; they can't fight back. They can't stop what's going on. They have no defense and so perpetration of the mistreatment is easy. It is also easy because:

e. they have no means to be heard Abortion works because you can't hear the scream of the dying baby inside the mother. But it's there! Children have no voice, mostly no one to tell and not enough experience to know even when they're being mistreated many times. It becomes normal to them. They can be mistreated in the privacy of the home or the backyard and there is no one to save them. Countless thousands of children are mistreated every day in varying degrees all around us and here's:

3. what happens to them because of their experience

a. they are wounded for life It shapes and colors and sometimes twists their personalities for life. It formulates the way they think and the way they behave later on. It may turn some into criminals, others into addicts, still others to a life of promiscuity, but the majority of them it turns into adult moms and dads who live a miserable life and in turn repeat the cycle for another generation. Unless they meet Jesus and are able to find healing through His power and love, often every area of their life will be affected and they may not even know it, the way they relate to people, their marriage, their self-image, everything. And what's worse is that often:

b. they are affected for eternity Their background and problem and the people in their life keep them from hearing of Jesus and His love and His healing and finding the love and security they were meant to find in Him. Sadly, many of them live a miserable life and then die and spend eternity without Him.

Mistreated children are wounded people, bruised reeds, smoldering wicks. Now, of course, the situation Jesus was in that particular day was nothing quite that serious. They were not seriously mistreating those children, not affecting their entire lives and crushing their spirits. Neither are most of you, probably. But Jesus was very upset with His disciples for their simple and perhaps well-meant reaction. The question, of course, is what is:

II. Our Reaction Toward Those Who Are Young First, let's consider:

1. the disciples' reaction which we must avoid (15) When they chased those children and their parents away and told them to stop bothering Him, they made two major mistakes:

a. they failed to see children as important How important are your children or the children around you? I see parents whose children are simply crying out for their attention, for them just to spend time with them or play ball or a game with them. But the parents ignore them constantly and just talk or go off to more work or go off to play and enjoy themselves. I see parents who choose their jobs, who choose their hobbies, who choose everything in life over their children. I know of kids who are crushed because their parents won't bother to go to their school concert or watch them play ball. The simple fact is that they honestly don't see them as being important enough to rate time. The disciples didn't! Do you? And what's worse:

b. they failed to see children as people, people with feelings and needs as real and as great as their own. That's the real root of it, isn't it? To many, children are objects, not people, just like to others, women are objects, not people and black people are not people, just objects... It's funny how the older we get, the more prone we are to forget that children are people. It amazes me that as people grow old, some of them start seeing children as nothing but a nuisance and a pain to be chased away and forget that they themselves once were children. But children, no matter how little, ARE people and they feel just like you do and they hurt just like you do, and they have hearts and souls just like you do. Yet so many times we break their little hearts like the disciples did with a "go away" or an "I don't care" or a "that's your problem" and we put our own needs and feelings and desires above theirs. But just look at:

2. Jesus' reaction which we must imitate (16) He rebuked the disciples and taught them an important lesson. What can you do? Well, for your own children, you can provide the kind of loving and protective home they deserve. You can give them time and attention and put yourself in their place and think about them as people. But what about the other children around you, the children of your neighborhood, your city, your world? What about when you see them being mistreated, what can you do? Well, first of all:

a. you can care when children are mistreated If you read **Mk. 10:14** it says, *When Jesus saw this, he was indignant*. Literally the word means to become very agitated, either through sadness and grief or irritation. To see children treated wrongly, to see people hold a wrong view of and attitude toward children really bothered Him. In fact, turn to **Mt. 18:5-6**. Jesus identifies Himself with little children. He loves little children so much that He indicates that His personal presence and attention is given somehow specially to little children and when one of them is mistreated or led astray, the penalty is grave! Hear that, you child abusers of the world! You'd better go look for a millstone and jump in the ocean because what's coming to you is far worse and you can't escape it. Verse **10** says angels are assigned to them directly by God. Brother, Jesus CARES when children are mistreated! In His infinite wisdom, for some reason, He does not always choose to stop it, but you can rest assured He knows it and feels it and never forgets it. He cares and so can you. When you see kids around you in your neighborhood, your children's friends, in your Sunday School class or Pioneer Club, or wherever, you can see them as real people with feelings and hurts, rather than just as a problem to be dealt with. If they are neglected or mistreated, you can't usually stop it, but you can allow your heart to be broken for them and to care and to do whatever you can to gently straighten the bruised reed or rekindle the smoldering wick. What can you do? Well, for instance:

b. you can work to remove hindrances and help them come to Jesus There are things, like the disciples, which are hindering them, preventing them from coming to Jesus who is the only one who can really meet their needs and soothe their wounded hearts. Sometimes the hindrance is as simple as needing a ride to Sunday School or Pioneers and a Bible of their own. Sometimes it may mean talking to their parents about letting them do something with you. It may mean letting them come over and asking God for opportunities to share with them. It may mean

becoming their friend, answering their questions, letting them have a piece of your attention and life. Look what Jesus did:

c. you can treat them lovingly - Mk. 10:16 says He took the children in his arms. He loved on them and held them. So many kids never get that. Just to give them a hug or let them sit on your lap if they're little. They love it and they need it. A child who's been neglected or mistreated is simply starved for love. Spend time with them; play with them; be interested in their things; let them sit on your porch and tell you about their day. It may be only a little but you can help to heal their hurts. And you can also do what Jesus did:

d. you can pray for them He took them up in His arms and prayed for them. He begged the Father to be with them and meet their needs and to bring them to Him someday. Kids are people too. They need prayed for. They need you to pray for them.

Mistreated children are wounded, hurting people and they don't even know it. Many times, it's years later that they truly understand just what was really done to them or what was denied to them in their childhood. Some of you here may be people who were wounded young, but now you're grown up and you realize what happened to you and it makes you angry and you hurt and you don't know what to do about it. Let me just share three brief thoughts of hope for you:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Wounded Young

1. Jesus is angered by your mistreatment Before you get angry at God and think, "How could a good God let me go through that? Where was He?" You can see it right here. He hated every minute of it. He was angered by it. Those who hurt you, unless they come to Christ for forgiveness, have a tremendous eternal penalty to pay. It was not meaningless and it was not forgotten! But:

2. Jesus wants mistreated little children to come to Him and belong to Him You may be big now, but Jesus is still looking for kids to adopt. He's looking specially for wounded, hurting big kids like you to come to Him, so He can hold you in His arms and tell you He loves you and soothe all your hurt. You see:

3. if you will come to Him child-like, you can belong to His Kingdom (17) If you will just trust Him like those little kids did and let Him have you, let Him pick you up in His arms, if you will in child-like faith say, "Jesus, I give myself to you", you will be made part of His Kingdom, part of His forever family, His own son or daughter. And He will heal your broken, wounded heart. It may take a long time. It may take the help of a counselor or Pastor. It may take some tears, but Jesus will hold you and sooner or later make the hurt go away.

Let me share with you a story that gives hope to those of you who may have been mistreated as children and also a challenge to the rest of us to care about you. *In 1958 at age 21 Marilyn Van Derbur was crowned Miss America. She made straight A's, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Colorado, sang, acted, was a competitive swimmer and golfer. She broke and trained horses and raced for ski teams. She was a model of achievement and her life was filled with extraordinary success. Three years ago at age 54 she finally found the courage to announce publicly that she was a survivor of childhood incest. From the time she was 5 until she left for college at 18 her father repeatedly appeared in her bedroom at night and abused her. In order to survive, her mind separated the two worlds in which she lived. She worked hard to repress the awful memories of the night and succeeded so well that as an adult she could no longer remember them because her life was so full of achievements. In her 20's it was her youth minister at church who first began to put two and two together from things she said and did and carefully, in the course of a conversation that changed her life, his words brought up the repressed past and it flooded back into her conscious mind. But dealing with it constructively came later. She married and had a child at age 34, but by age 47 she became so dysfunctional through anxiety and pain that she sought real help and began the healing process. Today at age 57 she is a well-known speaker and travels the country encouraging victims of childhood abuse to seek help. Her advice just last Monday to a group here in Philadelphia was: "It is necessary to speak out. Turn to a trusted friend or family member. Find the courage to attend a group meeting. We stay shamed by acting ashamed. We have nothing to be ashamed of."* My friend, if you've been hurt, there is help and there is healing for you. Tell someone. Tell Jesus. And may God grant that every one of us may have the love of that pastor to notice and care about those who hurt. Ours may be the loving words that change a life.

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke The Wealthy - 18:18-27

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

This is going to be, without a doubt, the most unusual message in this series because the type of wounded, hurting person Jesus ministered to in our text today is just the opposite of the type of person we usually think of as needing our care and attention. He was not sick or old. He was young and healthy. He was not poor or outcast. He had great wealth and was the ruler of the local synagogue, a man well-respected in his community. He was not living in all kinds of sinful behav-

ior and rebellious toward God. He was carefully obedient to God's commands and had been all his life. He was not resistant to Jesus but respected Him and fell on his knees before Him. He was a man with whom nothing seemed to be wrong and yet he was of all men most to be pitied because he went away sad and sorrowing knowing that there was one thing between him and eternal life: his wealth. Let's read the story, **Luke 18:18-27**. Now our first task is to try:

I. Understanding The Plight Of Those Who Are Wealthy and even when I say that, it seems a bit strange. Plight? You may be thinking, "Boy, that's a plight I'd love to be in!" but look what Jesus said in **(24-25)**. It is hard, very hard, for a rich person to be saved! Jesus never said that about any other class of people. When we think of people that it's hard to see come to Jesus, we think of drug dealers and thugs, really wicked people. He didn't say it's hard for the wicked to be saved, but the rich! In fact, He used what must have been a common proverb of the time. It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Various attempts have been made to find another meaning of the saying to make it less impossible sounding, but it means simply what it says: humanly speaking, apart from the grace of God, it is a virtual impossibility for a wealthy person to be saved. Man, I'm glad I was born poor! Now why is it so hard?

1. they may develop a self-image based on riches While not all rich people are snobs, the term "rich snob" had its origin somewhere! It is very possible for people that have a lot to build a materially based view of themselves, to feel that they are somebody, that they are better than others who don't have what they do, that they are somehow worthy or deserving of what they have and of a superior level of treatment. You've all met people like that. That kind of person has real trouble seeing themselves as a poor, lost person in need of a Savior! Or:

2. they may develop a self-sufficiency based on riches - Mk. 10:24 is the parallel account to Luke. You may as well turn there and leave a finger because we'll be back. Anyway, Mark tells us that Jesus actually repeated this statement twice for emphasis and if you look in the NIV margin, you'll see the phrase *for those who trust in riches*, which is in a lot of manuscripts. People place their trust, their faith, in riches because money is power. Money solves almost anything. It buys security, at least in a basic sense. The rich farmer said in his heart, "*You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.*" That's not unrealistic. It's hard for people who have a lot to have a sense of need, to look to anything or anyone else to meet their needs. They tend to become self-sufficient and that makes it hard to grasp needing Christ as a Savior. Or:

3. they may develop a self-righteousness based on riches (19-21) This man had not become proud or particularly self-sufficient. He went another route. He used his situation and possessions for good, to do good deeds, to help others. He had plenty of time and freedom to keep the Law with all its rituals and sacrifices. He had advanced so well in Judaism that he had become the ruler of the local synagogue, the man in charge. But the very question he came to Jesus with betrayed the way he thought, *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?* He was thinking in terms of keeping commandments and in reply, Jesus listed five of the 10 commandments. His reply was, "I've done all these, since I was a kid!" That's how he saw himself, righteous, but a righteousness that is self-made! A person who has much may devote themselves to good and worthy causes, may give thousands, may become very religious and be a very good person outwardly, so it's hard to see oneself as a poor wretched sinner needing forgiveness! In addition:

4. they may develop an idolatrous attachment to riches (22-23) Jesus saved the last of the commandments and changed its form. Instead of saying, *You shall not covet...*, to which the man would have replied, "I don't", He said, "I want you to go sell everything you have and give it away." All this man had was God's and Jesus simply asked him to give it away. What He was doing really, was making a test of the first commandment to love the Lord with all your heart.... But the young man couldn't do it. His heart had become attached to his riches. The real question was not, "What must I do?" but "What do I love?" and at the bottom line, he loved his riches more than God. They had become His idol. God does not command that every rich person give away his riches. But this is a test question for all of us, especially those who have lots. If God told you to sell all you have and give it away would you do it? Ask it seriously, your home, your car, everything. Everything I have belongs to God and He can do what He wants with it. The Bible says that greed or the love of money is idolatry; it takes the place of God, sometimes even in people who claim to love Him. And what makes it so difficult is that:

5. they are often blindly unaware of their condition Until this eye-opening moment, he had been blind to it all along. He had no idea of the role which wealth had played in his life and the extent to which he had become attached to it, until somebody threatened to take it all away. Jesus spoke these words to the church at Laodicea, *You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.* That is often the condition of rich unbelievers, but it can also be the condition of rich believers as well. A person can be truly saved and trusting in Jesus Christ and still be blind to the role wealth plays in their life.

Up to this point we've all been thinking about somebody else we know who has more than we do! I don't know of any millionaires among us and I doubt that any of us see ourselves as wealthy. Yet we are and I'm not just talking about our double income professional families. Compared to the vast majority of the world's 7 billion people, every one of us is rich. For example, one fifth of the world's people live in India where they average \$1,920 per person per year. In Pakistan \$1270

and in Afghanistan only \$500 - per YEAR! Most of us have our own house and 1 or 2 cars; we live in unspeakable luxury by comparison. When nationals visit here, they are amazed. The world thinks Americans are rich and they're not all wrong! The very things that may have been true of this young ruler may easily be true of us and we ourselves may be too blind to see it! That's why it's much harder for Americans to be saved and why it's sometimes harder for American Christians to make Jesus Lord of everything in their lives. The more prosperous we get, the easier it is for us to take our eyes off of Jesus Christ and the things that really matter in life. But the real point of this message is:

II. Our Reaction Toward Those Who Are Wealthy Wealthy people, Americans or not, are hurting people who don't know it. It is ever so difficult for them to be saved, and if they are, to turn everything over to Christ's Lordship. How should we react to this kind of hurting people? Well, there are some:

1. common reactions toward them

a. we may have an unrealistic picture of them (26) Why did the disciples say this? **Mk. 10:26**. They were amazed. They always thought rich was the way to go! Rich people are happy; rich people have no problems; rich people don't have to struggle with sin and temptation, they can have whatever they want. If rich people can hardly be saved, what hope is there for the rest of us? What an unrealistic picture, but we often share it. Wealth is great, wealthy is how we all want to be, it would solve our problems. But that picture is simply not true. Jesus' picture of the camel and the eye of the needle is the real picture. Then:

b. we may seek them because of what they have - James 2:1-4 warns us about that. We may cater to them, may court their friendship, but for the wrong reasons. We may seek them out and treat them specially because we want something from them or because we see that they could do so much for God if they got saved or for the church if they came here. That's a wrong motive and it'll backfire sooner or later. Or:

b. we may be jealous of them because of what they have You know how a child gets angry when their brother or sister has a candy bar and they don't? Some of us never outgrow that. We see people who have a lot more than we have and we covet their things; we're jealous of them. We're mad because we have to work so hard for what little we have and they don't for their much. It seems unfair and we may be angry. Or:

c. we may judge them because of what they have We may just categorically assume things about them that are not true. We may adopt the old "your money perish with you" approach and have a condemning attitude and look down our nose at them for being rich and for being blind. It is hard enough for them to be saved and then we turn our backs on them and say, "They'll never be saved, what's the use!" None of these is a proper reaction but just look at:

2. Jesus' reaction toward the rich young ruler Start by turning back to Mark:

a. He loved him - Mk. 10:21 When Jesus looked on that young man, He didn't feel envy, he didn't feel judgmental. He said, "Here's a man who's lost and doesn't know it; I love him and I'll die for him. I want him to have eternal life" Friend, we need to love wealthy people and to care about their salvation. Years ago, this church sent out a missionary to reach upper class wealthy people in the New England area. It was tough and expensive work and it eventually folded. But it was really tough to get support for, because nobody cares about the spiritual needs of the rich! At one point we had a set of missionaries who were striving to reach upper class urban professionals in Asuncion, Paraguay. God gave them a love for these up and outsiders of that society, whom no one was reaching. Everybody wants to reach the jungle Indian tribes who've never heard, so that the poor heathen might hear the Gospel, but nobody cares much about Society Hill! Jesus did and we must too! The next time you read about that millionaire becoming depressed and committing suicide, that movie star ending an unhappy marriage, that professional baseball player using drugs or even that politician who attends his church every Sunday while voting for anti-Christian causes, don't despise or condemn that person; love them! Pray for them! And let that love extend closer to home to your well-to-do neighbor, to your boss or the owner of your company, to your doctor or lawyer or the guy who blows the horn of his Mercedes at you at the red light. Somebody needs to care about them. They are people too and just like the rest of us, they need Jesus as their Savior and as their life! Secondly:

b. He attempted to help him see his condition (19) Jesus knew what this guy was all about before he even walked up. He called Jesus, "Good Master" and Jesus' immediate response was, "Remember friend, there is no one good but God!" He wasn't saying, "I'm not God"; He was saying, "The reason you can call me good is that I AM God and there is no one good but God; no mere mortal human being like yourself is good!" He came already thinking that he was good like Jesus was good. Jesus tried to open his eyes so that he could see himself as he really was. **1 Tim. 6:17** says, *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.* That's what Jesus was doing, warning him not to trust in himself or in his riches but to trust in God. When we know a wealthy person, like any other, we need to ask God to take the blinders off and for opportunities to share. This would apply not only to unbelievers but for believers who have their eyes taken off of Jesus by their material things. And lastly:

c. He encouraged him to become a true disciple (22) He said, "Come follow me. Put away your love for your wealth and love Me; make Me your Lord; become a disciple of Mine." We can encourage and invite people who place too much value on money to become true disciples. We can invite them, encourage them, to a vital living relationship with Jesus Christ as their Savior, their Lord, and their life.

With a few rare exceptions, wealthy people are usually wounded, hurting people. They are bruised reeds which, if nobody carefully straightens, will break and die. They are smoldering wicks which, if nobody carefully fans to life, will go completely out in darkness. Ask God to give you a heart of love for the up and out as well as the down and out. And before I close, in case any of this applies to you personally, let me say that in this text, there is not only a cry of sadness, but:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Who Are Wealthy (27) What is impossible with men is possible with God! God can save anybody, rich or poor, wicked or self-righteous so:

1. it is possible for you to be both saved and Spirit-controlled If you are outside of Christ today, it is possible for Him to open your eyes. He loves you; He wants you. Come to Him. And if you've already come to Him but you're one of those believers whose spiritual life has been choked by the pursuit of material things, God is not done with you. He is willing to take over your life and take control of it by His Spirit and live out a wonderful exciting Christian life through you, money or no money. The door of God's possibility is open to you. You have to walk through it or go away sad like this man did. But know this:

2. God wants the unconditional surrender of all that you have Non-Christian friend, God may not choose to take away all your money, but you can't serve two masters; no man can. You can't serve God and money. He has to know which one you love. He wants you to lay down everything that you trust in, to stop trusting in yourself, in people, in your position, in your good deeds, in your money and the security it provides, and trust only in Him to save you. There is room for nothing and no one else but Him as the object of your trust. That is the only way to be saved. And Christian, God wants you to lay everything at His feet. Every nickel you have, every pencil in your pocket is His, and He wants the absolute unconditional surrender of its use to Him. We're all wealthy to some degree and you need to settle that question for yourself. If God asked you to give away everything you have, would you do it? I hope the answer is yes, but listen:

3. God can use what you have for eternal good - Listen to **1 Tim. 6:18-19**, *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.* If you're willing to surrender its use to God and be generous and share and let go of what you have for the Kingdom, God can use it to lay up eternal treasure. God can use it to bring others to Himself and to meet the needs of His children and build them up. The rewards will be eternal. Plus, when it's surrendered to Him, instead of living life as the world has defined it and striving to get and to have and to accumulate, you can live the life that is truly life, the life of the Spirit of God molding you and shaping you into the image of Jesus and using you for His Kingdom and glory.

A little church was having a homecoming service, to which ex-members who had moved away were invited. One of the former members had become a millionaire. When asked to speak, he recounted his childhood experience, earning his first silver dollar, which he had decided to keep always. But when a visiting missionary preached about the need for funds in his mission work and the offering was passed, a great inward struggle occurred. "As a result," the rich man said, "I put my treasured silver dollar in the basket. I am convinced that God has blessed me richly because when I was a boy, I gave God all I had." The congregation was spellbound by the multi-millionaire's tremendous statement, until an elderly little man seated in the front row rose and said, "Brother, I dare you to do it again!" Brother or sister, I dare YOU to do it again, to make Him Lord of everything you have, not yesterday but right now. And I dare you to let Him mold your heart to love and minister to wealthy people.

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke

The Handicapped - 18:35-43

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

To this point in our series, we've mentioned only for a few moments in one study, one of the major groups of hurting people that Jesus said he had come to minister to. In the synagogue at Nazareth in Lk. 4:18, Jesus said, *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, ..."* There were many occasions in his ministry where Jesus made blind people see. They came with the crowds, along with the lame and the deaf and Jesus made the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, and yes, the blind to see. As Jesus passed through Jericho on his way up to Jerusalem for the last time, there was a particular blind man by the name of Bartimaeus who was sitting with a blind friend (Matthew tells us) by the side of the road near the town and heard the commotion of the crowd passing by. Let's pick up the story in **Luke 18:18-35**. Today we

would call Bartimaeus a handicapped person. He was not a sick person like the woman who was healed of the issue of blood; nor was he a totally helpless person like the paralyzed man. He could think. He could walk. He could work. He could do just about anything you can do except for one thing: he couldn't see. And because of that he couldn't do many other things without assistance. The dictionary defines a handicap as: *An anatomical, physiological, or mental deficiency that prevents or restricts normal achievement.* Lame people can do everything you can do except walk, which means they need assistance getting around. Deaf people can do everything you can do except hear, and because of that, speak. So they need assistance in communicating. Jesus cared a great deal about handicapped people like these. Indeed, He said He was sent to them in a special way. And if we are to be like Him, so are we. Let's begin by trying to:

I. Understanding The Plight Of Those Who Are Handicapped (35-39) Ours is really the first generation in history to pay real attention to the needs of handicapped people. We provide them with special parking spaces, special access ramps and elevators in buildings, special tools that help them function, and special services. It has never been so in history, nor is it so most other places in the world today. That is what made Jesus' ministry so unique. He paid attention to the people nobody else would. But even with all our improvements:

1. what they have often experienced is not good. Consider our friend Bartimaeus. Blind, deaf, and handicapped people today often experience things very similar to what he did. First:

a. they are denied many things normal to others Imagine his life as he sat by the roadside that day. That's where he sat every day. He did not expect to get a job. He did not expect to fall in love and get married and have a family. He did not expect to have his own home and support himself. All he ever really expected to do was sit by the road and ask people passing by for alms. In many countries of the world today, that's still all handicapped people have to look forward to. Here in the US, they may be able to do some or even all of those things. But in reality, they are still denied many things that are normal to others. In many cases, handicapped people are doomed to single-ness. In fact, they may be doomed to have very few friends because of their appearance or their inability to be normal in certain areas. Finding a job is still a large hurdle, especially one that is more than a low-level or token position. I know that we have had at least one US President in a wheelchair but you still don't see many men in a wheelchair with a job like Elmer Shick, the Project Manager for Reeves who built our church building. Blind people still never get to drive a car and run to the store whenever they feel like it or read their mail like you and I and hearing-impaired people can't pick up a phone and call home whenever they'd like. A thousand and one things that are normal to you in your everyday life are denied to them by their handicap and so:

b. they must often depend on others to assist them Bartimaeus had to ask the crowd what was going on around him. He was always dependent on the eyes of others to see for him. Just close your eyes for a few minutes while I talk and imagine what being like that would do to your life. The level of assistance varies according to the degree and nature of the handicap, but it's always needed somewhere and it's not always there when you need it or if it is, it may cost you a great deal to get it! And it's not only assistance:

c. they must often depend on others to provide for them Bartimaeus lived as a beggar. He lived by asking other people for help. Just look in the third world and you'll still find blind beggars. Many handicapped people are forced to be dependent on their family, their parents, their spouse, or even the government to provide the means that they might live. It's not what they want or prefer, but they have no choice in their circumstances. And to top it all off:

d. they have often been mistreated by others When he wanted to speak to Jesus, the crowd told Bartimaeus to sit down and shut up! This was probably not the first time. I'm sure he'd heard that from many an irritated passer-by. I'm sure he knew what it was like to get pushed aside or knocked down in the crowd as he felt his way along and what it was like to get teased by the children of Jericho who might take his cloak or his cane and tease him to come get it. Especially if they were born with their disability, unless they were carefully sheltered, handicapped people have often experienced at various times in their lives everything from being teased, stared at, ignored, or deliberately avoided, to being rejected, turned down, harshly treated or even actually hurt in some instances. And so, the frustration of their disability is compounded by the way they are treated.

While there are happy, well-adjusted, handicapped people, many of them are still wounded, hurting people who may have a whole mess of differing feelings inside them:

2. how they may feel because of what they've experienced

a. they may feel afraid or vulnerable because they can't help or protect themselves. They may feel afraid, afraid of crossing the street, afraid of leaving what is familiar to them, afraid that they'll have an accident and not be able to get help, afraid somebody might break in their home and rob them or attack them and they'd be helpless or simply that they'll fall out of their wheelchair and be hurt. Fear may be a very big part of their lives or:

b. they may feel guilty or useless because of their disability. Some people just hate to be a burden and are driven by a desire to achieve and contribute. So, they may feel guilty for what isn't even their fault, for being a burden on the people they love, for being unable to earn money, for being unable to do things they can't possibly do, but wish they could. Or:

c. they may feel self-pity or anger Some adopt a "Why me?" or a "Poor me!" attitude and either be angry about their handicap and all the suffering they endure or feel sorry for themselves and look for pity all the time. Some of them may not be very pleasant to be around or to deal with; they may be demanding or critical or unwilling to try to do what they really could learn to do. And if it's bad enough:

d. they may feel hopeless or desperate Jesus healed another blind man once in the Temple and got into a big controversy over it. In **Jn. 9:32** the blind man himself confesses, *Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind*. Sometimes people go blind from an illness or get blinded by accident and there is hope of healing. But until Jesus, nobody ever opened the eyes of a man *born* blind! There are some handicaps which are temporary or which at least improve, but many of them are forever apart from a miracle which God doesn't often choose to grant. As a result, a handicapped person may see only misery in the life they are forced to live and no hope of getting better and they may become desperate. They may run after miracle cures or they may become depressed and even suicidal.

So, a handicapped person, unless they've already experienced a great deal of healing in their lives, is usually a wounded, hurting person. They're a reed that's already been bruised and, if not treated with compassion and care, will break, like a smoldering wick that will be totally blown out if not fanned gently back into flame. That's how Jesus treated the blind and the deaf and the lame and that should also be:

II. Our Reaction Toward Those Who Are Handicapped Now the crowd there at Jericho which was following along with Jesus displayed some:

1. common reactions toward them (36-39) When we encounter a handicapped person in the course of our life:

a. we may ignore them That's the easiest thing. Everybody rushed up to see Jesus and listen to Him for themselves. Poor Bartimaeus was just left sitting there by the roadside going, "What's happening?" We do that, don't we? And sometimes on purpose. Sometimes if that blind person is coming down the sidewalk, we just stand quietly and let them pass or if we see the person in the wheelchair, we'll politely avoid them somehow. We may feel embarrassed and not know what to say, or be unsure whether to shake their hand or not and so, we often pull back and ignore or worse:

b. we may repress them When Bartimaeus did try to make his presence known and get Jesus' attention by calling out, the people around him told him to shut up and be quiet and quit being a nuisance. Now you or I probably wouldn't be quite that rude, but we could accomplish the same thing by discouraging them. Handicapped people need encouragement. Life is discouraging enough. But so many people stand in the way and say, "You can't do that, you'll never make that, you won't find a way to do that..." I heard a gifted handicapped speaker on a radio program the other day and he called them Dream-Killers! People that are always telling you to accept mediocrity, and give up trying and striving and pushing yourself so hard. And sometimes we're well-meaning when we do it. We don't want to see them get hurt or frustrated, so we just tell them not to try anything above bare minimum or we assume they can't. But you would be amazed what even the most handicapped person can do! That man on the radio had only one good arm, and that with limited movement, and couldn't walk the length of a room, but his dream was to be a Physical Education teacher. He not only became a PE teacher, but a teacher of PE teachers. He taught himself to shoot basketball in his own convoluted method so well that after 3 years he could make 96 out of 100 throws from the foul line. He plays golf and scores in the 80's with one arm. He learned to fly an airplane and got his pilot's license! Some time ago, the Lord gave me a friend who was a quadriplegic. He couldn't move to get himself out of bed in the morning. But once he was ready in his motorized chair, he drove himself to work every day in his own van. He taught computers in a Philadelphia high school for a dozen years since he became disabled. Another handicapped friend of mine was confined to a wheelchair by spina bifida, but became a professional Christian counselor and touched dozens of lives every year. But none of these folks would have made it without encouragement, because of people discouraging them and trying to keep them in their place. Then:

c. we may be ambivalent toward them - Mk. 10:49 tells us that after Jesus noticed the man, the crowd changed their tune and said, "*Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.*" One minute they ignored him and told him to shut up and the next minute they're going, "Oh look, Jesus is stopping for you; let me help you up!" Cold one minute and hot the next; that's called ambivalence. Handicapped people get a lot of that. Ignored one day and gushy concern the next day. Or people fall all over you and make all kinds of promises today so they feel good about themselves, but then you don't see them for a month! Handicapped people don't need that kind of false concern. Look at:

2. Jesus' reaction toward the blind man (40-42) And what Jesus did for Bartimaeus, we can do for the handicapped people God places in our lives, whether may be a relative, one of our own parents or children, or a friend or a school-mate or a fellow-church member or simply somebody we meet in a store or an office. First:

a. we can stop and gave time and attention to them Jesus stopped and, out of all the dozens of people crowding around him, he gave personal time and attention to Bartimaeus! And that's step one, get to know the person as you would any other person. Take the time it requires. If it's a casual encounter in the Acme, it won't take much to chat

while you're in line. If it's a person you're going to see more often, it will take much more. But you'll often find that they are enjoyable, interesting people and the time you spend can make a real difference. Then:

b. we can find out their actual needs and encourage their desires Jesus didn't just quickly zap his eyes and walk on. He asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The answer seems obvious from our perspective, but the man had just addressed Jesus as the Promised Messiah, the Son of David. He might have simply said, "It is enough just to hear your voice and touch you. Now I can die in peace," like old Simeon did at Jesus' birth. He might have said, "Take me with you; I want to be one of your disciples". But Jesus took time to find out the real desire of his heart, which was the desire of faith. He believed Jesus could give him sight. And we need to do the same. We need to communicate with handicapped people and not assume what they want or need but find out. What would really be helpful to them? What would they really like to do or try? How could we encourage them to try and to succeed at things in life, simple or complex? Then, like Jesus:

c. we can have compassion on them - Mt. 20:34 says, *Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes* He cared deeply about Bartimaeus and his friend. Ask God to give you a real love and caring for that handicapped person so that you can feel how life really is for them and help them from the heart, instead of having simply a token appearance of concern. Then like Jesus:

d. we can touch them - Mt. 20:34 says He touched their eyes. He didn't have to. He could have simply said the word or even thought it. But He chose to touch the man. I don't know why, but I do know that the simple act of touch often means a lot to a handicapped person. Often people hold back from normal touching. But just a hug or an arm around, even a simple pat on the back or touch on the arm can help them to feel loved and accepted and finally:

e. we can help them find spiritual healing in Jesus No, we can't heal their blinded eyes and Jesus probably won't either. He probably won't heal their useless legs or make their deaf ears hear right now. But He can and will bring healing to their wounded hearts. They can find that they are somebody in Him, that He has a plan and a purpose for their lives and that their handicap is God's opportunity to use them in a unique and special way. It can radically transform their life from one of anger or self-pity or misery, to one of purpose and meaning. And Jesus will do one more thing for them. He'll give them hope. He'll give them the assurance that the future will not be like this, that one day when they are with Him, there won't be any more handicaps. Their eyes will work and their legs will work and their ears will work, and they'll be on their feet leaping and shouting and praising God like this man was. And that hope can carry them through a whole lifetime of frustration and difficulty as they experience the grace and power of God in their life. And you can be the instrument to point them to Jesus. You can be the one to quietly and lovingly introduce them to the best friend they'll ever have, the one who can meet all their deepest needs. Verse 40 says Jesus commanded the others to bring Bartimaeus to Him. He says the same to us: Bring them to Me! And even believers who become handicapped may sometimes drift away into doubt and despair and may need you in a loving, caring way, to love them back to Him.

How will you react to the handicapped people God puts alongside your Jericho Road of life? Will you let Him touch your heart for them? Will you bring them compassion and caring and encouragement and most of all, will you love them to Him? And finally, let me say that in this story there is a tremendous:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Who Are Handicapped (42-43)

1. you need to trust in Jesus as the Savior like this man - Mk. 10:50 says, *Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.* You need to do the same, even if you can't jump to your feet! Rush to Him. Do it now. Trust in Him in simple faith to come into your life, to save you from your sins, and to become the very source of your life.

2. Jesus does have mercy on you He stopped and touched Bartimaeus and He'll do the same for you. You've longed for somebody to experience this thing with you, to feel what you feel, to know the frustration and the agony you know. He will do it. Every moment, every hour, He'll know and He'll care, because His heart already cares about you. He proved it at the cross!

3. your faith will make you whole right now and ultimately heal you The way to a useful and vital life is not simply through the trying and striving of human effort. You may achieve much, but still be empty inside. But when you come to Jesus, He will give meaning and purpose to your confusing life. He'll make you whole in spirit and in mind by His great power and ultimately, one day He'll give you a brand-new body as well, one which is perfect, which is made just like His own glorious body. And lastly:

4. God will use your walk with Him to touch others Others came to praise and trust God because of Bartimaeus. And they will because of you too. God can use you as a tremendous testimony of His power and grace to touch the lives of others, both handicapped and "normal"!

Mary Verghese was a young doctor at Dr. Paul Brand's leprosy hospital in India... One day she went on a picnic outing in a station wagon with other young doctors. The station wagon was driven by a new driver out to demonstrate his bravery. After aggravating moments of driving behind a slow school bus, the young driver jerked the car into the passing lane and floored it. Suddenly he saw another car coming. On his left was a narrow bridge over a culvert. Instinctively he scrambled to stomp on the brake pedal - but hit the gas instead. The station wagon plummeted over the bridge and tumbled down a steep embankment. Mary...lay motionless at the bottom of the bank, her face slit open in a deep gash from cheekbone to chin. Her lower limbs dangled uselessly like two dead tree trunks. Mary's next few months were almost unbearable. Outside, the temperature was 110°. In her hospital room, Mary was wrapped in a perspex jacket and a thick plastic brace. She faced agonizing hours of therapy. Each week she would fail the sensation tests, never feeling the pinpricks on her legs. After observing her persistent despair and sourness, Dr. Brand decided to talk to her. "Mary," he began, "I think it's time to begin thinking of your professional future as a doctor." At first, she thought he was joking, but he went on to predict that she could serve God as a doctor, perhaps bringing to other patients fresh qualities of sympathy and understanding. She pondered his suggestion a long time... Gradually, Mary began to work with the leprosy patients. The staff noticed that patients' self-pity, hopelessness and sullenness seemed to fade when Mary Verghese was around. Leprosy patients whispered among themselves about the doctor in a wheelchair who was more disabled than they. One day, Dr. Brand saw Mary rolling her wheelchair between buildings of the hospital and asked how she was doing. "At first the threads seemed so tangled and broken," she replied, "but I'm beginning to think life may have a pattern after all." Soon Mary Verghese was assisting at surgery - tedious exhausting work because she had to maintain her balance and operate while sitting down. Mary's recovery was to involve many excruciating hours of therapy as well as major spinal surgery. But she had caught a glimmer of hope. She began to see that the disability was not a punishment sent by God to entrap her in a life of misery. Rather, it could be turned into her greatest asset as a doctor. She had instant rapport and acceptance with disabled patients. Eventually Mary learned to walk with braces... and ultimately headed up a new department at Vellore, India Physiotherapy School. By turning toward God and accepting the fact that He could weave a new design into her life, Mary Verghese had probably achieved far more than she ever would have if the accident had not occurred. [Where Is God When It Hurts, Philip Yancey, pp. 90-92] I don't know what God wants to do with you, my handicapped friend, but I know that He wants to do something like He did with Mary. He wants to give meaning and purpose to your life and turn your handicap into a special means of blessing for others. And, my normal friend, you may be the means God uses to help this kind of healing and redemption happen to some handicapped person whom God places in your path, if you're willing to let him!

Caring For The Wounded - Studies From Luke

The Dying 23:39-43

*The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... the prisoners...the blind ...the oppressed... - Luke 4:18
...a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Mt. 12:20*

There is one final group of hurting people to whom Jesus ministered, those who are dying. Often throughout his 3 year ministry Jesus encountered them. His response usually was to heal their bodies and keep them from it. On several occasions when He arrived after they died, He even restored them to life. But those measures were only temporary. He preserved people from facing the reality of death for a time, but eventually they had to face it anyway. Jesus does not always do that. He does not always restore us and spare us. A minority of us, He will take home suddenly and without warning through accident or heart attack. But most of us, He allows sooner or later to face the prospect of our own imminent death, to experience the process of dying. Jesus Himself went through that and, in the very middle of it, He ministered to another who was dying alongside Him, a thief. Let's pick up the story in **Luke 23:39-43**. This is usually a Good Friday text and we probably all have the same four points memorized about it. But if we could try to forget the picture we already have of this scene and just think about the thief as a person, a person who was in the process of being killed, who knew his own death was only hours away and there was no escape, maybe it will help us in:

I. Understanding The Plight Of Those Who Are Dying (35-39) Who are they? They are the terminally ill. The ones who have heard the words, "The cancer has spread and there's nothing more we can do". The ones who have heard the words, "This disease has no cure; it will progress and we can't stop it." The ones who have heard the words "It's a tumor and it's inoperable". They are sometimes the elderly who have reached that stage of life and health where they know death is imminent; they must face it soon. They are sometimes the young, who find that now in the very midst of all that is important to them, they will be taken away. They are sometimes even children, who have something wrong with them they don't understand and who have to face the idea of leaving home and going to a place called heaven where Jesus is. There is hardly a one of us who doesn't know someone who is dying. So, let's think about:

1. what is happening to them First of all:

a. they are facing an experience that may be painful This thief certainly was. They may know that they are going to face a great deal of pain. They may realize that they're going to go out gasping for breath or sedated with morphine to overcome the pain.

b. they are facing an experience that is unknown They've never died before. Neither have you. We don't know what it's like, how it feels, how long it takes, whether death will actually hurt or what our senses will register. On top of that:

c. they are facing an experience that is final There's no coming back. This life is over. If death doesn't turn out to be a positive experience, there are no second chances and no alternatives. Then:

d. they are facing a separation that is complete Everything they have ever known will be stripped away from them. Their family, friends, loved ones, their possessions, their home, everything that is important in life to them. Even their own five senses and their very bodies. It will be a complete and final separation from absolutely everything. And finally, as this thief realized:

e. they are facing an encounter with God that is personal No matter how much you've prayed or been religious, you've never seen God "face to face". And no matter how much faith or lack of it you have, if there is a God, in the moment of death is when you'll find out, when you'll meet Him.

These are the things a person who knows they are dying is facing, so just think about:

2. how they may feel because of what's happening to them Sometimes:

a. they may wish to deny it Some people just can't face the thought. So, they pretend it's not going to happen. They ignore it; they put it out of their minds. They refuse to think or talk about it and hope it'll go away. But eventually it stares them directly and undeniably in the face and:

b. they may feel angry and lash out (39) The crowd around Jesus was mocking Him and yelling, "If you're the Son of God, come down, show us." The one thief dying there beside him did the same. He hurled insults. In fact, **Mt. 27:44** says that *both* of them hurled insults in the beginning, the same as the crowd. Why would these two men do that? Dying people often get angry about what's happening to them, especially if they are younger and feel that it's unfair for it to happen at this time of their life. They may become bitter and may take it out on others, on those around them, even on those they love.

c. they may feel afraid (40a) "Don't you fear God?" the other thief said, "seeing we're about to die just like he is?" I don't think he was using the fear of God in the religious, respectful sense. He was talking about being afraid to meet God, knowing what his life was like. He was scared. Many dying people are; in fact, most of them probably are. Some of them are afraid of God Himself; those of us who have dealt with that, are still often afraid of the experience of dying itself. Heb. 2:14 tells us that the fear of death is universal to the human race and Satan uses it as a tool to enslave mankind to his bondage, unless they are set free by Christ.

d. they may feel sorrow, regret, or guilt (40b-41) They may grieve and be sad over their loss of life. They may experience tremendous regret over things they have done or have never done that they wanted to. They may feel guilty about things they've done and have never felt forgiven for, or have never set straight or told the truth about or about relationships that have been severed. All these things, guilt, sorrow, fear, anger, and disbelief may flood their minds OR:

e. they may find grace to accept their death and live in eternal hope (42) This thief chose the route of accepting the fact that he was going to die and preparing for death and looking for peace. He turned to Jesus and asked as humbly as he knew how for a place in His Kingdom. He wanted to know the grace and mercy of God which would carry him through death and into glory. And thank God, through Jesus' reaction to him, he found it! Dying people may be wounded, hurting people with special needs and special fears, but they can find the grace of God to accept death and face it in confidence and assurance. And a big factor in whether or not these bruised reeds break or these smoldering wicks are snuffed out is:

II. Our Reaction Toward Those Who Are Dying When someone you know or someone you really love is dying, how do you react to them? Well, unfortunately, there are some very:

1. common reactions toward them that we often adopt, sometimes not even realizing it:

a. we may avoid them We may feel awkward when we're around them, not know what to say. Or we may feel so sad and torn up inside that we can hardly stand to see them and watch them deteriorate. So, we try to escape the pain; we withdraw, we pull back. We don't go to visit as often, occupy ourselves with other things, try not to think about it. And so, we may end up denying them the very thing they need most as they're dying: us! Or:

b. we may shelter their mind and emotions We may decide the best thing is for them not to know it's going to happen and just let it take them. Brother, don't you EVER try to keep from me the truth about my own death! I want to know; I have a right to know. Ultimately, I'm the one that's going to have to face it. So don't try to protect me from it by hiding it! Or we may just refuse to mention it in their presence or keep our whole relationship to unimportant

trivial things so as not to upset them. Brother, dying people need a chance to talk about their dying! More than ever, they need to be real and to express the feelings of their hearts and to hear the assurance of those they love that it's going to be alright. And then sometimes:

c. we may overprotect their circumstances We know they're frail so we try to protect them from people or things that might upset them or from doing things that might be too strenuous. We want to shelter and coddle them and try to keep them an extra day longer, instead of letting them live their remaining days to the full.

Well, Jesus Himself was dying a painful death. He had neither time nor opportunity for a lengthy conversation with this dying thief. He had strength enough to utter one sentence. But in that one sentence we can see:

2. Jesus' reaction toward the dying man (43) and we can find the elements that are most important in our reaction toward people who are dying. First of all:

a. He told him the truth - *I tell you the truth, today...* You will die today. You will be in heaven today. You can count on it. Tell them the truth about themselves, about their own condition. You're not doing them any favors by withholding it or minimizing it. Even a child deserves the truth in a simple fashion he can understand. Author Joseph Bayly writes *"Our little boy died at home. He began to bleed at 6 o'clock in the morning. The doctor came a little later and said, 'I could put him in the hospital and he could have a massive transfusion. Maybe he'd live a few days longer, maybe not.' We chose to have him stay at home in the familiar bedroom, with his father and mother to comfort him and love him and talk to him about Jesus' love and heaven. In the previous months, when we knew that he had leukemia - and even before - we had talked naturally about those things and he had responded with the simple faith of a child in what his parents tell him. Now he didn't want to go to heaven. He wanted to stay with us in the familiar home. (What little boy wants to leave his mother and daddy, his brothers and his sister?) At 2:30 he died."* They told him the truth at a child's level and helped him be ready the best they could. They prepared him for what he had to face so that his last day would not be a terror-stricken one but the culmination of a process of gradual acceptance and understanding. Truth may be upsetting at first, but at the last only truth is healing; falsehood brings no comfort in the face of death. And then:

b. He gave him assurance - *...you will be...* in Paradise. "Yes, I know you're a thief. Yes, I know you're worried about your sins. Yes, I know you have no reason to hope for anything based on yourself but listen to me. I tell you the truth, you WILL be in paradise." That's assurance. And the one thing every dying person needs more than anything is the absolute assurance and reassurance that they will be in heaven when they die. If they don't have it or if they begin to doubt it out of the fear that comes upon them, you can be the one to help them get it or to be reassured of it. You can be the one to introduce them to Jesus and the forgiveness of their sins if they don't have it. You can be the one to read the Scriptures and remind them over and over again of the promises of God, if they do. And when their confidence seems to falter, you can have it for them and let them hang onto the coattails of your own. Then:

c. He promised to be with him - *...with me...* What comforting words! This thief had nobody, not a soul in all the world to care. But Jesus said, "We will die together and I will be there with you on this very day. You will not be alone." Now, of course, we can't promise to die simultaneously and end up in heaven at the same time like Jesus did, but we can still promise to be with them through as much of the process as is humanly possible; we can promise to be there and hold their hand. Nobody wants to die alone. Joe Bayly also writes of his own father, *"In the intensive care unit of the hospital my wife and I were with him until the visiting hours were over. The mechanics of survival - tubes, needles, oxygen system, electronic pacemaker, were in him and on him and around him. He died alone, at night, after visiting hours. His grandsons had no chance to give him a final kiss, to feel the pressure of his hand on their heads..."* Oh, that is more and more true. We've moved death out of our homes and into the hospital and put it out of sight where we don't have to bear it, where we don't have to hold the person's hand and bear to watch them go, where somebody will usher us out if things get serious. But if I have to die, I want somebody with me through the months and the days as it grows closer. I want somebody to touch me and hold me. I want somebody I love there in my final hour to be with me. The best medicine you could give me is to promise me that you'll be with me as much as you can through this ordeal and that you'll do your best to be there when I leave and hold my hand until the moment Jesus can take it from you. And then with a word:

d. He made eternal things real for him - *...in Paradise* In that split-second Paradise went from being a fuzzy ethereal concept to a very real place in which to be. To most of us, eternal things are like that. We mention heaven and know we're going there, but we've never really thought about it much and it's sort of dreamlike and vague. But I've met a few precious saints in my time who talked about heaven and being with Jesus there in a way so concrete that it seemed as real to me as my talking about going home after work and seeing my wife! It's about time we started realizing, as we read the visions that God has given us of heaven in our Bible, that it's real, that these are snapshots of our own future, things we'll see and experience. Paul said to fix our minds on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, not on things of earth. The things of heaven need to become as real to us as the things of earth which we see with our eyes. I determined some time ago that when I know a person is

dying, I'm going to quit beating around the bush and talking about things that don't matter and start talking about Jesus and how wonderful it is going to be to be with Him. I read passages about heaven and talk about what it's like there. I try to talk about Paul and Peter and Bible characters like they're real people we're going to meet there. The more we can do to help them catch the reality of heaven, the easier dying will be.

Will you do that? Will you be brave enough to involve yourself with those who are dying? I know a number of you do all the time in your work, but what about the rest of us? When someone you know faces their last journey, will you be there for them to comfort and encourage? Will you be truthful and do all you can to bring them assurance and to make the eternal things real to them? You just might make the difference in how they spend their last days on earth. *A man in Iowa discovered that he had terminal cancer. For weeks he moped around the house avoiding loved ones, inwardly cursing God and wondering why this tragedy had happened to him. Then one day he made a decision; "I am not dead yet, and I am going to live each day to its fullest the rest of my life." Sometime later, when he was interviewed, he said he had experienced a more abundant life in the weeks after that decision than during his prior forty-two years; colors seemed more vivid, the laughter of his children more bright and precious. One of the suggestions he gave to help others with terminal illness was, "Consider each day as a gift from God; enjoy it fully."* You could be the key that helps a person change their attitude. You could be the hand that comforts a dying child or parent or spouse. And then let me close with:

III. A Message Of Hope For Those Who Are Dying (that is, all of us!) - Jn. 14:1-4 The night before, Jesus had done the same thing that he did for the dying thief for his own disciples, as they would have to face his death. He gave them these never-to-be-forgotten words: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.*

1. there is a real place called heaven It is your Father's house. It has many rooms. It is a place that Jesus actually went to and you will too:

2. Jesus is in that place right now preparing for you He is there and He'll be there. He's waiting and preparing in heaven rooms, dwelling places, permanent homes for each of His children and:

3. He will take you to be with Himself Whether it's at the Rapture or through means of death. He himself personally will be right there, just the other side of death's door, to be with you and take you home so you can be with Him forever. So, as you face death, your own or someone else's:

4. you need not be troubled or afraid Trust the Father. Trust in Jesus. Rest in Him. Believe Him above your own emotions and feelings. If you know Him, it will be well with you!

Many years ago, our retired missionary Ernie Kaskela was dying of cancer. He and Shirley served the Lord most humbly but wholeheartedly for many years. But in retirement, cancer was discovered in his lung area. It took the doctors a long time to identify what it was because it was a rare type. An operation was done to remove as much as possible, but there was no real cure. It grew back and is slowly took his life. Eventually treatment ceased and because of the pain he had morphine regularly. He had hospice care arranged for himself to do what Shirley could not. He and Shirley planned his funeral and set their house in order for when he would go. And when I spoke to him, he said, "I'm not afraid of death. I know I'll be with the Lord and I'm looking forward to that. It's just the dying I'm not looking forward to, whether I will suffer and have pain and agony, that sort of thing". We concluded simply that all the saints we have known receive the special grace of God to die at the moment they need it and he would too. Ernie was one of those guys who talked about eternal things like they're real, who talked about seeing the Lord. I couldn't be in Florida where he was, but I prayed for him regularly and I called him now and again. I wanted him to go out knowing he was loved. And I want to go out like he went out, in faith and in peace, knowing in whom I have believed and being absolutely persuaded that He's able to keep me, even through death. Is there somebody who's facing death that you should be ministering to? Somebody to whom you could bring comfort like Jesus did to this dying thief?

John: The Gospel Of Life The Word Become Flesh - 1:1-18

Today we begin a chapter by chapter exposition of the Gospel of John. Its prologue, the first 18 verses, are really what I call "The Other Christmas Story". Matthew and Luke report the happenings on the ground: the birth of John, the announcement to Mary, Joseph's dream, the stable, the angels, the shepherds, the arrival of the wise men and all the other things that have come to be so much a part of our thinking about the coming of Jesus into the world. They see it from man's side. But John does not tell that part of the story at all. He sees it from God's side; He talks about Jesus, God the Son from all eternity, now coming into the world in flesh and what that means to the human race. And that can be summed up in one word: LIFE! In the event of the incarnation God has given us life! Almost every chapter mentions over again this theme of life and John even said that he wrote this gospel, *...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* - John 20:31. John is truly the Gospel of Life! And he begins by telling us:

I. What Jesus Has Always Been (1-2) Here we read that Jesus:

1. He is the Logos, the living Word or expression of God The Greek word *word* is *logos*. However, as it is used here, it doesn't mean a word written on a page or even a word spoken by a mouth. A person's word is a living expression of Himself. I think the writer of Hebrews explained it well when he wrote **Heb. 1:1-3**. Throughout the history of the Old Testament, God spoke. He spoke through visions and angels, through dreams and prophets. But now He has spoken in a new and final way; He has spoken literally *in* the person of His Son! Jesus is the exact representation of God, the complete radiance of the very person of God, now down here on earth and walking around in a human body! You see, Jesus did not begin life in His mother's womb as you or I did. John tells us:

2. He has always existed, even in eternity past Gen. 1 tells us, *In the beginning God created...* John 1 tells us *In the beginning Jesus already was!* Micah 5:2 says His goings forth have been from everlasting. He never had a beginning; He just always was! He is eternal. He was around forever, literally, but at this one point in time, He entered the world in a new way. John also points out that:

3. He is distinct from God the Father yet He is God Not A god as the cults would try to make it. He was God, period! And yet He was with God. God *with* God, distinct and yet one, the Father and the Son, one God in two persons (three actually, because we include the Spirit also). He was not a creation of God, not a child born to God (in the sense we think of it), but fully and completely God, one with the Father. In fact:

4. He was the agent through whom all things were created (3) When God said, "Let us make man...", the *us* was the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit. Jesus said, *Let there be light...* Jesus hung the stars and planets in space. Jesus said, *Let the dry land appear...* Jesus made man in *His* own image. Not a single thing in this universe that exists was made without Him; He made it all! He sustains it all! Christmas is not about a helpless little baby in a manger; it is about the all-powerful God the Son, the Word of God, Creator of the universe, coming into His own world in a new and unique way! Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, wrote, *"This great Prince entered our abode. This little planet of ours was made to burn with a superior light among its sister stars while the Creator sojourned here in human form. If for the first time you had heard of the visit of the Incarnate God to this world, you would be struck with a wonder which would last throughout eternity. This is the heart of the Gospel--the incomparable fact of the incarnation of the Son of God, His dwelling upon the earth, and His presentation of Himself as a sacrifice unto God for the sins of mankind."* And look what John says next:

5. He Himself is the source of all life (4-5) Where is life? Life is IN HIM. It's not a separate thing; it is in His own person. 5:26 says, *as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.* 1Jn. 5:11 says, *God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son.* Nothing else has His life, so in order to give us His life, He has to give us Himself, His Person. He has to unite Himself with us. Now John notes that:

a. His life comes to us through light (which is a symbol for **truth**) Human beings receive His life through the process of understanding and believing truth, through coming out of the darkness of unbelief and evil into the light of truth. Jesus not only came into the world to teach the truth about God and sin and salvation; He Himself was the Truth. He said that. He also said, *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.* - John 8:12. **To believe** the message of who He is and what He has done on the cross for us and how we must be saved, is **to receive** Him and to receive His life! When Jesus came into this world, it was like the brilliance of the sun coming into a pitch dark room and John says that:

b. His light continues to shine despite the darkness of the world The darkness didn't like the Light. The darkness tried to stamp it out. The darkness tried to kill the One who was the Light, but it didn't work. He still shines. The darkness keeps trying to stamp out His message of Truth, to eliminate His followers, but it never works. The light still shines two millennia later and the darkness, for all of its power of evil, cannot stop it, cannot overwhelm it, cannot snuff it out. Jesus has always been and always will be the Light that gives us life. Now, John tells us:

II. What Happened To The World At The Incarnation First of all:

1. John the Baptist was sent to declare that Jesus was the Light (6-8) John was the forerunner. He was to prepare the way, to say to all men that Jesus was the Light. He himself was only a man, only a prophet, only a signpost for Israel, pointing to the fact that:

2. the true light came into the world in the person of Christ (9) He presented Jesus to Israel. He said, "Here is the One; Here is the Light, the true light that is for every man. He existed before me and now He has come into the world. Here He is, the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world, the true Light of the world!" John was sent by God to identify Him, but the sad fact is that:

3. His own creation did not recognize Him (10) He came into the world He had made. He made everything in it; everyone in it. It was all His doing, yet they did not recognize Him as their Creator. They didn't know Him. They didn't believe Him. They thought He was just another man, just another human being like the rest of us, the same thing that so many people think today. And what's even sadder is that:

4. His own people did not receive Him (11) He did not come to the masses in China where the knowledge of God was all but erased. He came to the very people He had chosen, to Israel, the people whom He had taken as His own and given His law and told to prepare for His coming. For centuries, they yearned for the day when Messiah would come, yet when He came, they did not receive Him. They did not believe Him. They crucified Him. But the good news is that, both then and now, SOME DO receive Him. How?

5. all who receive Him do so by believing in His Name (12-13) Verse 12 is one of the first promises of God I memorized when I was 15 years old. To receive Him is to trust in His Name, in His Person, in His work to save you. *A woman was having trouble understanding the way of salvation. She just could not comprehend what it means to receive Christ. When she told an evangelist about her perplexity, he asked her this question: "Your last name is Franklin, isn't it?" When she answered, "Yes," he said, "How long has it been that?" She replied, "Ever since my husband I were married 30 years ago." "Tell me," the preacher continued. "How did you become Mrs. Franklin?" "It happened at the wedding," she responded. "The minister asked me, 'Will you have this man to be your lawful, wedded husband?' and I said, 'I will.' With those words I became his wife, and his name has been mine ever since." The evangelist went on to ask, "Didn't you say, 'I hope so,' or 'I'd like to,' or 'I'll try to take him as my husband'?" "No," the woman answered, "I said, 'I will,' and that's all there was to it." The minister explained that God wanted her to take Christ as her Savior. Then he posed this question: "What should you say to that?" The woman finally saw the point and exclaimed, "How simple!" At last, she accepted Christ as her Savior. Believing what the Bible says about Him-- that He died for her sins-- she placed her trust in Him for salvation. And what happens when a person receives Christ?*

a. through His authority they become children of God They enter into a new **relationship** with God. No more His enemy, not even His servant, but His own precious child, His beloved son, His darling daughter; that's what happens because He says so! But there's more:

b. through His power they experience new birth They experience an inner **transformation**; they are born all over again. Not the way they were born the first time. Not born out of natural descent, not born because they choose it or work themselves up to it, or because someone else chooses it. God gives them a new spiritual birth and they are changed on the inside. A brand new spirit, a new nature is born in them. How? He Himself comes into them and they get His life!

Listen, it is Christmas time. The world is changed. Christ came into the world to give you His life! The majority have rejected His light, but what about you? Have you received Him? Have you become His child and experienced the new birth? If you haven't, it's for you! As many as received Him, as many as took Him as their Savior, as many as believed that He is the only way of salvation become His children. That is for you; if you haven't claimed it yet, do it today! But there is one more thing to consider and that is:

III. What Happened To Jesus At The Incarnation John says that:

1. He became flesh (14) Jesus, who always existed, who made everything that is, became flesh. That is:

a. He took to Himself a human body and sinless human nature. He didn't just appear on earth in human form like angels can do. He actually became a true human being, a person just like we are and:

b. He tabernacled among us as one of us He lived for a time right in the middle of us exactly the way we live. He lived; He worked; He ate and drank; He laughed and cried; He talked and listened. What we do, He did. What we

were, He became. He was not merely like us; He was one of us. And because He became one of us, John, as one of those who walked and talked and ate with Him and listened to His every word and saw His miracles, testifies personally; he says:

c. we saw the glory of the Father in the person of the Son "We saw the glory of the One and Only, the Only Begotten eternal Son of the Father. We saw God walking on two legs among us! And what we saw was grace and truth! He was full of it! No, more than that. His whole nature was grace and truth. It exuded from Him constantly." In fact:

2. He became the agent of grace to us (16-17) Moses gave us the law. It told us how to live. It told us what was right and just. It told us what was holy and pure. But it only brought us condemnation, because we couldn't keep it. Jesus brought us grace. He ate with publicans and sinners. He forgave a woman caught in adultery. He died on a cross for the sins of the world so that we might be forgiven. The whole act of incarnation is grace, the unexplained, unmerited love of God for human beings bound in sin, so much that He was willing to become one of us and die for us. And His grace is so abundant that He has lavished it upon us time after time and has given us one blessing after another that we don't deserve. But through becoming one of us:

3. He became the means of declaring the Father to us (18) Nobody has ever seen God fully and completely. The elders of Israel went up on Mount Sinai and saw the God of Israel and ate and drank, but they didn't really see Him in all His fullness. Moses spoke with Him face to face, but could only see His back when His full glory passed by. How could we look at Him? How could we know Him? The radiance of His glory is too great, too brilliant, too much for us. How could God ever explain His true nature and heart to us? He did it in Jesus! He did it by coming as one of us, one whom our eyes could see, our ears could hear and our hands could touch. One whom we could know. He revealed the Father to us in His very person. So much so, that when Philip asked that question, here's what He said, **14:8-11**. *Frank Fairchild tells of a beautiful fresco on the ceiling of a palace in Rome. Painted by the artist Guido Reni in 1614, it was one of the most impressive works of its day. But the masterpiece could not be fully appreciated because palace visitors had to bend their necks in order to see it. To solve this problem, a large mirror was placed on the floor beneath the painting. This enabled viewers to study its reflection and more fully appreciate its beauty. Fairchild made this observation: "Jesus Christ does precisely that for us when we try to get some notion of God ... He interprets God to our dull hearts. In Him, God becomes visible and intelligible to us. We cannot by any amount of searching find out God. The more we try, the more we are bewildered. Then Jesus Christ appears. He is God stooping down to our level, and He enables our feeble thoughts to get some real hold on God Himself."* Jesus, God the one and only, who was and is again at the Father's side, became one of us, that He might reveal God to us!

Jill Briscoe, whose name many of you will recognize, was in college before she discovered what Christmas was all about. It was then, she says, that "God became a baby for me! He came to earth because He knew I needed eternal life; the Christ child was the only way to the Father. I reeled in horror at the realization of how our family's benign neglect of the real understanding of Christmas must have offended Jesus. I knelt, then lay flat, face down in my college dorm room, crying, 'Jesus, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. Help me make good those 18 years!' At Christmas break, my struggle intensified. On Christmas Eve, I slipped away to church--alone. I found the little chapel crammed with people. Jesus was here! When I got home, the family party was still revving inside. I slipped in as unobtrusively as I could, but my mother's friend saw me. 'Here she is. We didn't know where you were.' 'She's been to church,' my sister interjected. 'How do you know?' asked the friend. My sister smiled softly. 'Look at her face.'" [Christian Reader, Nov/Dec 1997. Page 92.] Is Jesus, the Light of the World, glowing from inside you? Have you received Him as your Savior? And if you have, in all the hustle and bustle of the Christmas rush, have you thought about what the Incarnation really means for you? Let's be on our faces with Jill in worship and adoration. God became a baby for me. In His grace He became what I am, so that I might be what He is. He took my death and gave me His life. Oh, how full He is of grace and truth!

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Lamb of God - 1:19-51

The word *lamb* is John's special word. He calls Jesus *the Lamb* some 29 times in his writings, twice here in our text and the other 27 throughout the Book of Revelation. None of the other Gospels or New Testament letters ever uses that title for Jesus, though Peter in his first letter likens the precious blood of Christ to that of a lamb without blemish or defect. Now I want you to think about the symbol of a lamb. You don't see many of them where we live, but in Israel they were everywhere in the fields and even driven through the streets. Lambs are cute, furry, weak, helpless little things. No one follows a lamb. No leader would ever put a lamb on his flag or his shield. The people of England would never have called their brave king, Richard the Lamb-hearted! He had the heart of a lion! Just so, Israel was looking and waiting for a lion from the tribe of Judah to arise, a brave warrior-king, a Messiah who would lead them to victory over all their enemies. How strange it must have been to the people of Israel as they heard:

I. John The Baptist Identifies Jesus As The Lamb of God (19-34) In the year 26 AD a new phenomenon arose in Judea. John, the son of Mary's cousin Elizabeth, was about six months older than Jesus, but he lived all his life in the desert, unknown. Suddenly, in that year, the word of God came to him and he began to preach publicly. He was a fiery preacher, dressed in a hairy mantle like Elijah of old, calling people to repent of their sins and to be baptized in the Jordan River to show the sincerity of their cleansing. Large crowds came to hear him; many joined him and became his followers and his name soon became a household word from Judea to Galilee. This, of course, disturbed the Jewish leaders and they sent an official delegation to investigate him and see what was going on. **(19)** Here we have:

1. his testimony to the Jewish leaders (19-28) First of all, he said:

a. I am not the Christ (Messiah) (20) Surely, people had been speculating about him. Could this be the One we've been waiting for? Could this be the Christ, our Lion-leader come at last? And John told them right off, without hesitation, "No! I am not!" And, logically, their next question was, "Well who are you then?" **(21-23)** Based on a promise in Malachi, the Jews had come to believe that Elijah would return just before Messiah came. John lived in the desert like Elijah; he looked and dressed like Elijah. He preached boldly like Elijah. So they asked him if he was Elijah and he said "No!" Well then, based on Moses' promise that "God will raise up to you a Prophet like me...", some Israelites were looking for "THE Prophet" who was to come, so they asked, "Are you him?" And again, they got "No!" "Well, who in the world are you then?!" And John answered:

b. I am the "roadbuilder" He quoted **Is. 40:3**, *A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.* See, when the King travels, a road crew is sent ahead to level the road, to fill the potholes and depressions and level off the high spots and clear away any overgrowth. John says, "God is coming to you and I'm the roadbuilder! I'm preparing the way for Him. I'm softening the soil of hard hearts. I'm making Israel ready to receive Him." So, they asked him **(24-25)**, "Why are you baptizing? What religious authority do you have?" And John replies **(26-28)**. "The One I'm preparing the way for:

c. He is already here among you! We're not talking about some day long in the future; He's already here, already born and grown up to manhood, already standing among you and about to start His own public ministry. And I'm not worthy enough to do the job of the lowest servant and untie his sandals when He comes in the house! I call people to repent of their sins and plunge them into water because HE IS HERE and people need to be ready for Him TO-DAY!"

Now John's Gospel does not tell the story of how Jesus came to John and was baptized as the other Gospels do, but it is my judgment that that event had already happened, probably some 40 days earlier. Jesus was baptized and immediately went into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted, before going to north to Galilee, which He does here in verse 43. So, after His temptation He comes back by the Jordan where John is on the next day after these Jewish leaders have been there and that's when John gives:

2. his testimony to the whole world (29-34) Let's go back and look closely at what John says. For the first time he declares that:

a. Jesus is the Lamb of God (29) It's a brand new title, never before used or mentioned. The Lamb of God. What on earth can that mean? Lambs in Israel have only one function; they are noted for only one thing, they are for sacrifice! Every morning and every evening of every day an innocent spotless lamb is sacrificed on the altar in the Temple for Israel. Every year at Passover, every Israelite family, takes a spotless lamb and kills it and eats it as a reminder that, because of the blood of the lamb on the doorposts in Egypt, the death angel passed over the Israelites. Abraham and his son Isaac went up to the mountain and Isaac asked, "Here's the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" And Abraham answered, "God Himself will provide the lamb...!" Lambs are only for one thing; lambs are for sacrifice. They are innocent, pure animals who offer themselves willingly and without resistance for the guilt of others. John says JESUS is the Lamb which God Himself has provided and says:

b. He will take away the sin (not just of Israel, but) of the world! John is the first to understand fully why Jesus came to earth. He came for the cross. He came to die. He came to offer Himself as the innocent, pure, spotless Lamb who would die in the place of us all to take away our sins! Then John says:

c. He existed before me (30) That was not true in birth order; John was born first. But he knew that Jesus was not just a human being; He is God. He was with God from eternity and is now standing here in flesh to die. I am not worthy to tie His shoes! I am nothing; HE is everything. And:

d. my purpose is to reveal Him to Israel (31) He's what I'm doing here! I'm here to identify Him, to tell Israel, to tell the world that this One, Jesus, is the Lamb of God. How do I know? How can I be so sure? I didn't know. I wasn't sure. But:

e. God identified Him to me directly by sending His Spirit (32-33) God had told me, "The One on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the One you're looking for!" And after I baptized Jesus, I saw with my own eyes

the Holy Spirit of God descend from heaven in the form of a dove and land on Him and remain on Him! God pointed Him out and confirmed Him to me directly, so I would know and so I now publicly declare that:

f. Jesus is the Son of God! (34) Wow! What a radical thing to say! This man is GOD's SON! He is GOD in a human body! God's Lamb is His Son; God's sacrifice for the sins of the world is His SON!

Think how it must have shocked the crowd of John's followers that day! The Son of God, walking among them! And there He is! They can see Him; they can touch Him; they can talk to Him; they can follow Him! Little wonder it is on this very day that:

II. Disciples Begin To Follow The Lamb Of God The fullness of the truth didn't dawn on all of them right away. Many couldn't grasp it. But a few immediately caught the implication. And so, we read first of how:

1. Andrew and Peter began to follow Jesus (35-42) Among John's followers was a fisherman from Galilee who had been listening to John and had become a follower of his. The next day, as Jesus passed by again, John pointed him out directly to Andrew and his companion (who was probably John, the author, himself). That's how:

a. Andrew believed John and followed Jesus (35-37) They followed Him literally. They began to leave John and to walk after Jesus which is exactly what John intended. Andrew believed what John had said and wanted to find out for himself. But:

b. he came to faith after spending time with Jesus (38-40) It was 10 in the morning and they spent the day with him and by that time, Andrew was convinced. He believed that Jesus was the promised Christ, the Messiah. But notice:

c. his first impulse: to bring his brother to Jesus (41-42a) We don't know where his brother Simon was, obviously somewhere nearby, but Andrew hunted high and low until he found him. He had news to share, life-changing news. It feels like he almost dragged Simon by the arm into the presence of Jesus. And that's how:

d. Simon becomes Peter "the rock" (42b) Peter, who would become the leader of the group, the one who would take care of Jesus' sheep after He was gone, who would preach the first sermon on Pentecost, who would be the first to take the Gospel to the nations, who would be the leader of the church, became that "rock" because his quiet brother Andrew brought him to Jesus! Hold that thought and ponder it for a moment.

Now please realize that Andrew and John and Peter didn't begin to follow Jesus full time right on this day. They went home to Galilee and to their fishing, where Jesus met them later and called them away from their nets to follow Him and become fishers of men. But this is why at that later time they left all to follow Him; they believed what John had said here by the Jordan. Next, we read that more disciples:

2. Philip and Nathanael follow Jesus (43-51) The next day Jesus left for home in Galilee where:

a. Jesus found Philip and called him to follow (43-44) Amazing, the connection. They're all from the same little fishing village of Bethsaida on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee! Jesus went there on purpose! And He sought out Philip on purpose, but the same thing happened to him that happened to Andrew. After being with Jesus, he was convinced right away of who He was. And again, notice:

b. Philip's first impulse: to bring his friend Nathanael to Jesus (45-46) He can't keep it to himself. He has a good friend that he has to find and tell! John calls him Nathanael; the other Gospels call him Bartholomew which really in Aramaic means "Son of Tolmai". It's really a tag-on like Simon Bar-Jonah (son of John). Nathanael was sitting someplace under a fig tree resting or perhaps meditating when Philip found him and started to rattle off, "We've found Him, the One Moses wrote about. His name is Jesus and He's from Nazareth...Come see!" He's a bit of a skeptic, "Nazareth, can anything good come out of Nazareth...?" Nevertheless:

c. Nathanael believes because Jesus displays omniscience (47-49) Jesus says, "I saw you sitting under that fig tree," which He would have had no way to know. And Nathanael knows the signs of God when he sees them and immediately says, "You're the Son of God!" Wow! That's not just logic; that's a Divine opening of the eyes! But this whole section concludes with the words of:

d. Jesus' testimony to Himself (50-51) "You'll see greater things than this little bit of foreknowledge. You'll see miracles. You'll see the lame walk and lepers healed and the blind see. Remember Jacob and his ladder with the angels going up and down from heaven? I'm not only the Son of God, but I'm the Son of Man, God and Man. I came from heaven to earth. Angels go back and forth to serve Me! You'll see them do it as you follow Me! I am the Son of God!"

Now what's important for us to learn here this morning? First, **Jesus is the Lamb of God who died for your sins.** *In a small Oriental town several men were working on a scaffold high above the street. Suddenly one of them lost his footing and fell to the pavement below. Horrified, his companions quickly came down, expecting to find his body broken and*

mangled. To their surprise they discovered that their friend was unhurt! At the exact moment of his fall some sheep were passing through the street beneath him, and he had landed on the back of one of the younger animals. There it lay, crushed and dead, but the man was saved. As he gazed upon that lifeless young lamb, he whispered, "It died for me!" Jesus was God's Lamb; He was crushed beneath the weight of your sins on the cross. He died that you might live. So now, when you believe that Good News and take Him as your Savior, all your sins are washed away and you are made righteous. *In Chinese writing, the symbol of righteousness is formed by placing the character for a "lamb" above the character for "I". In other words, when by faith I come under the merits of Jesus, God's spotless lamb, I am declared right for all time and eternity.* And once you know that, once you've experienced that, **your first impulse should be to share it with others!** Andrew ran to find his brother. In fact, every time we see him in the gospels, he's always bringing somebody to see Jesus. Philip ran to find his friend. John the Baptist went a step further; he preached it to the crowd. He told the world what he had seen. In fact, that's why we're here and not in heaven enjoying the presence of the Lamb. He has others. He wants us to run and find, others to tell, in our families, among our friends, the people we know and even to the ends of the earth, until every last person hears the news that the Lamb of God has come to redeem them!

John: The Gospel Of Life

The First Miracle - Ch. 2

Jesus did literally hundreds of miracles during the three years of His ministry. They ranged from healings, to exercising direct control over nature, to raising the dead. From among them all, the Apostle John chose 7 to weave his record of Jesus' ministry around in chapters 2-11. He begins here in chapter 2 with the very first miracle Jesus ever did:

I. The Water Changed To Wine (1-11) Let's begin by reading:

1. the story of the miracle (1-10) This celebration was obviously hosted by a family that Jesus' family knew well. His mother was there and He himself was invited. Cana was only about 9 miles north of Nazareth where He lived. Now don't think of this wedding as being like ours with a fancy half-hour ceremony and a three hour dinner. The wedding feast in that culture often lasted as long as seven days! And in a small village where you know everybody, can you imagine having the whole town eat a major meal at your house for a week?! No wonder after a while they ran out of wine! Mary told Jesus about it as though she expected Him to do something to solve it. Of course, she knew who He was, but she had never seen Him do a miracle before. Yet somehow faith sprung up in her. With a loving, gentle reminder that He had to follow God's timetable, not hers, He does something very strange. Outside, probably, there are 6 stone water jars that hold 20-30 gallons each. The guests took water from those jars to wash ceremonially as they came into the house. Nobody would think of drinking from them! But Jesus told the servants to fill them up with water and then to draw some out and take it to the host of the feast. They did it, but I'm sure they were really skeptical. They had put water in, but what he drank was the best wine of the feast, so good that he complimented the groom on it. The water had been transformed by the power of God into wine! It was a miracle! Now God does not do miracles randomly and haphazardly. He always has a purpose. They always point to Him. In this case, if we stop to ponder a moment, we can draw several:

2. lessons from the miracle for ourselves. First of all, it teaches us:

a. a lesson about feasts Many times through the centuries, Satan has tried to introduce into Christianity in different ways the notion that there is something unspiritual about the normal pleasures of life and that it is more spiritual to abstain from them. Self-denial or asceticism has often been seen as a means of somehow gaining God's favor, as though we should all somehow be like John the Baptist, living in the desert, eating only what locusts and wild honey will keep us alive and dressing in the coarsest of garments in order to be holy. But Jesus did not fit that mold. Yes, He lived simply, but He went to the wedding feast. He stayed for days. He laughed and talked with the guests. Likely, He danced for joy with all the rest as the music was played. He ate the food and drank the wine happily with everyone else and when the wine ran out, He provided more and enabled the celebration to continue. In fact, you often find Jesus eating in somebody's house, sharing in a banquet, enjoying the simple gifts that God has given to us. So, through this miracle He **teaches enjoyment, not asceticism**. You can enjoy the normal pleasures of life that God has provided with a thankful heart and without feeling guilty. And, going a step further, He teaches:

b. a lesson about marriage Jesus went to the wedding and honored and blessed the bride and groom by His presence and participation. We say that in almost every wedding ceremony we have still today. Jesus himself, of course, never married. Paul, too, was single and wrote about the goodness of that. So, it's really easy to develop the idea that the most spiritual people, the closest to God, the most effective for God, are those who don't marry but give themselves only to ministry. In fact, for centuries at least one branch of the Church institutionalized that very idea. But through this miracle, Jesus **honors marriage, not celibacy**. He celebrates with joy man and woman becoming one in marriage, as God intended from the beginning. While in the plan of God many people may be called to or end up in a life of singleness and be given grace specially for that, through this miracle Jesus forever put away the notion that marriage itself and even the consummation of marriage in sexual union (which would have occurred and been celebrated during this feast) is somehow tainted or unspiritual or even less than God's best. It is holy and blessed and to be enjoyed. Then, there's a third lesson here:

c. a simple lesson about wine: Somehow during the early 1900's the church adopted the idea that any drink with alcohol in it is evil in itself and Christians should never drink a drop. Well, no matter how you try to twist it, you can't get away from the fact that Jesus drank wine and here, Jesus MADE wine and that, the best! On the other hand, Jesus never, ever got drunk, never gave control of Himself over to the wine. So, through this miracle, Jesus **teaches temperance, not abstinence**. Now let me be quick to point out that the wine Jesus drank was a far cry from the high-proof hard liquors that we distill today. And their custom was often to dilute it with water one part to three. Plus, they didn't drive home at 60 mph in their 8 cylinder donkeys! That means we have to be much more cautious and careful about using alcohol. Obviously, there is a place *not* to drink alcohol at all, for example, if you'll be driving or operating tools or equipment or if you know you can't exercise self-control and one will lead you to the next until you get drunk. Any former alcoholic will testify to the need to steer clear of that first drink. So, in our culture there is a real need to preach the message: be careful about your use of alcohol. It can grab you and addict you before you're even aware of it! However, that being said, we still have to affirm that all food and drink, wine included, is a gift of God to be enjoyed wisely as Jesus Himself did. Finally, we can also find here:

d. two lessons about God: Jesus indicated to his own mother that God:

(1) He has a time for all things in His plan. We want it now, today, quick. We want our problem solved so that we or the guests won't have to do without. But God has a time and maybe what we want at the moment is in His plan, as this miracle was, but maybe it's not. *An earnest Christian who had prayed for 30 years about a certain matter asked her pastor why she hadn't received an answer. The minister gave this reply: "My friend, your experience is much like presenting bills to God and expecting payment for them before they are due. The Lord has His own schedule for responding to your request."* We, like Mary, simply have to **trust Him** and wait to see what it is that He is planning to do in His time. And here's something that you'll notice about God:

(2) He often saves the best for last, the best wine, the fullest joy. The greatest blessing often comes *after* the lack, the adversity, the difficulty, the struggle. God's favorite timing is "in the end", not the beginning. That's what will make heaven so precious. Anyway:

Jesus didn't advertise this miracle; in fact, nobody really knew what happened except Himself, his mother, his few disciples and those servants. Neither the hosts nor the guests ever knew at the time. But for those who did know, it would never be forgotten. It had a powerful impact. John tells us in verse 11:

3. the purpose of this first miracle (11)

a. it began the revealing of His glory In 1:14 John testified, *We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father...* They had heard John the Baptist tell who He was; they had talked with Him and believed His words. But now they began to SEE it with their eyes in an undeniable way, because He began to reveal it, to unveil it. It was a sign, a dramatic evidence that He was indeed the Son of God! And so:

b. it began to build the faith of His disciples It taught them to believe, to trust, to fall at His feet saying, "My Lord and My God!"

Well, now we come in the second half of the chapter to a different sort of event:

II. The Cleansing Of The Temple (12-25) [Read 12-17] John says this happened right away, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The other Gospels don't record that; they say it happened after the Triumphal Entry in the last week of Jesus' life. John doesn't record that. How can that be? The simple answer of faith is that He did it twice, here at the beginning and later on at the end in such a way that it led to his arrest. In the two accounts His words are different, his actions are different. Here He took a whip and created a stampede of animals, driving them out of the outer court of the Temple. He cast out the people and chastised them for turning this holy place into a common market, a place of commerce to make money. Now why did He do this? What are:

1. the reasons for it Do note that it was not a fit of temper; it was not an angry flip-out. It was deliberate and premeditated. He took time to make a whip out of cords and choose His course of action, radical as it was, toward the crowd. What passion drove Him to create this very public stir? It was:

a. the defilement of His Father's house The very dwelling place of God, the place which should be approached with awe and reverence and respect. The place which should be approached in joy and thanksgiving for all that the Father has done, for all His mercy and bounty and blessings. This place should be a house filled with prayer. And what does Jesus find there? Stalls full of sheep and goats and cattle. Cages full of doves being sold. Moneychangers at big stone tables charging a high exchange rate to make their living. It was a market full of stalls, just like the open air bazaar down the street! Jesus could not stand to see it; He could not tolerate it. He had to cleanse it. He had to purify it. He had to restore it to the purpose for which it was made. His passionate love of the Father launched Him into action. But so did another factor:

b. the fulfillment of prophecy His disciples stood there with their jaws hanging open as this scene unfolded! They had never seen anything like this, yet they knew who He was. Their minds instinctively went to the Scriptures and

they remembered **Ps. 69:9**, *Zeal for Your house will consume me!* And they said "That's it! It is HIS FATHER's house!" It became to them another proof in their growing understanding that this truly was the Son of God. He fulfilled the Scriptures.

Of course, one would expect that if one made such a public disturbance that there would come a public:

2. the reaction to it (18-22) And sure enough, some of those religious Jews standing around immediately question Him and make a demand:

a. the demand of the Jews for a sign (18) They want to know what right He has to do this, where He got the authority. They want to see a sign, a miracle, to prove that He is from God, because he certainly doesn't have any earthly permission to do it! So, He gives them:

b. the offer of His defining sign: His own resurrection (19-21) He will not do miracles on demand for those who do not believe. To them He will give only one irrefutable proof. His finger points at Himself, *Destroy THIS Temple and in three days I will raise it up!* But because He is standing in the physical Temple, they start muttering about the fact that it had been 46 years in construction and wasn't done yet, and how could he rebuild it himself in three days..yada..yada...yada. Later on, He would say it again, *...A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* - *Mat.12:39-40*. "You're going to kill Me, destroy the Temple of my body, and on the third day I'll raise it up! That's the only sign you get, the one sign for all time!" The Jews walked off mocking. It had no spiritual impact, yet it must have stuck with them because they charged him with saying it at His trial three years later! But it also had:

c. the later effect of confirming His disciples (22) His words stuck with them also. After He rose, they remembered He had predicted His own Resurrection on this very day. Their faith was strengthened by it.

But before we leave the Temple, let's take away a:

3. lesson from it: For us it is a graphic picture of just **how God views the defilement of His temple**. However, the Lord our God no longer dwells in temples made with hands. In the Greek language Jesus goes into the *hieros*, the shrine, the physical building. But how easily He refers to His own body as the true Temple, the *naos*, the dwelling place of God. Is that not true of:

a. our bodies - 1 Cor. 6:19-20 Your body is the very *naos*, the dwelling place, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God Himself. God lives in you. Jesus lives in you! *A story is told about a Scottish fisherman who had a beautiful picture of Christ hanging on the wall in his small hut. A friend who stopped by was impressed by the picture and asked where he got it. The fisherman explained that during a time in his life when he drank heavily, he had wandered into a pub where he was startled by that picture hanging on the wall. He said, "I was sober, and seeing the face of Jesus brought deep conviction to my heart. So I said to the bartender, 'Sell me that picture. This is no place for the Savior.'" The fisherman said that he gave the man all the money he had in his pockets and took the picture home. Then he added, "That same night I dropped to my knees and cried out to the Lord for mercy and deliverance from my sin."* Christ is not just a picture hanging in the wrong place; He actually lives in your body! Think about that! Ponder it! How do you think He responds when you use your body, His dwelling place, as an instrument of sin? When you use it to cheat, to steal, to kill, to commit adultery? Or perhaps to lie, to be unloving or unkind! Or even when you use it to pursue your own will instead of His! I'll show you how He feels! Look at Jesus in the Temple! Remember this scene! Zeal for His house consumes Him. He wants to drive those things out, to purify the house for its intended purpose that the Father might be glorified in His house! And the same thing is true of His temple which is:

b. the church - 1 Cor. 3:16-17 You yourselves, the Church, Christ's body, you are that Temple in which He dwells. When His church is defiled, when His church is led astray, when His church is corrupted and tainted and destroyed, His passion is aroused! Zeal for the Father's house consumes Him! There's a good warning for us to stay pure and true!

Finally, before the chapter closes, John makes a last observation about:

III. The Effect Of His Miracles (23-25) It was here in Jerusalem at the feast that Jesus began to publicly do miracles, not at the demand of the leaders, but out of compassion, as He saw the needs of the people. From here on and as he returned to Galilee, they would be a hallmark of His ministry everywhere He went. John doesn't tell us specifics, rather he notes their effect:

1. they caused many people to believe in His power, not His true Person. They believed that He had Divine power, that He could heal, that there was power in His name. Yet Jesus:

2. He knew that their hearts did not truly believe He could see the inside. He could see that they believed for the benefit that was in it for them. That's how one day the crowd could chant, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of

the Lord” and the next, “Crucify Him!” Crowds are fickle. There are many who will believe in the moment but it is not real and Jesus knew that. Consequently:

3. He did not fully entrust Himself to them, but rather to His disciples. He was glad to help and to heal, but He fully entrusted Himself to those He knew were really genuine, those who were His true followers. That’s where He invested His time, training them, preparing them, realizing that the big crowds would fall away, but they would persevere because they were genuine.

And Jesus knows what is in you too. He knows if you’re just one of the crowd who want to get something from Him, one who is hanging in there as long as there is some visible benefit, or if you’re one of those who has truly bowed the knee and given yourself to Him unreservedly, forever. He knows what’s in a man. He knows what’s in a woman. And if you entrust yourself to Him completely, He will entrust Himself to you. He will show you His glory. He’ll reveal Himself to you more and more, day by day, event by event and your faith will be deepened.

John: The Gospel Of Life

The New Birth - Ch. 3

In chapter 2 Jesus had gone down from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Passover and we noted that it was during this week that He began to do public miracles for the first time. The chapter closed by noting that Jesus did not entrust himself fully to the people because “He knew what was in a man”. Well, sure enough, toward the close of that time a particular man comes to Jesus with:

I. An Inquiry About Salvation (1-21) and it’s clear that Jesus knows what is in him [READ 1-2]. Nicodemus is an important man, a teacher, a leader, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. Why He came to Jesus at night, we do not know, perhaps simply to find Him alone or perhaps to avoid being seen. At any rate he had seen the miracles Jesus was doing and drawn the obvious conclusion, “Only God can do these things; this man has to be a teacher come from God!” Yet Jesus is so different from anyone in the Jewish religious system that he knows. So, he comes to inquire, to ask questions, to find answers, but Jesus doesn’t even let him get them out of his mouth. He knows what’s on his mind, the Kingdom of God, and he breaks into his train of thought immediately and teaches three lessons that are as much for us today as they were for Nicodemus. The first is this:

1. salvation comes through spiritual rebirth (3-12) Now there’s a shock. If you want to comprehend, let alone enter, the kingdom of God, you can’t do it through obedience or sacrifice or keeping of the law. You have to be born all over again; you have to experience a transformation, a spiritual rebirth that makes you a brand-new person. And this new birth:

a. it is necessary to enter God’s kingdom and there are no **exceptions!** Verses (3, 5) say NO ONE. Not a king, not a teacher, not an untaught person, not a rich person, not a poor person, not a person full of good deeds, not a criminal. NO ONE can enter God’s kingdom without the experience of spiritual rebirth and this birth:

b. it occurs from above The Greek word is *anōthen* which means *from above*. It is not something you can make happen, not something you can generate by earthly effort. It is something that happens to you from on high, from a heavenly source, and it happens **by the entry of the Spirit (6)** The Holy Spirit does this work. You were born out of water in your mother’s womb the first time you came into the world, but to be born a second time is an act that is performed by the spirit of God inside you when He comes into you. So:

c. it is an internal act; only the effect is visible (8) It’s just like the wind. You can’t see wind; it’s invisible. You can see trees move and bushes shake and leaves fly down the street. You can hear it as it whistles by and feel the power of a strong gust. But you can’t see it. The new birth is just like that; it’s a spiritual transformation which occurs invisibly inside you. It is the creation of a brand-new spirit, a new person, a new man or woman in your spirit. You can’t watch it or see it, but you can sure see the effects of it, the change it produces in the person’s life! But if we can’t see it, how do we know it’s real, that it’s really something that can happen to us? Simple:

d. we accept the reality of it on Jesus’ authority (11) Jesus said so and that settles it. It is true. Whether Nicodemus can grasp it or not, whether we understand or agree with it or not, Jesus said that we **MUST** be born again to enter His Kingdom. Now when does that occur? How do we come to experience it? Here’s lesson two:

2. spiritual birth occurs when we believe in Jesus Christ alone to save us (13-18) Jesus starts by using a vivid:

a. the illustration: the bronze serpent (14-15) You remember the story in **Num. 21:8-9**. In their wilderness journey, Israel had sinned by grumbling and complaining against God and against Moses. So, the Lord sent venomous snakes among the people and many of them were bitten and died. They could not save themselves. They could not get rid of the snakes or heal the poison. But they came to Moses and confessed their sin and begged for mercy. So, God told Moses to make a snake out of bronze and lift it up high on a pole so that anyone who was bitten by a snake, anyone who was condemned to die, could look in faith to God’s snake on the pole and he would live. God

would give him life by a divine miracle. Thousands of Israelites were saved simply by believing what God said and looking at the snake that was lifted up for their salvation, trusting that they would live. And Jesus said, "That's a picture of Me! I'm going to be lifted up on a pole, a cross, because of the sins of the world. Anyone who places their trust in Me, who believes in Me, who looks to ME to save them, will experience that Divine miracle of new birth; the Spirit will give Him life that is eternal!" Then follows:

b. the explanation (16-18) Let me break it down into three statements:

- **God loved the world and sent His Son to save us on the cross** Jesus came down from heaven to be given as a sacrifice for our sins, to go to the cross for us. God GAVE, He SENT, He SACRIFICED, His One and Only Son because He loved us and wanted to rescue us. You see, we've all been bitten by the snake of sin! Every last one, no exceptions. We all stand under the condemnation of the holiness of God. Eternal death would be our unavoidable destiny. But God loves us and does not want to see us perish. So, He gave His son for us and now:

- **whoever believes (trusts) in Him is no longer condemned and perishing but has eternal life** When I come to Him and confess my sin and my inability to do anything about it, when I cry out to Him to save me, when I trust in Him and what He did at the cross where He took my place and died for me, then I am no longer condemned. I will no longer perish. My destiny has changed forever. I have, right now, the life of God through His Spirit who comes into me. I have eternal life. And, thank God, I'm a whoever! Anyone, anywhere, anytime, rich or poor, murderer or philanthropist, ANYBODY who looks to Jesus alone, lives! But:

- **whoever does not believe remains already condemned** Jesus didn't come to condemn people; they were condemned already. You don't have to do one thing to be lost, to perish. Neither does your aunt, your uncle, your son or daughter, your parents, your neighbor, your coworker or the person at the farthest end of the earth who has never heard the name of Jesus. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The whole human race stands condemned. Anybody who hasn't looked, who won't look, who can't look, doesn't live, can't live! And finally, lesson #3:

3. we believe when we let God's light (truth) shine on our lives (19-21) You see **our deeds are evil and we are afraid for them to be exposed**. We don't want them to be seen for what they are. We want to be seen as nice and good and kind and generous and doing the best we can. We don't want even God to see that we're mean and selfish and unkind and proud and jealous and lustful. So, **we love the darkness of ignorance and untruth because it hides them**. We would rather continue to press on believing that we're not so bad, that God understands that nobody's perfect, that when we die, He'll weigh our good against the bad and we'll get in. We'd rather believe that He's a loving God who couldn't possibly send anyone to hell, that all people are basically good or they make it to heaven somehow, even if they have to suffer for a little while first. But when we're willing to let the light of God's truth shine, to accept what HE says, we see that we're all lost, every last one; we are all without hope and without God in the world and there is only one way to be saved, to look to Jesus to save us! And that's when we believe, when we trust Him instead of ourselves, and we experience new birth and are given eternal life!

George Whitefield, at the age of 16, became deeply convicted of his sin. He tried everything possible to erase his guilt through religious activity. He wrote, "I fasted for 36 hours twice a week. I prayed formal prayers several times a day and almost starved myself to death during Lent, but only felt more miserable. Then by God's grace I met Charles Wesley who put a book in my hand which showed me from the Scriptures that I must be 'born again' or be eternally lost." Finally, by the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart, Whitefield came to understand Jesus' words in John 3. He believed and was gloriously saved. After he became a preacher, he spoke at least a thousand times on the subject, "Ye must be born again." He fervently desired that all who heard him might experience the transforming power of God's grace. What about you? Have YOU been born again? If not, thank God you're a whoever! You can make a choice to believe that Jesus is the only way of salvation today and ask Him to save you!

Nicodemus left, still not fully understanding I assume, but we'll meet him again later on. After the Passover, Jesus did not go back north to Galilee right away, but stayed in Judea and for a brief time He had a parallel ministry alongside of John the Baptist. That's why, in the second half of the chapter, we find:

II. A Controversy About Baptism (22-36) [READ 22-24] Let's stop right there and learn a quick:

1. a lesson about baptism Notice first of all that:

a. it was done by immersion, by putting the whole person under the water. That's why both John and Jesus were using the Jordan river, though in different spots. The text says that John chose Aenon because there was plenty of water there. You don't need plenty of water to sprinkle a hundred people. Baptism, as it was originally practiced, was a full bath, a going under the water, being plunged in the river. And why was it done?

b. it was done as a symbol of cleansing/spiritual change Neither John nor Jesus believed in it as a magical religious rite. It was a symbol of the spiritual change that had occurred in them. People came to John because they

were convicted of their sins and were tired of them. They wanted spiritual change, to call upon God for grace to live differently. He baptized them and pointed them to Jesus, telling them to believe in Him! In Jesus' case it had a particular purpose:

c. it was done as a declaration of discipleship By being baptized in Jesus' name, people declared themselves publicly to be His followers, **4:1-2**. People came to declare that they believed in Jesus, that they were committing themselves to follow Him, to become His disciples. And that's exactly what baptism is and why we practice it still today.

d. it is commanded for all Jesus' followers Jesus gave us the command in **Mt. 28:19** *...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. Peter repeated it in **Acts 2:38** *... "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. Every one of us is to change our minds, to trust in the Name of Jesus for forgiveness and receive His Spirit and then be baptized in order to declare it publicly, once for all!

How about you? Have you been baptized? Have you publicly declared that you have given your life to be a follower of Jesus Christ in the way He has commanded you to show it? And if not, why not? Well, there's a second lesson here:

2. a lesson about self and success (25-30) It must have been a bit confusing. Now there were two men out by Jordan preaching and drawing large crowds and baptizing. John's disciples were certainly confused by that and especially by the fact that John's crowds were getting smaller and Jesus' crowds were getting bigger. They are a reminder to us that:

a. we must beware the jealousy that can occur in ministry Somebody else is getting more recognition, more attention, than we are. Someone else gets elected and I don't. People like that teacher or that other counselor better than me. That other class is growing and mine isn't. That other church is prospering and mine isn't. Our flesh is really self-centered and it doesn't take much for it to come out in thoughts and attitudes like this. It's something we must guard carefully against. John's response to this attitude in his followers was wonderful. Look what he taught them:

b. we must accept the place and purpose that God has given us (27) It's not our place to decide the role we play in the world. Where we are, what ministry we have and how it succeeds, that is all for God to decide. Charles One pastor speaks to millions; I speak to you. Another plays a wild guitar and sings; you babysit kids in the nursery. Wherever God has me and whatever He's given me is OK, because we can only do and be what He wants us to do and be. We just have to accept it. Our joy is not found in ourselves and the circumstances we're in. Rather:

c. our true joy must be in Christ receiving glory (29) We're not the ones getting married; we're only friends of the bridegroom arranging the wedding for him. Our joy is not to get rewarded for what we've done, not to get applause for us, but to see the Groom get His bride. Our true joy is to see Jesus being worshipped, being glorified, being followed, whether somebody else is the instrument or we are. Paul knew of brothers who didn't like him, who were envious and jealous of him, who were preaching Christ and trying to stir up trouble for him at the same time. But listen to his attitude in **Phil. 1:18**, *But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice. Jesus is what matters; His glory is what's all important, not ours*. John's principle must be:

d. our principle: He must increase; I must decrease (30) I need to be out of the way. I'm not the point. I must decrease, especially in my own eyes. In fact, I must die (to self!) HE is all in all. His glory. His will. His kingdom. He must increase!

Now you know that quotation marks are a modern invention and the original text had none. The rest of the chapter is probably not John the Baptist continuing to speak, but the Apostle John adding his closing comments and reaffirming again for us:

3. a lesson about Jesus (31-36) Three important facts about Jesus. First:

a. He is from above, from heaven, and because of that He knows what He's talking about; **He speaks the absolute truth (31-34)** We can trust what He says. Second:

b. the Father loves Him and has placed everything in His hands (35) He is, as they say, "all that!" He is everything. He is the Father's eternal love and you can't get around Him. You can't get past Him. You can't get by Him. Everything in the universe is in His hands. So, as John says:

c. placing our trust in Him is the only way to receive eternal life (36) Whoever rejects Him will never receive life. He remains under the wrath of God which will fall on him forever. But whoever comes to Jesus, whoever trusts Him, HAS (present tense, in that moment) eternal life.

Queen Victoria of England once heard a sermon that greatly impressed her. Later she asked her chaplain, "Is it possible to be absolutely sure in this life of eternal safety?" He replied, "I know of no way that one could be absolutely sure." This incident was later published in the "Court News" and came to the attention of a minister of the gospel by the name of John Townsend. After much thought and prayer, he sent the following letter to the Queen: "To her gracious Majesty, our beloved Queen Victoria, from one of her most humble subjects. With trembling hands but love-filled heart, and because I know that we can be absolutely sure even now of our eternal life in the home Jesus went to prepare, I would ask you, Most Gracious Majesty, to read the following passages of Scripture: John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10. These passages prove there is full assurance of salvation by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ for those who believe and accept His finished work." Several days later Townsend received this note: "Your letter of recent date received, and in reply would state that I have carefully and prayerfully read the portions of Scripture referred to. I believe in the finished work of Christ for me and trust by God's grace to meet you in that home of which He said, 'I go to prepare a place for you.' (Signed) Victoria Guelph." How about you? Are you resting in that finished work of Christ for you? Do you have the assurance that you KNOW that you have eternal life, based on His Word? Can you put your name into that last verse...*I believe in the son; I have eternal life!* Can you put it into verse 16, *God so loved me that He gave His only Son so that I believe in Him and I will not perish but I have everlasting life?* I hope so and if you can, take these moments to thank Him. If you can't, Jesus said, you must be born again!

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Fields Ripe For Harvest - Ch. 4

Jesus remained in Judea for some weeks out by the Jordan River near John, making and baptizing disciples. The longer He did so, the more the crowds around Him grew and it eventually brought Him negative attention from the Jewish leaders. At that point, verse 2 tells us that Jesus left to return home to Galilee in the north, and verse 3 says He needed to go through the region of Samaria which lay in between the two. Now that wasn't geographically true. In fact, most people didn't go that way. If they were religious enough as Jews to actually go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts, they usually regarded Samaria as a kind of "unholy ground", a land of unclean people who were half-Gentiles, through which they didn't want to pass. So, if they were in Jerusalem, instead of taking the straight road north, they would take the road east down to the Jordan River by Jericho, then take a road north, crossing and eventually re-crossing the Jordan again nearer home, in order to avoid Samaria almost altogether! But not Jesus! He was already down by the Jordan; it would have been easy to follow the route north along the river on the east side! Instead, He deliberately took the road back west into the mountains and then north through the middle of Samaria. His need to go that way was not a physical one, but a spiritual one. He had a Divine appointment to keep and an important lesson to teach. The news of His coming and the call to believe in Him was not for Jews alone. It was for despised Samaritans and hated Romans and everyone else. All peoples are invited into His Kingdom! So, He headed north to give:

I. A Witness In Person By A Well In Samaria (1-42) [Read 5-6] After walking all day and covering about 25 miles, He and his disciples arrived at a place at the foot of Mt. Gerizim where many roads met at a well, a well dug some 1500 years earlier by the patriarch Jacob himself, still in use in Jesus' time and still there today! The nearest village, Sychar, was another half-mile further on and, tired as He was from the journey, Jesus sat down to rest by the well as night fell, while His disciples went on into town to buy food. You do realize, don't you, that homes in those days didn't have running water and one of the daily chores, morning and evening, was to go to the nearest well or spring and bring home a jar of clean water for drinking and washing. And so it is that there by the well, Jesus ends up in:

1. a personal conversation with a woman (1-30) Such a natural course of events. Weary traveler meets local resident by the water hole. Our lives are full of such interactions. We meet people naturally every day in the process of living, at the gas station, in line at the grocery store, by the school yard picking up kids. There are too many of those meetings to keep track of, but some of them, like this one, are really Divine appointments in which God wants to inject some news of Himself into that person's life through you. Watch Jesus as He meets her. Notice first:

a. his intentional connection (7-9) It was so simple and natural. He had no bucket to draw water; she did. So he simply asked *...will you give me a drink?* Yet even that simple question conveyed something immediately. First, He was a Jew and she a Samaritan; a Jew would never soil his lips by drinking out of a Samaritan's water jar, let alone speak to one unless it was absolutely necessary! He would rather have died of thirst! Second, it was unusual for a man to speak to a woman who was a stranger in public. The very fact of His asking conveyed acceptance of her. Sometimes a simple conversation which you initiate is enough to communicate to someone that you care about them. So often we pass each other in silence, when intentionally choosing to speak a cheerful word or two might be God's means of leading into a great opportunity. Then notice:

b. his meaningful illustration (10-15) Jesus went right for spiritual things. You don't always have to do that. But in light of the fact that she's about to draw water out of a well for Him, He makes a return offer: *...I can give you living water!* You do understand that living water in common parlance of that day means flowing water, fresh water, water from a spring instead of stagnant water. She quips, "But how would you get it?" And He says, "I'm talking about a spring of flowing water that would be inside you, one that would give you eternal life, just the way that fresh water brings life to the desert and turns it green." Somehow, she can't get past the physical water thing; after all she

has to walk this half-mile and pull up water from a well that today is 75 feet deep (who knows how deep it was then). That's a chore! But she wants it, this living water. She does what He suggested; she asks Him for it. Now that conversation would be totally irrelevant, let's say, by the office water cooler today; yet it was filled with meaning then. There are all kinds of things that God may lead you to say to someone as they respond. You may say, "You look kind of sad; are you OK?" And they may tell you that a loved one is in the hospital. And it would be so natural to respond, "Oh, I'm sorry, could I pray for him? What's his name?" Who would refuse that? Yet it has already introduced both prayer and God as an element in the conversation and if God has the person ready, they may pick up on that and who knows what might happen. A person may be flustered and need help with their grocery cart or their luggage and just the kind offer of a hand may lead to them saying, "Thanks for helping me!", to which you could naturally and easily respond, "It was my privilege; I knew God had me in this checkout line for a reason!" Sure, they may smile and walk away, but then God may have their heart prepared and who knows how you might get to share about spiritual things. Intentional contact... a natural mention of spiritual things... then notice:

c. his manner of conviction (16-18) Before she can have the living water, Jesus has to address the issue of sin. It helps to be omniscient if you're going to try it this way, but He says *...go call your husband!* He already knows she is living with a man and has had five husbands before that. But He makes this simple, natural request and it is enough; she hangs her head and says quietly, "I have no husband". Most women would have simply called the man they were living with their husband and told his name and offered to go get him. But she can't bring herself to do that and Jesus agrees with her and, in a sense, commends her for telling the truth. Nobody can realize their need for a Savior unless they are conscious of their need for one, unless they have a sense of their own sinfulness. You can't just explain this to someone or argue them into it. It's a God thing, a work of the Holy Spirit. Yet people whom God is in the process of drawing to Himself already know it! As her spotted record comes out of His mouth, she feels the guilt and realizes that this is at least a man of God, a prophet and the conversation is getting a little too close to home. Thus:

d. her attempt at evasion (19-24) She changes the subject *...let's talk about where to worship*. Isn't that what happens? "What church do you go to? Do you believe in predestination? What about all these 'Left Behind' books I see for sale in Walmart? Why is there so much suffering in the world?" Jesus doesn't really indulge her sidestep. He says, "The place where you worship doesn't really matter. True worshippers ARE God's temple! They worship Him in their own spirit and in truth, not for show or reward but because their own spirits are connected to His." Don't let people side-track you into all those unimportant secondary issues. You don't have to straighten all those things out. The important thing is that a person must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They must know and worship Him, take Him as their Savior. Stick with that; that's the message. Jesus did, and now we come to:

e. her response of faith (25-29) She knows one thing: Messiah is going to come and Jesus says, "I'm here" and she believes. She doesn't even grab her water jar, she's so excited! She runs the half mile back to town and right in the street starts gathering people and saying *...come see this man*, I think He's *the Christ!* You know, I think we get so used to failure in this area that we kind of live in doubt. We may witness or share a word or even share the whole good news about Jesus, but we are almost pre-conditioned to believe that nobody's going to respond. Yet if God has them ready, they do! I'm looking out at 3 or 4 people sitting among you, adults, who in the last year or two heard the good news of Jesus through the witness of this church and responded. They believed; their lives are changed. They've gone back and told family and friends and are seeking to bring them to Christ. Don't give up; let God use you as a personal witness; it still works! Now Jesus planned all of this to be:

2. a strategic lesson for His disciples (30-38) What does Jesus want us to learn? Three things. First:

a. the most satisfying thing is involvement in God's purpose (34) The disciples are hungry and tired and can't think of much besides satisfying their physical needs. They say, "Here.. EAT!" Jesus says, "How can you think of food? I just gave somebody eternal life! I just did the Father's will and saw somebody's life be changed! That's real food! That's what satisfies!" How many commercials do you see where somebody is relaxing by the poolside with a drink in their hand or by a fire in the woods with the guys sipping a beer, and they say something like, "This is the life; it doesn't get any better than this!" Oh yes it does! We Americans have kind of bought into that idea that the epitome of life is to be able to relax with every physical need satisfied, but if you try it, you'll find before long that it's empty. Listen, the most satisfying thing on this earth is active work; it's being involved with God in completing His purpose, in advancing His Kingdom. It's in praying strategically and giving sacrificially and in witnessing and in discipling and teaching and in building relationships, helping people or in doing anything else that is part of finishing the Father's work! He won't say one day, "Well - rested, good subject!", but "*Well-done, good servant!*" That sense of "I must be about My Father's business" came out in Jesus at age 12 and it pervaded the whole of His life. That's what satisfies and:

b. the greatest joy is in spiritual harvest: bringing people to eternal life Around Jesus were fields of wheat on the plain of Samaria. They had been planted months earlier and now in May they stood tall and ripe with full heads waving in the breeze. I don't think we have any clue what harvest time meant to an agricultural society. It was the

culmination of all their efforts for the year; all their hard work of plowing and planting and cultivating looked forward to one thing: the harvest. And when the harvest was reaped, it was a time of plenty, of fullness of joy, of dancing and celebration, the happiest time of the year. Everybody knew that. So, Jesus says, "We are harvesters; we are harvesting God's wheat field and bringing in the sheaves of people to eternal life! That's what every effort goes toward and that's where the greatest joy is!" And then He adds:

c. the hard work of sowing is done; now is the time of harvest! He says, "Lift up your eyes; look at the fields; they are ripe; it's harvest time now!" And as He does so, I can see his finger pointing across the fields toward the town of Sychar and as they follow His gaze, what do they see? According to verse 30, here comes that woman, leading a crowd of followers, practically the whole town, streaming toward Jesus. He's saying, "See, there is the harvest; it's harvest time now! Forget the bread and dance for joy! There's the crop for eternal life!" And now we see how this whole incident leads to:

3. a mass conversion in the village (39-42) Wow! A whole village believes in Jesus. Seems almost impossible where we live, doesn't it? Here, people come one at a time. But in many parts of the world, it still happens like this today. In 1995 John Osteen, the pastor of Houston's Lakewood Church, was driving down a road in one of the most remote parts of Mexico. He writes: "There was a man standing on the road, and he waved us down. 'My village is far away,' he said after we stopped. 'Many years ago someone told us a little bit about what is known as 'the gospel.' Our village has now appointed me to walk this long distance to the highway and see if I could find anyone who knew something about this gospel so they could come tell our village,' he said. 'I've been standing here all day, and no one I've stopped had any answer.' 'You have the right car!' I said. When we arrived at his village, the man spoke in Spanish and children started running out into the fields to get the villagers. Soon, all the men, precious, perspiring, brown-skinned men--came from the fields. 'I will never forget it. Taking off their straw hats, they wiped their faces and sat down to hear the good news. Every person in that village came to Jesus!' [Ministries Today, Jul/Aug 1995. Pages 42-43.] Now he doesn't say whether it was all on that one day or over a period of time that he stayed with them. But there is a lesson to be grasped here:

a. the Gospel flows fastest along the web of human relationships It takes a long time to learn to know a stranger well enough to trust what they say. But every one of us comes with a whole web of relationships already in place and when one person comes to Christ, it's only natural for that one to tell the ones she knows and who know her and they believe and each one of them has a web that extends farther and so forth. Especially in village societies, in places where the community is small and tightly knit, it is often tough for a stranger to come and make the initial breakthrough, but once it is made, it will often spread very quickly because:

b. the testimony of a known person gains a hearing for it When someone they already know and respect says, "I have found the Savior", they are much more ready to listen than if the speaker is a stranger. That's true even for us. In your life God has already built a web of relationships through work and school and neighborhood and even family. That will likely be your greatest sphere of spiritual influence. Work to expand that web; ask God for opportunities to share with people you already know. But note that they did not simply listen to the woman. They asked Jesus to stay with them and for two days they listened to His Word and that's why many believed. So:

c. personal experience with the Word results in faith - Rom. 10:17 ...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. It requires more than just your say-so; they must hear the Word of God and read it and listen to it and think about it. That's how they will come to truly believe for themselves.

Well, after two days Jesus moves on and next, He gives a different kind of witness:

II. A Witness By Power At Cana In Galilee (43-54) He is once more back at the scene of his first miracle in the village of Cana, when a man comes to Him with:

1. the desperate request for a miracle (46-47) This is a royal official, a Roman or at least a Jew who works for the Roman government. His son lay dying, so he has come from Capernaum, some 15 miles away to try a last resort, to fall on his knees and beg Jesus to come and heal him. Jesus points out:

2. the danger in this method: which is **having faith only in what you can see (48)** If the doing of a miracle is the basis of faith, then when there is no miracle, there may be no faith. Jesus doesn't just want to heal the sick boy; He wants the father to believe in Him. So, he makes:

3. the demand for faith before the miracle (49-50) This puts the official in a real dilemma. Jesus says, "Go home...your son will live." But he's not at home to see that it worked. He doesn't have Jesus there in his house laying his hands on the boy and seeing him raised up. He either has to trust Jesus' word and walk away, or stay and keep on begging until Jesus comes with him. He decides to take Jesus at His word and go home - that's faith. He chooses to believe. And as he is going home, we have:

4. the confirmation of faith by the miracle (51-54) Wow! What authority Jesus had! The moment He said the boy would live, he got better, whether anybody was there to see it or not. That was enough, both for this man and for his whole household. They all believed together. Another field white unto harvest, now gathered in to eternal life.

That's what Jesus was about. That's what He's still about: gathering in the harvest. And His challenge to His disciples is still the same: Open your eyes! Look about you! What you see is God's field and in that field are people that He wants to harvest for eternal life! *A man named Mark was on a golf course he had played many times before. Suddenly he exclaimed to his golfing partners, "Look at that beautiful sight!" There, stretching away over the golden sand dunes, was a marvelous view of Lake Michigan, its sparkling blue waters shimmering in summer splendor. Always before on that particular hole, Mark had been concerned with a golfing problem--the chip he had to make or the putt he had to sink. His eyes had always been focused downward. And as he gazed on in wonder, he exclaimed, "I never looked up from here before!"* What course does God have you playing? What field does He have you standing in? A field of Samaritans you don't even usually talk to? Have you ever looked up from there and seen it with Jesus' eyes? You want joy? You want true satisfaction in life? Go get involved and reap God's harvest.

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Healing At The Pool - Ch. 5

We left Jesus in chapter four in Galilee healing the royal official's son. John chooses not to record much of what Jesus does over the next several months there, but rather picks up the story again when He returns to Jerusalem, perhaps alone or maybe with only John who recorded this story, since none of the other Gospel writers did. It was here as He entered the city that:

I. Jesus Does A Miracle Of Healing (1-15) Let's read:

1. the story of the miracle (1-9a) Beth-esda, the house of healing or house of mercy, was a pool near the sheep gate around which a great number of disabled people used to congregate. The reason they came there is missing in several modern translations. You'll notice that verse 4 is not there; it's in the margin. That's because the words of verse 4 are not found in any manuscript of John that we have that was written before 400 BC. It seems to have been added centuries later as an explanation. The reason that's important is that this verse may be reporting a Jewish superstition that these folks believed, rather than a statement of truth as to what actually happened. Every so often the water in this pool would become stirred or agitated and would bubble (possibly because there was a spring at the bottom that fed it). People believed that it was done by an angel and the belief was that the first, and *only* the first, person in the pool when that happened, would be healed of whatever disease he had. That doesn't sound much like something God would actually do or that He ever did anywhere else, but it does sound an awful lot like something desperate people who were blind and lame and paralyzed and had no chance of ever being cured would believe and stake their hope on. Jesus found a man who had been an invalid for 38 years lying there, who knows for how long, so frustrated that he had given up hope because no matter how hard he tried and how often he tried, he could never be the first one into the water. So, Jesus did for him what the pool could not. He said, "Take up your mat and walk" and, in that instant, the man was healed, totally and completely. He *walked* away! Jesus healed hundreds, if not thousands, during His three years of ministry and his apostles healed that many more in the years that followed in His Name. And this would be a good place to talk about the subject because it is near and dear to our hearts. There is not one of us that doesn't have someone we love and care about that is either desperately ill or permanently disabled in some way. How our hearts would wish that we could simply do for them what Peter and John did at the temple and say to the lame man, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" and it would happen! We pray for healing, and sometimes it does happen, even suddenly and miraculously, but often it doesn't. Why not? Well, let's gather from this story:

2. some lessons about physical healing The first is that often:

a. we would rather cling to superstition than look to Jesus Jesus had to ask this poor man, "Do you want to be made whole?" That seems like it has such an obvious answer. Why else was he lying there? However what Jesus was really asking was, "Do you want ME to make you whole?!" But the lame man can only babble on about having no one to put him in the water. He had no clue who Jesus was or that He could heal with a word. He was desperately clinging to a false hope. It amazes me what people will cling to today. Crystals, little angel figures or they'll send money to some radio speaker to get a bottle of oil to anoint themselves with or a special cloth to convey healing power. They'll journey miles, days, to some shrine where miracles are purported to happen. They'll do everything except come to Jesus and acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior and fall before Him like the leper who said, *Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean!* - Mt. 8:2. You would think that the minute that lame man stood up that every person in the place would have started crying out, "Jesus, heal ME! too" He should have been mobbed, as He was so many times out in Galilee. But there is no record that they asked or that anyone else was healed. They kept lying by their pool. All healing, both physical and spiritual only comes from one source: Jesus. Whether it comes through a natural process, through doctors and medicine, or in a miraculous fashion, it comes from Jesus so it's time to throw away all confidence in anything else and place it in Him. Now lesson two:

b. Jesus can always heal but does not always choose to heal He chose this man, perhaps the worst off of the lot, but still only one, to heal. The rest He chose not to. Look at Paul's experience. Many miracles had been wrought through his own hands, time after time. Yet when he had a thorn in the flesh that needed healing and he asked the Lord three times for it, Jesus said plainly, "No, my grace is sufficient for you! - that's what you need!" It is not a question of power or ability; Jesus has plenty of that! He could heal everyone. Nor is it a question of faith; who had more of that than Paul? It is a matter of His will and purpose. He heals whom He chooses and sometimes He chooses not to heal! And if He is really our Lord, we need to leave that choice to Him and trust His wisdom. But here's lesson three:

c. when Jesus does heal by miracle, it always has a greater purpose Sure, this healing was an act of kindness shown to a crippled man, but it was more than that. Jesus used it as an occasion to declare Himself the Son of God with power by healing the man. He used it as an unarguable testimony to the Jewish leaders that His words and His claims were true. He used it for the advancement of the Kingdom. When He healed the multitudes, it was not simply for their benefit; it proved that He spoke as One with Divine authority, that His words were true. It advanced the Gospel. And when God does miraculous things today, it is still always in pursuit of His greater purpose of advancing His kingdom.

A few years ago, in a little village in Nepal in the foothills of the Himalayas there was a poor farmer whose wife was very sick. She was also pregnant. Nothing helped. He took her to the village shaman who chanted and did all his rituals and she only got worse. He took her to the shaman in the next village who did all his rituals and she was not helped. He took her home to his hut with no hope that she would live. At that time one of the young men from his village caught a ride on a truck to another village far away to find work as a carrier for an expedition that was climbing Mt. Everest. In that village was a medical missionary who invited this young man into his clinic along with some others to be his guests. He told them some simple stories about Jesus and taught them a few simple Christian songs. But soon a lady in critical condition was brought in. The men asked the doctor, "Will Jesus heal this lady?" He wisely replied, "I don't know, why don't we ask Him?" So, he laid hands on the lady and prayed to Jesus and she was healed. The young man was tremendously impressed and the whole time he was carrying packs up and down the mountain he told himself those stories and repeated the songs over and over. He was thinking of the man in his village with the sick wife. When he got back, he went right to the man's hut. His wife was barely alive. He told the man everything he could remember about Jesus and how he saw Jesus heal the sick woman. The man asked, "Would Jesus heal my wife?" And the young man replied as he had learned, "I don't know, why don't we ask Him?" So, the two laid their hands on the wife and prayed to Jesus to heal her. And He did. In a few days she was well. The two of them rejoiced in Jesus and sang their simple songs. And the man was so full of joy that he began going around his village - guess why - looking for sick people. And he would tell them all he knew about Jesus and they would ask whether Jesus would heal them and he would say, "Let's ask Him" and people would be healed. Soon there was a church meeting in that village and the man began to devote less time to his farming and more time to telling about Jesus. He went to the next village and the next. By the time a white missionary arrived in the area there were churches meeting in 7 villages! Two years ago, in that region there were more than 100 little village churches! Isn't that just like what Jesus did back then? He healed so people would know who He was and believe. He is still doing that today, especially in places like the 10/40 Window where people don't have any idea who He really is and have no way to hear about Him! But the people around Jesus on this day did not respond so well. Next, we have:

3. the reporting of the miracle (9b-15) This man was in deep trouble. To be caught deliberately working, even by carrying a mat through the streets, on the Sabbath day, carried a stiff penalty. He was only able to tell them, *the man who healed me told me to*, yet in the excitement Jesus had slipped away and the man never even got His name! They let him go, but he just had to go up to the Temple to worship and thank God for his healing. And there Jesus deliberately sought him out and found him a second time to tell him what he told the woman taken in adultery - *Go and sin no more!* It was a call to repent and believe and surely more passed between them than is recorded here. Why the man felt he had to tell the Jewish leaders it was Jesus who healed him is not clear; perhaps they had made him promise to do so as a condition of his release. But to speculate misses the point: Jesus deliberately chose to do this on the Sabbath and it brought him into a great confrontation with the Jewish leaders in which, in the second half of the chapter:

II. Jesus Declares His Deity (16-47) Immediately we read that:

1. Jesus is persecuted because of the miracle (16-18) They pursued Him; they hunted Him down. They wanted to get their hands on him for two reasons. First because:

a. they felt He was a law-breaker: He worked on the Sabbath Day by healing the lame man and by telling him to carry his mat. In reality, He was not violating God's law but He was violating the whole web of rules which they had woven around God's law. And beyond that, His response to them was, *My Father is always at His work....* and that statement made them furious:

b. they felt He was a blasphemer: He called God his Father personally, and that was a claim to be equal with God, to have His Nature. For any man to claim to be God is pure blasphemy and punishable by death. So:

c. they intentionally tried to kill Him The text doesn't say exactly how, but that was their intent, to seize Him and execute Him for such serious charges. The plot to kill Jesus was not something that came up in the last week of His life; it was there throughout His whole ministry, from this early moment on. And He seems to have deliberately provoked this hatred because here, directly to their faces:

2. Jesus clearly declares His Deity (He declares that He is equal with God!) You see, claiming to be God is only blasphemy if you're *not* God! If you *are*, it's simply a statement of the truth. So, Jesus tells them the truth in seven different ways. He says:

a. I am at work on this day as My Father is at work (17) God works on the Sabbath! The grass grows, the sun shines, wounded bodies heal, all things are given life and breath. He is always at His work and in healing a crippled man, I'm acting like He acts; I'm carrying out His work. In fact, Jesus says:

b. I do what the Father does (19) Our work is one and the same. I don't do anything on my own initiative. Whatever I see Him doing, I do. His work is My work. We are one! And:

c. I know what the Father knows (20) I know everything He's doing, ALL He's doing. I have Divine knowledge, the very knowledge of God. I KNOW what I'm doing. He and I are one! And here's a really powerful claim: Jesus says:

d. I give life to whom I please (21) The Father raises the dead and gives them life; I do the same thing. I give life to whomever I please. That's what I did with the lame man. I raised him up physically to health by healing him and my power can even raise the dead. I am the source of life. I am God, and further:

e. I must be honored or the Father cannot be (22-23) Did you get that? If you don't honor me, if you don't acknowledge Me for who I am, if you don't acknowledge that I am God the Son and One with the Father, then you don't honor God! Nobody comes to the Father but by Me! So much for the Jehovah's Witnesses! So much for the Mormons! So much for the millions of liberal protestants and anybody else who wants to believe that Jesus is just a man, a great man, a good teacher, a prophet, but only a man and not God! There are not many ways to God. There are not many nice people who believe different things about Jesus, but are all OK. John got the message; here's what he wrote in his first letter, *No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.* - 1 John 2:23. They're a package; you can't have one without the other. Worship Jesus or forget worshipping God, period. Look what He goes on to say:

f. I save and give life to all who believe (24-26) The *dead* in this verse are the spiritually dead who are still physically alive. Now is the hour, that whenever a person who is dead in trespasses and sins hears the voice of the Son of God, hears My word and believes in Me, I give Him life! I save Him. I have life in Myself and I give that life of Mine to him! He is no longer dead, no longer condemned. He has crossed over from one side to the other, from death to life! I am the only Savior. And what's more, one day:

g. I will raise the dead and ultimately judge all men (27-30) On that last day it is MY voice that will raise all the dead from their graves and they will stand before ME for judgment. I am the Judge of all the earth; I am God! Wow, what a statement! How much more clear can you get? And then Jesus goes on to:

3. Jesus names the witnesses to His identity (31-47) [Read 31] In Jewish law, every word must be confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses. One person's word is not valid because he could be lying. Jesus knew this is what they were thinking, so he lists all the witnesses to His identity. First:

a. Jesus' own words declared it (31) He himself said, "I am the Son of God; God is my Father." But He was not alone in that:

b. John the Baptist declared it (32-35) You believed John was a prophet; you investigated him. He said, *I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.* - Jn. 1:34. He's the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world! And that's not all:

c. the works Jesus did declared it (36) Can you do miracles? Can you deny that the lame man is walking? Can anybody but God do that? Later, Jesus would tell His disciples, *Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.* - Jn. 14:11. The very miracles declared that He was the Son of God. Plus:

d. the Father declared it (37-38) You didn't hear it; you don't want to hear it, but the very voice of the Father Himself testified to who I am. Remember Jesus baptism?...*a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* - Mt. 3:17. It happened there; it happened later on the Mount of Transfiguration. The Father said it out loud! And finally:

e. the Scriptures declare it (39-40, 45-46) Jesus is all over the Old Testament. He is the Prophet of whom Moses wrote, like unto him, to whom everyone would listen. He is there in the words of Isaiah and David and the prophets. Look with me at **Ps. 2:7-12**. David wrote of Me! You need to fall down and worship the SON, ME! But alas Jesus knew that:

4. the Jewish leaders would refuse to accept and believe it (41-44, 47) The evidence was plain, the testimony irrefutable, but they would not believe.

There is no ending to the story. They didn't seize Him and Jesus probably just walked away and left. But it reminds us of the key question in life that every human being has to answer: Who is Jesus to you? Is He a good man, a prophet, a great teacher, a figure of history? Or is He the Christ, the Son of the Living God, your Lord and Savior? Has He saved you and given you life? Have you crossed over from death to life by trusting in Him? *Calvin Miller, in his book A Hunger for Meaning, has written: "At the person of Christ two roads diverge. Those on the barren road disappear over the horizon of time, muttering in hunger that He was only a carpenter. Those on the other road [the road of faith] admit that they cannot answer all questions. Still, they are on a pilgrimage to drive a stake in a promised destiny. And ever and anon they stop and cry for the overwhelming joy that fills them and spills over the brink of meaning, 'He is the Christ!'"*

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Bread Of Life - Ch. 6

As we leave John 5, six more months of Jesus life and ministry have gone by. It is now near Passover time in the spring of His last year. In these months He has called His disciples away from their boats to follow Him full time and designated them apostles. He has engaged in public ministry throughout Galilee and done many miracles. He has sent out the Twelve on a preaching mission and, upon their return, He decides to take them apart to a quiet place on the eastern shore of Galilee to rest, but there is no opportunity because the crowds seek Him out and find Him. And it is there, near Bethsaida that:

I. Jesus Feeds Five Thousand (1-13) This miracle is significant because it is the only miracle of Jesus recorded by all four Gospel writers. It was evidently a watershed event in Jesus' ministry. Up to this point there has been immense popularity. From this point on, there is growing opposition and Jesus will devote Himself most fully to the training of the Twelve. We all know the story; it is so familiar. But let's not miss the lessons in it. The first is:

1. a lesson about our responsibility (1-6) John leaves out the fact that the disciples came to Him first saying, "Send them away so they can buy bread!" He replied, "They don't need to go away; YOU give them something to eat. Then He asked Philip, "Where can WE buy bread?" He's strongly making a point here: ***we must feed the multitude***. And it's really a spiritual point, not simply a physical one. In a moment we'll see that bread is a picture of life. The multitude is dying without eternal life through Jesus. WE have to meet their need. That's a picture of the world. We, His disciples, have a responsibility for the 4 billion people in the world who either have no opportunity to hear about Jesus where they live or have the opportunity but just haven't heard yet. They can't get the bread; we have to give it to them! We can't just say, "Well, that's their problem. They need to get their own bread; they need to seek and find Jesus somehow on their own." They can't; they won't. We have to give them the Gospel which brings life. The task of missions needs to be strongly on the heart of every believer. And there's a second lesson that goes with it:

2. a lesson about Jesus' ability (7-11) The task seems so huge. There are so many to feed. The world is so big, billions of people to reach, so far away. Like the disciples we say, "How can we do this? How can our little loaves and fishes feed so many?" It was a test for the disciples to see where they would look, to themselves or to Him. And they couldn't get their eyes off their own inability. So, Jesus showed them. He sat the people down and multiplied their poor lunch and fed 5,000 men plus women and children! The lesson is obvious, ***...He can provide all that's needed!*** He commands us to feed the Gospel to the whole world and it is a momentous task, but HE will provide all we need for the task! He is our source! And He can literally create something out of nothing to make it happen if He needs to, as long as we make ourselves available and stay committed to the task. *J. Hudson Taylor said, "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply." He founded the China Inland Mission with ten pounds sterling, and "all the promises of God." His life not only touched a nation with the Gospel, but changed the course of missions history as it encouraged other brave souls to go "Inland" from the coasts to the interior of the great continents. Millions heard because of the heart of one man who believed that God could supply anything needed for His work. We can count on that for ourselves too and I think we're learning it! This scene ends with:*

3. a lesson about Jesus' economy (12-13) If Jesus has given you what you need, ***...don't waste the extra!*** He always has more people for us to feed! But we do waste, don't we? *A lady fell out of a second-story window and landed in a garbage truck that was slowly moving past the house. Half buried in the litter, she tried without success to get the driver's attention. A foreign diplomat standing on the sidewalk saw her and commented indignantly, "Another example of how wasteful Americans are! That woman looks like she's good for at least another 10 years."* The truth is that we Americans are wasteful. Because of the relative luxury in which we live, we not only waste food, but many things. We

waste time by the hour, daily, time that God could use to serve others in ministry or in prayer. We waste money; we spend it on the most incredible things sometimes, without even a thought that God has more people for us to feed and He could use our extra! Can you hear Jesus saying to you in your life, "Gather for Me the pieces that are left over; let nothing be wasted!"

The second major event in the chapter is another miracle, but a private one:

II. Jesus Walks On Water (14-21) It begins with

1. a misunderstanding about miracles (14-17) The crowd got the wrong lesson. They thought, "Here is a man who can do miracles. He is from God. He could save our nation from the Romans. Let's make him king, whether he wants to be or not!" That's the problem with miracles. People see what He can do and inevitably end up in the position of thinking **...He will do what I want**. But it doesn't work that way, even for us. When they got to that mindset, Jesus withdrew from them and He sent His disciples away also. You can't force Him to do what you want, to give you your personal miracle. They are for His purpose, not ours. But that night he also gave His disciples:

2. a lesson about fear and faith as they were rowing across the lake **(18-21)** He came to them walking on the water, but they were afraid because they thought it was a spirit. Yet once they knew it was Him, their fear vanished, He came in the boat and suddenly they were safely at shore. By the way, this is where Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water, for about 2 seconds before he became afraid of the wind and the waves and began to sink. The lesson was obvious to all, **...if I trust Him, I need fear nothing**, not winds, not waves, not mysterious figures walking on water! Not lack, not failure, not death, not anything in my circumstances. David said, *I will fear no evil for Thou art with me!* He is with us so we need not fear anything!

Now both of these miracles were leading up to a point of climax where:

III. Jesus Declares His Identity (22-71) and that takes the rest of the chapter. It takes only until the middle of the next day before once again:

1. the crowd finds Jesus (22-25) They searched for Him diligently. They expended a lot of effort. Some of them even got into boats and sailed across to Capernaum where they found Him in the synagogue. But why? To fall at His feet in worship? No:

a. their purpose was the desire to benefit self (26-31) Jesus read their minds and hearts. What they got out of that miracle was that here is a man who could feed them bread every day without working! Here was a man who could feed their bellies daily and make their lives easy and secure. They wanted Him for their own benefit in an earthly way. But that was not:

b. God's purpose: In that miracle, God the Father was **certifying His Son (27)**. He was putting His Divine seal of approval on Him before them all. He was saying, "This is My Son; Listen to Him!" **and demanding belief (29)**. The work of God is not a work at all; it is simple faith, to believe in the One He has sent, Jesus. He fed the 5000 so they would fall before Him as the Samaritans in chapter 4 did saying, "Truly this man is the Savior of the World". So now Jesus makes a:

2. Jesus' powerful claim: He says **I am the Bread of Life (32-59)** This is the first of Jesus' great "I am" statements. We'll see more of them in future chapters: I am the Light of the World, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the Vine. Here it is: I am the Bread which gives life. To us that doesn't mean much. Bread is just one item in a whole supermarket full of thousands of types of food. But for a large portion of the world for many centuries and even today, bread is the staple of life. It may be all that people have to eat and bread IS the meal, not an extra to it. One field worker in Kyrgyzstan recently commented about some people in the rural villages who are surviving on "little more than tea and bread". They may not have any meat or any cheese or milk or any vegetables, but in many cultures of the world, the last, most basic staple of their lives is some form of bread. In a sense, to say, "I am the Bread" is to say, "I give life" and that's exactly what Jesus goes on to spell out. He makes three clear statements about Himself. First, He says:

a. I came down from heaven to give life to the world (32-40) They couldn't get away from the physical bread. They went back to Moses and said, "Moses, gave our fathers bread from heaven, manna, to eat. You can do that too; we've seen it!" And Jesus says, "No, no, no! I AM the real Bread that came down from heaven to give life! It's not about physical bread; it's about ME! You see":

(1) the one who believes in Me will live forever I can give not just physical existence like bread gives. I give spiritual life, eternal life, to those who believe. If you believe in Me, trust in Me, your spirit will never be hungry or thirsty again; it will never die. It will live forever with my very life. And what's more:

(2) the one who believes in Me will never be lost What assurance for us! "I will never drive you away! I will not lose a single one, a single person, of all that those that believe on Me! And not only your spirit; I will even raise up your body, resurrect it, on the last day." Isn't it wonderful? Do you believe in Jesus, trust in Him as your Savior? You will never be lost. You can't be lost. Your eternal future is guaranteed by the Son of God. No matter how you may fall or fail, no matter how feeble and doubting and timid you may be, no matter what your past may

hold! You have trusted in Jesus; you have eaten the Bread that gives life and you cannot be lost! Well, this statement really rocked the crowd and Jesus made a second claim. He said:

b. I will give my body to give life to the world (41-51) They said, "Wait a minute; what do you mean you came down from heaven? You have a mother and father in Nazareth, people that we know; you were born, not parachuted down!" Jesus said, "You will only get this if God enables you to get it, but I came down from heaven and entered a human body and I am going to give that body to die upon a cross for the sins of the world. My body will give life to all who will believe. So:

(1) I am the only way to the Father "I came from heaven. I'm the only one who has seen the Father. I'm the only One who knows the Father. And you have to believe in Me to get eternal life! I and I alone am the Bread that gives life; I am the only One who can give His body for the world and life comes through believing in Me alone. So:

(2) the one who partakes of Me will never die Your ancestors ate physical manna, but it didn't give them true life; they died. If you eat Me, if you believe in Me, even though your body expires, you will never die!" Did you hear that? If you believe in Jesus, you'll never die! Oh, your body will breathe its last; they'll lay it in a grave somewhere and it will return to dust, but you, the real you, the spirit, will never die, will never be lost. You will be with Him and live with Him! The minute you close your eyes, you're in heaven! What assurance!

Well, this claim sat even less well with the crowd, because they still couldn't get their minds out of the realm of the physical. So Jesus said:

c. the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me (52-59) They said, "How can we eat your body? How can it give us life? Are we to be cannibals or something? What on earth are you talking about?" Jesus says plainly:

(1) unless you partake of Me, you have no life and let me point out that He's not talking about communion. He's not talking about the bread and the cup. He's not talking about what our Catholic friends call "the sacrifice of the table", the mass. He's not talking about some physical act where we eat and drink something. We partake of Him, of His body and blood, by believing, by trusting, and by receiving His Spirit into ourselves. Him IN us. That's what gives us life. We live because of Him, because He is in us and His life is in us giving us life. Without it we have no life! But, He said,

(2) if you partake of Me, you have life and will be resurrected You have My life right now and I will even raise your physical body to life on the day of My return, the day of Resurrection.

These are some of the most powerful claims any human being has ever made. Either Jesus is a bold liar, or He's a lunatic and purely crazy, or it's all true. He is who and what He says. Lord, liar or lunatic. Those are your choices! This crowd, I think, chose that latter. Look at:

3. the impact on His disciples (60-71)

a. many who would not believe deserted Him (60-66) There were many who were simply followers. Some of them were merely hanging around to see or get another miracle. Others had likely been following Him around for some time and had begun to believe to some level or other the things He was saying. But when He said this, when He claimed to be the very Giver of Life, to be God standing there in a body, they couldn't buy it, in spite of all the miracles they had seen and they left. For good. No more would there be huge crowds; the time had come to separate the wheat from the chaff, those who truly believed from those who were only following for selfish reasons. They went away, but:

b. the Twelve remained faithful (67-71) There it is: "We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God. There is no one else to go to!" True faith, faith that would not be shaken. So, Jesus now began to devote His ministry very directly to the training of the Twelve, preparing them to understand His coming death and resurrection. And even so, one of them, Judas, was still not genuine, but an adversary, an enemy who would betray Him.

Now try to put the lesson of the whole chapter together at once, if you can. What is Jesus saying to us? "You have the true Bread that gives life! You have Me. There is a hungry multitude out there, a world full of people who are perishing, who are on their way to eternal condemnation because they do not believe in Me. You have Me! You can't ever lose Me! Feed them! They need Me!" *Max Lucado tells the parable of a beggar who came one day and asked for bread. The "baker" told him he had certainly come to the right bakery and then took his cookbook down off the shelf and proceeded to tell the poor man everything he knew about bread. He talked about how the wheat was milled into flour, reciting all kinds of interesting statistics and the precise measurements of the recipe. He was pretty impressed with his presentation himself, but when he looked up the beggar wasn't smiling. "I just want some bread," he said. The baker commended him for that desire and offered to show him the bakery. Guiding him down the hallowed halls, he paused to point out the rooms where the dough was prepared and the ovens where it was baked. "No one else has facilities like these," the baker boasted. "But here is the very best part--the room of inspiration." He just knew the beggar would be impressed as he swung open the double doors to the sanctuary with its beautiful stained-glass windows. When the beggar didn't say a*

word, the baker assumed that he was in awe. Quickly he stepped behind the pulpit and whispered, "Oh, I know, my friend. I find it overwhelming, too. People come here from all over the city to hear me speak, and I read to them the recipe from the cookbook of life." The beggar had slipped into a pew and sat down. The baker assumed that he knew what the man wanted. "Would you like to hear me speak," he asked, but the shabby old man repeated his original request: "I'd just like some bread." "A wise choice," the baker said and led him out through the front door of the bakery. "Now what I'm going to tell you is very important. All along this street you'll find other bakeries, but watch out. They don't serve true bread. I know one of them uses two teaspoons of salt instead of one. And at that one over there they heat the ovens three degrees hotter than they should be. Oh," the baker went on, shaking his head, "they may call it bread, but it's not according to the book!" The beggar silently turned and started to walk away. "I thought you wanted some bread," the baker called after him. With a shrug, he turned and looked back. "I think I lost my appetite." The baker went back inside lamenting the fact that the world just isn't hungry for bread any more. [A Gentle Thunder by Max Lucado. Word Publishing, 1995. Pages 41-42.] Yes, they are! But they don't want to hear about bread. They want to eat it. They want to experience life. You have the Bread; you have Jesus. Don't offer them church. Don't offer them religion. Offer them Jesus! Someone has said that evangelism is simply this: one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Tell them they can find it in Him.

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Water Of Life - Ch. 7

Six more months have gone by. It was Passover time in the spring when Jesus fed the 5,000 in Galilee in chapter 6. Now 7:1 tells us that Jesus deliberately stayed in Galilee for these months because the Jews in Jerusalem were waiting to take His life, ever since he healed a cripple there on the Sabbath day back in chapter 5. However, now in our September or October, more than a year afterwards:

I. Jesus Goes once again up to Jerusalem, **To The Feast Of Tabernacles (1-10)** [Read (2-5)] For those of you who may never have heard it said, Yes, Jesus did have brothers, four of them according to Mk. 6:3, James, Joseph, Judas and Simon -- and some sisters too! Mary and Joseph had these other children together after He was born and He grew up in a large family with them and was an older brother to them. James would later become the head of the Jerusalem church in the book of Acts and write the book of James. Judas or Jude would later pen the letter in our New Testament that bears his name. But at this point in His ministry, even after all His miracles, John says, his own brothers did not believe in Him.

1. the desire of His brothers was expressed clearly. Their thought was: ***show yourself to the world now*** If you're the Messiah you claim to be; go up to Jerusalem. Go to the capital. Do your miracles there. Show the world who you are. What are you waiting for? You can't keep hiding out here in the backwaters of Galilee. If you are the Savior, then go and show them! Go up to the Feast with the rest of Israel at this most important time of the year and show them! People are gathered from our whole nation and from all the nations where Jews have scattered. They've all come here. Show the whole world! But Jesus' concern was different from theirs. It was:

2. the timing of God (6-10) He said: ***the right time for me has not yet come***. What is "the right time for me"? It's God's time, the time that God has planned for it to be. Your time is always "now"! Isn't that so true of us? Our time is always "Now!" We want God to act NOW! When we think like the world thinks, we try to push Jesus into doing what WE think He ought to do. WE tell Him how He should get glory to Himself, how He should show the world who He is. And it's unbelief; it's a lack of trust on our part. We don't fully trust that He is God and He knows best and His timing is always perfect so that we patiently wait for it.

Jesus would not yield to their faithless desire, any more than He will to ours. He waited until after his brothers left for Jerusalem and then He went up privately and quietly in (11-14). The Feast of Tabernacles was 8 days long and for 3 or 4 days Jesus stayed hidden and did not appear in public. Jews by the hundreds had arrived in Jerusalem from all over the land and all over the world. They had built little booths or huts out of branches and palm fronds everywhere in the streets and squares of the city, even on the rooftops. Everyone lived in booths to remind them of how their ancestors lived in the wilderness. Daily there were sacrifices at the Temple and religious ceremonies for people to attend. Naturally, the crowd was looking for Him and were surprised He wasn't there. They were bandying about their opinions of him privately. Then suddenly, in the middle of the Feast, He appeared publicly in the Temple and began to teach. The authorities' hands were tied. He had done nothing wrong and they couldn't very well seize and arrest Him in front of everyone without cause. But they could argue with Him. And so, in the next portion of the chapter, we have recorded for us:

II. The Controversy At The Feast Of Tabernacles (11-36) There were three issues on the table, really. Three things that galled the religious authorities there about Him. First of all:

1. they questioned His credentials (15-18) Even though it began with amazement or admiration at how well He taught, there was an underlying:

a. the issue: You never attended our Rabbinic schools (15) There were at least two theological schools in Jerusalem led by famous Rabbis in that day, but Jesus had never attended either one. Now, the essence of good teaching in that day was very simple, since most of it was oral and there were no books: it was to pass on as accurately as possible the words and opinions of the great rabbis who had gone before you. Jewish teaching was filled with, "Rabbi Hillel taught this..." or "Rabbi Shammai taught this about that passage..." But Jesus taught (we're told else-

where) “as one who had authority; not as their teachers of the law”. He said, “This is what that means; this is what you should do; this is what God says, period!” How could He teach like that? He hadn’t even been to school! Well, here’s His:

b. the answer: (16-18) He cuts out the middle

- **My teaching is from God!** “I have an authority too, but it is not the opinions of some Rabbi. I operate on the same principle that you do. I faithfully tell you what I have heard the Father say. It’s His teaching and I just pass it on. If I was just telling you what I thought, I would be self-serving and seeking my own ends. But I simply pass on to you what I hear from God and therefore you can be assured that I’m a man of truth and there’s nothing false in it. And here’s how you can test that:”

- **If you choose to do His will, you’ll know it!** “If you choose to accept and believe what I say and do it, you’ll know whether it’s from God or not. It will be plain and clear to you. If your only desire is to serve Him, then you’ll see that in what I’ve taught. If your desire is to serve self, you won’t be able to do what I teach!” That challenge, still stands, by the way! If you set out sincerely to know God’s will and carefully begin to read and examine the words of Jesus, sooner or later you’ll end up believing and following Him.

Jesus then moved them along to what He knew was the real issue:

2. they questioned His integrity (19-24) He knew, as did everyone else, that there were orders out among the religious leaders to arrest and kill Him. And he knew it was because of the last time he was in Jerusalem in chapter 5.

a. the issue was: You healed a man on the Sabbath Day! “You’re a law-breaker; you even told the man to carry his mat on the Sabbath; you’re worthy of death!” That’s what was going on, kind of undercover, with the leaders, so Jesus addresses it directly.

b. the answer: He says, first of all:

- **You are trying to kill Me [which is against the Law]** “Moses taught you, ‘You shall not commit murder’ but you’re plotting to do it. Why are you breaking the Law by planning this? Why is it punishable by death to pick up a mat on the Sabbath but to plot murder is OK? And besides that”:

- **You circumcise a baby on the Sabbath [which is working]** “Moses said you have to circumcise the child on the eighth day. If the eighth day falls on the Sabbath, you circumcise him anyway. You work on the Sabbath for the good of the child. So, I found a lame man on the Sabbath and healed him fully whole. Was not God’s command to do good, to heal and help and save, more important than resting, just the way circumcision is? Here’s the problem:”

- **You judge by mere appearances instead of truth!** “You look at the surface. Your thinking and theology is a mile wide, but only about an inch deep!” That’s a problem with a lot of theology, even with ours sometimes. We make a rule to solve our problems and judge a person by outward appearances, rather than looking in depth at the heart of the matter. Well, this shook the whole crowd up, but there was another issue that bothered them:

3. they questioned His origin (25-36)

a. the issue is: We know where You came from! (25-27) “You’re from Nazareth. You have parents and brothers and sisters. We know your family. You’re a person just like us. The Christ is supposed to appear suddenly. He’s not supposed to be somebody we know, that grew up among us”. But look at Jesus’:

b. the answer: He said:

- **I came from God! (28-29)** “Yes, I grew up in Nazareth, but the truth is I’m not from Nazareth. I’m from heaven! I came down from God; He sent me.” Well, that shook them up pretty good, as we’ll see in a moment, but then Jesus added:

- **I’m going back to God! (33-36)** “I’m only going to be here a short while longer and then I’m going back to heaven. I’m going back to God. And what’s more:”

- **You can’t come!** “For all your religion and all your profession, you don’t know God and you can’t go to heaven.” That’s what He was saying but they couldn’t grasp His meaning. They scratched their heads pondering where he could possibly go that they couldn’t go.

But Jesus just left them there pondering and walked off. Having proclaimed the truth of who He was, He went back to secrecy and didn’t show his face for several more days, until the last day, the most important day of the Feast. That’s where we have:

III. Jesus’ Great Offer At The Feast Of Tabernacles (37-53) Read (37-39). Now let me paint a picture for you of what this day was like. At daybreak on this day a procession of worshippers would follow a priest carrying a golden pitcher as

he went down from the Temple to the Pool of Siloam near the Fountain Gate. The pool was fed continually with running water by the Gihon spring. And the priest would fill his pitcher and lead the procession back up to the Temple. He would time it so that he would arrive just as the morning sacrifice was being laid on the Altar of Burnt Offering. A three-fold blast of the priests' trumpets would welcome the priest as he entered the Temple through the "Water Gate" and then went into the Court of the Priests. Here he was joined by another priest who carried the wine for the drink offering. The two priests ascended the steps to the altar and turned to the left. There were two silver funnels with narrow openings leading down to the base of the altar. Into the one on the east, the wine was poured and at the same time the water was poured out through the funnel on the west. At that moment the Levites would lead all the people as they began to chant the great *Hallel*, Psalms 113-118, responsively, waving the branches they held in their hands and concluding with *Ps. 118:25-29, O LORD, save us [Hosanna]; O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.*" It was, no doubt, in the great pause at the end of this ceremony as the life-giving water has been poured out, that the lone voice of Jesus rings out through the Temple in the midst of thousands of worshippers making this offer: *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* What a dramatic, powerful moment! Listen to:

1. the terms of His offer What is He shouting to them?

a. *I am the water of life* This ceremony was to supposed to remind them how in the wilderness when there was no water for the Israelites to drink, God gave them life-giving water out of the dry barren rock. They were thirsty and they cried out to Him for water and He gave them water out of the rock. Paul's comment in Corinthians is *...that Rock was Christ!* In other words, Christ was there. He was their Source. He gave them the water to drink. That's exactly what He's crying out here: *I am the source of life; I give the true living water and:*

b. *you must come to Me to drink by believing in Me* Another passage often chanted on that occasion was **Is. 55:1**, *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!... Jesus is saying it clearly: If you want the true water that gives life, you must come to ME. You must believe in ME. You can't get it anywhere else. But if you do, if you come to ME..."*

c. *I will give you the Holy Spirit* Everybody in the crowd also knew that this pouring out of the water had a second symbolism. It symbolized the promise of God in **Is.44:3**, *For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.* Jesus says: *That's Me. If you believe in ME, I will plant a spring of water inside of you, a spring of life that will satisfy you so that you will never thirst again. I will give you the Holy Spirit to live in you! So come to ME! You are welcome with Me!*

What a claim! It is to say, I am God; I give life; you must come to me to have eternal life! And if you do, I will put My life inside you! My friend, that offer is still good today! It stands for you; it stands for your friends and family; it stands for everybody you'll ever meet. And it stands for the peoples at the ends of the earth who have never heard it. Jesus says, *Come to ME and drink!* If your soul is thirsty, there is nothing on earth that will satisfy it, but if you will come to Him, He'll put His spirit inside you and His life will well up and you will never thirst forever! But look at:

2. the reactions to His offer First there was:

a. the divided reaction of the crowd (40-44) Their reactions varied, just like people's reactions to Christ do today. Some say, "He's a good man, a Prophet." Others, "He's the Christ," but they don't know what that really means. Some try to offer logical reasons why He can't be. Others were angry at Him and wanted Him arrested. But the most telling reaction on that day was:

b. the astonished reaction of the temple guards You see, we skipped a paragraph **(30-32)**. Those few days before, when Jesus had said He came from God, the Jewish leaders gave orders to their Temple police to find an opportune moment to arrest Him so they could have Him killed. These several days they had waited, but Jesus had stayed hidden. So now they had their moment. Now, there He stood in the very Temple crying out to all that they must come to HIM. It was their moment to grab Him, but they just stood there with their jaws gaping open. And look what they said in **(45-46)**, *No man ever spoke like this man!* How true! But how sad:

c. the hardened reaction of the leaders (47-53) Like so many today, they said, "We know better; we're smarter; we know the answers. He can't possibly be the Christ. Even when some sensible person like Nicodemus says, "Shouldn't we at least hear him out and consider what He says before we condemn Him?", they shake their fists and say, "There's no way we're ever going to believe in Him!" Their hearts and minds are hardened. You've probably met people like that. Maybe you have one in your family. How sad.

Well, it seems that everybody just left and went home. But what the guards said was true. There was never a man who spoke like this One, never a man who made these claims, never a man who claimed to be the source of eternal salvation, demonstrated it by miracles and by his own death and resurrection, and then proclaimed to all: Come to Me and drink of

the water of life! During a gospel meeting in a town in Ohio, a man was greatly convicted of his need of the Lord Jesus. He concealed his feelings even from his wife, who was a lovely Christian. One evening after she left the house for a while, his anxiety of heart became so great that he began pacing the floor. His little daughter noticed her father's agitation and asked, "What's the matter, Daddy?" "Oh, nothing," he replied, endeavoring to calm the deep pangs of conviction. But it was all in vain. The youngster looked lovingly into his face and said with the profound simplicity of childhood, "Daddy, if you were thirsty, wouldn't you go and get a drink of water?" Her words startled the father. He thought of his thirsty soul, so parched and empty. Then he remembered the gospel he had heard in the meeting, which told of a freely flowing fountain opened for sin. He resisted no longer, and that night he asked Jesus to save him. It's as simple as that. If you're thirsty, come to Him and drink. It is for you; it is for everyone. He IS the water of life.

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Light Of The World - Ch. 8

In chapter 7 Jesus came down from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. As we left Him, it was the last, the Great Day, of that 8 day feast where the water was poured out at the base of the altar and Jesus had interrupted the whole affair by shouting out to the crowd in the Temple, "If anyone is thirsty let him come to ME and drink!" That is, "I am the water of life!" There was a mixed reaction to that scene, but no one tried to arrest Him. Then suddenly, we arrive at the last verse, verse 53 and, in most modern translations you'll find brackets or some other indicator setting apart the section of text through 8:11. This section is the familiar story of:

I. **The Woman Taken In Adultery (1-11)** and the first thing that we obviously need is:

1. **a lesson about this text - 7:53-8:11** The footnote in your Bible probably says that:

a. **it is not found in most of the earliest manuscripts** that come from the first centuries after Christ's death. It IS found in many of the later manuscripts on which our earlier translations, like the KJV, were based. But today we have hundreds of copies of New Testament manuscripts that have been found and compared and we now know what we didn't know in 1611, that the very earliest copies don't have it. It seems to have been inserted later on. So, does that mean that this text is not really part of the Word of God? Well, the reason the translators left it IN your Bible (instead of taking it out altogether or putting it in the margin as they have a few other verses) is that it DOES appear in so many manuscripts, even if they were later. The fact is that:

b. **it appears to be historically accurate but from another occasion** It does seem to accurately portray Jesus and His words and the fact that the Pharisees tried to trap Him as they did on other occasions. But it doesn't seem to fit here. In fact, in the manuscripts where it does appear, it appears to have been inserted at several different places. With the reference to going out to the Mt. of Olives and the Pharisees' trap, it appears to fit more with the events that were going on during the last week of Jesus' life while He was in Jerusalem, rather than at this visit. One entire family of manuscripts has it as part of Luke's Gospel after chapter 21, which ends with almost the same words with which this text begins. That would indeed place it in Passion week as part of the traps being set for Jesus then. But even though it seems to be out of order, let's not miss the lessons in it. The most obvious one is:

2. **a lesson about sex outside of marriage** This woman was caught in the act of adultery; she was having sex with a man to whom she was not married. We live in a day when this whole issue is taken so lightly. Children become sexually active in their young teens and even below. It is natural for couples to sleep together before they are married and to live together as though they were married when they aren't. Hollywood has sent us the message that adultery and fornication are concepts that don't exist. Sex is a natural act; it is never wrong. But that is not the Bible's message. That is not God's message. God designed sex as a beautiful gift to be enjoyed between a man and a woman who are committed for life in marriage. Outside of that specific box, **it is a serious sin** and Jesus says to **forsake it!** It is so serious to God that under the law of Moses it was punishable by death; the community was to take the person out and together stone them. That is what the Pharisees told Jesus and He did not disagree with that at all. It is not "fooling around"; it is not "OK because we're in love" or "we're going to get married anyway". It is a violation of one of God's most sacred basic principles for the human race. Jesus told her, "Sin no more! Leave your life of sin! Stop it; never do it again! You have no idea of the damage that you're doing to yourself and others! Save sex ONLY for marriage." Listen to Jesus, young people! That's a powerful lesson and a warning for us. But in this story, there is also:

3. **a lesson about condemnation** What about when you've already sinned, whether it is this sin or another one? It cannot be undone. Is there no hope? Jesus makes a clear point by challenging her accusers, "Whoever is without sin has the right to cast the first stone!" Of course, nobody could do it. His point was that **no one can condemn us!** We don't have the right and the privilege to judge one another for our sins; that's God's privilege alone. The only human being without sin is the Son of God, Jesus. He could have cast the stone at her, but instead He went to the cross and died for her sin! No matter what we've done, no matter how awful it is, **Jesus won't** condemn us! If we come to Him and accept His salvation, there is forgiveness for ALL our sins. *Rom. 8:1, Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...* What a comfort that is!

Now after that parenthetical story, we return to:

II. The Controversy In The Temple (12-58) during the Feast of Tabernacles. Read 7:52 as though the story continues directly at 8:12. The “Water of Life” incident occurred early in the morning of that last day of the Feast. The rest of this chapter occurs later on that same day. That claim was not the only one He made to the crowds. In fact, He went on to make five more very powerful claims that day. And the rest of this chapter is like a running dialogue of argument between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Jesus makes a claim; they dispute it. He answers them; they react; He answers and finally makes a new and bolder claim. That’s the pattern repeated here. Let’s try to follow it. It begins with:

1. Claim #1: I am the light of the world! (12) This was probably toward evening of that day. Jesus was now in the “Treasury” area of the Temple in the Court of the Women. During the Feast of Tabernacles, in the evenings the Court of the Women was brilliantly lit up by giant lamps, actually a giant Menorah or lampstand. The wicks of the lamps were made from worn out garments of the priests. The people would gather there to sing and dance and celebrate. It was a reminder to them of how God went before their ancestors in a pillar of fire by night in the wilderness to give them light. But it also had a Messianic meaning. The Jews believed that when Messiah would come that He would kindle in Israel a great light of His glory which would be a light to all the peoples of the world. They would point to Israel as the People of Jehovah. When old Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms, he knew he was holding the Christ, the Messiah and he said, *My eyes have seen your salvation...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.* So, when Jesus cried out in the Temple that evening, *I am the Light of the World*, everybody knew what He meant! *I am the Messiah, I am the Christ, the One who will bring His light to all the nations of the world!* But He made it individual and personal! *Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life!* They thought Messiah would make Israel so grand and glorious that the nations would come to her and worship her God. Jesus said, “No, I’m going to light the world one person at a time; when they come to Me and believe in Me, I will put My life inside them and they will never again walk in spiritual darkness. They will know the true God and the truth about life and will no longer live a way of life that is in bondage to Satan in his kingdom of darkness!” And that’s how Jesus has been lighting the peoples of the world ever since, one person at a time. As they come to Him and receive Him, His light shines in their hearts and they see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! The Pharisees, of course, weren’t interested in that so they began to argue:

Jews: Your testimony is not enough to be valid (13) “It’s not enough for you to say this; one person’s testimony by itself is not valid!”

Jesus: My testimony IS valid; the Father is my second witness (14-18) “I know what I’m talking about whether you do or not. I’m telling the truth and my testimony IS valid. However, my Father is my second witness. He has also testified to the truth of who I am.” What Jesus meant was that His Father’s voice spoke from Heaven at His baptism. His Father confirmed his identity by His power working miracle after miracle through His hands these past years! He was talking about God! But the Jews didn’t get it and asked:

Jews: Where is your father? (19a) Not *who* but *where*? They’re thinking of a human father. And Jesus replies:

Jesus: You don’t know Him! (19b-20) What an indictment! For all their religiosity, all their law-keeping, they didn’t know God. If they had, they’d have known Jesus! Sadly, that’s true of many religious people today. They “practice their religion”; they say prayers and take communion and do many other religious works without ever really knowing God in a personal way because they don’t know Jesus; they don’t trust in Him to save them. Now Jesus switches gears and makes:

2. Claim #2: You will die in your sins unless you believe I AM! (21-24) That phrase in verse 24 “that I am the one I claim to be” is the NIV’s attempt to render the meaning of two simple clear Greek words, *ego eimi*, which means *I AM*. Other translations fill in a pronoun, “that I am he”. But Jesus only said, *I AM*. *I AM* is God’s proper Name in Greek. The Aramaic is *Jah*, the short form of *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. Remember how Moses asked God for His Name to tell the Israelites in Egypt and God said, *I AM that I AM; tell them I AM has sent you!* Jesus is really saying, “Unless you believe that I am God, that I am one with the Father, you will die in your sins and you’ll never go to heaven where I’m going! I’m from heaven and I’m going back there but you can’t come unless you believe in ME!” Of course, that’s still true today. There is no other way to heaven. No one can go there unless they believe that Jesus Christ is God and died for them! Of course, they don’t get it and respond:

Jews: Who are you? (25a) to which Jesus replies:

Jesus: After you crucify Me, you’ll know that I AM! (25b-30) “My Father is God. He sent Me. I do nothing on My own. I speak what He tells me. I do what He tells me. And after you have lifted me up [on the Cross, you’ll know that I AM one with Him, that I am God.” How? He didn’t say it, but He means, *On the third day I will rise again!* Paul said He was *declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead... - Rom. 1:4*. Now, by this point some of them actually began to believe Him, to accept His words, but their faith was not genuine and Jesus knew it, so He now addressed these who were warming up to Him with a new claim that really set them back:

3. Claim #3: My truth will set you free! (31-32) “If you’re genuine, you’ll stick. You’ll hold fast to My words and they’ll set you free!” Well, that touched a nerve. Instantly they replied:

Jews: We’re not slaves! (33) Oh, see the pride? “We’re Abrahams seed; we’re Jews. We’ve never been slaves of anyone or anything!” Jesus says, “Oh yes you have!”

Jesus: You're slaves to sin and you're acting like your father! (34-38) "You may be physically descended from Abraham, but here you are ready to kill me, to stone me. That's what's seething in your hearts. You're living in slavery to sin; the power of sin is controlling you. If you'd come to Me, I'd set you free. I'm acting like MY Father and you're acting like YOUR father!" So, they repeat:

Jews: Abraham is our father! (39a) to which Jesus replies:

Jesus: You don't act like Abraham; you have another father! (39b-41a) "Abraham did seek to murder innocent people; you're not acting like him; you have a different father! You're acting like somebody else!" They come back with, "OK, then":

Jews: God is our father! (41b) And Jesus replies:

Jesus: If He was, you'd love Me; the Devil is your father (42-47) Wow, there it is! "If God was truly your Father, you'd love Me because I'm one with Him and He sent Me. But you don't! You lie and deceive and want to kill Me. Your father is the Devil! He's the original murderer and liar and you're acting just like him, in his power." Well, that got a response:

Jews: You're a demonized Samaritan! (48) "You're nuts; you're crazy; you're not a true Israelite and a demon lives in you and is talking through you!" But Jesus says:

Jesus: No, I'm honoring My Father! (49-50) "I'm seeking His glory, not My own. This is not a power trip of self-elevation. I'm telling you the truth." And then He kicks it up another notch with:

4. Claim #4: Whoever keeps my word will never die! (51) What a great promise for us who believe! We'll never see death; we'll leave these bodies of ours, but we'll live forever! But what a stumbling block to these Jews. They say:

Jews: Abraham and the Prophets died; are you greater than them? (52-53) They still don't hear Him. He's been saying all along, I AM God! But He throws them another curve:

Jesus: Abraham saw Me and was glad! (54-56) "When He was on earth Abraham looked forward by faith to seeing My day, to seeing the coming of the Redeemer, the Promised Seed. And then He saw it! He was there in Heaven with Me. He saw Me. He saw Me that day as I left to come to earth." That was too much for them:

Jews: You're not even 50 years old; you haven't seen Abraham! (57) "How could you! Abraham died 1800 years ago. You're not even 50. What kind of nonsense is this?" Are you ready? Here comes the claim to end all claims:

5. Claim #5: Before Abraham was, I AM! (58) "I AM GOD! I existed from all eternity, before Abraham ever came into being." This time the light goes on. They understand His meaning:

Jews: AAAIIIIIEEE! Stone Him!!! (59) A long time later when Stephen said he saw Jesus at the right hand of God, the Jews covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. - Acts 7:56-58. That's, no doubt, what they tried to do to Jesus here in the Temple, to drown Him out, to drag Him out and stone Him. But His time had not yet come and by His Divine power he simply slipped away and left the Temple.

Now let me sum up what Jesus taught this day: Jesus IS GOD. He existed from eternity. He came down from heaven to save us by dying on the cross in our place. If you don't believe that, you die in your sins. But if you do believe that, if you do accept that, you know the Truth and you've been set free from the power and the penalty of sin and you'll never die. You'll be with Him in heaven forever! To those who heard it that day, they were words of great condemnation because they rejected Him. To you who hear them this day, they can be words of great assurance, if you have believed in Him truly with your heart. *A church in Frankfurt, Germany reports recently that David, a Muslim refugee from Afghanistan who was living nearby, had a dream. In the dream he met an old man. The old man reached out and stroked David's forehead. David felt an immediate peace he had never felt before. He asked, "Who are you?" The old man reached out and touched David's forehead again. "I have never felt this peace before, who are you?" inquired David again. For the third time the old man touched David on the forehead. "Tomorrow you will know me," was all the old man said. David woke up. The next day an acquaintance of David's invited him to come to the church. The pastor felt strongly that morning that he needed to talk explicitly about Jesus. As David heard about Jesus for the first time, he jumped up with excitement and said, "I met Jesus, I know who he is!" After the service the pastor led David to place his faith in Jesus.* Knowing who Jesus is and placing your trust in Him makes all the difference for anyone, anywhere in the world. It brings light to your darkness, peace to your troubled heart and assurance for your eternal future.

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Man Born Blind - Ch. 9

It has been quite a week, this celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus has had multiple confrontations with the leaders of the Jewish people as He has made major declarations about Himself during this Feast. *I am from heaven; if anyone is thirsty let him come to Me and drink; I am the light of the world; before Abraham was, I AM!* At this last state-

ment on that final night, they picked up stones to stone Him! Now it is probably the morning of the day after the feast. Jesus is still in Jerusalem and, as he passes through the streets, He meets a blind man who was probably sitting and begging at the entrance to the Temple, almost like the lame man that Peter and John met in Acts 3. So, in the first seven verses we have the familiar story of:

I. The Healing Of A Blind Man (1-7) When the disciples saw him, it does not seem that they were particularly moved with compassion toward him because of the lifestyle he was forced to live. They were more concerned academically with:

1. the cause of the blindness (1-5) People are blind for various reasons. Some are blinded in an accident. Some gradually lose their sight through some disease or aging. This man's blindness had no such cause. He was *born* blind. He didn't lose his sight; he never had it to start with it. He had never seen a single thing in his entire life! In the Jewish system of thinking, they had a way of explaining why that would occur. It was a punishment for sin. The parents must have sinned or been cursed somehow and God punished them with a sightless baby. Or perhaps the baby itself sinned in the womb or in some type of prior existence. The disciples were immediately convinced that such was the case. They didn't ask, "Is this because of sin?" They assumed that; they just wanted to know who sinned, the parents or the man himself. Job's three friends spend half the book trying to convince him that he must have sinned in order for all those bad things to happen to him. God was surely punishing him! I know it's 20 centuries later, but aren't we still quick to assume the same thing? When something negative happens we are quick to ask, "Why is God doing this to me? Why is He punishing me? What have I done to deserve this?" Are we not? Well, Jesus settles that kind of thinking once and for all here as He clearly says:

a. its cause was not as punishment for sin The man hadn't sinned and his parents hadn't either, at least not in any way that was connected with his blindness! Somebody raised this kind of thinking with Him on an earlier occasion; look at **Lk. 13:1-5**. People are abducted and killed while jogging in the park. Traffic accidents claim lives every day. Buildings still fall on people. Is it because these people are worse sinners than others? No, we're all sinners and we all need to repent. Is tragedy caused by personal sin? Well, our sins can indeed sometimes have tragic consequences, but most of the time, these kinds of things are just a part of the fallen world we live in. Congenital blindness is *caused* by a damaged chromosome, a developmental deficiency, a birth defect. But Jesus said:

b. its purpose was that God's work might be displayed in a life! We get hung up on *why* things happen. God is more interested in what He can do with them, how He can use them to show His power and glory, how He can display His almighty presence in the life of a human being. That's what He is about, even in your life. Why did Joni Eareckson Tada have an accident and become a quadriplegic? Because sometimes 15 year-olds do adventure-some things like diving headfirst into water that's too shallow and their necks get broken! Or because her diving angle was 2 degrees too steep. Or whatever; I don't know the cause but my, look at its purpose. Look how God has displayed Himself and His work in a life as she has encouraged and blessed and helped disabled people all around the world for many years. It's time to stop asking, "Why did this happen?" and start asking, "Lord, how do you want to use this to get glory to Yourself? How do you want to display your work in my life?"! Now let's look at:

2. the cure of the blindness (6-7) The first thing I notice is that:

a. it was an unusual healing in several ways: First, **it involved means**. How many blind men had Jesus healed just by saying a word? But here He took His own saliva and mixed it with clay to make mud. Then he plastered the man's eyes with it. It also involved **time**. The healing was not instant. It did not occur until perhaps half an hour later or so, after he had felt his way to the Pool of Siloam to wash. And that also meant **obedience**. He had to go and do something. He was *sent* to wash in the "Sent" (Siloam) Pool. If he hadn't gone and if he hadn't washed, he wouldn't have been healed. You know, maybe there's a mini-lesson here. Sometimes when Jesus brings healing into our lives, it comes instantly. Other times it occurs over days or weeks or months, maybe years. Sometimes He just does it. Other times He uses material means like medicines or casts or treatments or doctors. Sometimes He just does it all. Other times He requires us to act to make it happen. We have to exercise or we have to make changes in our lifestyle and habits or seek out counseling so healing will come. He heals us all differently at different times and yet all healing is from Him. At any rate, this miracle:

b. it physically displayed what Jesus taught: I am the light of the world; *Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life!* So, here He takes a man who walked in darkness, who had never seen light once and gives him light, makes him see. He has the power to make the blind see, to give light to those in darkness - physically! And by the end of the chapter, we'll see that it is also true spiritually. But unfortunately, this miracle:

c. it was a violation of the Sabbath laws (14) Putting saliva on sore eyes was a recognized treatment for healing soreness (of course not blindness) but to do it on the Sabbath was expressly forbidden, not in the Old Testament law of God, but in the Sabbath laws the religious Jews had developed in their traditions. Do you believe that? To attempt to heal any non-life-threatening disease on the Sabbath was illegal. Treatment had to wait until Sunday! To mix mud, whether to make bricks or eye salve was forbidden on the Sabbath. I don't even think to wash or bathe was acceptable, except maybe the hands. Jesus was not unaware of these things and, I think, deliberately chose to

do them this way instead of just speaking a word. It was an intentional challenge to a religious system gone far astray. So, as we read on, you see:

II. The Controversy Created By The Healing (8-34) Immediately it caused:

1. a doubting stir among his neighbors and acquaintances (8-12) Some of them couldn't believe it was the same guy. They were sure it was someone who just looked like him! They had to explain this away somehow! Aren't these often the first people to doubt when Jesus does something in your life? Neighbors, friends, relatives, those who know you the closest. You talk about what Jesus has done and they are quick to doubt it or try to explain it away. Yet this man gave a clear testimony. He assured them it really was him and that now he could see. And even though he didn't know where Jesus had gone while he was at the pool and coming back, he still gave Him the credit. Well, this soon led to:

2. a direct conflict with the Pharisees They turned the guy in! They drug him to the Pharisees, the religious leaders, at the Temple, to see what they would make of this situation and here's:

a. the paradox they stumbled over (13-17) You know what a paradox is, right? Two things that seem to contradict each other yet are both true. Well in their minds:

(1) a man who works on the sabbath must be a sinner He made clay; He put balm on the eyes; He told you to wash. He doesn't care about the law but violates it. He **MUST** be a sinner! And yet:

(2) a man who does miracles must be from God Mud doesn't heal blind eyes! No doctor can even do that. Only God can give sight to the blind so He's got to be involved in this somehow. So how can this be? How can we explain this paradox? Well, in the next verses we have:

b. their attempts to explain what they could not understand First:

(1) they tried to discredit the miracle (18-23) They still feared this was some kind of hoax. So, they called the man's parents to make sure he had been born blind and, of course, they said he was. They couldn't deny it. He really was a blind man and it was obvious that he could now see. Isn't this what people do when God works a real change in our lives? They want to play it down, explain it away. "Maybe you weren't really so bad... maybe this or maybe that..." And they watch to see if you'll revert back so they can say, "See, I knew it wasn't real!" But the Pharisees couldn't deny this miracle and they refused to admit that their Sabbath traditions were invalid so all they could think of was this:

(2) they tried to discredit Jesus but credit God (24) All right, God did it. It's a miracle. Give Him the glory. But this Jesus is a sinner who breaks the laws. It's a Divine coincidence that God healed you in spite of that! That's where people go next. Of course, God does miracles; He's a wonderful guy. But this Jesus, we're not too sure about. He's not really part of the equation. We don't need Him! Tell me about God, tell me all about what He can do. But don't tell me about Jesus. I don't want to hear about Him! Well, to his credit, this once-blind man stood up to these religious authorities in spite of the consequences he knew would be coming. In the next verses we have:

3. the irrefutable testimony of the healed man (25-33) Let me summarize the man's testimony for you. It had three key points. He said:

a. one thing I know: I was blind but now I see! "I'm no expert in the law and I never met this Jesus before so I don't know much about Him, but there is one undeniable fact in this case: I know I was blind and I know that now I can see. Nobody can take this miracle away from me! I live with the reality of it every day! Every time I open my eyelids, I know it is real!" Isn't that true of the miracle of our salvation? I may not be a theologian and understand all the salient points. But I know that I was spiritually blind and lost and bound for an eternity in hell. And one day I met Jesus and now I can see. I have eternal life. I have assurance of a home in heaven. I have peace in my heart. Argue and examine all you want, but you can't deny a miracle that I experience every day of my life! Then his next point is:

b. this was an act of God: only He can cure congenital blindness! There have been cases where a person lost their sight and it came back, where they fell and hit their heads and lost it for a time. But nobody has ever heard of a person who has never had sight from birth suddenly gaining it. Only God can do such a thing; it **HAS** to be from Him and the obvious conclusion is simple:

c. Jesus **MUST be from God!** Or He couldn't have opened my eyes. God doesn't "hear" sinners; He doesn't just do whatever they want and answer all their prayers while they're ignoring Him. If Jesus was not of God, He could never have done a miracle like this! Anybody can see that!

Well, He had them and they knew it. They couldn't argue against it and they absolutely wouldn't repent and admit they were wrong, so it made them extremely mad and that leads us to look at:

III. The Consequences Of The Healing (34-41) The first one is that:

1. the man is excommunicated from the synagogue (34) This is the very penalty his parents were afraid of in verse 22. It doesn't sound like much to us, but this was a very serious thing. The Jews had three levels of excommunication. The first two were disciplinary. One might be cast out for 7 days and readmitted if repentant. In the second degree it was 30 days. But the third degree was permanent; it was to be cast out forever. It meant being cut off from all of Jewish society. As if he were a leper, people would keep at a distance of 6 feet from him. If he died, stones were cast on his coffin and he was not allowed an ordinary funeral, nor was anyone allowed to mourn for him. He was essentially considered to be dead. He was not allowed to study with others and no conversation was to be held with him. He was not even to be shown the road. He might buy the necessities of life, but it was forbidden to ever eat or drink with him. It was pretty much like the "shunning" which the Amish practice and it's really like how believers are treated in many Muslim communities or Hindu communities. The believer becomes an outcast and is treated like one dead, disinherited and despised by both family and the entire community. That ban still stands in many places where to choose Jesus means to be rejected by all. Just this week I got this request from Jalalabad in Kyrgyzstan: *The second request concerns a group of four young believers who are students at a local university. Aibek, Jarkin, Simon and Ildus are all known by the faculty and other students to be believers. The Head of their Department recently called them out in front of the other students and publicly humiliated them, calling them traitors, ridiculing their faith and telling them they should resign from the university. All four have remained steadfast but they are understandably hurt, embarrassed and worried about their future at the university. Aibek is also experiencing persecution from his family.* This man knew that was coming if he stood up for Jesus. These students knew it too. When they believed they expected to pay this kind of price in their community. When we get to chapter 16, we'll see that Jesus warned us that this very kind of thing and worse WILL happen to us and He taught us to expect it and not be surprised by it. What a blessing that where we live there is so much freedom to choose to believe! Thank Him for it but don't expect that it will always be so! The second consequence of the healing is that:

2. the man believes and worships the "son of God" (35-38) That phrase "Son of Man" in verse 35 is in many manuscripts "Son of God". The two are essentially equivalent anyway. "Do you believe that I am the Son of God?", Jesus essentially asks. So the man falls face down and worships Him, acknowledges that He is indeed God! And Jesus accepts his worship. He IS God. Notice how Jesus sought him out. The miracle was not done. He had received physical sight but still needed spiritual sight and now he had both. Now his physical AND spiritual blindness were healed and he could see in both realms. This is the clincher that Jesus' real point here is not about the physical but about the spiritual. He is the light of the world; He wants to give people spiritual life and calls them to believe that He is the Son of God who died and rose for them. And in the end, we have:

3. Jesus' principle about spiritual blindness (39-41) Jesus has come into the world for two purposes. First:

a. He has come to heal those who know they are spiritually blind and want to see People like the blind man here was. People like you and I were. People who know that they don't know, who know that they are lost and helpless and can do nothing to help themselves spiritually. Jesus came to give those kinds of people sight, to draw them to Himself so they will believe, but as we can also see from this story:

b. He has come to blind those who claim they see but don't want to People like the Pharisees. People who are sure they know, who won't listen, who are so hardened that they think they know it all already and will get into heaven because they're good and they act right. People who pretend they can see and are convinced they can. Those kinds of folks, Jesus blinds even further, He hardens, not because He hates them, but simply by presenting them with the truth. The truth wounds their pride and they reject it all the harder and become more entrenched in their blindness. There's a proverb that has been around in the English language since at least the 1500's that says: *there are none so blind as those who will not see.*

Of course, there are exceptions. There is always the occasional Pharisee like Saul whose vicious hardness Jesus breaks and he is transformed into an apostle Paul. Yet that is the exception, not the rule. Jesus' heart lies with those who know they are blind and desperately want to see. He will do anything to give them sight and so should we. *A maid by the name of Maggie Shields worked in a large home in Edinburgh, Scotland. Having suffered from an incurable illness for some years, she recognized she would soon die. Yet with her sins unforgiven, she knew she was not bound for Heaven. One day the staff was informed of a gathering in the drawing room where some guests were to be addressed by John Thompson, a former fisherman who now made it his business to witness mainly in the slum districts of the great city. Maggie was very happy to hear the news, for she thought she would probably learn the way of salvation from this plain-spoken street preacher. When all had arrived, however, the servants were dismissed and the door was shut. Lingered in the hall, the maid returned and pressed her ear to the keyhole. The speaker was bringing a thrilling message about the good news, that sinners may drink of the water of life freely and receive eternal life through faith in Christ. But the aristocratic company was little moved by this itinerant evangelist, and he saw no visible results. A few weeks later Mr. Thompson was asked to visit a young woman who was dying. The girl he called on was Maggie. She repeated the words he had said, "If anyone puts his name into this 'whosoever' text in Revelation 22:17, he will be saved." She continued, "Your listeners that day were not interested, but I was. I asked the Lord to make me His child, and I felt the burden of sin roll from my heart. Now I*

can die with the blessed assurance that Heaven lies ahead, because God's 'whosoever' took me in! His peace and joy now flood my soul. I thought you should know that I was saved at the keyhole!" Let's go out and find the *Maggies* of the world; let's look on them with compassion as we pass by and let's see them as an opportunity for God to show His work in a life and tell them what we often sing in the old song, "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see".

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Good Shepherd - Ch. 10

Chapters 7 through 10 are one solid block of teaching and events that occurred while Jesus was in Jerusalem during and just after the Feast of Tabernacles in October, about 6 months before His death and resurrection. Chapter 10 is the continuation of a dialogue that Jesus was having with some Pharisees about spiritual blindness the day after the Feast, at the end of chapter 9. The subject of chapter 10 is another new claim that Jesus made: I am the Good Shepherd, the true Shepherd, the loyal, faithful caretaker of the Father's flock. Yet He made this same basic claim on two different occasions. The first, as I said, is in October as:

I. Jesus Concludes The Feast Of Tabernacles (1-21) [READ 1-6] Notice that it is not to His disciples, but rather to the Pharisees that Jesus gives this:

1. the parable of the shepherd (or more properly this figure of speech as it's called in verse 6, because it didn't really involve a story, but rather an extensive comparison. He pointed their minds toward something they knew well; sheep and shepherds were everywhere in Palestine and every Jew knew how the process of caring for sheep was handled in that day and time. A sheepfold is a large enclosure, likely a wall of stones, where all the village shepherds gather their flocks and put them in together for the night. It has only one opening, one gate. So, the sheep are safe from predators or wandering off and only one person needs to remain on guard duty, while the rest can go home and get their sleep. Now here are the points he's going to make:

a. thieves and robbers enter the fold illicitly (1) The guard is at the door so if you want to steal a sheep, you're not going to use the gate. You're going to try to quietly slip in over the back wall in the corner somewhere. People with legitimate business come to the gate; thieves and robbers try to get them some other way. So:

b. the true shepherd enters by the gate (2) In the morning he comes to the gate and is recognized and allowed to enter. Then, here's something that's quite different from the way we have done it in the western world:

c. He calls his sheep by name and leads them out (3) Sheep were not just numbers to be fattened up and sold. Each shepherd had an intimate relationship with his sheep. He spent all day with them and sometimes the night. He named each one and knew each one by name. And the sheep learned to know the shepherd too; they knew the sound of his voice. So, in the morning he would stand at the gate and call them the way you would call your pet dog, and they would come out from among all the other sheep and line up for him and he would lead them out of the fold. In fact, that's what he does all day long. Instead of driving them from behind like we do:

d. He leads them and they follow His voice (4) He starts in the direction of the pasture where they are to graze that day or the water hole where they are to drink. And as he goes, he talks to them and calls to them and they follow after him. They follow His voice, but:

e. they won't follow a stranger (5) They know the shepherd's voice. When a strange voice calls them, they know it's not their beloved shepherd and they won't follow; in fact, they may run the other direction.

Now I know what you're thinking: "Bummer, you could never take a day off in the shepherd business; nobody else could take care of your sheep!" But the real point here is not career choice. Actually, the Pharisees were quite mystified as to what the point was too. Why was Jesus talking about sheep? And so naturally:

2. Jesus explains the parable You see, the sheep are people. That's nothing new. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and many of the Old Testament prophets talked about Israel as God's flock and the leaders as shepherds who were to take care of the flock. In fact, those prophets were filled with words of condemnation for the false, worthless shepherds, the leaders who did not take care of God's flock! I'm sure that part of the comparison was not lost on these Pharisees, but here is where Jesus takes it a step further. He makes three very clear, very direct claims about who He is. The first one is:

a. I am the gate (7) The fold is God's sheepfold, His place of safety and refuge, His kingdom. And I am the gate, the entrance to that place of safety. One writer comments, *Few people in the western world can picture accurately the Palestinian sheepfold. It usually consists of a low circular enclosure, on one side of which is an opening about 6 feet wide, the only place where entrance can be gained without climbing over the wall. There is no door that can be closed and locked, no gate or barrier of any kind. They are unnecessary, and were never provided, for at nightfall the shepherd will stand in this breach and call his sheep, counting one by one until all are safely within the shelter. Then, with his staff by his side, he lies down in the doorway and sleeps with his body across the opening. The door, therefore, is not an ordinary one of wood or iron, but is actually a LIVING PERSON! For the intruder to reach the*

sheep, he must first pass over the body of the watchful shepherd. Jesus used this figure of such an enclosure when He said, "I AM THE DOOR; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved [and safe]." On the other hand:

(1) the Pharisees were thieves and robbers (8) All who ever came before Me... is a thinly-veiled reference to His own listeners. The Pharisees didn't come through the door; they didn't come to Him. They tried to climb into the sheepfold some other way and only thieves and robbers do that! They were pretending to be shepherds, caretakers of the sheep, but they were really not. And the sheep know it and won't follow them. But Jesus said:

(2) I am the gate (I am the way to salvation) (9) And like the sheepfold, there is only one! I am it! "I'm the ONLY gate. A person can only get in one way, by coming to Me! But if a person comes to Me, He will be saved, kept safe eternally, and he will also find everything he needs for his daily life. He'll be pastured and cared for." Now those:

(3) false shepherds have harmful motives (10a) They want to steal the sheep, kill them and eat them, destroy them. Thieves and robbers come to the sheep to take what they want for themselves, not to care for the sheep. That's what the Jewish leaders of that day were doing, caring for themselves, their own advancement, not for the people. Jesus often criticized them for things like foreclosing on widows' houses while cloaking it in religion by making a long prayer. They didn't care if the common people lived or died, only about how they could be used for their own ends and purposes. However, in contrast, Jesus says:

(4) I seek to give my sheep an abundant life (10b) The real shepherd wants the sheep to live, not die. He wants them to have rich pasture and springs of water. He wants them to be full and healthy and to live well. Jesus loves His sheep and wants what He knows is best for them. He wants their lives to be rich and full of His Presence and grace. He wants their growth, their fruitfulness, their multiplication. And then He goes on to make a second claim:

b. I am the Good Shepherd because I will die for my sheep (11) Sheep are basically defenseless creatures. They can't defend themselves. So, when danger comes, a real shepherd, a true shepherd, has to protect them and that might mean endangering his own life **(12-13)**. Wolves, lions and bears all preyed on sheep in the mountains and wilderness areas. And, of course, in those days there were no firearms so to protect the sheep, so it meant facing dangerous creatures with a bow or a spear or even a sling. A person would be forced to ask himself the question, "Are these sheep worth it? Am I willing to risk my own life for them?" Well, Jesus said:

(1) a hired hand does not own the sheep If you're just hired to take care of someone else's flock and they're not really yours, you don't care about them that much. So, the hired hand:

(2) he will flee in time of personal danger He'll leave the flock to the wolves to be scattered and torn. He loves himself, not the sheep.

But Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd... I love my sheep so much I am going to lay down my life for them. I am not only ready to die to protect them; I'm planning on it already! I'm going to a cross and die in their very place, for their sins, so that they might be saved and kept safe. I'm going to let myself be slaughtered to protect them!" The Pharisees and Jewish leaders weren't ready to do that. They were hirelings. They cared only about themselves, about preserving their own necks and their own power. Then Jesus made a third claim:

c. I am the Good Shepherd because I know my sheep (14) "I have a relationship with My sheep. I know them and they know Me." A hireling doesn't take time to know the flock; he's just doing a job. But a real shepherd spends hours and hours of time alone with his sheep and gets to know each one intimately, to love them and care about them personally. He says, "I know them the way My Father and I know each other!" and that's why:

(1) I will die for my sheep, because they belong to Me (15) "I'll die for them because I know them, I want them, I love them. But you must also realize that:"

(2) I have other sheep I must bring into the fold (16) "My fold is not just Israel; it is not just the Jewish people who come to Me. I have other sheep, Samaritans and Romans and some from all the nations of the world, from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, even white skinned people from Glenside some day. And I MUST bring them also! It's not optional; I have to bring them too and I can't keep them separate from you. There is only one fold and there is only One Shepherd, one Door, and one flock! That's my plan, to gather people to myself from all the peoples of the world, make them My sheep and give them life! And here's how that's going to work:"

(3) I lay down my life voluntarily and will take it up again (17-18) Nobody made Jesus do it and nobody took it from Him. He laid His life down and He took it up again on the third day! All on the authority given Him by the Father. Now there's a shocking prediction, *I will die and rise again at my own choosing!* No wonder there was:

3. the confusion of the listeners (19-21) Some thought He was crazy and some couldn't get the healing of the blind man out of their minds. At any rate, Jesus left Jerusalem at last and went home to Galilee for two months. It is not until December that:

II. Jesus Comes To The Feast Of Dedication (22-42) of the Temple. [Read 22.] We know it as Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights. It was another eight day celebration, this time commemorating the cleansing of the Temple and the resuming of sacrifices in 164 BC after the Jews gained their independence for a brief period. And Jesus no sooner arrives in Jerusalem and goes to the Temple when the Jews literally surround him as He is walking and make this challenge:

1. the challenge of the Jews (23-24) "Tell us plainly. No more mincing words. If you're the Christ, just say so!" Well, Jesus tells them more than that. He makes His last and final claim by going back and picking up His shepherd theme from two months before.

2. the claim of Jesus: I and the Father are One (25-30) Those are some of the most comforting verses I know in the Bible. How many times have I quoted them to troubled souls; how many times have they brought assurance to believers' hearts. Jesus says again:

a. I know My sheep and they know Me *A man in Australia was arrested and charged with stealing a sheep. But he claimed emphatically that it was one of his own that had been missing for many days. When the case went to court, the judge was puzzled, not knowing how to decide the matter. At last, he asked that the sheep be brought in to the courtroom. Then he ordered the plaintiff to step outside and call the animal. The sheep made no response except to raise its head and look frightened. The judge then instructed the defendant to go to the courtyard and call the sheep. When the accused man began to make his distinctive call, the sheep bounded toward the door. It was obvious that he recognized the familiar voice of his master. "His sheep knows him," said the judge. "Case dismissed!"* My friend, if you have come to Jesus and you're one of His sheep, He knows you! You are not forgotten and you know Him. And He promises this:

b. I give my sheep eternal life and they'll never perish Eternal life that you could lose wouldn't be very eternal, would it? Eternal life that could end, that could leave you perish at some point, wouldn't be eternal. You will NEVER, EVER perish. None of His sheep will, not one! Why? You're in His hand! He said:

c. My Father gave them to Me and He protects them "My Father is greater than all." Did you ever play that game as a child where you put something in your hand and clench your fingers tight and then defy someone else to open them and get it? Remember how tough it is to open that hand? Well, you're not just in the hand of the strongest man on earth, you're in the hand of God Almighty, the Omnipotent Sovereign of the universe. Nobody is strong enough to pry His fingers apart. "And being My sheep is being in My hand and My hand is HIS hand because."

d. I and the Father are One; I am God! He couldn't have said it any clearer than that. And they got it; they understood what He meant this time.

3. the charge of the Jews: blasphemy (31-33) That's what they thought, here's a mere man claiming to be God! That's the ultimate sacrilege, the ultimate desecration of God's person, blasphemy. But Jesus is wise and makes a rebuttal:

4. the rebuttal of Jesus: it is only blasphemy if it's not true! (34-38) He disarmed them. "There are passages in the scriptures where God refers to human beings by the title of 'gods'. And, of course, the Scripture is true. So, since I AM God's Son and He sent Me into the world, how is it blasphemy for me to say, 'I am the Son of God!' It's only blasphemy for a mere man to say; I'm not a mere man. I'm the Son of God sent from heaven!" Well, of course they didn't buy that and tried again to seize Him, but He escaped and left. And that led to:

5. the withdrawal of Jesus (39-42) He went back across the Jordan to the north where His early ministry and the ministry of John had been. John's influence was still powerful in that area and people kept coming to Him because of what John had said. So, **many believed through John's witness**. I've often thought I'd like that put on my tombstone, "All John said about this man was true!" I want to speak truth about My Savior.

He is the Good Shepherd who loves you, who died for you, who invites you to come to Him and be His sheep and be in His fold. He wants to give you, His sheep, eternal life. *A minister in Virginia phoned in his Sunday morning sermon title to the religion editor of the local newspaper. He said, "The topic for my message is, 'The Lord is My Shepherd.'" "Is that all?" asked the editor. Trying to make a spiritual point, the pastor replied, "That's enough!" On Saturday, when the paper was delivered to the preacher's door, he immediately opened it to the section containing the church notices. His topic for the sermon read, "The Lord is My Shepherd--That's Enough!" And it is! C. H. Spurgeon once said, "I have all things and abound, not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have a good skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because 'The Lord is my shepherd.'" Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd." Is He yours?*

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Resurrection And The Life - Ch. 11

As we pass from chapter 10 to 11, we move from December to approximately February, perhaps two months or so before the Cross. Jesus is deliberately staying away from Jerusalem because of the recent attempts on His life at the two previous feasts. He is northward on the other side of Jordan in Perea making disciples, but He is interrupted now by the first of two major things that happen in chapter 11. The sickness and death of a close friend lead to the crowning miracle of His ministry, the last and greatest of John's seven reported major miracles:

I. The Raising Of Lazarus From The Dead (1-44) There is a lot to learn in this story; there are a number of key lessons, the first of which are:

1. lessons given to His disciples (1-16) as the news reaches them about Lazarus' illness. [READ 1-5.] We don't know how Jesus came to know this family of three singles. We do know from Luke 10 that He had dinner as a guest in their home, perhaps a few months earlier, where Martha was busy serving, while Mary sat at His feet, though Lazarus is not mentioned. Their home was in Bethany, a small village located on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives, nearly 2 miles east of Jerusalem. When Lazarus became seriously ill, evidently with a high fever, their faith moved them to send messengers to find Jesus and make Him aware of it. They hoped, of course, that He would get there in time. However, as the news arrives, Jesus uses this opportunity to teach His disciples:

a. two lessons about sickness (1-5) The first one is in verse 4:

(1) God's purpose in sickness is to glorify His Son Jesus did not say Lazarus would not die. He said that the sickness was literally "not for the purpose of" death or "not for the final end of death." It had a higher purpose; whether Lazarus lived or died, God was going to use this sickness to bring glory to His Son. It's very similar to what He had said about the blind man back in 9:3, *...this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life*. That is always His purpose, even in our sickness. His desire is that it bring glory to Himself. If we are sick and live, we testify to His grace that sustains us even in our weakness. If we die, we testify that we have a home in heaven and are confident that we go to meet Him. And people look at us and say, "That must be God; only He could do that; this Jesus must be real!" Now, the way Jesus intended to use Lazarus' particular case was even more dramatic than that, as we'll see, but that doesn't lessen His purpose and desire to be glorified in you or those you love in sickness, even right now. Will you ask Him to glorify Himself through it? At any rate, there's another lesson here:

(2) sickness or healing are no indicator of Jesus' love for us The very next verse is a simple statement of fact. Lazarus was sick and dying but Jesus loved him! Their message was, "the one you love is sick!" That is equally true of us! His love for us is not measured by our circumstances. If we are sick, it does not indicate a lack of love any more than the healing of our sickness indicates an abundance of love. Never try to measure God's love by circumstances; that's the wrong place to look. If you want to know His love, look at the cross, look to Calvary. *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* - Rom. 5:8. He loves us whether we are sick, dying or being healed! Nothing can change that. But there are also here:

b. three lessons about timing (6-10) Jesus seems to always have been teaching His disciples about this fact. God has a time, a plan that we must follow and:

(1) God's timing is not always what we would choose (6-7) You and I would have rushed off to Bethany immediately! We'd be overcome by the thought of being at Lazarus' bedside and all other considerations would vanish. Jesus stayed two more days right where He was, on purpose, and then said, "Let's go to Judea..." That seems awfully strange. Why wait when someone is critically ill? Jesus knew God's plan; there was a larger purpose afoot and He was following it. There are many, many times when God does not act on our timetable, when He does not answer prayer at the time we call or do what we want Him to at the time when we think He needs to do it. He always acts according to His plan and purpose and so, Jesus went on to teach His startled disciples that the same applies to us:

(2) if we act in His timing, we will accomplish His purpose (8-10) They had already forgotten about Lazarus; all they could think about was the danger Jesus would be putting Himself and them in. But Jesus taught them by a parable. He said, "There are twelve hours of light in the day; if you walk along your assigned path in them, you're safe; you can see what you're doing. If you walk the path at night, you're in danger; you'll stumble because you can't see what you're doing." In other words, God has a time for walking and when He gives you light to walk, when He tells you to do something, you need to do it. You'll succeed in accomplishing His purpose. If you wait and try to do it in your own time and way, without His light, you're going to stumble and fail. We need to learn to listen to God, to walk in the light of His direction, rather than fearing all the bad things that could or might happen to us if we obey. The safest place to be is always right in the center of His will! And here's another thing that's always true:

(3) seeing the results of His timing strengthens our faith (11-17) He now told them the reason He waited, "Lazarus is dead, I'm going down to raise Him from the dead and that is really going to cause you to believe!" Actually, if you calculate that Jesus waited two days and then took one day to walk the 40 miles or so to Bethany and when he got there Lazarus had been in the tomb for 4 days already, it's plain that Lazarus must have died right after the messengers left Bethany. He was already dead when they got there to tell Jesus and He knew it. Jewish superstition said the fourth day was the day when corruption officially set into the corpse, when the soul finally departed from all connection with the body. Jesus was waiting until there was NO possibility of life, of resuscitation, in Lazarus and that fact would be recognized by all, so that when He raised him, no one could doubt it! His timing was perfect. When we see that in our own lives, it strengthens our faith, doesn't it?

Dr. Helen Roseveare, missionary to Zaire, told the following story. "A mother at our mission station died after giving birth to a premature baby. We tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle we had was beyond repair. So we asked the children to pray for the baby and for her sister. One of the girls responded, 'Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won't feel so lonely.' That afternoon a large package arrived from England. The children watched eagerly as we opened it. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started to dig deeper, exclaiming, 'If God sent that, I'm sure He also sent a doll!' And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of that child's sincere requests, and 5 months earlier He had led a ladies' group to include both of those specific articles." Jesus is always right on HIS time! And as He arrives now at Bethany, we find several:

2. lessons given to Mary and Martha (18-37) Of course, when He came:

a. they displayed their current level of faith (18-22) Martha wasn't blaming Him for not being there. She realized Lazarus died long before the messengers could have reached Him. She is expressing the faith that she and her sister had:

(1) they believed Jesus had power to prevent death Mary said the exact same thing in verse **(32)** when she saw Jesus. They had seen Him heal the sick. They believed that He could cure even the deadliest disease. Had He been there, the fact is, Lazarus would not have died. But nobody really dared to hope that He could raise the dead, not after this many days. Martha appears to have a glimmer of that hope in saying, *even now I know...*, but when Jesus responds to it positively, she wilts **(23-24)**. You see:

(2) they believed in the general resurrection of the dead, that is that one day far in the future in God's kingdom all of the faithful who have died will have their bodies raised. But that's not what Jesus meant. The word *again* is not in the Greek and somehow makes it seem future to us. Jesus simply said firmly, *Your brother will rise!* and He meant, "I'm going to raise him, as you briefly dared to hope! I am not talking about the end of time." And then:

b. Jesus called them all to a new level of faith (25-27) Oh, what a powerful claim Jesus made for Himself that day. He said:

(1) I AM the Resurrection: a believer lives even though he dies "The Resurrection of the dead is not an event. It is a POWER and that power resides in a PERSON. I AM IT! I AM RESURRECTION! One who believes in me lives even though he may die, even though his body may expire and lie in the grave. At MY call his body rises. Trust in ME and the state of your body matters not! I AM THE RESURRECTION! And:"

(2) I AM the Life: a believer has eternal life and never really dies "His body may fall asleep but one who believes never dies in eternity. He is eternally alive. Why? Because I AM LIFE! I am eternally alive and he is joined to Me; My life is His life. He lives forever and never dies!"

Oh, what beautiful truths for us! Our Jesus is Resurrection and Life. We will live when our body dies! We will never actually die! We have life that is eternal! And then Jesus put the real question to Martha personally, "Do you believe this?" It jumps right off the page, doesn't it? Do YOU believe this? Not, do you hope it's so, but do you REALLY believe this? Martha confessed: Yes, *Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.* Have you said that? Have YOU called Him Lord? Have you come to Christ and confessed Him as your Savior, the Christ, the Son of God? I hope you have! And then as the story unfolds:

c. Jesus displayed the depth of His sympathy for their pain (28-37) Jesus wept. There, as you know, is the shortest verse in the Bible, but still very profound. You can analyze it and discuss why He wept but that misses the point. Here was Jesus crying, deeply moved, over someone He loved who had died, over two sisters who had lost their brother and were grieving. Hebrews says that He is touched by the feeling of our infirmities; He sympathizes, He "suffers with us" in our weaknesses! He hurts for us when we hurt because He loves us, even though He knows that we must go through it! And then at last comes that mighty moment which holds:

3. lessons plain for all to see (38-44) Imagine the shock, the awe. Jesus calls to a corpse that has lain in the tomb 4 days and the dead man gets up and walks out the door! No human being can do that! No force on earth can do that! No doctor, no medicine, no scientist. Only God can give life. Here we see Jesus':

a. His omnipotent power to raise the dead He had declared the hour was coming back in **5:24-29**. And now He showed it was true. A dead man who was in his grave heard the voice of the Son of God and came forth alive! So it will be for all of us. In fact, many have commented that Jesus was careful to specify Lazarus by name in that moment; if He had merely said, "Come forth!" the resurrection of all the dead would have occurred at that moment! That is His great power! One day at His return He will descend into the air and shout loudly once more, "Come forth!" and all the dead in Christ will rise first; their bodies will come out of the graves and be reunited with their spirits because He IS the Resurrection! And He gave proof of it to all men by rising Himself on the third day! But there is something else to see here:

b. His obvious union with the Father He only prays so that all the listeners and onlookers will know that the Father always hears Him, that He is one with the Father, that He is God! Years later, Paul asked a good question in **Acts 26:8**, *Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?* That's just the point. They were amazed because man can't do it! It brought them face to face with the idea that here in a body in front of them stood God Almighty, Jehovah, the Great I AM and His Name is Jesus! John's record of the moment closes abruptly, but verse 45 makes clear what happened. Many fell on their faces and believed and worshipped! But not all, as hard as that is to imagine. Here we come to the second major thing in the chapter:

II. The Plotting Of The Jewish Leaders To Kill Jesus (46-57) [Read 46-48]]. You see:

1. this miracle threatened them terribly

a. they feared for their personal status Everyone was believing in Him, declaring their faith and allegiance to Him. That meant they as leaders were on the way out. But beyond that:

b. they feared for the survival of their nation They feared it would lead to an uprising, one that Rome would not tolerate, and that the Roman legions would come and destroy their Temple and, indeed, their whole people, exactly what happened 40 years later! That's why:

2. this miracle fixed their course of action: to kill Jesus (49-52) They had wanted to arrest Him and kill Him before, but now they were desperate. It became a settled conclusion. As the official High priest:

a. Caiaphas prophesied: Jesus would die for the nation (51) God even used the words of his mouth to speak truth, though not in the way he meant it. He meant that Jesus would die so that Israel as a nation would continue to survive. But in truth, Jesus did die for the nation, for their sins, and:

b. John added: for all God's scattered children (for the whole world) He spelled it out in **1 Jn. 2:2**, *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*. The statement was more prophetic than Caiaphas could know. But what changed now was that:

3. this miracle led to public announcement of their intent (53-57) They gave public orders now that anyone knowing where Jesus was MUST immediately report it. He was a wanted man and so for his last two months or so He withdrew to the obscure little village of Ephraim about 16 miles northeast of Jerusalem on the edge of the wilderness. No more would he return until He came riding in on a donkey as their King!

How ironic when you think about it! Peter said, *You killed the Prince of Life but God raised Him from the dead!* That was their plan, their intent, to kill Him who was the Resurrection and the Life! What an impossibly ridiculous idea! But you know, Jesus still is that today and He's still demonstrating it. *Enoch Wang is the key leader of a huge network of house churches in China today. In 1995 he had already spent time in prison and was, as usual, wanted by the authorities. He was living secretly with his family on the fourth floor of a house where other believers lived. His daughter was out on the balcony holding their little baby, just a small toddler, when she screamed. The baby had somehow slipped out of her arms and fallen. They rushed down into the street. The child had landed headfirst and was lying there, obviously dead and lifeless. Her skull had cracked and a piece of her brain was protruding through a hole. They could not go to the hospital as they would be arrested and so would the people housing them. Besides, there was no use; the baby was already dead. That day Enoch was supposed to go to one of the most important meetings in the history of the Chinese Church. The leaders of three key movements representing millions of believers were to meet for several days to unite with one another and remove the resentment and criticism that existed between them and to plan a bold new missionary thrust together. Holding his lifeless daughter, Enoch was convinced this was a direct attack of the Enemy to break up this important thing that God was doing. So he prayed, "Father, If you truly want unity in the Chinese Church, I pray you will heal my daughter. I pray that tomorrow she will feed, the day after that she will speak and the third day she will walk! And if not, I am ready to quit and never preach again!" He left his wife wailing with the lifeless toddler in her lap and went off to the meeting. When he came home, she was alive, breathing normally and sleeping soundly. When he came home the next night she was nursing hungrily. When he came home the third night, his wife put her down, held her by the arms and she took a step*

towards him!" The wound on her head had closed by itself with no medical treatment! Today she is a grown woman who loves Jesus! My friend, these are not just ancient stories in your Bible. Jesus is alive; He is still the Resurrection and the Life; He can still raise the dead today if He so chooses and He will raise all who believe in Him as He promised! The question still is, "Do you believe this?!"

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Triumphal Entry - Ch. 12

As we move into chapter 12 it is now Friday, exactly one week before Jesus' crucifixion. As the end of chapter 11 reports, streams of pilgrims are already arriving in Jerusalem from all over the land of Israel to purify themselves and be ready to celebrate the Passover. Jesus and His disciples are among those heading in the direction of Jerusalem once more. It is now the hour to appear and present Himself there to the nation one last time, but He enters this time differently than ever before. He enters in royal procession with followers before and behind. He enters as their King. It is Friday evening as Jesus and the Twelve enter the home of a man known as Simon the Leper in the village of Bethany. A dinner is being given there that night in his honor and Martha is, as usual, busy preparing and serving, while her recently-resurrected brother Lazarus is among the guests. And it is during the course of this dinner that an important event occurs:

I. The King Is Anointed At Bethany (1-11) It is really:

1. a selfless act of devotion by Mary (1-3) Mary had an *alabastron*, an alabaster box, a stone flask and in it was sealed a pound of very precious ointment made from pure nard. This fragrant perfume was probably imported by traders from India and was extremely expensive, worth a year's wages. What's that? Maybe \$30,000 or \$40,000 in our money? We don't know how she came by it or how long she'd had it, but it was evidently something Mary treasured and had saved for a very special occasion. And for her, this night was that occasion. She broke the flask open and poured its precious content, first on Jesus' head, and then on His feet as He lay reclining at the table. Then she bowed her head and wiped His feet dry with her own hair. The fragrance welled up and filled the whole house. What a touching act born out of love and devotion. It was as though she is saying with the songwriter, "All I once held dear, built my life upon, All this world reveres and wars to own, All I once thought gain, I have counted loss, spent and worthless now, compared to this.... Knowing YOU, Jesus, knowing You; there is no greater thing!" What a way of saying, "I love you, Lord!" The room was filled with Jesus' disciples. You would think someone would have applauded. You would think someone would have said, "Oh, how sweet, how lovely! How generous! See how she loves Him!" But not one did. Many of them began to murmur against her and the next voice we hear is:

2. a selfish cry of objection by Judas (4-6) He speaks up to criticize her. He calls it a waste. He says it could have been sold and just think how many poor people it would have fed; just think what better use we could have made of that! But he says it, not because he cares about poor people but because he's a thief. He kept the money bag for Jesus and the disciples and throughout their journeys he repeatedly found ways to help himself to what was in it. So, he cries out; he raises an objection, not for the poor, but for the satisfaction of his own greed. But though not one disciple will speak in her defense, it does not go unanswered. It brings:

3. a swift rebuke and justification by Jesus (7-8) Mark's account adds:

Mark 14:6-9 ...She has done a beautiful thing to me...She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her. She was the only one who got it. For months He had been telling His disciples that He was going up to Jerusalem to die. They still didn't get it. But she understood. She believed His Word. She couldn't save Him or spare Him from death but she did what she could. She poured out this precious perfume to anoint His body ahead of time for His burial, just as though He were already lying there dead. Freely and out of love for Him, she poured out everything she had for His purpose because she believed His Word. And we're still talking about it 2000 years later on the other side of the world, just as Jesus promised. It seems to me there's a lesson here, that she's an example. We've all got our own alabaster box, our own precious treasure that we're saving for ourselves and haven't really given to Jesus. It might be a sum of money or some valuable object like hers, but it might just as easily be our precious child for whom we have our own plans or even the control over our own precious life, the choice of what we will do and where we will go. It's something we've reserved to this point because it's tough to surrender, to give up. But Mary's example calls to us this morning; whatever our treasure is, whatever we value most of all, to pour it out at His feet, to lay it down as a gift to Him in love, to bow before Him in humble surrender, wiping His feet with our hair, believing that what He has said is true and that His purpose is more important than our program. What is it for you? Your bank account? Is it your dream; your life's plan that you're trying to make happen? Is it releasing your child for the ministry or the mission field? Is it answering His call to go yourself? What is it that you hold dear, that He is calling to your heart to lay down this morning? But that day, no one was impressed. Indeed, Judas was incensed beyond measure. Mark tells us this event is what moved him to go to the chief priests and offer to betray Jesus. There was also:

4. a two-fold reaction by the Jews to all the events of that day (9-11) Jesus stayed on through Saturday and into Sunday and news got out that He was there. Crowds came, especially to see Lazarus, the living dead man. Many believed in Jesus, placed their faith in Him. The chief priests just kept on plotting against Him and now they decided to kill Lazarus too, since he was such a testimony of Jesus' power. No wonder they were delighted when Judas showed up! Their plan was taking concrete shape. But now, on Sunday, comes an event they did not expect:

II. The King Enters Jerusalem (12-19), only not quietly and privately as He had always done before. This time He comes in the middle of a veritable Passover Parade. We call it the "Triumphal Entry". Look how He rode into Jerusalem (12-13). There were two crowds, actually. Many people, including His disciples were with Him there in Bethany. They followed Him on His descent to the city. But a huge crowd of Passover pilgrims who were already in the city heard that He was coming and ran out to meet Him. They took palm branches to wave and cast as a carpet before His feet. So, with a crowd behind and a crowd in front and Himself in the middle, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Why? For two reasons:

1. it was a public declaration of Messiahship The crowd was shouting portions of **Ps. 118:25-26** the whole way. *Hosanna* means *Save us we pray!* They called Him "Son of David", that is, the Messiah, the Promised One. They called Him "The King of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord!" They shouted "Blessed is the Kingdom that comes, the Kingdom of our Father David!" The message was pretty clear. He was coming to town as King, as the rightful ruler and heir to David's throne. And Jesus didn't stop it; He didn't silence anyone! This was His moment to declare to the world, and especially to Israel, publicly who He was. And at the same time:

2. it was a fulfillment of prophecy (14-16) Zechariah had prophesied hundreds of years before in **Zech. 9:9**, *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* Jesus borrowed a donkey and rode into Jerusalem this way so that everyone would recognize Him, so that all of Zion would know that their King was coming to them riding on a donkey! This was Israel's moment, Israel's opportunity. Her king was coming to her and she could turn in faith and receive Him and become part of His kingdom! But not even His own disciples understood the enormous significance of what they were doing. It was only after the Resurrection that it all became clear in their minds how God had predicted this and how they had done exactly what was predicted! And if they couldn't grasp it, certainly the Jews did not! Even though this crowd of pilgrims who had come from all over the land was ready to follow Jesus as King on this day:

3. it was a deep disturbance to the Jewish leaders (17-19) The leadership of the Jewish nation was mortified. This was the last straw! To them, their cause seemed almost lost. "The whole world is going after Him!" But sadly, instead of opening their minds to the possibility that Jesus actually could be the Promised King, they only hardened themselves further and became that much more resolved to find a way to kill Him. They knew that by the end of this Passover feast they had to find a time and a place to arrest Him, try Him and execute Him swiftly. Hey, by the way, you and I have the same choice to make. Jesus is the King who wants to ride into your life and take over. He's the King; He is Lord, Master. Yet He comes meekly, humbly, as He did that day on a donkey, not a war horse, not forcing His way to the throne of your life, but bidding you to surrender it nevertheless. Will you stand with the pilgrims and bless Him and invite Him to sit on the throne of your life or will you stand with the leaders and say, "This man shall not rule over us!"? Well, Sunday ends; Monday comes, though John doesn't record it. Jesus cleanses the Temple. He curses a barren fig tree. But sometime either on Monday or perhaps on Tuesday, another strange and somewhat confusing minor incident happens. Yet when you understand it, it is truly significant because it is on this day that:

III. The Harvest Of The Nations Begins (20-33) The immediate circumstance is that:

1. Jesus is sought out by some Greeks (20-21) These were not merely Jews who lived out among Gentile peoples, but actual ethnic Greeks who worshipped God and came to the feast. And they were drawn to Jesus. They came to Him and sought Him out. They went to one of His disciples, Philip, to ask for an audience with Him. This was new, novel, and Philip wanted somebody else in on it with him, so he got Andrew and they went to tell Jesus that Greeks had come. The odd part is that we don't know what actually happened, whether they eventually got their interview or not. John doesn't say. But it became the occasion for Jesus to reinforce to His disciples:

2. the necessity of His death (23-24) These Greeks coming were a sign to Jesus, an indicator that His hour had come, His time to be glorified and:

a. the road to His glorification was through death He used the metaphor of a seed to explain it to His disciples. He said that:

b. the death of one wheat seed is needed to produce a harvest of many That kernel of wheat by itself, if left on the stalk, remains only a single seed. But if you take it and bury it in the ground, if you sow it in the soil so that it appears itself to die, from that one seed will burst forth a plant that results in the harvest of many kernels of wheat, many seeds. Jesus is saying, "And I too have to die. If I don't, I remain by myself, the only One fit to enter heaven, the only One with eternal life. But I have to die; I have to be buried in the soil, laid in the tomb so that there will be a great harvest of many souls who have eternal life!" And Jesus went on to indicate that that is:

c. a principle for us also: we must die to self to glorify Him (25-26) He says: "You want to be with Me? You want to join Me? Then follow Me! Do what I do! Die to self! Let go of your own life; give up control over it. Hate the idea of running your own life in this world. Serve ME and you'll be with Me! My Father will honor you! Let your own life fall into the ground and die to it. Let me take it over; let me fill it with My power; let me through you produce a great harvest of many seeds, many souls who will love Me and be with Me!" *The proprietor of a dry-cleaning and dyeing [D-Y-E-ing] business hung this quaint sign in his shop window: "We dye to live, and live to dye; the more we dye, the more we live; and the more we live, the more we dye." For the child of God, it is also true that the more he dies, the more he lives! Someone asked George Mueller the secret of his marvelous fruitfulness as a Christian. He replied, "There came a day when George Mueller died, utterly died! No longer did his own desire, preferences, and tastes come first. He knew that from then on Christ must be all in all!"* What about you? That's the choice you and I face. Now look at:

3. the choice He made to die (27-30) [Read 27-28a]

a. He knew the suffering it would entail His heart was troubled, just as it would be two or three nights later in Gethsemane when He faced this issue again. He knew the suffering that His dying would entail. He knew the horror of the cross that awaited Him. And yet:

b. He chose to surrender to the Father's purpose What was He supposed to pray? "Father, save Me from this hour?" That's what we would want to pray! That's what His disciples wanted Him to pray. But He made a choice and He prayed differently, crying out: "Father, glorify Your Name! I accept death. I accept the suffering. I accept the cross, because that is Your will and that will bring You glory! I choose to glorify Your Name!" And at that very moment an amazing thing happened:

c. His choice was verified by the Father's voice from heaven (28-30) The Father's voice rang out like thunder; everyone heard the sound though they couldn't all distinguish the words. He said, "I have glorified it [that is, in Your life] and I will glorify it again [that is, in Your death]!" Jesus already knew that was the case; He didn't need the voice, but oh, how they did! How they needed to hear and accept that God's plan was to be glorified in the death of His Son! The Father wanted to cement that thought in their minds; that's why He spoke and then Jesus went on to explain:

4. the results of His death (31-33) His death would accomplish two eternal purposes. First:

a. it would defeat Satan and ensure his final judgment Being lifted up on that cross would be the absolute end of Satan's dominion and power. It would ensure that now he will be driven out. The kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ! Satan is a defeated foe. He likes to roar and make a lot of noise and try to work his will in the world, but his doom is sealed; his authority must bow before the authority of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords because Jesus chose the cross! But there is a second eternal result. His dying:

b. it will produce a great harvest: it will draw some from every people to Him There is Jesus' ultimate point that ties this whole section together. These Greeks who have come to Him now are just the first fruits of a huge harvest that is yet to come and is soon to start, a great harvest of souls from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. He could see it in them; it was the joy that was set before Him, the joy of literally millions of redeemed children of God from all over the earth, and so He determined to endure the cross and despise the shame in order to sit down at the right hand of God together with them!

That's why Jesus wants you and I to die to ourselves! That's why He chose to go to the cross. He wants to reap that great harvest of the peoples through us! He wants to take our surrendered lives and infuse them with His power so that through our giving, through our praying, through our going across the world and across the street, through our speaking, our serving, and our loving, His great harvest of the nations of the earth is brought to completion and gathered in! That's what will happen to us when we choose to die to self, when we pour out our greatest treasure at His feet; He will involve our life in His great Kingdom purpose. It will no longer be given to pursuing our own ends but the thrill and the passion of our life will be ministry to others, advancing His Kingdom in whatever way He calls us to do it!

Now John brings his chapter to a close by writing a summary that shows how:

IV. The Offer Of The King Is Rejected (34-50) He tells us that:

1. many refused to believe (34-36) Tuesday's crowd was not Sunday's crowd. These folks raised a theological objection to which Jesus essentially replied, "I am the light of the world. Put your trust in the Light quickly, you've only got another two days or so!" and then He left. Then John tells us:

2. the reason they would not believe: blindness (37-41) Even after hearing a voice from heaven, they still wouldn't believe because they were blinded. Isaiah prophesied that and it was about Jesus. Their continuing refusal only hardened them more and more. On the other hand, John says:

3. many did believe but would not confess it out of fear (42-43) They believed, but they were afraid of becoming social outcasts. Even some of the leaders knew Jesus WAS who He said He was, yet they were too afraid to follow Him. So, Jesus ended this day with a clear, simple:

4. warning: to reject the Son is to reject the Father (44-50) Do you hear it? "I and the Father are One! You can't have Him and not have Me! You can't hang back and say, 'Well, I believe in God but I can't accept Jesus; the consequences are just too tough.'" His own words are the Father's words and they will condemn you in the day of judgment. As He will say in 14:6, no one comes to the Father except through Him.

Many, even today, refuse to believe because they're spiritually blind. They can't see. Others believe intellectually, but are afraid to commit themselves to Jesus for one reason or another. But you can't have God without Him. You can't have true faith without Him! You can have religion; you can have ceremony; you can have all kinds of self-invented beliefs and speculations, but this truth remains: Jesus is the one and only way to God. To reject Him is death eternally; to receive Him is life eternal. I'm going to stop there and finish with a story told by Jim Cymbala: *Back in 1921, a missionary couple named David and Svea Flood went with their two-year-old son from Sweden to the heart of Africa, to what was then called the Belgian Congo. They met up with another young Scandinavian couple, the Ericksons, and the four of them sought God for direction. In those days of much tenderness and devotion and sacrifice, they felt led of the Lord to set out from the main mission station and take the gospel to a remote area. This was a huge step of faith. At the village of N'dolera they were rebuffed by the chief, who would not let them enter his town for fear of alienating the local gods. The two couples opted to go half a mile up the slope and build their own mud huts. They prayed for a spiritual breakthrough, but there was none. The only contact with the villagers was a young boy, who was allowed to sell them chickens and eggs twice a week. Svea Flood, a tiny woman only four feet, eight inches tall, decided that if this was the only African she could talk to, she would try to lead the boy to Jesus. And in fact, she succeeded. But there were no other encouragements. Meanwhile, malaria continued to strike one member of the little band after another. In time the Ericksons decided they had had enough suffering and left to return to the central mission station. David and Svea Flood remained near N'dolera to go on alone. Then, of all things, Svea found herself pregnant in the middle of the primitive wilderness. When the time came for her to give birth, the village chief softened enough to allow a midwife to help her. A little girl was born, whom they named Aina. The delivery, however, was exhausting, and Svea Flood was already weak from bouts of malaria. The birth process was a heavy blow to her stamina. She lasted only another seventeen days. Inside David Flood, something snapped in that moment. He dug a crude grave, buried his twenty-seven-year-old wife, and then took his children back down the mountain to the mission station. Giving his newborn daughter to the Ericksons, he snarled, "I'm going back to Sweden. I've lost my wife, and I obviously can't take care of this baby. God has ruined my life." With that, he headed for the port, rejecting not only his calling, but God himself. Within eight months both the Ericksons were stricken with a mysterious malady and died within days of each other. The baby was then turned over to some American missionaries, who adjusted her Swedish name to "Aggie" and eventually brought her back to the United States at age three. This family loved the little girl and were afraid that if they tried to return to Africa, some legal obstacle might separate her from them. So, they decided to stay in their home country and switch from missionary work to pastoral ministry. And that is how Aggie grew up in South Dakota. As a young woman, she attended North Central Bible College in Minneapolis. There she met and married a young man named Dewey Hurst. Years passed. The Hursts enjoyed a fruitful ministry. Aggie gave birth first to a daughter, then a son. In time her husband became president of a Christian college in the Seattle area, and Aggie was intrigued to find so much Scandinavian heritage there. One day a Swedish religious magazine appeared in her mailbox. She had no idea who had sent it, and of course she couldn't read the words. But as she turned the pages, all of a sudden, a photo stopped her cold. There in a primitive setting was a grave with a white cross, and on the cross were the words SVEA FLOOD. Aggie jumped in her car and went straight for a college faculty member who, she knew, could translate the article. "What does this say?" she demanded. The instructor summarized the story: It was about missionaries who had come to N'dolera long ago... the birth of a white baby... the death of the young mother... the one little African boy who had been led to Christ... and how, after the whites had all left, the boy had grown up and finally persuaded the chief to let him build a school in the village. The article said that gradually he won all his students to Christ... the children led their parents to Christ... even the chief had become a Christian. Today there were six hundred Christian believers in that one village... All because of the sacrifice of David and Svea Flood. For the Hursts' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, the college presented them with the gift of a vacation to Sweden. There Aggie sought to find her real father. An old man now, David Flood had remarried, fathered four more children, and generally dissipated his life with alcohol. He had recently suffered a stroke. Still bitter, he had one rule in his family: "Never mention the name of God-because God took everything from me." After an emotional reunion with her half-brothers and half-sister, Aggie brought up the subject of seeing her father. The others hesitated. "You can talk to him," they replied, "even though he's very ill now. But you need to know that whenever he hears the name of God, he flies into a rage. Aggie was not to be deterred. She walked into the squalid apartment, with liquor bottles everywhere, and approached the seventy-three-year-old man lying in a rumpled bed. "Papa," she said tentatively. He turned and began to cry. "Aina," he said. "I never meant to give you away." "It's all right, Papa," she replied, taking him gently in her arms. "God took care of me. The man instantly stiffened. The tears stopped. "God forgot all of us. Our lives have been like this because of him." He turned his face back to the wall. Aggie stroked his face and then continued, undaunted. "Papa, I've got a little story to tell you, and it's a true one. You didn't go to Africa in vain. Mama didn't die in vain.*

The little boy you won to the Lord grew up to win that whole village to Jesus Christ. The one seed you planted just kept growing and growing. Today there are six hundred African people serving the Lord because you were faithful to the call of God in your life... Papa, Jesus loves you. He has never hated you." The old man turned back to look into his daughter's eyes. His body relaxed. He began to talk. And by the end of the afternoon, he had come back to the God he had resented for so many decades. Over the next few days, father and daughter enjoyed warm moments together. Aggie and her husband soon had to return to America, and within a few weeks, David Flood had gone into eternity. A few years later, the Hursts were attending a high-level evangelism conference in London, England, when a report was given from the nation of Zaire (the former Belgian Congo). The superintendent of the national church, representing some 110,000 baptized believers, spoke eloquently of the gospel's spread in his nation. Aggie could not help going to ask him afterward if he had ever heard of David and Svea Flood. "Yes, madam," the man replied in French, his words then being translated into English. "It was Svea Flood who led me to Jesus Christ. I was the boy who brought food to your parents before you were born. In fact, to this day your mother's grave and her memory are honored by all of us." He embraced her in a long, sobbing hug. Then he continued, "You must come to Africa to see, because your mother is the most famous person in our history." In time that is exactly what Aggie Hurst and her husband did. They were welcomed by cheering throngs of villagers. She even met the man who had been hired by her father many years before to carry her back down the mountain in a hammock-cradle. The most dramatic moment, of course, was when the pastor escorted Aggie to see her mother's white cross for herself. She knelt in the soil to pray and give thanks. Later that day, in the church, the pastor read from John 12:24: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." He then followed with Psalm 126:5: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy!" Jim Cymbala comments: They both gave their all, not counting the cost and not expecting to be rescued before pain and suffering would strike. They both died far too young by human standards. And yet their accomplishments in the spiritual realm are beyond measuring. How we live is more important than how long we live. I would rather live a few meaningful, fruitful years for Christ than hang on to age eighty-nine and accomplish little. I want to be totally yielded to God, don't you? I don't want to live half full; I want to experience what it means to be full of the Holy Spirit in the way God intended. He promised that through the gospel and the Spirit's anointing, our lives could be used, just like Svea Flood's, to bring blessing and hope to multitudes. The thought of that means far more to me than any worldly honor or achievement. I don't want a title; I don't want to be famous or meet some earthly dignitary; I don't want to be rich. I just want God to clothe me with his Spirit so I can affect people for Christ. [Taken from: FRESH POWER by Jim Cymbala with Dean Merrill, Zondervan Publishing ISBN 0-310-235585-5] "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed."

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Washing Of Feet - Ch. 13

It is already Thursday of Passion Week as we enter Ch. 13. John does not record a great many of the events of Jesus' ministry which the other Gospels do. In fact, throughout his gospel, he seems to focus on important events which Matthew, Mark and Luke choose not to record. In each of the other Gospels these several hours in the Upper Room occupy merely half of a chapter or even less; John gives us five solid chapters worth of what Jesus said and did with His disciples on that special evening. These were His last hours with them. They celebrated the Passover together for the last time. It was a special, precious occasion, a time for Him to share His heart with them, a time to give them His last and most important instructions, a time to pray a last prayer with them. While the other Gospels focus on how from this Last Supper, He gave them the lasting ordinance of the Lord's Supper, John doesn't even mention the bread and the cup. The most important thing to Him about that meal was something entirely different; He alone records that:

I. Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet (1-16) Let's look at:

1. John's introduction (1-3) As John reflected back on that night years later to write it down, he now fully understood what was going on and wanted to make sure that we grasp it too. So, he points out that:

a. Jesus knew the full extent of everything that was happening He knew the time had come to leave this world. He knew this was the night of His arrest and tomorrow would bring the Cross. He knew Judas had already gone to the chief priests and made an agreement to betray him. He knew that He had all Divine authority and was completely in charge of everything that was happening. And He knew He was soon to return to heaven. Not one whit of any of this took Him by surprise. He planned it; He chose it; He made it happen! So, beginning in these hours:

b. Jesus now showed His disciples the full extent of His love He had loved them all along. They were His own; they belonged to Him. The Father had given them to Him. He wanted them to know the infinite extent of that love. So, He showed it to them first by a visual illustration. Then He showed it to them by sharing from His heart the precious truths in chapters 14-16. Then He showed it as He prayed for them in chapter 17. And finally, the next morning He showed it to them on a cross, where His outstretched arms symbolically said, "I love you THIS much!" as He died. The visual illustration was:

2. Jesus' action (4-5) Nothing could have shocked them more! You'll understand why when you realize:

a. the utter pride that was in the hearts of the disciples Luke records something that actually happened at the beginning of the supper in **Luke 22:24**...a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be

greatest. Can you even imagine it? Hours from the Cross and here they are around the table, beginning their last meal arguing with each other about who is the greatest disciple, which one should be in charge, like a bunch of schoolboys clamoring to be “king of the hill”. The thought of their selfish pride is appalling (although it’s not like that kind of dispute doesn’t happen among His followers in our churches today; it does!), and it must have broken Jesus’ heart. **Luke 22:25-27**, *Jesus said to them, ...you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.* My guess is that it was at that very moment that Jesus abruptly stood up from the table, took off His robe, tied a towel around His waist and began one by one to wash their feet. Now we need to understand:

b. the abject humility in the act of washing their feet Israel is a dry and dusty place. Streets and paths are dry dirt lanes. And people did not wear socks or have enclosed leather shoes; they wore simple sandals tied on with thongs. You could take a full bath and simply walk across the street to your neighbor’s house and your feet would be dirty. So, every house had its basin of water near the door with a towel for the washing of feet. If guests came, it would be the job of the lowest-regarded person in the house to wash their feet, a servant or slave if there was one. If not, then the children and if none, the guests would be forced to wash their own, because the homeowner would not do it. It was the job of a lowly servant, a slave. Any person of any level of rank or importance would never do it. They certainly would never stoop to do it for one another, so there they lay round the table with their dirty feet. But now here is Jesus, their Lord and Master, the Son of God, naked to the waist, on His knees with a basin and towel, doing the job of the lowest servant, washing the dust of the street off their feet. The significance of this was not lost on them; the very first one He came to, Peter, raised an objection:

3. Peter’s objection (6-11) First, Peter was shocked, “Lord, You wash my feet?” He could not understand. But then it became rebellion, “NO! NEVER!” You see:

a. his false humility was a mask for pride. “No person of rank, certainly no Rabbi, no Teacher, let alone Jesus, should ever wash feet. I wouldn’t! Jesus should never wash my feet!” But then it moved to, “He doesn’t know what He’s doing! I’ll stop Him; I’ll take charge and refuse!” It’s amazing how many times we want to tell Jesus what He ought to do, even though we call Him Lord! You see, **true humility is complete submission**, whether we understand what He’s doing or not! Jesus said, “If you don’t let me wash you, that is, if you don’t submit to Me and do what I say as your Lord, then you can’t be with Me in My work! I can’t use you!” Well, that breaks Peter’s heart and love takes over, “I wouldn’t trade You for anything; if that’s what You want, wash ALL of me; do my hands, do my head!” Once again, he missed the point, didn’t he? None of this was really about the washing or being clean. In fact, He tells us:

b. we are already clean We’re like a person who’s had a bath. You do know, of course, that in the city they didn’t have individual bathrooms, right? No pipes, no running water. They had public baths where there was a water source. So, every once in a while, you’d walk a few blocks to the bathhouse and get all clean. Then you’d put your sandals on and walk home on the dirt street. When you got home, you’d only have to wash your feet! He’s teaching us this: We’re already cleansed spiritually; we’re made pure by Him. So, we need only to yield our feet to Him; **we need only** shake off our bit of foolish pride and **submit** in order to **have part in His work**. Now He finishes and goes back to the table and we have:

4. Jesus’ explanation (12-16) You see, in this act:

a. He provided an example of humble service to one another He’s showing us by illustration what He did for us. He, the Lord and Master, left heaven for us and came to earth; He took the form of a Servant and became a man. Then He humbled Himself further still and went all the way to death for us, even the death of the cross. He, our Lord, took the lowest place to wash and cleanse us from our sins because He loved us. And if that’s how He acted, if He took the lowest place to love others and serve them, that’s how WE ought to act toward each other. We should not consider ourselves better than Him, more deserving than Him. In fact:

b. He gave us the command to humbly serve one another “Wash one another’s feet!” That doesn’t mean to institute some kind of foot washing ritual; it means to *serve one another in love* - Gal. 5:13. It means to always have the attitude, “I’m here to serve you; what do you need and what can I do for you?” That’s what is to characterize our lives and our relationships within the church. **1 Tim. 5:10** commends the widow whose habit is *...washing the feet of the saints*, that is, doing a myriad of loving, caring tasks that bless other believers. *Robert E. Speer says that several years ago he was visiting a small college in the South and was being entertained by its president. The school had very limited facilities for guests, so the head of the institution graciously offered him his apartment. “I woke up early the next morning”, said Speer, “when I heard someone tiptoe into the room. I lay there quietly with my eyes open just a slit to see who it was. To my surprise the president of the college walked in, picked up my dirty boots, and walked out. I got out of bed, opened the door a crack, and watched him take them to an adjoining hallway. Then he got down on the floor and began polishing them. I could have cried at the sight. His hospitality and*

thoughtfulness showed me what a great man he really was. That's the kind of attitude Jesus wants to build in us as His followers.

But even as He says these things, something else is strongly on Jesus' mind and He chooses to address it next:

II. Jesus Warns His Disciples Of His Betrayal (18-30) He had told them a year earlier, *One of you is a devil.* But now He gives more clearly:

1. His prediction of betrayal (18-20) "Not all of you are really My followers; one of you who shares my bread is going to lift up His heel against Me!" Why did He tell them this?

a. it was to keep their faith in Him from being shaken They were going to see it happen in a few short hours. Judas would arrive in the garden with a mob of soldiers and He would be arrested and led away. He didn't want it to take them by surprise and shake their faith in Him. He wanted them to know that He knew ahead of time, that it was even written centuries earlier in the Psalms, that it had to happen and when it did, their confidence in Him would be increased, not shaken. But even warning them like this, they must still have had a blank look on their faces so he proceeded to speak more clearly **(21)**:

Well, that had an effect, **(22)**! The other Gospels tell us they began to question among themselves, "Who is it?" They were full of sorrow and began to ask Him one after the other, "Lord, is it I?" And He said, "It's one of you eating out of the same dish with Me." But that led to:

2. His specific identification of the betrayer (23-26) The table was about a foot off the floor. Each of them was lying on their left side and leaning on some kind of pillow while they ate, with their feet away from the table. John was in front of Jesus and Peter whispered, "Ask Him who!" so John leaned back and quietly asked. Jesus said, "The one to whom I give this piece of bread after I dip it in the dish." So, He scooped out some food on the sop and handed it to Judas. As He was doing this, the "Lord, is it I's?" were still coming at Him and being ignored, until Judas said, "Is it I?" And Matthew says Jesus replied, "It is." You see this:

a. it was Jesus' last personal warning to Judas He said, "Woe to that man! It would be better if he had never been born!" It is as though He is pleading, "Judas, I KNOW it's you and I know the price you'll pay. Don't choose this!" But that moment was also:

b. it was Judas' final choice to yield to Satan (27a) He took the bread, knowing what Jesus meant, knowing the warning was for him. He made a choice in his heart to ignore it and that was the end. Satan literally entered him and he jumped up from the table and left the room. By pointing him out, Jesus actually precipitated this and so:

c. it set in motion the events leading to the crucifixion (27b-30) Do you see? Jesus picked the night and the time of his own arrest; He is controlling the whole process. He knew Judas would run and get the Temple guards to come and arrest Him and actually urged him on in the process to do it literally "more quickly" so that they would arrive at the garden in time!

So now that Judas the false one is gone, Jesus is free to open His heart and pour out His final thoughts to these 11, his dearest friends and followers. In this final section of the chapter:

III. Jesus Gives His Disciples A New Command (31-38) He begins by sharing with them:

1. the imminence of His death and departure (31-33) "We have only a little longer. It is time. God is going to glorify Himself in Me now. I am leaving. I am going where you can't follow right now. I'm going to die and soon I'm going back to heaven." And the other gospels add, "This very night you will all fall away from Me". He made it plain: this is our last night, so listen carefully and then He gave them:

2. the commandment to love one another (34-35) He had taught them, "Love your enemies!" and reiterated "Love your neighbor as yourself!" But this new command was specifically for His followers, for the church, for us: "Love each other!" And note:

a. the manner of that love: as He has loved us How did He show the full extent of His love? By humbly serving them, by sharing His heart with them and ultimately by dying for them. He's our model. We are to humbly serve one another without thought for ourselves. We are to share our hearts with one another until we are bound as one. And we are to lay down our lives in sacrificial actions for one another, standing with each other even to the death if need be. Can you see if we love one another like this what kind of a special, unique community we will be? How attractive it will be? Jesus said:

b. the effect of that love would be a testimony to the world The community around us will sit up and take notice because they don't see anything like that. People will give their lives to Christ; they will want to be part of His body because they see the way we love each other, or else they'll be repulsed by it. Radical love has always been the hallmark and the trademark of the true church. Around 200 AD Tertullian wrote in Rome during a time of persecution: *[Our offerings are used] to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fide-*

ty to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. "See," they say, "how they love one another", for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; "how they are ready even to die for one another", for they themselves will sooner put to death. Much of self-centered Roman society was repulsed by the selfless love of the Christians, but they KNEW they were Jesus disciples; love was their defining mark and it still is. Sixteen ladies from Evanston, Illinois arranged their schedules so they could give round-the-clock nursing care to Martha, a 26-year-old woman with Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS). They bathed her, fed her, talked with her, prayed for her, and witnessed to her. Martha, who had not accepted Christ as her Savior and couldn't understand how a loving God could let her get ALS, saw His love in these ladies and eventually became a Christian. Although she was feeble and unable to speak clearly, she gave a testimony of her faith and was baptized in a local church. A short time later, she died. She is with the Lord today because 16 women, following Jesus' example, personified God's love.

I see that kind of love here among us. I see a parade of GBCers flowing by Audrey Sherman's bedside as she's dying, singing to her, praying with her, helping make her homegoing glorious. I see it in Jim Garcia who is at your doorstep to help before I even know anything's wrong. I hear of visits and phone calls and dinners that Ken Sleep gets constantly from a group of you as he's homebound, but certainly not forgotten. I watch others of you take teenagers under your wing and mentor them and wipe the noses of little kids from our community in our Nursery School and take them to the bathroom or exhaust yourselves looking after elementary kids with ADD at Pioneer Clubs. I see you ladies wrap your arms around people with special needs like Christine DelPaggio and invite newcomers into your homes and make them part of your families. That's our trademark; that's Jesus' dying command: Love one another! And there's always room for improvement. *T. W. Hunt writes about a man who exemplified genuine servanthood: "At first I thought he was showing special deference just to me. He worked hard to help me find a retirement house. He watched our house and cared for it in the year of our absence before we moved into it. He saw that the lawn was mowed. When I mentioned painting the closets, he recruited fellow church members to do it, and then worked with them. It seemed that I could not mention a need without him hurrying to fulfill that need. Then I moved to his town and joined the same church. His name was Lucian Stohler, and I soon discovered that his name was synonymous with service. He continued to attend to me and my family, but now I became aware that he attended to everybody. He met needs quietly and without officiousness. He was constantly available and working behalf of others. I asked Lucian to tell me what brought this attitude into his life. He said that a crisis led him to dedicate his life and his whole personality to servanthood. He led a 'normal' Christian life until a retreat in Michigan brought a confrontation with his life purposes. The preacher spoke on the deeper life in such a way that Lucian realized the importance of the lordship of Christ. He struggled with that concept as he went back to his cabin and poured out his heart to the Lord. He realized he had been angry with the Lord because God had not given him a wife. He said he 'regurgitated' all the bitterness he had at God. He told me that the hardest words he ever said were the words he prayed that day: 'Lord, if Your lordship means I'll never be married, I accept Your lordship.' In the three years before he met his wife, the Lord taught him the meaning of servanthood. He learned the walk of ministry, which is to say, the walk of a life given to the service of others. He learned that ministry and servanthood were synonymous. His own words were, 'My drive to serve has given me a love for people that makes me want to help them, to serve them, to witness the love of Christ to them.' For Lucian Stohler, lordship meant servanthood."* [The Mind of Christ by T. W. Hunt. Broadman & Holman, 1995. Pages 65-66.] That's what Jesus was trying to get across to us on that last night by washing feet and by giving a new command. "Love one another as I have loved you; serve each other the way I have served you; that is who you are."

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Father's House - 14:1-14

It is still Thursday night of Passion Week and we are still looking at those special hours in the Upper Room as Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples. Judas had already left the room as Jesus told them in 13:33, *I will be with you only a little longer...where I am going you cannot come*. Then He gave them that wonderful new commandment to love one another, but Peter's mind was stuck back on that "going away" thing and he asked in verse 36, *Lord, where are You going?* The familiar words of this first portion of John 14 are Jesus' answer to Peter's question. First He tells them about:

I. The Place Where Jesus Was Going He says, "I am going to **The Father's House**" (1-3) For many people the concept of heaven is a fuzzy, unclear thing. Some picture it as a sort of state of bliss that people enter into after death, a kind of nirvana where we are one with the universe. Others see it as kind of a mythical place that "modern" people don't believe in. But according to Jesus, heaven:

1. it is a real place It's an actual location to which you can go. John was taken there in a vision and saw it. It contained a city, a huge city half the size of the United States and equally as high with walls and gates and foundations. He saw it measured with a measuring rod; it has real dimensions. It is as real as New York, Chicago or Philadelphia. It is the place that Jesus came from when He came down to earth in the body of a baby, and it is the place that He went back to as He ascended into the air after His resurrection and left His disciples. Jesus said:

a. it is the Father's home, His *oikia*, the house that He lives in. Just like you have a building that you live in which you call "your house" or "home", heaven is the Father's home, the place where He dwells in all His glory. Yes, He is present everywhere, all the time, but in his vision, John saw Him there, seated on a glorious throne above a crystal

sea of glass surrounded by an emerald green rainbow and all the hosts of heaven. Heaven is the place where God is, where He dwells eternally and, Jesus said:

b. it has many rooms The King James translated it as “mansions” and from that we get the impression of huge buildings in which each of us live, kind of like the housing developments of half-million dollar homes up in Bucks County or the stone mansions of Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia. And of course, from that comes all the gospel songs about heavenly mansions and also the “heaven” jokes. But the word is really “dwelling places”, “places to stay, to live”. If you want a mental picture, think of this one. In Bible times a whole extended family might live together in one big house belonging to the patriarch, the father of the family. But in that house, there would be separate living chambers for each of the sons and their families, for the aged parents, for the servants and so on. Jesus said, “My Father’s house is so big, so huge, that it has *many* rooms, many dwelling places, enough for all who will ever believe and more! And, Jesus said:

c. it has been prepared for us In it there is a place, our own personal portion, set aside, reserved and made ready for our arrival. He Himself is there, right now, today, alive and seeing to the preparations. And the good news in verse 3 is that:

2. Jesus will return to take us there Now His primary meaning is, of course, that He is coming again. He will return one day, perhaps soon, and call all of His children up to meet Him in the air and return to heaven with Him. We call that the Rapture of the Church and it is our blessed hope. But until that day, one by one as we die, He still takes us to that place. Paul said that to die is *to depart and be with Christ which is better by far*. At death, we go to the place where Jesus is, to the Father’s house. And the real point is:

3. we will remain with Him forever He told the disciples, “I’m going away and you can’t follow Me right now, but you WILL follow me later! You will come to the Father’s house and you will be with me where I am. You’ll remain with Me forever; that’s My plan and purpose, even though we have to be separated for a little while.” The reason He told us this is so that:

4. we can rest in this promise despite our circumstances The disciples were about to be scattered, to see Jesus arrested by a mob and tried and scourged and crucified. Then they would see Him again, alive after His resurrection, and He would leave them. Events like these could shake them to their very core; circumstances like this could destroy their faith. Jesus said, “Trust ME! I’m going to die and rise and leave. This is all part of My plan to save you. I’m going to the Father’s house and you’re coming too. You’ll be with Me forever. If this was not true, I would have told you! Trust ME, no matter what circumstances hit you in the next few hours, no matter if it seems that all hope is lost and gone, no matter if it seems you will die!”

In AD 125, a man named Aristides sent a letter to an acquaintance to give this explanation for the rapid spread of Christianity: “If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.” What circumstances are you facing this day? Do they seem impossible, overwhelming? Does it seem that you will die? Even if you do, you will only leave this place to go to the place where He went, the place prepared for you, to the Father’s house, to be with your Living Savior! Then Jesus went on to talk about:

II. The Way To That Place: Jesus (4-6) Here is the roadmap, the directions to get to Heaven. Here is MapQuest to get from Glenside to glory. Jesus said:

1. the way is a Person: I AM THE WAY. It’s not like turning left or right and driving so many miles. It’s not a process you complete. You can’t get there by being good, by being righteous. You can’t get there by being religious, by saying so many prayers, by attending so many services, by confessing or taking communion so many times or by accepting certain doctrines. The way is a Person; it’s Jesus Himself, so **going there requires a personal relationship** with Him! People want information about how to go to heaven; they seek after truth and try to figure it out. But:

a. He is the Truth He said in **18:37**, *...for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.* People are trying to find out how to get life, what to do in order to live after they die. But:

b. He is the Life John already told us in **1:4**, *In him was life...* And He spelled it out more clearly later in **1 John 5:11-12**, *And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.* That’s what Jesus was saying, “I am the way; I am life; know Me and you have life!” But He also said that:

2. the way is exclusive: There are not many ways to heaven. It is not true that the Muslims have one way and the Buddhists have another and we have another. It is not that you have your way of believing this and that and doing this and that and I have mine. There is only ONE way to heaven and His Name is Jesus. So **going there demands faith**, exclusive faith. Try to remember this little acronym; FAITH means: **Forsaking All I Trust Him!** That’s the way! I quit de-

pending on anything or anyone else and especially on myself and I trust Him and Him alone to take me to the Father's House. And now Jesus mentions:

III. The Master Of That Place: The Father (7-11) Philip expressed:

1. our human thinking: we wish to see the Father Somehow, we can't seem to quite get past that dichotomy in our thinking. Somehow, we get the idea that Jesus is for us, Jesus loves us, Jesus died for us, but the Father we're not so sure about. He's a Holy God who hates and punishes sin. Can we stand in His presence? Can we really live in His house? "If only we could see the Father with our eyes, just once, just one glimpse, that would do the trick. We could face anything! Then we would KNOW that He is for us." But Jesus' answer astonished them, "Here I am, don't you recognize Me?" You see:

2. Jesus was the incarnation of the Father John wrote in **1:18**, *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known*. In Jesus, the Father was walking about in a body. Look what He said:

a. the Father, though in heaven, was IN Him and He was IN the Father The Father literally lived in His person, in His body. They were One. So:

b. the Father spoke through Him, speaking His words and:

c. the Father lived through Him, doing His works His words were the words of God; His acts were the acts of God. But His point was to give them and us assurance:

3. since we've seen Jesus, we've seen the Father! The Father whose house you're going to is standing right here in front of you telling you that you're going to His house! Or in our case today, since we've known Jesus, we've known the Father! We are reconciled to God. We have a place waiting for us in His house! We're safe; we're sure; we can face anything! And then Jesus goes on to tell us:

IV. The Promises We Have Because Jesus Has Gone To That Place (12-14) He says:

1. we will do what He was doing Think about it. Everything Jesus said about his relationship with the Father is now true of our relationship with Him. The Father, though in heaven, was IN Him. Now:

a. Jesus, though in heaven, is IN us and we are IN Him The risen Jesus literally now lives IN us. And just as the Father spoke through Jesus:

b. Jesus will speak through us, speaking His words, if we choose to let Him and:

c. Jesus will live through us, doing His works, if we let Him.

We will do what He was doing. He will live out His life through us, even though locationally He is in heaven. In fact, He promised that:

2. we will do greater things than He did while on earth Not that we will do greater or more impressive miracles than He did, but the scope of what we do will be greater. After Peter's first sermon, 3,000 people believed and after the second there were 5,000. By the end of Paul's life there were believers in literally every major city all over the Roman Empire, the whole Mediterranean world. Today the Name of Jesus is worshipped in literally every country on the face of the earth, even if only by a few. The things Jesus *began* to do, He planned to continue in us and bring to completion! We can expect it. But here's the best assurance. Just as the Father *always* heard Jesus and gave Him whatever He asked because He always did what pleased the Father, just so Jesus:

3. He will do whatever we ask Him in His Name for the glory of the Father Of course, you know that isn't a blanket promise to get anything we want. It is not "Ask me for a new car, a new house, a million dollars, anything your mind could wish, and I will give it." Rather it is this: "If I am living through you and doing My work, then you can rest assured that I'll give you whatever you need as long as your desire is solely and only to glorify the Father!" "In My Name" is not a formula where you say "in Jesus' Name" and tack it onto whatever you want. "In My Name" means, "For My sake." "Whatever you ask, whatever you need in the process of doing My work and carrying out My will for the glory of God, I will not fail to give it to you. Even though I am going away, Trust Me!"

Listen, Jesus is alive! We have a living Savior. He went back to the Father's House and He's there right now preparing an eternal dwelling place for each one of us who know Him. And His plan is, whether we die or He comes back first, that He will take us there to be with Him and the Father forever. And in the meantime, while we're still down here, He's living inside us, speaking through us and doing His work through us every day, as we yield ourselves to Him and allow Him to do it. And as we do that, as we seek His glory and build His Kingdom, He'll give us whatever we need, whatever we ask for, so that we might serve Him. There is no limit to what He will do through us or what He will supply to us! So, we can face anything that comes our way, absolutely anything! If we live, He lives through us; if we die, we are in the Father's house

with Him. That's what Easter means! Let me share with you the testimony of an anonymous believer, dated January 22, 2002. *Born to a Saudi family, in Saudi Arabia, and living very close to Mecca, I grew up with strict principles and traditions of Islam and the Arab culture. As a teenager I went to the mosque five times a day in obedience to my parents. One night, while I was asleep, I had this horrible dream of me being taken into hell. And what I saw there brought me real fear and these dreams kept coming to me almost every night. At this point I was really wondering as to why I should be seeing hell in this manner. Suddenly one day, Jesus appeared to me and said, "Son, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. And if you would give your life to Me, and follow Me, I would save you from the hell that you have seen." This came as a surprise to me, for I did not know who this Jesus was. Of course, He is mentioned in the Koran... He is stated as one of our prophets, but not as a Savior who could save us from hell. So, I started looking out for a Christian who could give me some advice about this Jesus I have seen and possibly get one of the Christian Holy Books, which I now know is the Bible. But it was a difficult task for me to get any Christian to speak to me about Jesus. As you would know, Christianity is totally banned in Saudi Arabia and if a Christian is caught witnessing to a Muslim, he could be almost sure that he would be beheaded. Then the Lord led me to an Egyptian Christian who was sick. I prayed for this man's healing and this man gave me a Bible. Then I, by myself, started reading the Bible. By this time Jesus had become a close friend to me. Soon I started witnessing about the experience I had with all my family relations and friends. Soon the authorities were informed that I had converted to Christianity, and I believe this was done by one of my family members. As it states in the Koran, if someone would turn away from Islam, he is a traitor to the faith and he should be executed. So, I was taken into custody and tortured. They told me that I would be beheaded if I would not turn back to Islam. But I had already made my decision that I would never turn back. So, I told the authorities I'm willing to die for Jesus and that I would never come back to Islam. After much torture and imprisonment, I was sentenced to be beheaded. They gave me a date and a time and I told them, "You go ahead and execute me. I'm going to heaven to see Jesus. But I pray that what you would do to me would stay in your minds and not give you rest until you come to Jesus." The appointed day and time came for my execution, and I was waiting with much anticipation, yet very much strong in my faith in Jesus. Generally, the executions are carried out on the set time and date. But to my amazement, no one turned up. One hour lapsed, two hours went by, then it became three hours, and then the day passed by. And no one turned up. Then two days later, the authorities turned up and opened the doors and told me, "You demon! Get out from this place!" I also noticed that the main person who was determined to get me beheaded was not present when they came to release me. I asked them where this guy was. And with much hesitation they replied that his son had died on the same day they planned to execute me. Although I continue to go through much persecution, one thing I know is that the Lord's hand is upon me. Friend, if you really believe Jesus is alive and He has prepared a place for you, you can face anything. Do you know Him?*

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Comforter - 14:15-30

We are still in the Upper Room that Thursday night before the cross. Jesus has told His disciples clearly, "I am going away; I am leaving you." Peter asked, "Lord, where are you going?" And in the first half of chapter 14 Jesus answered that question, "I am going to the Father's house to prepare a place for you and one day I'll take you there to be with Me where I am". That was the first huge promise that was intended to keep them through all the horrible things that were about to happen. But the next concern on their hearts is obvious, "But how will we survive? What will we do without Jesus? We'll be all alone!" Jesus knew this fear that was rising in their hearts and addressed it before they even had a chance to express it. He gave them a second huge promise:

I. The Promise Of The Holy Spirit (15-21) Verse 18 expresses the rising concern of their hearts, "He's leaving us; we'll be like orphans, all alone, no one to care for or help us!" So, Jesus says, "NO! I'm going, but I won't leave you like orphans! I won't leave you alone! I will send Someone to take My place with you. I will send the Holy Spirit!" I don't think any of us recognize the magnitude of that promise or the privilege we have as people now living in the fulfillment of it, who HAVE the Holy Spirit! The promise of the Holy Spirit is:

1. the promise of a *paraclete*; that's the Greek word in verse 16. It is variously translated as **counselor, comforter, advocate, or helper**. It literally means "one called alongside", someone who will be *with* me in whatever I'm facing, to help me in whatever way I need. If I'm in a courtroom, I need a lawyer, an advocate, someone to plead my case. If I'm in a funeral home, I need a comforter, someone alongside me with an arm around to comfort me in my grief. If I'm in a quandary of circumstances and don't know what to do, I need a Counselor with Divine wisdom to show me. If I'm crushed under the pressure of my situation, I need someone alongside me with the strength to hold me up and impart to me the strength to stand. To have the Holy Spirit means that no matter what I face, I have Someone who is with me to impart to me whatever I need to face it! I am not an orphan; I am not alone. I am not left to depend on my own resources. I have a *paraclete* in whom is everything I need! Secondly, the promise of the Holy Spirit is:

2. the promise of Jesus' permanent presence Jesus said, "I'll give you *another* counselor". That is, "while I was with you, I was your paraclete, the One who was with you, your Divine resource. Now, I have to leave bodily, but I'm going to give you ANOTHER, Someone to take My place, to be to you what I have been, and He, the Spirit, will be with you forever! He won't ever leave, won't ever go away as I've had to." In fact, in verse 18 Jesus says, "I will come to you!", that is, "I will come to you in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, and in Him I will be with you forev-

er. We will never be separated. I will be with you always, even to the end of the world, in Him!" Thirdly, the promise of the Holy Spirit is:

3. the promise of personal indwelling Look at the end of verse 17, *You know Him for he lives with you and will be in you!* Throughout the whole Old Testament era, the Holy Spirit had been present and at work in the lives of God's people. He was *with* men like Moses and Joshua. He came *upon* people like Miriam and Deborah and Saul and David. He came *upon* the prophets. He was even *with* the disciples as Jesus had sent them out. They did miracles in His Name; they healed the sick and cast out demons. That was the power of the Holy Spirit at work through them. But now there was to be a change. Whereas before He was with them and came upon them in times and ways that pleased Him, now, after Pentecost, He would be *IN* them. He would indwell us, literally live inside our bodies permanently! Paul said we who are joined to the Lord are made one with Him in Spirit; His Spirit is joined to our spirit, which means He is IN us. The Resource that we need, the Counselor, the Comforter, is no longer out there somewhere. He is right in here, in our spirit, in our mind, in our body, always accessible, always in the midst of everything we're in. What a promise! And Jesus also gives here:

4. the promise of His resurrection and of His life imparted to us (19) He promises, *You will see Me!* "You'll watch Me hang on a cross. You'll see them pierce My side. You'll see them lay me in the tomb. But don't give up hope; trust My word: YOU WILL SEE ME! I WILL RISE FROM THE DEAD; I WILL LIVE." And here's the promise, *Because I live, YOU will live too!* "I will impart My life to you." When? Verse 20 says, *On that day!* What day? "The day of Pentecost, the day I send the Spirit! I will impart My very life, the eternal Divine life of God, to you through My Spirit who will join with your spirit and give you My very Life!" *Rom. 8:11, If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.* When? Not later, not just some day when we get our new bodies, but right now in this body! His life is our life! Now, that's hard enough for us to grasp and we know the whole story, which they didn't, so He gives them another promise:

5. the promise of full realization (20) "On that day, the day the Spirit is actually given, the day of Pentecost, that's when you'll really understand. You'll understand, not how all this can be, but that it is! Once He's in you, you'll realize that we are all One, You and I and the Father, through the Spirit. You'll know that He is in you and so I am in you!" Paul said in *Rom. 8:16, The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* We have an internal witness. We know it's true. We know Jesus is IN us and we are God's children! The Spirit in us tells us it is so! And greatest of all:

6. the promise is for all genuine believers (21) It is for ALL who love Him, not just for a few, not just for some, not just for leaders, but for all. Peter said in *Acts 2:38-39, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.* It is for every genuine believer, everyone who truly loves Him. But who are those? He says they are the **ones who obey** Him, who do what He says. He started with that in verse 15. Real believers are not those who say they believe, but those whose *actions show* that they believe, those who obey what He has said. If you truly love Him, His spirit lives in you and you *will* obey Him. What a promise Jesus gave, the Promise of the Holy Spirit! But then He went on to talk about:

II. The Program Of The Holy Spirit (22-24) The "other" Judas, the son of James who is also called Thaddeus in other Gospels, interrupted Jesus with:

1. the question: Why not show the world? (22) "If you're the Messiah, the King, why just us? Why just show Your disciples? Why not show everybody? Why not show the whole world?!" The question makes sense. But Jesus doesn't choose to answer it the way he asked it. His answer, in essence, is that:

2. the answer: Full revelation comes only by indwelling Visibly showing Himself alive to the world wouldn't make much difference. The way He planned to show Himself to the world was by indwelling people and transforming them! So, He says that:

a. God will only indwell believers, those who love Him (23) The Father and the Son will come in the person of the Spirit and permanently live, dwell, inside those who truly believe. But:

b. He will not inhabit those who do not love Him (24) He's not going to live in people who don't love Him; hence they won't be able to comprehend Him, to know Him, because:

c. they are unable to receive the Spirit (17) Unbelievers can't see Him; they can't know Him. He will not give them His spirit; He will not reveal Himself to them until they are ready to repent and acknowledge Him as Lord. So, there's the program for this age. Jesus shows the world He is real by living in us and living through us so that others will come to Him. And then they too will receive His Spirit and KNOW. One at a time. Each individually. That's the plan. Then Jesus goes on to explain:

III. The Purpose Of The Holy Spirit (25-27) The Holy Spirit does three important things in our lives. First, as He did for the disciples:

1. He will remind us of what Jesus has taught Peter and James didn't have notebooks and pencils and write down every word Jesus spoke. John didn't have a laptop that he carried around typing up notes on Jesus' sermons. When the Spirit came, He reminded them of the many things Jesus had taught; He brought them back to mind and they wrote many of them down so we could have the Gospels. Of course, He does the same thing for us. We read what Jesus taught in the Bible; we read God's Word day after day and the Spirit reminds us of it at just the right times when we need it. We sometimes call this the process of **illumination**, bringing the Scriptures to mind, helping us to understand them and apply them to the very situation we are in at the moment. He will do this for us! God speaks to us through His Spirit. And not only that, Jesus said:

2. He will teach us all things we need to know There were a lot of things the disciples needed to know, but Jesus didn't have time to teach. The Spirit added to what Jesus taught. That's why we have the rest of our New Testament. The Holy Spirit showed Luke and Paul and Peter and James and John and Jude other things that they and we, the church, needed to know. We call that process **revelation**. Today, of course, the Holy Spirit is no longer giving us new Scriptures, but He is continuing to personally reveal and unfold the plan of God in our lives step by step individually as we need to know it. Paul said the Spirit teaches us all things, the deep things of God. He gives us the thoughts of God that we need to have. He gives us the words God wants said, the actions God wants lived out, as we yield to him and let Him live through us. And then Jesus said the Spirit:

3. He will give us Christ's perfect peace We always yank verse 27 out of its context and quote it as though it is referring to peace as a "thing," as though it simply means that He would make them calm in the face of what was going to happen. I think He's saying, "I will not leave you as orphans, but I will leave you with peace, My peace, the person of My Spirit!!" If you think about it, peace is the result of our minds and emotions being totally under the control of the Holy Spirit. Peace is when we think like God thinks and feel like God feels about all that is going on. It's the Divine calm that passes all human understanding, the calm that knows all things are under control and going as planned. That peace comes from Him being in us and in control of us. He IS our peace.

Now I don't know whether you've noticed, but this is really the first time Jesus has actually talked with His disciples about the Holy Spirit and it is His last hour with them. He has held off until now, but as the chapter closes, He tells them why He shared this precious promise of the Spirit with them:

IV. The Purpose Of Jesus In Sharing This Promise (28-31) First:

1. it was to give the disciples joy (28) He was leaving and they were sad, stricken because of it. If they understood that He was going to the Father and that the Spirit was coming, they would be glad. He told them moments later in *John 16:22*, *Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.* That permanent joy would be the presence of the Spirit. Second:

2. it would verify the disciples' faith later on (29) After the Spirit came, Peter stood up and said in **Acts 2:32-33**, *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.* When the promise came to pass, they recognized it and it confirmed their faith in Jesus. They knew He had sent the Spirit just as He said He would! Finally:

3. it was to give the disciples hope, though time was short (30-31) He had only a few more precious moments. He was already getting up to clear things away and leave. In just hours, Satan was coming to the garden to do his worst. But before they experienced all of that, Jesus wanted leave them with this blessed assurance: "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. I will send you My Spirit to be your Counselor, your Advocate, your Comforter. The time grows short...trust Me."

The story is told in Beams of Light of a timid prisoner who committed a minor infraction and was sentenced to spend the night in a dark, isolated cell, deep inside the prison walls. The inmates feared the silent, total darkness of that cell almost as much as death itself. As the man was led down to it, the dank and loathsome air seemed to choke him. The heavy door clanked shut, and he knew a long, lonely night was before him- far beyond the sound of any human voice. As he sank to the floor in despair, he thought he heard the sound of footsteps. Then a voice said softly, "I'm the prison chaplain. I knew you could not stand it alone, so I've come to be with you. I will be here as long as you are." Because the grateful prisoner knew that another person was with him in the darkness, his lonely chamber became a place of rest. My friend, when the circumstances of life seem awfully dark and you feel awfully alone, when despair rises up within you, Jesus says, "I knew you could not stand it alone so I've come to be with you; My Spirit is in you. And I will be here as long as you are!"

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Vine And The Branches - Ch. 15

We are still in the Upper Room that Thursday night before the cross or perhaps on the way walking out of the city. In chapter 14, Jesus assured His disciples of their future home in heaven that He was leaving to prepare and then He assured them that He would not leave them alone, that He would send them the Holy Spirit to live in them and be with them forever. Now, in chapter 15, Jesus moves on to address the issue of relationships. He knew that this band of men and those who would later follow them would form a distinct community. Out of all the world, they would be the people of God, His assembly, His Church. And in this last hour with them, He wanted to define for them the three key relationships that would characterize their lifestyle from here on as His followers, their relationship with Him, with one another and with the world around them. Of course, they are now us, so we begin the chapter by learning about:

I. Our Relationship To Christ, and to explain it He used a common, but special, image to describe it visually, **The Vine And The Branches (1-8)** Vineyards and the keeping of grapevines is something that was everywhere in Israel. In fact, the symbol of the vine was God's special symbol for the nation of Israel itself. He describes her as His vine or His vineyard in many passages of the Old Testament, for instance *Ps. 80:8-9, You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.* A great golden vine, the national emblem of Israel, was displayed on the very front of the Temple itself. But His vine, His people Israel, had brought forth bad fruit, Isaiah said. Hosea said that God's vine brought forth fruit for itself. She was a fruitless, faithless vine that was about to be cut down. So, there is no way that the disciples missed the symbolism when Jesus said that:

1. He Himself is the true Vine Israel was false. She was not being His people So God was now planting another Vine in the person of His Son. The vine is **the living organism of people that God is growing in the world**, Jesus' followers, the Church. But it is not just a group of people by themselves, rather it is a group of people formed out of their personal union with Him. Notice that:

2. He is the whole Vine, trunk, branches, leaves and fruit, the whole thing. **We are the little branches of Him!** We have no separate identity! It's not Him *and* us. God has one Vine, Jesus, and we are all the hundreds of little leafy branches He is sprouting from His trunk. Paul used a similar concept. He said that we are all together the Body of Christ. Christ has ONE body; He IS the Body. But we are all individual members or body parts of that one body. Same concept. Now, His concept is that:

3. the life of the Vine flows into and through the branches (us) to produce fruit The life-giving sap comes up from the roots of the vine through the trunk and out into each branch causing it to live and sprout green leaves. So, His life is flowing into each one of us who have been joined to Him; that's how we live. We get life from Him. And the sap in this figure is the Holy Spirit whom He has placed in each of us. His life-giving Spirit is IN us and flows through us for a purpose, to produce fruit, grapes! That's what vines are for; they're not like flowers who are supposed to look pretty. They're supposed to produce grapes for the owner's use, so he can have wine to drink. But any good farmer knows that you can't just let a vine grow untended all by itself or it will eventually produce less and less. That's why Jesus said:

4. the Gardener (God the Father) cuts off dead branches which have no life and so bear no fruit On this vine of God's, there are branches that look sort of like branches, but they're dead. No sap is flowing into them so they are not green and living and they don't bear any fruit. Any vine-dresser knows these dead branches have to be cut off the vine and thrown away or burned. Well, in God's vine there are also some people that look like the rest of us, but they're dead. They have no connection to the Vine; the Holy Spirit does not live in them. They profess to be followers of Jesus, but they have no real spiritual life and so they produce no real spiritual fruit. Judas Iscariot would be a case in point and it's quite possible that the disciples thought of him instantly when Jesus said this. He was with them, but He wasn't one of them. He was not "clean", Jesus had said earlier, and in verse 3 He repeated that all of them were clean; none of them were dead branches. But across our community and our country and our world there are people who sit in churches and who say when asked, "I am a Christian" but who have never met Jesus Christ personally. They don't have His life, His eternal Spirit in them. They are professors of Christ, but not possessors, and Jesus Himself warned that there would be many like that. In the end, these dead branches are cut off from the tree and get burned, unless they find true salvation first! But there is another thing the Gardener does:

5. He also prunes living branches to bear more fruit You see, that's His goal. **He wants much fruit!** So, he takes a good, living branch and he clips off a little where it tries to grow too many leaves or too many sub-branches here and there. I remember when we used to grow tomato plants in our back yard. One of our members now in heaven, old Sam Weisel who used to grow 100 tomato plants, taught me many years ago that when you plant your tomato plants, you have to watch and every time you see a new third branch starting to grow out of the middle of a joint, it's called a sucker and you have to pinch it off. If you don't, the plant will pour its energy and nutrients into that branch and make lots of leaves but little fruit. Left to itself, that tomato vine becomes a huge bush of branches with small fruits. But, if you pinch off the suckers so that all the life goes into the main stem, it brings forth huge, heavy tomatoes. And that's what God is

interested in; He doesn't want a pretty looking vine with bushy symmetrical branches; He wants a heavy crop of fruit! Now, what is the fruit God produces through us, His branches? Well, Paul talked about the *fruit of the Spirit* or the character qualities that reflect the presence of Christ in us. He also talked about the *fruit of good works*, deeds that reflect the presence of Christ in us. But at the bottom line, he says in *Col. 1:6* ...*All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you...* He means people are being saved and added to the body, to the vine. The real fruit of a Christian is another Christian. His life flows out through us, through our character and our actions and our words to bring others to faith and make them part of the Vine! So, He prunes us. Using His Word, using other believers, using circumstances, using suffering, He clips away our flesh, our dead sections, to make us better channels for His purpose of fruit production. And the reason in verse 8 is that:

6. much fruit glorifies God Old Sam had the best and biggest tomato crop of anybody I ever knew. He had a reputation for it. People said, "What a gardener!" You see, much fruit brings glory to the Gardener and that's what God wants. It is to His glory that we, his church, are living and growing and producing much fruit, winning many to Jesus Christ. That's why verse 7 says, **He will give whatever we ask to get it!** If what we ask is focused on His goal of fruit-bearing, He'll give us whatever we need. We can bank on it! But this whole illustration boils down to a single:

The Point: We are called to abide in Christ (4) The branch can't produce any fruit at all by itself. The life of the vine flows through the branch and into the fruit. The branch has to *abide* in the vine, to remain deeply connected and attached with its central core open wide to the supply of life-giving sap the Vine supplies. That's our calling, to abide, to remain deeply connected to Christ with the core of our being yielded wide open to the life-producing power of His Spirit who will produce the fruit. *S. D. Gordon tells of a spring storm that broke a large limb on his cherry tree. Although it hung by a very slender strand, to his surprise the blossoms came anyway. Later some fruit began to grow as it did on the other branches. He noticed, however, that only those in full contact with the tree bore "much fruit," while the partially severed branch produced only a scanty supply. As believers, we must be careful about our spiritual connection, making sure we are fully abiding in Christ. The fruit we bear, whether much or little, tells the story.* The more deeply we abide, the more fruit we bear in our character, in our choices and in our converts. How deep is your connection? How thorough is your dependence on Him? How much of His life are you letting flow through you or are you just pursuing your own goals and dreams, living the way you want? We are called to abide in Him! And as we learn to abide, it will impact:

II. Our Relationship To One Another (9-17) and that's what Jesus goes on to talk about next. He says:

1. we are to abide in His love (9) [Read 9-11] Here He sets up a paradigm for us. The way the Father loved Him is the way He loves us. The way He was able to deeply abide in the Father's love is the way we are to deeply abide in His love. And the way:

a. we abide in His love is by obeying His commands (10) Jesus drank so deeply of the Father's love for Him that it permeated every moment and situation of His life. He was so full of the Father's love that He could only do what pleased Him; He would run to do the Father's will, to keep His commands. Now Jesus says we are to abide in His love, to drink so deeply of His love for us, to be so aware and so full of it, that we can only do what pleases Him, that we run to do His will, to obey His commands! Our deep, deep conviction and experience of that great love is what causes us to bear the fruit of good works and others won. And, Jesus adds:

b. as we abide in His love, we will experience His joy (11) Living out of His love in obedience will fill us with a deep and abiding joy, His joy, the joy He had in doing the Father's will. That joy will be ours; our joy will be brought to fullness and completeness as we live a life saturated with His love fleshed out in doing His will. And that will lead us to complete the third part of that paradigm: The Father loved Him. He loved us the way the Father loved Him and so He says that:

2. we are to love one another the way He has loved us (12) That's His command. If we love Him, that's what we'll do. His vine, His people, will be an assembly unlike any other in the world, a group who are so filled with His love that they love each other the way He loved them. How is that? They love each other:

a. sacrificially (13) - He gave His life for us, so out of His love we lay down our lives for each other. Not just literally being willing to die for each other under persecution, but laying them down for each other day after day in a myriad of small ways where we die to self and choose our brother or sister instead. And His people love each other:

b. intimately (14-15) - He shared His heart with us; that's what He's doing here in the Upper Room. We are not just people He owns and orders around. We are close confidants; He shares the secrets of His heart with us. He shows us what He's doing, His heart, His plan. He is intimate with us and includes us in His purpose. So, out of His love we will develop a deep intimacy with one another as we together pursue His purpose. We will have a bond of fellowship deeper than anything the world knows as together we bask in His love. And that common purpose of His heart is actually what He has already said:

3. He has chosen and appointed us to go and bear lasting fruit (16) Eternal fruit. Souls touched by His love through us and drawn to find salvation in Him. He chose us for that purpose and to that end. He has sent us to that end. He'll give us anything we ask in prayer, anything we need, to that end. That's His heart; that's what He's about and as we abide in His love, that will become our purpose. But Jesus again repeated His key:

The Point: We are commanded to love each other (17) Pure and simple: love each other. It's not optional, not only if we want to or it's easy. It's not selective, only for a few and not others. It's not a request; it's a command, an order and if we love Him, we'll do it. *When the missionary explorer to Africa, Frederick Arnot, was on a trek through the tall grass with a group of his black converts, a lion suddenly sprang out at one of the young men. Instantly, Arnot pushed the youth to the ground and covered him with his own body. The animal landed right next to them. For some unexplainable reason, the beast did not attack the missionary, but retreated without harming anyone. When the chief of the tribe heard about the incident, he said, "I'd go anywhere with a white man who would put his own body between a lion and his black friend."* It came naturally. He didn't have to think about it. Love was just there and it was a testimony to the whole tribe. And that brings up the third point that Jesus addresses:

III. Our Relationship To The World (18-27) Here is an important theme of Jesus' teaching that we have all but forgotten today here in the US. However, our Chinese brothers and sisters understand it well. Our brethren who live in the Muslim world know it first-hand. Jesus told us clearly that:

1. we are hated by the world (18-19) The world we live in, the culture and non-believing people all around us, are part of Satan's system. We find it strange, for instance, that our culture will tolerate almost any kind of religious belief or moral lifestyle, anything EXCEPT evangelical Bible-believing Christianity. There is room for all, tolerance for everyone's views and beliefs, except ours. It's frustrating. Why is that? Jesus told us plainly that the world at large will hate us. We may live in a place and a time where we are tolerated, but what is the record of history? Through the ages, true followers of Jesus Christ have often been imprisoned, persecuted, killed, thrown to lions, burned at the stake, and shot, simply for being Christians. The world at large hates the church; we should expect it. Why?

2. we do not belong to the world We're in it, but we're not *of* it. We don't belong. We don't act like the rest of the world. We don't do what they do. We don't hold their values and support their actions. We stand for love and forgiveness and for an exclusive faith in Jesus Christ that will not accept anything but itself. We're not citizens of this world; we don't belong here; we belong to heaven. And so, Jesus warned us clearly that:

3. we will be persecuted by the world (20-21) Did they persecute Him? Did they mock Him? Did they arrest Him? Did they beat Him? Did they kill Him? He's our Master and we're not greater than Him. That's what will happen to us, His followers. We should not be surprised by it. We should expect it; Jesus taught that repeatedly. We should expect our faith to bring us discrimination and scoffing and harm because we're different and we don't belong. But as we skip down to verse 26, we see His real:

The Point: We are sent to testify to the world (26-27) That's our relationship: we testify about Jesus Christ to the world. We, through the power of the Spirit working in us, tell the world who Jesus is and how He loves them. We show the world His love for them in how we love one another. We declare to them that He is alive and living in us. And we invite them to be grafted into His Vine, to become His people.

While conducting meetings for a regiment of British soldiers in Egypt, Dr. Stuart Holden became acquainted with a big sergeant who was a shining, effervescent Christian. Holden asked him how he had been brought to the Savior. The soldier recounted his conversion. "There is a private in the company," he said, "who was converted in Malta before the regiment came to Egypt. We gave that fellow an awful time. On one terrible night he came in very tired and wet. But before getting into bed, he knelt down to pray. My boots were soaked with water and covered with mud, and I let him have it with one on the side of his head, and struck him with the second on the other side. But he just went on praying. The next morning, I found those boots beautifully polished and standing by the side of my bed. That was his reply to me, and it just broke my heart. I was saved that day." My friend, Jesus is the Vine and as we abide deeply in Him and His Spirit flows through us, we'll bear much fruit. His character will shine out through us. We'll love each other radically. The world around us will hate it and will mock us and make fun of us and sometimes hit us with dirty boots or lawsuits or even prison sentences, just for being who we are. Yet some of them will be touched by what they see; they'll be convinced that Jesus is real and fall on their knees in repentance and be grafted into the growing Vine! And Jesus will be glorified! Abide in Him; love one another and you will testify to the world!

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Final Promises - Ch. 16

We are still in Jesus' final hours with the disciples as they leave the Upper Room. He is winding up this special evening of instruction He has spent with them. And as He closes it in chapter 16, He leaves them with what I've called His final promises, the last and final things that He wanted to assure them of. The first one is really a continuation of the conversation

He was having with them at the end of chapter 15 about how the world is going to hate them because they are different. Now, He spells out more clearly what is going to happen by giving them:

I. The Promise Of Coming Persecution (1-4) He shares with them plainly:

1. the depths that it would reach in the future I already shared with you how serious a thing it was to a Jew to be put out of the synagogue. It meant to be cut off and despised by the entire community; nobody would even talk to you. He warned them and us that our culture, our community, will often react against us. In fact, as crazy as it may seem to us, there will be circumstances where very religious people will think they are serving God by killing us. Stephen was stoned first, the first martyr. James was put to death with a sword. All the disciples except John died martyr's deaths. All because religious people thought they were serving God! Paul testified that before his conversion in **Acts 26:9-10**, *"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.* In the end, he himself was beheaded at Rome. The spotty persecution of these first decades gave way to open and legal persecution throughout the Roman Empire from 250-313 AD. Thousands died before Constantine the Emperor himself became a Christian. It has recurred down through the centuries time after time and it is still occurring today. Last Wednesday I had an email asking prayer for Zhamal, who came to Christ in Afghanistan (I believe). He evidently fled after his conversion and his parents warned him clearly not to come home, saying it would be their religious duty to end his life! All communication was severed. Now his family has asked him to come home because his uncle is dying and needs him and has guaranteed his safety for this purpose. Please pray for him and for their salvation! But this is exactly what Jesus promised would happen! In fact, as He ended this conversation a few minutes later He predicted:

2. the scattering that would occur that very night (32) He would be arrested that very night and they would all flee away from Him and run to hide because their lives were in danger. He told them plainly and did not hide it from them. Why?

3. the reason for this warning: so they would know that God is in control So it wouldn't take them by surprise. So they wouldn't think that this is the end, when it happened. So they would remember He had told them ahead of time and realize that their suffering and even death did not mean failure. And, at the bottom line, look at verse **(33)**. It was to give them peace, the certain knowledge that He was in control and all things were happening according to His plan and purpose. They would know that, even though they faced pressure, tribulation, and oppression, that Jesus has already conquered the world and is in charge of all that happens. It's part of His plan and serves His purpose. In 1949 when Mao Tse Tung took over China, thousands of believers died or were imprisoned in the name of a religion called Communism. Today there are more than 100 million believers in that land and they are planning and preparing to send out a minimum of 100,000 Chinese missionaries to the countries of the 10/40 Window that lie between them and Jerusalem. My friend, suffering for the Gospel is inevitable. It will come. Jesus promised it! But don't let it shake your faith; He knows what He's doing. Through it He is building His church! He also promised that and said that the gates of hell would not stand before it! But now we come to the second of Jesus' final promises:

II. The Promise Of The Ministry Of The Spirit (5-15) The logical question is, "OK, if the world is going to hate us and reject us and even kill us, how on earth are we going to accomplish anything? How will anyone ever believe in You?" So, Jesus picks up again on His promise in chapter 14 to send the Holy Spirit to be in them and explains what the actual ministry of the Spirit will be. He starts with:

1. the absolute necessity of His ministry (5-7) The Holy Spirit HAS to come. Jesus HAD to leave so the Spirit could come. Without the Holy Spirit living in each believer, we would still have what the Old Testament shows us, failure upon failure of the people of God and a handful of genuine believers in one place. It is the Holy Spirit who propelled the church out into the world to the ends of the earth. It is the Holy Spirit who touched the very enemies of the Gospel and drew them to salvation and transformation, who took "Sauls" and turned them into "Pauls". Today evangelical believers number more than 700 million and more than 2 billion people in the world would identify themselves as Christians, despite all of the suffering and persecution. This has happened because of the Holy Spirit's:

2. His ministry of conviction to unbelievers (8-11) If it was the disciples' job to convince people that Jesus died for their sins and that He's alive and they should come to Him for salvation, the church would never have gotten off the ground! *1Cor 2:14, The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.* We could talk until we were out of breath and nobody would fully understand or receive what we were saying. They can't; the Bible says in their natural state human beings are spiritually dead, cut off from God and from spiritual understanding; they are without God and without hope in the world. Our task would be impossible without the Holy Spirit! But Jesus promised that when He came, He would do what we cannot; He would have a ministry of conviction to unbelievers as we share with them. He would convince them internally of truth in three areas. He would convict them:

a. about their sin of not believing in God's Son We can tell them the message that God loves them so much that He sent His Only Son to die in their place, that He sacrificed His dear Son for them and how could they ignore such

a gift, but it is only through the Holy Spirit that they become convinced of the truth of **John 3:18**, *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*. The Spirit of God takes the words of truth and sinks them deep into the soul so that a person *knows* "I stand condemned before God because I have not believed!" Then, the Spirit convicts them:

b. about the righteousness of God's Son whom they can't see We can tell them that He was the pure, innocent Lamb, without spot or blemish, who didn't deserve to die, that in Him was no sin and He knew no sin, yet He was made to be sin for them and to bear their sin. But He is not here for us or for them to see. Only the Spirit can take those words and show them Jesus as He really is, so that they *know* the truth of **1 Pet 3:18**, *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God*. And then the Spirit convicts them:

c. about their coming judgment by God's Victorious Son We can tell them that one day they will stand before Jesus Christ as their Judge, that the Cross proves His victory over Satan, and that one day every sinner will face eternal punishment, just as Satan will. But only the Spirit can take those words and make them *know* their lostness so that they fall on their knees and cry out as the Philippian jailer did, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*"

William Mackay had been brought up by a godly, praying mother; but when he became a medical student in the local university, he renounced his early training. Joining a group called the "Hell Club," Mackay assisted one evening in a mock celebration of the Lord's Supper. Sacrilegiously he raised a glass of wine and said, "Behold the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Suddenly he turned pale and trembled from head to foot. Setting the glass down, he fled from the place in terror and spent the night pacing the streets muttering, "I'm guilty of the blood of Christ!" By daybreak he had made his way to his parents' home. Under deep conviction of sin, he went to his room and began praying for God's mercy. When his mother heard him, she came and threw her arms around his neck, exclaiming, "Are you actually praying, my son?" Then with her help he accepted Christ as his Savior. Years later He would write, "We praise thee O God, for Thy Spirit of Light, Who has shown us our Savior and scattered our night. Hallelujah Thine the glory! Hallelujah Amen! Hallelujah, Thine the glory! Revive us again!" Only the Spirit of God can turn a member of the "Hell Club" into a hymnwriter! That's His ministry! You see, I was a member of the "Hell Club"; we all were! Until the Spirit of God showed me MY sin, until He showed me that pure and holy Jesus took MY place and the punishment I deserved on the cross; until He showed me that I was eternally lost and in deep need of mercy. I came so under conviction that I cried out to Him and He came into MY life. That's the ministry Jesus promised the Spirit would have in people's lives even as we go forth in His Name to share His Word, even in a world that hates us! Then He went on to emphasize the Spirit's:

3. His ministry of revelation to the disciples (12-15) In other words, Jesus promised that He:

a. Jesus would continue to speak to them through His Spirit The Holy Spirit who would indwell them, would speak to their hearts and minds and that would be His means now of conveying truth to them. Do note that there is a word missing at the end of verse 13. In the Greek it literally says:

b. the Spirit would lead them into all THE truth This is really the promise on which our New Testament is based. Look back to **14:26**, He will *remind* you of everything I have said, that is, the Gospels, the historical portion of the New Testament. He will *teach* you all things, that is, in the Epistles, the doctrinal portion of the New Testament, all the things that Paul and Peter and James learned and taught that came later. And now here, He will show you things to come, that is, the prophetic portions of Scripture, like Revelation. And there we have it, our whole New Testament, all THE truth that would be delivered to us once for all for all time. The Spirit would cause it to be given, written and recorded. And now for us, He applies the truth to our lives; He illumines it; He makes it real to us, shows us how it applies to our situation. Jesus continues to speak, even to US through the Spirit and, as He noted in verse 14:

c. the Spirit's purpose is always to glorify Christ As He take the things of Christ and conveys them to us and speaks them to our lives, we praise Jesus! He is always with us! There is no spirit of Mohammed living in the hearts of his followers speaking his truth to them. There is no spirit of Buddha indwelling his followers to guide them. They're dead, but Jesus is alive and speaking to us day after day through His Spirit. What a promise! Then finally, Jesus gives them His last promise:

III. The Promise Of His Certain Resurrection (16-28) You can see through all of this long discourse:

1. the continuing confusion of the disciples (16-19) The language implies that this questioning back and forth between them went on for some time. Indeed, it had likely been going on through the evening as Jesus was speaking and, of course, they were eating and there were long pauses in the conversation that were not recorded. They could not grasp what Jesus was trying to tell them; they could not comprehend it. Especially this phrase, *in a little while you will see me no more; then after a little while you will see me*. So, as He concludes speaking with them, we have:

2. the clear explanation of Jesus (20-22) They may not have understood it right at that moment, but within hours they would see clearly what He was saying. That's why He told them to listen carefully. He was telling them that:

a. they would have a time of grief because of His death It would begin that very night as He was arrested and they were scattered. It would deepen in the morning as he was condemned in the public square and crucified. By tomorrow afternoon they would see Him laid in a tomb and their hearts would be overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. But He was assuring them that:

b. they would see Him alive and their pain would be lost in joy! Sunday would come! The third day He would rise again as He promised and they would see Him and, just like a mother who forgets the horrible pain of childbirth because she is filled with the joy of the new child in her arms, their time of sorrow would be forgotten and lost in the joy of seeing Him alive! And, He was explaining to them that:

c. after that He would return to the Father in heaven (28) He would ascend to heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father. He would be alive forever and would eventually take them to be with Him.

It was this promise of His certain resurrection that He wanted most of all to instill in them, to assure them that He would live, that He would rise. To encourage them NOT to believe their eyes as He was crucified and laid in the tomb, and give up in despair, but to wait only a little while and see His promise fulfilled in resurrection life! When the women got to the empty tomb, the angels told them, *He is risen as He said!* and Luke adds, *"Then they remembered His words!"* They didn't comprehend it that night, nor the next day, but oh, on Sunday this promise came flooding back into their minds and faith was born. They believed in the risen, living Christ and their lives were never the same! Nothing could take away their joy! Not all the persecutions they would endure, not all the hatred and even martyrdoms that would come. They took the Good News to the ends of the earth and gladly died for the joy that was set before them, the joy that all of His promises were true. And He leaves them with a:

3. the new exhortation to pray (23-27) Now that Jesus has risen and gone back to heaven, we have a new way to pray, a new practice:

a. we now ask the Father in Jesus' Name We don't need a priest; we don't need any offering, any sacrifice; we don't need any intermediary to go between. We go straight to the Father in prayer; we come directly into His presence in the Name of His Risen Son. Now that doesn't mean that when we pray, Jesus has to step in with the Father for us up there in heaven. That's not what His present ministry is about, though sometimes we hear it taught that way, that Jesus has to be always pleading with the Father for us. No, Jesus said:

b. the Father Himself already loves us because we love Jesus We come to Him in the Name of the Son He loves, as followers of the Son He loves, as believers in the Son He loves, and He answers us in the name of the Son He loves!

c. the Father gives to us what we ask **and** by doing that, **fills us with joy**. We come in Jesus' Name, for His sake, and time after time we receive in Jesus' Name, for His sake.

One of the great prayer warriors of the last century was Cameron Thompson. The following quote is from his book [Master Secrets Of Prayer?]: "God's people must learn to pray--and soon. Has not our God bound Himself by the golden girdle of a thousand breathtaking promises to answer the feeblest prayers of the faintest saints--if it be for His glory and signed by the name of His Son? No one has ever been accused of praying too boldly... The Bible reveals no limit set to the number of answers that may be obtained. Those who retire to lonely spots, who... weep with their faces buried in the midnight pillow, ... with immeasurable desire for lost souls, who dig for gold before the sun has risen--all these find the accumulated love of God in a golden cascade of incredible blessing. If answers are delayed, we wait along the wharves of hope, and at last the triple sails of treasure-laden ships appear across the horizons of faith, and as the great packages are carried to shore, we are found weeping with unspeakable joy... My heart is enlarged and I cannot explain to anyone anywhere what God will do for a praying heart. But... often out of nights where the darkness could be felt, His face has slowly risen before me, the face of a Mighty Victor; and He has... said, looking through and through me, 'If ye shall ask ANYTHING in My name, I will do it.'" My friend, in this world you will have trouble. It was His last promise in verse 28. But in the same breath He also promised that based on His victory at the Cross, you can have complete peace. You have the Holy Spirit to bring conviction to the people of this world to whom He sends you and you have the marvelous unlimited privilege of praying in His Name to the Father who loves you and will do whatever you ask. What more could He leave us with?

John: The Gospel Of Life

The High Priestly Prayer - Ch. 17

As Jesus and His disciples are leaving the Upper Room that last Thursday night, He has finished His last instructions to His disciples. And now as we come to chapter 17, either just before they go out or somewhere on the way out of the city, Jesus does what we would expect Him to do. He stops to pray with them. And what a prayer it is! This is the true Lord's Prayer. The one we call the Lord's prayer is really the Disciples' prayer, the prayer He taught *them*. This one is His own, sometimes called His great High-Priestly Prayer. You know, you can learn a lot about a man by listening to what he says when he's about to die! *When Cecil Rhodes was about to die, he cried out, "I've found much in Africa - diamonds, gold,*

and land are mine, but now I must leave them all behind. Not a thing I've gained can be taken with me. Eternal treasures that abide I have not sought; therefore, I actually have nothing at all!" The prospect of dying brings out what matters most deeply in the heart. The things that Jesus prayed about here are those of most profound importance to Him and therefore things that should be of profound importance to us. And some of them may be surprising! His prayer divides easily into three parts. As He lifts His eyes to heaven and begins:

I. Jesus Prays For Himself (1-5), but not like we might! As He comes to His Father in Heaven, He prays first:

1. for His glorification now on earth (1-4) What does that mean? Verse 4 says He brought glory to the Father by completing the work the Father had given Him to do. The more that He obeyed and fulfilled and completed, the more He glorified the Father. When he prays, *Father, glorify Your Son that your Son may glorify You!*, He is praying:

a. that He might fully complete the work given him to do That is, He is praying to go to the cross and die there! He is praying that all of the Father's will for His life would be accomplished and that meant even the death of the cross! While we would probably be praying to be spared from the cross or at least to die quickly and feel little pain, none of that mattered to Him. Only one thing mattered: that the Father's will be carried out to its fullest extent in His life, regardless of pain or suffering! And why did He pray that? Was it so He could get a "well done!", so He could get a reward for Himself? No, according to verse 2, He prayed to go to the cross and finish the Father's work so:

b. that He might give eternal life to all who are given Him He prayed to die so that every last person who would ever believe might have their sins laid on Him and be forgiven and live forever! Or to make it more personal, as the songwriter put it, *when He was on the cross, I was on His mind!* He was thinking about me! He was praying for me! He was praying that He might endure to death to the end that I might have eternal life! And eternal life is not just existing forever. People do that anyway! Every human being, once conceived, will be alive, will exist forever! Eternal life is not how long you live! The word *eternal* means having no beginning and no end, perpetual existence in both directions. Eternal life is the very life of God, uncaused, self-existent, indestructible, ceaseless being, the life that God has. And He prayed to die so He could give His very life to me, so that all of the millions who believe could be given His eternal life and, He adds in verse 3, so:

c. that they may know intimately the Father and the Son To have His life is to be joined to His Person, to be made one with Him in spirit. It is therefore to know Him in the deepest, most intimate way possible, to be capable of having a relationship with Him where we are no longer two, but one, He in us and we in Him! In other words, He prayed to die so that He would not have to live without me, without you, without all the millions that the Father had given to Him, but that we would all be joined to Him in one body forever, His eternal bride! And only then, after He had prayed to complete the Father's purpose on earth, did He pray:

2. for restoration to His pre-incarnate glory in heaven in verse (5) Glory is more than a kind of bright shining splendor, the way Jesus' robe glowed white on the Mount of Transfiguration. Paul wrote in *Phil. 2:9-11 (NASB)* *...God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* That's the glory Jesus was praying for, to be returned to His exalted position in heaven as Lord over all, and the Father answered His prayer!

Now we're just the opposite of Jesus. We're big on being glorified in Heaven with Him, but not so much on completing all His purpose for us on earth, especially if it involves suffering! Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church who wrote "The Purpose Driven Life," found a Bible verse that he says he would like as his own epitaph: *Acts 13:36, ...when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep...* He says he prays to serve all God's purpose, to complete all God's will, everything that God wants to do through him and *then* die and enjoy the glory. That's not a bad way to learn to pray. That's how Jesus prayed! Too many of us are focused on OUR eternal reward instead of on HIS eternal reward, His glorious inheritance in the saints! He counts His inheritance, not in gold and jewels and mansions and crowns, but in people, in receiving all that have been given to Him in every generation until He comes! And giving them to Him needs to be our life's purpose in the generation in which we live. What are YOU living for? How are YOU praying? Well, now we come to the second part of the prayer, the part where:

II. Jesus Prays For His Disciples (6-19) For the 11 men gathered right there around Him, His own trusted and trained few. He prays for them:

1. because of their special position (6-11a) These men were to form the core of the church that Jesus was going to build; they were the foundation layer of the plan God was going to implement for the rest of human history; they were the ones who would begin the process of taking the Good News of Jesus to the uttermost parts of the earth. Jesus had invested three years of intensive personal discipleship training in them and now it's done. He says:

a. they belonged to the Father through faith in the Son They genuinely believed. They knew He came from God. They accepted His words as truth. They alone, out of all the world, believed in Him and belonged to Him. But He realized that:

b. they were being left behind in a world which hated them He was going to the Father, but they would be left on earth in a hostile environment, a world which would hate them and try to kill them, to eradicate them and wipe out their message. The fate of the whole enterprise for which the Son would die would lie in their hands. They needed special prayer! So, Jesus prayed three things for them. First, He prayed:

2. for their protection by the Father's power (11b-12) In essence, He prayed for them what He prayed for Himself, that all of them would be protected by God's almighty power, the power of the name of Jesus, until they had completed all of the will of God, everything God intended to accomplish through them in their lives. He was obviously *not* praying that they would all be totally safe from harm and die of old age in their beds. Every one of them suffered severely from persecution and most of them personally made it far into foreign territory with the Gospel. James was the first to die, in Jerusalem at Herod's hand just a few years later. Peter was crucified in Rome upside down. Thomas was martyred in India. Every one of them except John died a martyr's death, and even he was exiled. So, His prayer was obviously not simply for physical protection, but that none would be lost like Judas was, that none would go astray and become apostate, that none would perish eternally, that all would be one in their common faith and identity, one body. He prayed that all would be preserved to fulfill their purpose in their generation and then be part of the eternal Kingdom. And they were. But then He prayed for another thing:

3. for their permeation by the Son's joy (13) This is not to be some grim enterprise where these faithful few press on in their suffering with gritted teeth. He prays that the full measure of His joy would be in them, that they would be filled and overflowing with it! Now what was His joy? *Heb. 12:2, Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* What was that joy that was set before Him that allowed him to endure the cross? Again, it was YOU; it was ME; it was ALL that the Father had given Him being with Him in glory! The joy of knowing that all these millions of His people would be with Him sustained Him through the cross and that's the same joy that will sustain us. When we are sure that His purpose will be accomplished in our lives and that through our labors and sufferings He is getting the desire of His heart, that His dream is coming true, that ALL His people are being brought to Him through us, we are filled with a joy that nothing can wipe out! And then He prayed for a third thing:

4. for their preservation by the Father's Truth (14-19) There is another kind of protection they needed. The Evil One has many ways to destroy God's people and one of the most cunning, and yet common, is to lead them astray into error. To cause them to doubt or misunderstand or ignore portions of God's Word and to begin to behave like the world around them and eventually be absorbed by it. Jesus prayed that these would be preserved by the Father's truth, by the Truth of His Word and so remain set apart to His purpose. Just think, what if some of the 11 had drifted in their beliefs into some of the things that people in modern day churches have come to believe? What if they had fallen into the error that all religions are paths to God, that Jesus was just one Divine teacher or the belief that human beings are basically good and if they live well, they will go to heaven? What if they had become like the world saying that sexual immorality is OK; God doesn't mind!? Where would the church be today? They were the foundation layer, the ones to whom all generations of believers to follow would look and listen; they needed to be preserved in the truth and set apart from the influence of the world. So, Jesus prayed for them and they were! They died martyr's deaths, standing true to Jesus and His teachings at the cost of their very lives. What a heritage we have!

But then we come to the last part of Jesus' prayer, which is for us the most important, because now:

III. Jesus Prays For Us (20-26) [Read 20] That's us! You and me! All who have ever believed, have come to faith through the word of the apostles which we have written down for safekeeping in our New Testament. On that night before the cross, YOU and I were on Jesus' mind, and look carefully at what He prayed for us! It is really telling that the first thing on His heart was to pray:

1. for our unity with one another (21-23) Jesus never intended that there literally be thousands of denominations among His followers separate from one another. One counselor has described that as "multiple personality disorder in the body of Christ"! Yet this is something Jesus has had to allow because throughout history such large portions of His church have become cold, dead and apostate and He has had to have groups of the faithful break away and start over again. But there's no putting it back together now and besides, it's not organizational unity that He prayed for. It is spiritual unity. He prayed that our unity as His followers:

a. that it would be like that of the Father and Son *Just as I am in You and You are in Me...* The oneness of being, the full unity of purpose, mind and heart that the Father and Son had. He prayed that kind of unity would be ours, that we would literally be ONE body on earth and He said it three times in those few verses! And He prayed:

b. that it would result from the glory of the common mission given to us in verse 22. The Father gave the Son His glory through the mission of the cross, the glory of redeeming all who belong to Him. And He gave the glory of participating in that mission to us and prayed that it would result in our unity. You know, that's when I find Christians most united! When they're talking about their favorite doctrines or discussing difficult passages of Scripture they divide and separate easily. When they're talking about the music styles they prefer in worship or the color of the new carpet the church is buying, they divide quickly. But just put them on a short-term missions team together and

watch the differences disappear! If you want true unity, focus on the heart of God for the world and you'll find it. Jesus prayed for unity out of that and He prayed:

c. that it would be brought to a perfect completion in verse 23. I think He realized there would be struggles in this area, that there would be times and periods of dividedness in His body, but He prays that God would eventually perfect that spiritual unity, bring it to a real completion. I hope that what we see today is part of the Father's answer to that prayer. Every month I get together to eat and pray with local pastors from churches as different as Lutheran and Episcopalian and Presbyterian and Baptist and more, all of whom love Jesus personally, and by the time we are finished praying for our community and the world and one another, our hearts are deeply knit. We know we have a ton of differences but we know we are one in Jesus and His mission. Years ago, I wouldn't have done that. Years ago, you didn't see that happening. I'd like to think that in some ways the church in this generation is waking up to a new kind of unity, the kind Jesus prayed for us. Then secondly, He prayed:

2. for our testimony to the world Twice! **(21, 23)** He prayed that this unity we have would show the world that our message of the Risen Christ is real and true. What would you think if 10 different people tried to talk to you about the same basic thing, but each one told about it with a different slant and none of the 10 would have anything to do with each other? You would dismiss the thing out of hand! That's how people feel when they see us come to them divided and separated from each other. But when we come united, with one heart and mind, despite all our differences, people sit up and take notice! Our unity in coming to them with the same heart, with the same message, holding hands together is a powerful witness. People look at it and think, "Man, something must really have happened to them all! It must be real!". Then thirdly, Jesus prayed:

3. for our destiny with Him (24) Oh, listen to that! There is our guarantee of heaven! Jesus prayed:

a. that we would be in His Presence in heaven forever, that we, all of us, would be with Him where He is, in heaven. He prayed that each one of us who are given to Him would be in His personal presence, that He would have us with Him for all eternity. He said, "I want it!" He wants us. He wants us in heaven and we shall be there. But more than that. He prayed:

b. that we would behold His glory, that we would see Him high and lifted up, seated on the throne of the universe with the Name that is above every Name, that we would see Him shine in all His splendor, that we would see all the angels and all the redeemed of all the ages gathered round His throne crying, "Here I am to worship..." and casting their crowns at His feet. If you want a shortcut to understanding this, just check out Rev. 4-5 and you can read John's description of the scene there will be when we get there, all the peoples of the earth in all their splendor bowing before the throne of God and of the Lamb. That's what Jesus prayed for and we've read the end of the Book; we know He'll get it! And we'll be there to see it! And you know what, that's when we'll all be one, when His prayer for perfect unity will be fully answered! Then finally, Jesus closed His prayer by asking:

4. for our indwelling by Him (25) Did you hear that? "I pray that the love YOU have for ME might be in THEM!" What a thing! The very love of the Father for the Son! That infinite, eternal love, now in us! How is that to be? Because Jesus prayed that the day would come when He would personally indwell every believer, and when the Spirit came 50 days later, it happened. From that moment on every believer is now indwelt by the very Spirit of Jesus. Jesus wanted you to be with Him in glory forever, but while you're on earth He wants to be in you! Personally! He never wants to have one moment of separation from you; rather He wants to go with you through every minute of your life, filling you with Himself so that you are able to live a life of love and love one another as He loved us! And, of course, the result of that will also be unity!

It's the one thing that was most on His heart the night before He died. He wanted us, his followers, to be one. But it's not easy. *In his book The Mark of the Christian, Francis Schaeffer told that Hitler, during World War II, ordered the union of all religious denominations in Germany. A Brethren group became deeply divided over the issue. One segment obeyed and suffered little persecution, but gradually their spiritual vitality was weakened. The group that resisted stayed vibrant, but many died in the concentration camps due to their stand. Following the war, feelings between these groups were sharp. Tensions were high. An elder of one of the groups told Francis Schaeffer that they knew the problem had to be resolved. So leaders of both groups agreed to get alone in a quiet place to ask God to show each one where he had failed to keep Christ's commands. After several days of heart-searching, they met together. "And what happened then?" asked Schaeffer. "We just were one!" the elder replied.* What will it take for Jesus to see the answer to His prayer in our own lives, in our church and in our community? Maybe we need to search our hearts too! To see where we're divided, where there's spiritual pride, to see what Jesus wants to cleanse us of so that we can be unreservedly ONE!

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Arrest And Trial - Ch. 18

At Chapter 18 we reverently enter the beginning of what has come to be called Christ's "Passion", that is, His sufferings. [Read verse 1] Jesus left Jerusalem with the Eleven, crossed over the brook of Kidron and entered into a quiet olive grove called Gethsemane to pray. It is there that His suffering began as He sought the Father in prayer and prayed, "Not my will, but Thine be done." It is there that His inner agony was such that He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. But John passes over all of that in his account and moves ahead several hours to tell the story of how:

I. Jesus Is Arrested In The Garden (1-11) It is late at night, actually in the very early hours of the morning while it is still dark, that Jesus finishes praying and wakes His sleeping disciples for the third time to meet:

1. the arrival of the mob (2-3) Judas had left the Supper early that night and run to the chief priests. They in turn must have applied to the Roman commander for a detachment of soldiers to aid in the arrest along with the Temple guards. Judas, no doubt, led them back to the Upper Room, only to find it empty. But he was not to be dissuaded. He knew Jesus liked to go to this Olive Grove to find solitude and he led the mob there next, searching for Him. They had torches and lanterns on poles and they were armed, the other Gospels say, with swords and wooden clubs in case Jesus or His followers put up any resistance. Judas, seeing Jesus in the shadow, must have run ahead and singled him out for the mob with a kiss, but John doesn't record that either. For him what stood out that night was Jesus':

2. His total control of the situation (4-6) Jesus was in control here, not the mob! He went out to meet them. He knew everything that was going to happen; He knew that the time had come. He asked them boldly who they were looking for and when they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth", an amazing thing happened. Without hesitation, Jesus deliberately answered, "I AM", and at His words they literally "went away backwards and fell to the ground". In other words, they backed up and bowed down; they lay face down on the ground! Why on earth did they do such a thing? What force would make an entire mob of dozens of men suddenly lie on the earth? Some have said they were simply astonished at His boldness and His surrender to them, but to me there is only one explanation that makes any sense. The word "he" is not in the Greek. Jesus said, "I AM" and in Aramaic, that is Yahweh, Jehovah, the very Name of God! They did not stumble; they were driven to their knees and then to their faces in the very presence of God by the very mention of His Name! I'm reminded of the fact that at the Name of Jesus every knee will bow, whether they want to or not! I believe Jesus, for one moment, unleashed His mighty power and drove them to their faces to make a point for all of us who would hear this story in the future: they did not take Him; He gave Himself to them! No one took His life from Him; He laid it down willingly. He could have stopped the whole thing at any moment of his choosing, but instead, He chose to endure the suffering; He chose to be arrested and tried and crucified for us. So, after making them bow for a moment, He left them up and asked them the same question again. Now notice His concern for:

3. the protection of His disciples (7-9) This time He allows them to stand, but practically gives them a command NOT to arrest any of His disciples. Haven't you ever wondered why they were not seized also? There were only 11 of them. It would have been dreadfully easy to capture the whole group and put an end to the whole movement at once. But they didn't even try! Not even after:

4. Peter's brash reaction (10-11) Suddenly Peter wakes up and realizes they're really going to arrest Jesus and he goes into action. He whips out his sword and swings it at the one who was the closest, probably the leader of the group, the servant of the High Priest. But either Malchus dodged or Peter was a lousy swordsman, because instead of beheading him, he only managed to take off his right ear! Now you would think that would send the soldiers into a frenzy, that out would come the swords and a rain of blows would fall on the whole band. But they don't even move! Again, Jesus appears to be totally in charge. He commands Peter to stop and says, according to Matthew, *Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?*" - Mat. 26:53-54. In other words, "I'm in charge here. I could stop this at any moment! But I have to do this! I have to let Myself be arrested...and tried...and crucified! I MUST fulfill the Scriptures. I have to drink the cup the Father has given Me to save my people!" And then, Luke says, Jesus quietly and calmly reaches over and picks up the fallen ear and with a touch reattaches it to Malchus' head, perfectly whole! He was sovereignly in control the whole time!

It's almost like this whole scene played in some sort of dignified slow motion and then at this moment, it all broke into fast forward. They grab Jesus and begin to tie his hands. His disciples suddenly break for cover in all directions into the darkness and scatter, leaving Him alone. Not one is captured, just as He said. And now John tells the story of how:

II. Jesus Is Tried Before The Jews (12-14, 19-24) This next section reads almost like the script of a modern movie. First, John tells what's going on with Jesus, then he breaks away to show Peter, then back to Jesus again and back to Peter and finally back to Jesus. He's telling two interwoven story lines, but for our study we'll unravel them one at a time. The first thing Jesus had to face was:

1. the initial interrogation by Annas (12-14, 19) Annas had been the High Priest for about 9 years, from 6-15 AD. The Romans had deposed him, but four of his sons had followed one at a time in his office and had themselves been

removed. Now his son-in-law, Caiaphas, had been serving as High Priest since 18 AD, but in the eyes of the Jews, one is High Priest for life, so Annas was highly respected and probably the real power behind the priesthood. To him they took Jesus first for a private interview, no doubt so he could formulate some charges against Him. He wanted information about who His disciples were and about what He taught. But Jesus answered His questions instead with a challenge:

2. the challenge of Jesus: (20-21) He said, **"My record is public!** I always taught in synagogues or in the Temple. The whole nation heard Me. I have no secrets to hide; I said nothing evil, nothing seditious. Ask them what I said, they know!" And it's just here that John brings out:

3. the unjustness of the process (22-23) Nothing about this whole thing was done right by Jewish law. One of the officials didn't like the way Jesus answered and struck Him in the face. You can't strike an uncondemned man! Jesus even pointed that fact out, but it didn't stop the process. You can't gather the ruling council and pass a death sentence on a man in the darkness of night; a day has to pass between the ruling and the execution to give time for any hidden evidence to come to light. None of this mattered! It was all unfair. It was all unjust. You see, this interview with Annas was really just a stalling for time. The Sanhedrin had to be called, roused from their beds. Messengers had to go out and gather them together so the trial could occur by dawn. When Annas was satisfied that he would get no real answers out of Jesus, he sent him on to:

4. the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (24) John doesn't even record it, but the other Gospels do. It's more of the same. False witnesses are brought to accuse Him unjustly, but they can't get their stories straight. Finally, they ask Him outright, "Are you the Son of God?" And He says, "I AM!" They call it blasphemy. They curse Him. They strike Him and beat Him. They spit in His face. They mock Him. They pronounce the death sentence upon Him, simply because they want Him out of the way for good!

But while all this is going on, something else of significance is happening in the outer court. As Jesus stands true:

III. Peter Denies Jesus (15-18, 25-27) right outside in the courtyard. Let's examine the story. Notice first:

1. the bravery of John (15-16) John never talks about himself in the first person and says, "I", but this is most likely him. He and Peter fled originally in the garden but did not go far. Their courage returned and it seems that they actually came back and joined in the mob, following along behind Jesus as He was being led back to Jerusalem. When they reached the High Priest's house, John was evidently known to the family and was allowed to pass through the gate and actually entered in together with Jesus. What a bold move, to identify publicly with his Master in the hour of His arrest, to go visibly in with Him to the house where He was tried! Peter, however was a stranger, and was left standing outside the gate. John had to come back and get him let into the courtyard once everyone was inside and Jesus was taken into the inside rooms for questioning. But in contrast with John's bravery, you can see:

2. the increasing fear of Peter It began at the door **(17-18)** The servant girl unnerved Peter and caught him off guard. He didn't want to be kept out, so he lied and said, "I am not". But it was cold and as he stood around the fire warming himself with the servants, the subject came up again. **(25-27a)** A second person asked him and he denied it again. But the third person to confront him had actually been in Gethsemane and was a relative of Malchus, whose ear had been cut off. Of course, it was dark and, in the confusion, it was difficult to identify anyone positively, but this man had an inkling that Peter was the sword-slinger. And Peter's fear escalates from afraid to terrified! Fear rules him and he begins to vehemently deny that he's a follower of Jesus, to curse himself and swear it so they'll believe him. You know, Peter had said, just hours before in the safety of the Upper Room, that He was willing to die for Jesus, that he would never deny Him! But when suddenly his life was on the line, humble John stood firm while proud Peter crumbled and folded. What would you do? I daresay that none of us really knows until we're actually put to the test, which here we seldom are. But our brothers and sisters around the world, especially those who live in China or who live in Muslim lands, face this kind of test in their lives regularly. If they refuse to deny Jesus, they may be cast out of their home and family or their community altogether. They may be arrested and imprisoned and with that usually comes torture. They may be threatened with death. It is easy for us to tell them they should stand firm; it is easy for us to criticize Peter. But what would we do in their shoes? In his shoes? What's more, what am I doing now where I am? How am I hiding the fact that I'm His disciple, at work, at school, at college? In my life right now am I denying Him in small ways already like Peter or am I standing up bravely like John? Well, as the story closes, notice again:

3. the absolute control of Jesus (27b) Jesus had told him, *This very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.* - Mat. 26:34. And at the very moment Peter denied Him the third time, the rooster crowed! Jesus is in absolute control of every part of what was happening to Him. In fact, Luke tells us that wherever Jesus was standing, at that moment He turned and looked straight at Peter and Peter "woke up". He remembered Jesus' words. He realized what he had just done; it broke into his mind like a flood. He was overcome with remorse and immediately ran outside and wept bitterly.

And there we have to leave him and continue with the story inside as:

IV. Jesus Is Tried Before Pilate (28-40) [Read 28] The Jews were a conquered people. Their leaders could pass decrees in their council but they had no civil power to enforce them. Specifically, they could not execute anyone. That had to be a Roman matter. Besides, how much better it would look for them if the evil Romans executed Jesus instead of themselves! So, off they went to the Roman Governor. He was up early, before 7 AM, no doubt having already been informed of Jesus' arrest during the night by his commander. He knew they were coming. Their religious scruples wouldn't let them come inside and defile themselves by entering the house of a Gentile. It would keep them from eating, not the Passover meal itself which was the night before, but the first sacrifice of the Passover festival which was offered that morning. Strange how they could condemn an innocent man to death without guilt, while worrying about ceremonial defilement! So, Pilate comes outside to them and we see:

1. his argument with the Jews (29-31) Pilate was no friend of the Jews and they hated him as well. After many years they actually managed to get him recalled to Rome by their protests! He has no time for them and their petty quarrels and religious beliefs, so he tries to send them away. But notice:

a. their insistence on execution They insist that Jesus is worthy of death and they want the Romans to carry out the sentence! They will not take no for an answer. But in doing so, John points out:

b. their unwitting fulfillment of the Scriptures (32) If the Jews had executed Jesus, they would have done it as they later did to Stephen. They would have stoned Him! The Romans hung their criminals on crosses for public execution. If Jesus was stoned, his bones would have been crushed, but the Scripture says, *Not a bone of Him shall be broken!* Moreover, Jesus had said in *John 3:14*, *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up*, that is, on a pole and later in *John 12:32*, *...when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself*. No Jewish mob would ever have done these things. In turning Jesus over to the Romans, they were unknowingly doing His will, fulfilling the Scriptures, carrying out His own words. Again, it's apparent that though He seems a victim, that He was in control the whole time. So, Pilate takes Jesus inside privately and we have:

2. his interrogation of Jesus (33-38a) The record of their conversation is brief and it probably contained much more. In fact, there are a number of things John leaves out of the story, like the fact that Pilate sent Jesus to Herod and Herod sent Him back. But two things are clear from this glimpse. First:

a. Jesus declared that He was the King He was not willing to defend Himself, but He would not deny His own identity either. He said plainly, "I am the King, not a king of this world, but of another kingdom, the Kingdom of God." And:

b. Jesus declared that He spoke the truth I think this was really a call to Pilate, an invitation... "I speak the truth; everyone on the side of truth listens to Me... YOU should listen to Me!" He is not trying to prevent His death but appealing for Pilate's own soul!

But Pilate is not so easily shaken, at least not yet. He mutters a disgusted, "What is truth!" and goes back out to the Jews. He knows the true score. He knows that it is out of envy and jealousy that these leaders want to eliminate Jesus. He doesn't want to be their patsy, their instrument and, in the meantime, he's thought of a way to outwit them at their own game:

3. his attempt to outwit the Jews (38b-40) By this time a crowd has gathered. He knows how popular Jesus is. So, he says, "I can't find any basis for a charge against Jesus, but I tell you what I'll do. Every Passover out of my generosity, I release one Jewish prisoner to you and grant him clemency. This year I'll give you the choice between two. You can have Jesus or you can have Barabbas!" Of course, Pilate's scheme was simple, to pick the worst, most insidious criminal he had in custody. Barabbas was involved in an insurrection. He had committed murder. He was in our terms a terrorist, a member of Hamas or Al Qaeda, a hated man and someone they were glad to have in custody at last. Pilate figured it would be no contest: Jesus or Osama Bin Laden! They would have to pick Jesus! Imagine his shock when they start shouting, "Give us Barabbas! We'd rather have a terrorist running around loose than have Jesus live!" So intense was their hatred of Him!

And there we have to suspend the story for today, but I don't want us to miss the point of it all. We could focus on that intense hatred and blame the Jews for killing Jesus. We could focus on Pilate's indifference and weakness as a leader, his failure to just stand up and say "NO," and blame the Romans for killing Jesus. But the point John makes over and over is the one Peter later made in his prayer in Acts 4: *Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. - Acts 4:27.* God sent His Son Jesus to die, to die for you and me! The mob, the Jewish leaders, Pilate, the soldiers, they were all just the tools He used in offering this great once-for-all sacrifice. No one took His life; He laid it down willingly. For you, for me. *In February 1941, "Maximilian Kolbe was incarcerated at Auschwitz. He was a Franciscan priest. In the harshness of the slaughterhouse, he maintained the gentleness of Christ. He shared his food. He gave up his bunk. He prayed for his captors. He was soon given the nickname 'Saint of Auschwitz.' In July of that same year there was an escape from the prison. It was the custom at Auschwitz to kill ten prisoners for every one who escaped. All the prisoners would be gathered in the courtyard, and the commandant would randomly select ten names from the roll book. These victims would be immediately taken to a cell where they would receive no food*

or water until they died. "The commandant begins calling the names. At each selection another prisoner steps forward to fill the sinister quota. The tenth name he calls is Franciszek Gajowniczek. As the SS officers check the numbers of the condemned, this last one begins to sob. 'My wife and my children,' he weeps. The officers turn as they hear movement among the prisoners. The guards raise their rifles. The dogs tense, anticipating a command to attack. A prisoner has left his row and is pushing his way to the front. It is Kolbe. No fear on his face. No hesitancy in his step. The captain shouts at him to stop or be shot. 'I want to talk to the commander,' he says calmly. For some reason the officer doesn't club him or kill him. Kolbe stops a few paces from the commandant, removes his hat, and looks the German officer in the eye. 'Herr Kommandant, I wish to make a request, please.' That no one is shot is a miracle. 'I want to die in the place of this prisoner.' He points at the sobbing Gajowniczek. The audacious request is presented without stammer. 'I have no wife or children. Besides, I am old and not good for anything. He's in better condition.' Kolbe knew well the Nazi mentality. 'Who are you?' the officer asks. 'A Catholic priest.' The block is stunned, the commandant uncharacteristically speechless. After a moment, he barks, 'Request granted.' Prisoners were never allowed to speak. Gajowniczek says, 'I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on. The immensity of it: I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me--a stranger. Is this some dream?' The Saint of Auschwitz outlived the other nine. In fact, he didn't die of thirst or starvation. He died only after the camp doctor injected phenol into his heart on August 14, 1941. Franciszek Gajowniczek survived the Holocaust. He made his way back to his hometown, but every year he goes back to Auschwitz. Every August 14 he goes back to say thank you to the man who died in his place." [Six Hours One Friday by Max Lucado. Multnomah, 1987.] That's John's point and that's why we are here today. Every Sunday we come back to say "Thank You!" to the man who died in our place and to worship at His feet.

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Cross - Ch. 19

We left Jesus at the end of chapter 18 in the middle of His trial before Pontius Pilate in the wee hours of Friday morning. Now in chapter 19 we come to that series of events which we have come to collectively call, "The Cross". John R. W. Stott wrote: "In daring to write a book [or preach a sermon, I might add] about the cross, there is of course a great danger of presumption. This is partly because what actually happened when 'God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ' is a mystery whose depths we shall spend eternity plumbing; and partly because it would be most unseemly to feign a cool detachment as we contemplate Christ's cross. We are involved. Our sins put Him there.... We can stand before it only with a bowed head and broken spirit. And there we remain until the Lord Jesus speaks to our hearts His word of pardon and acceptance, and we, gripped by His love and brimful of thanksgiving, go out into the world to live our lives in His service." So, it is with great personal humility and reverence that we must approach the three principal events of the Savior's last hours that John describes for us. First, he shows us how:

I. Jesus Is Sentenced to death (1-16) Pilate has already tried to free Jesus by his first ruse of offering to release Jesus or Barabbas, never dreaming that the Jews would choose a hardened criminal, yet they did. Now he tries another tactic. He orders that Jesus:

1. He is punished by scourging (1-3) We read those words so lightly. Most of you have seen *The Passion of the Christ*, so I don't need to describe for you in any detail what flogging or scourging is. With hands tied to a post and bent back, the prisoner was whipped repeatedly with a "cat-o-nine-tails", a whip of 9 leather thongs with pieces of bone or metal on their ends. A few strokes would tear the flesh off a man's back. It was called "the intermediate death" because many prisoners died from the scourging before they ever got to a cross. Jesus was left in complete agony with wounds all over His body and extremely weak from blood loss. Yet the soldiers were not finished. They decided to mock His claim to be a King. They found a cast-off purple robe to put on Him, wove a crown out of thorns growing nearby and put a reed in His hand for a king's scepter. Then in mockery one after another, time after time, they bowed before Him shouting, "Hail, King!" but in rising, they struck His face. In this state of humiliation Pilate brought Him forth again to the crowd, no doubt hoping that this punishment would be enough to satisfy them, that they would see how utterly ridiculous His claims were as He stands humiliated publicly before the nation and be satisfied with that. But it didn't work. Instead:

2. the crowd screams for His death (4-7) He utters that famous phrase in Latin, *ecce homo*, "Behold the Man! Look, see His stripes, see how he has been punished, see how He has been humiliated. See that His claims are only a mockery; He is no King! Is that not enough?" But they immediately begin to shout, "Crucify Him!" Pilate mockingly says, "YOU crucify Him! I can't find any basis for a charge that would warrant death!", knowing full well that they really had no authority to do that nor would they ever crucify anyone. But they came back with their real charge, "This man must die because He claimed to be the Son of God! Blasphemy!" Now, that shook Pilate up. Pilate was a pagan Roman, a worshipper of the Roman and Greek gods who, according to ancient mythology were known fairly frequently to consort with human women and produce supernatural hybrid offspring. Hercules is one name you might recognize. That "son of God" claim took him back. His wife had already sent him a message that she had had a dream about Jesus and warned him to not to have anything to do with "that innocent man". He had to know who Jesus really was so:

3. Pilate re-interviews Him privately (8-11) He has to know where Jesus is from, who He is. But Jesus won't answer him. So, Pilate pulls rank; he tells Jesus that His life is in his hands to force Him to talk. But Jesus already knows what he will do and asserts that God is the one who has the real power, not him. And Jesus paints what he is doing and what the Jews are doing as a sin, an act of wrongdoing for which they are guilty before God. Now Pilate is desperate, but in the end:

4. Pilate surrenders to the crowd (12-16) Pilate worked hard to free Him. He made two more attempts to present Him to the people and might have set Him free, but there was one cry he could not get away from. "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar!" That doesn't sound like much, but it is a serious threat. Tiberius, the Emperor, was a bitter man and very suspicious of any rivals. Treason is always punishable by death. The Jewish leaders threaten to report him to the Emperor, to say that he set free a rival leader, a king, and this he could not risk, so in the end, he resigns himself and surrenders to their cries.

His is the ultimate case of yielding to the pressure of the crowd, going along with the majority, doing what you know is wrong to protect yourself from their wrath. It's still with us today. Our young people call it peer pressure. In business we call it corporate pressure. And, like Pilate, we still justify it in our minds and tell ourselves, "I had to do it; I had no choice; I had to look out for myself! I didn't want to; I washed my hands in protest; it is NOT my fault." Strangely enough, centuries later, probably based on his trying to free Jesus, legends arose saying that Pilate later became a Christian. In fact, the Coptic church canonized him as a saint by 600 AD and his wife Claudia Procla was made a saint in the Greek church for her stand toward Jesus' innocence. Her feast is celebrated to this day on Oct. 27. But the hard truth is that Pilate was soon removed from his procuratorship after one of his many violent crimes against the Jews and sent to Rome to stand trial. Tiberius probably died before he got there and he went into exile. The most authentic reports indicate that he died by his own hand somewhere in Gaul. However, his most telling indictment is that for 20 centuries now, thousands of Christians all over the world have repeated in unison these words of the apostles: *I believe... in Jesus Christ His only son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate...* His name lives forever in infamy. Washing your hands and blaming somebody else does not make you innocent. Folding under pressure and going along with what you know is wrong and evil, simply makes you a coward, and a guilty one at that. What a lesson he is for us! But now, leaving Pilate, John goes on to tell us how:

II. Jesus Is Crucified (17-30) The beam of a cross is laid across His bleeding back and his hands are tied to it. He can hardly stand, let alone walk, but He must bear his own cross. A procession is gathered. Two other prisoners are also brought, each one, like Jesus, attended by four soldiers and a centurion. The parade winds its way slowly through the streets of Jerusalem to:

1. the site outside the city (17-18) Jesus is too weak to make it all the way and falls under the weight of the cross. A stranger named Simon from Cyrene is grabbed and forced to carry it for Him. But eventually they arrive at:

a. the place of execution, Golgotha in Aramaic, the "hill of the skull", Calvary in Latin. It is the place of death, the place close to the road north of the city where prisoners were commonly executed. There the procession stopped. John spares us the details of:

b. the process of crucifixion which his original audience knew only too well and simply says, *there they crucified Him*. But to us that is such a meaningless phrase. Crucifixion was designed to be the cruelest possible means of killing a person. The Phoenicians invented it, but the Romans perfected it to a science. The upright was usually placed into the ground. The condemned man was laid on the ground on the crossbeam with his arms stretched out and bound in place. A metal spike was driven through each wrist between the bones. Then, by ropes or ladders, he was hoisted up into position and the crossbeam fastened to the upright. Only one skeleton of a crucified man has been unearthed and, in his case, they turned both his feet sideways in the same direction and drove a spike through both of those into the upright, leaving the lower half of his body twisted 90 degrees. As long as the person had strength in his arm and leg muscles, he could pull and push upward to relax the tension on his chest enough to breathe. So, every breath was agony as the raw wounds pushed against the spikes and the bleeding back against the post. But as the person grew weaker and unable to help himself, his respiration would gradually lessen. His lungs would begin to fill up with fluid and eventually he would suffocate to death. Hung up on a post by the road, humiliated before the world, naked except for the barest loin covering, exposed to the scorching of the hot sun by day and the desert cold by night, a man might live as long as three days in this agony. No wonder Paul reverently says in *Phil 2:8*, *...he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!* To say that Jesus was *crucified* for me is to say more than we'll ever realize. Then John mentions:

2. the sign above His head (19-22) In theory every condemned prisoner had one of these. One soldier would hold it out as he walked in front of the prisoner all the way to the place of execution and then it would be nailed to the upright above him:

a. it was a written accusation declaring the man's name and crime: *Jesus of Nazareth, "The King of the Jews"*. Pilate ordered it to be written, probably as a mockery of the Jews, as though he had conquered them and this is what he did to their king. This outraged them when they saw it and they begged him to change it to read, "This man

said...he was the king of the Jews!" But out of spite, Pilate wouldn't do it. He left it stand as an emphatic declaration rather than a false claim. But unknown to him, he was exactly right:

b. it was a Divine declaration He WAS the King of the Jews. He was God's chosen, appointed Messiah. They were indeed crucifying their King! God had written it! Next, John turns our attention to:

3. the soldiers at His feet (23-24) The average person had a turban or head-covering, an outer cloak or robe, a sash or girdle for the waist and a pair of sandals. These normally became the property of the executioners and four items were easily divided among four soldiers. But Jesus also had an undergarment, a seamless one-piece tunic, and rather than tear it in four:

a. they gambled for His clothes They cast lots (we'd say they threw dice) to see who would win it. A little sport, a little diversion. So callously done at the feet of one suffering so horribly. What cruel and un-caring men. And yet, John reminds us:

b. they unknowingly fulfilled the Scriptures David had prophesied hundreds of years earlier that it would be this way in *Ps. 22:18, They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing*. Notice how specifically both dividing and casting lots are predicted and the soldiers did both. Another evidence that God is the One truly in charge here, orchestrating every detail. John's reasoning is simple: "He said it, so that's why they did it!" And then John moves on again to tell us about:

4. the mother at His side (25-27) You can't help but notice:

a. Jesus' love for His mother and hers for Him. She was there with Him to the very end, standing near the cross, tears in her eyes and her very soul pierced with anguish. And in turn, His last act in dying was to do something to care for her. He would no longer be there. He could no longer protect or provide for her. He did not trust His own brothers to do it, as they had not yet believed. But there was one whom He did trust:

b. Jesus' trust in John John was Jesus' cousin, but also "the disciple whom He loved". He was the one to whom Jesus' heart was most closely bound, the one who seemed to understand Him most deeply. So, Jesus simply and lovingly said to Mary, "There is your son" and to John, "There is your mother". With those words He bound the two as mother and son from that day on and John immediately took her in to his own home as part of his own household. He fulfilled that trust until the Lord took her home. Now, with that last immediate care out of the way, we come to:

5. the culmination of His purpose (28-30) Notice three things here. First:

a. the fulfillment of all the Scriptures Every last prophecy concerning Jesus' life and death was fulfilled to the letter. *Ps. 69:21* had said, *They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst*. So, He cried *I thirst!* and the soldiers gave him wine vinegar mixed with gall, according to Matthew. Not the smallest part of one of the prophecies pointing to Him was left undone. This was the last little piece. And then Jesus makes:

b. the declaration of completion He shouted somehow with a loud voice, *FINISHED!* Oh, that is a blessed word. In the Greek it is *tetelestai* and it has many meanings. Completed! Done! Fulfilled! Accomplished! All that the Father had sent Him to do was now done, completed, fulfilled, finished. There was nothing left to do. But there is one meaning that I like above the rest. This same word is found in the records of many ancient business transactions, the same way we use it today on our invoices and receipts. We mark them PAID IN FULL. That's the one that speaks to me; Jesus shouted PAID IN FULL! The debt of my sins, the punishment I deserved, the sentence of death given to me, Jesus cries is PAID IN FULL! As Hebrews says, He offered one sacrifice for sins forever; no other will ever be needed. And having shouted that with His last ounce of strength, immediately we have:

c. the dismissing of His spirit He prayed, *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit*. and then note that he bowed his head and literally gave His spirit into the Father's hands for safekeeping. Matthew says He dismissed it, He sent it away. Normally when a person dies, the spirit leaves, the life force is gone and then the body sags limp, the head bows. Jesus laid His head to rest first and then left His body. It was a choice. He had said it Himself in *John 10:18, No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*" The soldiers did not take it from Him. The Jews did not take it from Him. The suffering of the cross did not take it from Him. On Friday afternoon around 3 PM He laid it down and on Sunday morning He took it up again! But now John tells us how:

III. Jesus Is Buried (31-42) First, he mentions:

1. the prophetic actions of the soldiers (31-37) Since a man could live for several days on a cross before dying, the soldiers had a way to speed up the process. It was called the *crucifragium*. They would take a hammer and with one hard blow break both of the man's legs. Not only was this more pain, but then he would be unable to push himself up

to breathe and would quickly die. This is what the soldiers did to the two thieves, but notice that when they came to Jesus, He was already dead, so:

a. they did not break His legs And John sees the significance of that immediately. Not a bone of the Passover Lamb was to be broken. And not one of His was. Yet:

b. they did pierce His side with a spear to make sure He was dead. They no doubt punctured His lung and out came all the fluid, the “water” as well as blood. John saw it and wanted to verify for all to come as an eyewitness that He was really and truly dead, but he also saw the significance, even of this, for Zechariah had prophesied that one day at His return *They will look on the One they have pierced...* The soldiers were simply carrying out God’s instructions to the letter. Then follows:

2. the hasty interment of His body (38-42) It is strange to see:

a. the two men who buried Him (38-40) Both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus now step boldly forward. Both were leaders among the Jews and part of the Sanhedrin. They had come to believe, yet were secret disciples out of fear. But now in the end, they wax bold and ask for His body. They lovingly take it down and carry it between them to:

b. the tomb where He was laid (41-42) It was Joseph’s own tomb and it happened to be nearby in a garden. There they laid his body down, carefully covered it with a large quantity of spices, wrapped it in white linen cloths, covered His face with a napkin and finally laid His body on a shelf in the stone cave to rest. As they went out, they rolled a large stone in place over the entrance to seal the tomb and went sadly to their homes. And there we leave Him until Sunday.

That is the story of the Cross, of how Jesus our Savior died for us. And yet we often think and even speak of it as though it is simply an event of history. *Dr. Tom Dooley wrote of being in China and building a cage for a small Himalayan moon bear someone had given him. An old Chinese man came by and saw the cage and began to cry. When Tom Dooley asked the old man why he was weeping, he told him this story: He and his son had been harvesting rice on a commune in Red China. They were not allowed to keep any rice for personal use. But the son had hidden a small bit of rice in his clothes to take to his mother who was suffering from disease. The rice was discovered, and the soldiers put the boy in a cage in the middle of the town. The cage was so small his son could not sit up or even move. The father and mother watched their son slowly die in that cage under the hot sun, starving, with insects crawling over his body. Many years had passed, but he still cried every time he saw a cage. The man could not see a cage without becoming passionate. How did Peter and John react when they walked by another crucifixion? Could they ever again look at a cross without remembering what Jesus suffered for them that day and being shaken?* [Tabletalk, Feb 1996. Page 28.] What about us? Today the cross has become the key symbol of Christian faith; crosses are everywhere. But the cross is more than a pretty emblem to hang on a chain around our necks or to adorn the walls of our churches. The cross was an instrument of torture, suffering and death. It is a reminder of all that our precious Jesus endured to save us. If we really love Him as we say we do, can we ever look at or think about or talk about the cross without our hearts being moved?

John: The Gospel Of Life

The Living Savior - Ch. 20

It has been a long, sad Sabbath for Jesus’ followers. After His burial late on Friday afternoon, they went slowly to their homes or wherever they were staying, confused, disillusioned, overwhelmed with sorrow. Jesus, their Lord was dead! Buried! Their hopes, their dreams were shattered. Saturday passed in silence and Saturday night was a second sleepless night. The only thing they could think of was the immediate. His burial had been so hasty; they could at least make sure His body had been properly laid to rest. As we pick up the story at the beginning of chapter 20, it is about dawn when:

I. Jesus’ Followers Discover The Empty Tomb (1-10) The discovery begins with:

1. the early visit of Mary Magdalene (1-2) Mary and (the other Gospels add) some other women went to the tomb early with more spices to anoint the body. On the way, they were discussing what they considered to be a great problem: who would roll away the stone? First, it was heavy, probably weighing several hundred pounds. Second, on Saturday the stone was sealed; that is, a wax seal was placed on it, the sign of Roman authority that it might not be moved and Roman guards were put in place to guard it. How would they get in? But when they arrived, they found the guards gone and the stone rolled away! That was the first miracle of resurrection morning. There was no way into or out of that tomb. It was sealed and guarded. Nobody could have stolen the body and no Roman soldier would ever desert his post. Matthew tells us that God sent an angel to do the job; He rolled away the stone and the guards fainted and then ran off! Why? Not so Jesus could get out, but so His followers could look in! At any rate, when Mary arrived, she looked in and the tomb was empty. She could only assume the body had been taken away, so she ran to tell the disciples and that led to:

2. the rushed visit of Peter and John (3-10) They ran as fast as they could to the tomb. John outran Peter, but when he came up, they both went inside. They too found it empty, but John noticed something significant, the graveclothes lying there. Jesus' body was gone, but the strips of linen were still lying in place and the cloth napkin that covered His face was not lying in the pile, but carefully and deliberately placed separately. I can't verify this, but one commentator says this means the headcloth was still rolled up in the shape of Jesus' face, the way it had been wrapped around it and separated from the rest by the distance of the neck. He feels it "looked as if the body were still in them when no body was there." In other words, it is as though the body around which they were wrapped suddenly disappeared (or passed right through them) and they fell in place exactly as they were. Nothing but resurrection in a spiritual body could have produced that! Anyone unwinding the burial cloths could never have made such a pattern!

But even the empty tomb and the arrangement of the graveclothes was not enough for the truth to dawn on the disciples completely. Peter and John left in confusion and went home. The empty tomb is one evidence of Jesus' resurrection, but it is not the primary one. Our faith is not in empty tomb but in a living Person. That's why next:

II. Jesus Shows Himself Alive To Mary Magdalene (11-18) Mary hung around awhile outside, weeping and crying, her grief renewed all over again, now, not only at His death, but also at the fact that even His body does not have proper burial. In her tears at one point, she looks inside the tomb again and suddenly:

1. she sees two angels (11-13) She sees angels in bright apparel. They speak with her and ask why she is crying, but even that is not enough. She remains unconvinced. She still believes the body has been stolen or moved and tells them so. But just then:

2. she sees Jesus Himself (14-17) She is so blinded by her grief and convinced that the body has been stolen that she can't even recognize Jesus standing there alive! The sound of His voice doesn't even register, that is, until:

a. He reveals Himself by calling her name There is something about someone you know really well and love dearly and the way they call your name. There is something precious about that. As soon as they say it, you know who it is by the way they speak it. Think about it: if I answer the phone and hear "John...", I can instantly tell whether it's my sister, my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law, my secretary or my wife. Jesus said, "Mary..." the way only Jesus could say it and had a hundred times before, and instantly she knew Him! Hey, do you know that Jesus does the same for you? *He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out!* - 10:3. I'll never forget in one of the musicals we did many years ago, we had Mike McMonagle all wrapped up playing Lazarus in a tomb over here on the side and the choir was singing, "I heard the voice of Jesus call my name" and our Jesus shouted "Lazarus, come forth" and out he came. And Mike's testimony is that it was in the darkness of that cardboard tomb as he heard the song, "I heard the voice of Jesus call my name", that salvation became real for him. He sensed Jesus speaking to Him personally, calling him by name to believe, to trust and he responded in faith! To call someone by name is to know them deeply and personally. And one day, Revelation says, Jesus is going to give you a white stone with a new name written on it which nobody knows, but you and Him. Why? So that for all eternity He can call you by name, His own special name for you! When Mary heard her name, she cried out *Rabboni*, "my dear Lord, my dear Teacher" and she must have lost all restraint, flung her arms around Jesus and clung to Him for dear life, as though she would never let go! So, gently, Jesus has to tell her to stop clinging to Him and then He reveals something new:

b. He states there is an intermediate time before His ascension "I'm resurrected, I'm alive again, but I'm not yet ascended. I haven't yet gone back to the Father as I told you I was going to. I do plan to, but not just yet. I need you to see Me. I need the disciples to see me. Go tell them!" There's going to be a time, which we know was 40 days, a period when He will appear repeatedly and verify His resurrection with many infallible proofs and give them instructions and then He will ascend to heaven to await His return. But look closely at verse 17. In that same sentence:

c. He declares our new relationship to the Father "My work has accomplished its purpose; it has been effective. My Father is now YOUR Father! My God is now YOUR God!" In other words, "YOU have been brought into relationship with the Father through Me. You are now His children, His sons and daughters, My brothers and sisters. Many sons have been brought to glory through My suffering. It worked. It is effective. Rejoice!" I don't know if that point was lost on Mary or not, but it shouldn't be lost on us! At any rate, off she goes:

3. she returns to tell the disciples (18) She says, "I've seen Him! I've seen the Lord! He's alive!" But even the empty tomb and the testimony of the first eyewitness were evidently not enough. They still didn't believe, so now on the evening of that Sunday:

III. Jesus Shows Himself Alive To His Disciples (19-23) *Read (19-20)* Suddenly, there He is, right in the room where they are gathered, greeting them, "Shalom!" You can imagine that they nearly jumped out of their skins! But Jesus:

1. He convinces them of His resurrection He shows them that it's Him and He's alive. You'll notice that:

a. He appears behind locked doors: That says He has a **new body**, one that can pass through doors and walls, one that can appear and disappear at will. One that is not bound by physical limitations any more. It's like the new resurrection body that you and I will get one day at His return. But at the same time:

b. He shows them His hands and side. Why? To prove that it's **the same body**. It has the nail prints in the wrists and the spear wound in the side. It is really Jesus, the same One who died and was buried in the tomb. They can see Him. They can touch and handle Him with their hands. He's real; He's not a ghost, a spirit. Luke tells us He asks for a piece of the broiled fish they were eating and He eats it just like they do and it doesn't fall through Him! He's real and He's alive. It's really Him, risen from the dead! And they finally believe. They are flooded with joy! They can't contain themselves. Now, once He has them convinced of that:

2. He gives them a commission (21-23) He lays out their purpose in life from here on. And He will repeat it four more times in the next 40 days, but this is the original of the Great Commission and it contains three elements. First:

a. He sends them to complete His work, as the Father has sent Him The Father sent the Son into the world to save those the Father had given Him through the cross. Now the Son sends us, His disciples, into the world to complete the job, to save those the Father has given Jesus through bearing to them the message of the cross! We are "sent ones", apostles (from the Greek *apostello* which means to send forth officially on a mission). And apostle in Latin comes out *missionary*. We've been sent on a mission, to complete the work that Jesus accomplished on the cross by taking the Good News of it to every person and every nation. That's why we're here now; that's the purpose of our lives, our life-mission. And to carry it out, in verse 22:

b. He promises them the Holy Spirit He does something really strange. He breathes on them. He blows His breath on them. And then He commands them, "Take, lay hold of, receive, the Holy Spirit!" What's He doing? He's pantomiming! He's acting out what is to happen to them exactly 50 days later. They will hear the sound of a rushing mighty wind, *ruach*, breath (same word) and the Holy Spirit will come and indwell them all. In the Upper Room He talked to them about the coming of the Spirit. Before His ascension He will tell them to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the promise of the Spirit. But here He is simply showing them that this mission, this being sent out, will not be accomplished by them, but by that Spirit which they will receive. They will have power. They will be equipped for this mission. And then in verse 23 He makes another powerful statement:

c. He declares that forgiveness of sins will be applied through them This verse has been interpreted in many ways. From it has been derived that the church has been given the authority to forgive sins and thus that priests have the authority to forgive sins. But I don't think Jesus had any of that ecclesiastical doctrine in view here. I think He's simply saying, "The success of this mission depends on you. Literally, *if of any ye may loose the sins, they are loosed to them; if of any ye may retain, they have been retained.*" (YLT) "I'm sending you to all men with the message of forgiveness of sins through the cross and if you get there and share it and they believe, their sins are loosed, sent away, forgiven! And if you don't, they are retained! I'm leaving for the Father's house and giving this work, this task, to you to complete; it's up to you to change the eternal destiny of the peoples of the world. Their forgiveness depends on YOU!" It's the same thing Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:18-19, *God...reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.* That's our mission, our ministry. We complete His work by taking the message to the world! That's to be our life-purpose! Is it yours?

The 10 were convinced, but the scene was incomplete. Thomas was missing; he wasn't with the group that night and he didn't take it well when they told him. So, a week later:

IV. Jesus Shows Himself Alive To Thomas (24-29) Notice:

1. his stubborn refusal to believe without personal experience (24-25) How obstinate! "Your word is not good enough! I can't believe unless I see, touch and put my hand in!" Do you know people like that? "Well, that's nice for you, but I only believe in what I can see. Unless I see it and experience it, it's not really real for me!" These are the people who say, "But how do you know it's true? That was 2000 years ago. I can't see Jesus and touch Him; how can I know He's real?!" That was doubting Thomas, one who had heard Jesus predict His resurrection repeatedly! Maybe that's what brought on:

2. his stern rebuke by Jesus (26-27) A week later Jesus came to the group again, just as He had on Resurrection Sunday, and greeted them with "Shalom!". But this time He came specifically for Thomas. He had heard every word Thomas said and He immediately commands him, "Look at Me, touch me, stick your hand in my side, do all the things you said you had to do. STOP doubting and believe!!" But Thomas never even gets that far, never even stretches out his hand. He no longer needs to. In that instant we have:

3. his personal confession (28) From the mouth of doubting Thomas we have that clear confession which expresses the faith of us all: **my Lord and my God**. In my mind I see him falling at Jesus' feet prostrate in worship. Not only is Jesus Lord to be obeyed and followed, but He is God to be worshipped and served! No Jew would ever say that. To call a man God would be the ultimate blasphemy. For him to call Jesus God is for him to be convinced that before him in a body stands God Almighty, Jehovah, in the flesh. He is not just the Son of God but He is God the Son, God of very God, God come in flesh to save us and now returning to glory! And now Jesus points out:

4. our blessing of believing without seeing (29) That's all who will ever believe after Jesus returns to heaven, that's all who have believed over the last 2 millennia, that's US! We can't see Jesus; He's not here on earth anymore. We have to do what Thomas could not. We have to take the word of those who saw Him; we have to accept their word as truth and believe without seeing! And Jesus calls us blessed, happy, because we haven't adopted that attitude of Thomas, we've chosen to believe in spite of the fact of not seeing personally! That's what we call people to, to believe our word without seeing, to trust what we tell them about Jesus. But the good news is that after they choose to believe, they DO see Him! Not with their eyes, but the Spirit bears witness with their spirits that they are children of God. They begin to see Him at work in their lives, to hear the whisper of His voice in their thoughts. But believing comes first. If you wait until you see, you'll probably never believe unless Jesus chooses to give you some vision or answer some prayer in a special way and He does do those things. But His call is to believe without seeing, to believe on the evidence of the eternal word of God. That is to be enough for us. And then, as John closes the story of this Resurrection Day, he adds a personal note which explains His:

V. John's Purpose In Writing These Things (30-31) There were hundreds of miracles and signs that Jesus did, but John only chose to record seven key ones and tell the story of Christ's death and resurrection. He explains that he deliberately limited his material; it is not meant to be an entire history of Jesus' life, but it's more like a tract that is given to the reader to make a point. What for? So:

1. that we may personally believe the Good News about Jesus There is John's altar call, his invitation. "I have told you these things; now I call YOU personally to believe that Jesus IS the Christ, the Son of the Living God! I know you can't see Him, but I'm telling you the truth of the Good News that Jesus is God and He came to earth and died for You. Now believe!" Why? So:

2. that we may personally receive His life *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* God wants you to have life; that's why He gave His Son. Jesus wants you to have life; that's why He came and died and rose from the dead. When you believe personally that Jesus is God and died for you, you receive His life.

We always characterize Thomas as a doubter, but Thomas became convinced that Jesus is alive. In fact, he became so convinced that we are told he later ventured into the regions of Persia preaching the Gospel. After that, they say, it was Ethiopia and finally he made it as far as India where he penetrated farther and farther east to a place near the mouth of the Ganges River. Many were converted to Christ and it aroused the anger of the Brahmin priests. So, they waited for him at a place where he retired outside the city for prayer. While he was praying, they shot him with darts and one of them ran him through with a spear. Thomas was so convinced that he not only took literally the Lord's commission and ventured into dangerous lands, but he was so convinced of the truth of eternal life that he willingly laid down his earthly life for the Savior. How about you? I know you know the story. But Jesus IS alive right now today and He calls you to believe it without seeing Him, to trust that He died for your sins and that He lives to save you. If you have done that, His commission is for you! The purpose of your life is to obey Him and spread the Good News to the entire world! Is that your purpose? And if you haven't done that, would you do it right now?

John: The Gospel Of Life

Feed My Sheep - Ch. 21

The last chapter of John's Gospel is the story of one final incident that occurred between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension. Jesus had made several appearances on that first Resurrection Sunday and then one appearance a week later as the disciples were gathered together so He could set Thomas straight. Now the story picks up sometime later, no longer in Jerusalem, but back up north in Galilee where the majority of Jesus' ministry took place and where His disciples were from. There on the shores of their familiar and beloved lake, this important scene takes place. It begins with:

I. A Miraculous Catch Of Fish (1-14) Let's read:

1. the circumstances of the story (1-6) The first question is, "Why are they back in Galilee?" The answer is that:
a. the disciples returned to Galilee at Jesus' command When He appeared to the women that first Sunday, He told them plainly in **Mt. 28:10**, "*Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me*" We have no record, but I'm almost sure Jesus would have repeated those instructions during His conversation with the whole group. I don't know how long it took for this instruction to sink in but eventually they got the message: "Go back to Galilee and you will see Me there!" It was in Galilee that Jesus wanted to spend the larger portion of those 40 days with them before His ascension, away from the pressure of the authorities in Jerusalem. When they arrived there, it was not clear where they should go or what they should do. Seven of the group happened to be together on this day and at least four of them were fishermen and their families still owned fishing boats. So, they did what came naturally:

b. Peter returns to fishing and the rest follow him. They get in his boat at evening for a night of fishing. They need both food and income and this is a ready means at hand. But they fail utterly. They fish the entire night, these sea-

soned fishermen, and have not a single fish to show for it. As morning dawns, they are coming in to shore discouraged and empty-handed. But as they draw near:

c. a person appears on shore and gives them direction They are still about a hundred yards out so they can't see clearly who it is. But sometimes people on shore can see schools of fish from their angle that people in the boat can't see. And, whether to humor him or just to give it one last try to catch some breakfast, they throw the net out on the right side at His suggestion and to their shock and surprise:

d. their net is suddenly overflowing with fish It's so loaded they can't pull it out of the water. Later they count them and there are 153 fish in there! That just doesn't happen, not even on the best of days! They stand in the boat struggling against the impossible weight of the net and suddenly:

2. the disciples recognize Jesus (7-8) John is the first to catch on, to realize that nobody could do this but Jesus and all were quick to agree. How did they know? Well, I'm quite sure it dawned on them that this:

a. it was a replay of Jesus' initial call to them When Jesus first called them away from their nets three years earlier, He had done almost the exact same thing. **Lk. 5:1-11** tells the story of how, after they had been fishing all night and caught nothing, that Jesus came by and used their boat to teach from. Then He told them to launch out into the deep and let down their nets. Peter had moaned a bit, "We've worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but because you say so, we will." But they threw their nets in and suddenly they were not only full of fish, but so full that they began to break when they tried to pull them in! In that moment they had realized Jesus' Divine power and had left all to follow Him. Now here they stand again with nets suddenly full and they know it could only be the Lord! Peter is so sure that he forgets the net and simply dives into the water to get to Jesus as fast as he can! But it was more than a way to identify Jesus:

b. it was a reminder of Jesus' lesson to them: He had told them that first time when they left everything to follow Him, ***Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men!*** That was to be their call. They were no longer to be fishers of fish and now it's clear that there is no going back to it. There was not going to be a return to life as usual now that He was leaving. They were going to catch men! And if they would listen to Him and obey Him instead of following their own plans and depending on their own abilities, they would be successful; their nets would be full. They would catch men! By the way, that's not a bad lesson for us either. The call to follow Jesus is the call to be fishers of men; that's what our lives are to be about, catching people for Jesus. But He knows where the fish are. He knows where exactly to let down the nets, to share the Gospel. And if we do what He says, the way He says it and depend on Him and not on ourselves, there will be a harvest! People will be caught in the Gospel net and become followers of Jesus. At any rate, the disciples finally arrive ashore with their load of fish and:

3. Jesus eats a meal with them (9-14) They found Jesus had bread at hand and fish already roasting on the fire, to which they added more. His appearance seemed to be slightly different somehow, but not one dared to ask who He was because they knew, they were sure it was Jesus. And no doubt, when He took the bread and gave it to them and took the fish and gave it to them it increased their certainty because:

a. it reminded them of Jesus multiplying the bread and fish Once before in this very region He had taken bread and given thanks like this and given it to them and taken fish like these and given them to them and 5,000 people were fed. And though there was no actual multiplication here, it was as though Jesus brought them 153 fish out of nothing! So together they sat and ate their meal. You see:

b. it verified again to them as a group that He was alive This was the third time He had appeared to them as a whole group. It was not just the report of one individual, but together they saw and experienced Him, talked with Him, ate with Him. And:

c. it demonstrated again the reality of His new body They touched Him; He ate the fish with them. This was no ghost. This was Jesus in the flesh, risen from the dead.

But the real point of His appearing to them this day was not so much about fish or breakfast. Last time He had appeared to give certainty to doubting Thomas; this time He came primarily to extend:

II. A Gracious Restoration For Peter (15-17) Peter had already seen Jesus alive at least three times but one issue remained to be addressed. Peter was once the ringleader, the spokesperson of the disciples, the first to open his mouth. But on that most horrible Thursday night when it counted, Peter had denied Jesus three times. It has impacted him and you can tell that it is still on his mind. Notice:

1. the sincere humility of Peter as Jesus asks him, "Simon, do you love Me more than these others do?" That night he had boldly declared, "even if all the rest fall away from you, I won't. No matter what they do, I am willing to die for you!" But he wasn't, and now he knows it. His boasting is gone. He won't compare himself to the rest again. He won't even use the strong word for love that is in Jesus' question. Jesus uses *agape*, sacrificial love. Peter simply replies, "Lord, you know I care for you." He uses *phileo* which means family love or friendship. Jesus asks him a second time

and he still won't say it, so finally Jesus asks the third time using his word, "Do you care for Me?" Peter knows the pride of his heart. He knows how lifted up he was and the depths to which he fell. He's not going to make that mistake again. But notice:

2. the deep concern of Jesus He's not looking for an apology or even an admission. Peter is already forgiven. Jesus has one thing on His mind. Three times He gives him the same command: **feed My sheep**, take care of them, shepherd them, pasture them, feed my precious lambs! That's what is on Jesus' heart. He's leaving soon; He's going back to heaven. He has to have somebody to tend His precious little flock of followers, someone to lead them, to show them the way, to watch out for them and warn them of danger, someone who will love them like He does, to whom they will also be precious. You see, Jesus loves His sheep. He laid down His life for those sheep! He is looking for people, then and now, who will be pastors, "pasturers", literally shepherds, who will take care of His flock. Leaders who will love them and tend them when they have problems and feed them with His word. And His point was, "If you love Me, then love My sheep; feed them, take care of them, shepherd them!" I was 19 when I heard that call, when Jesus made it clear to me that I was to be a pastor, to take care of His sheep. And after some 40 years of doing it, it seems to me that one of the most needed things both here and around the world is pastors. Jesus needs pastors to shepherd His flock, but here not many seem to be signing up for the job! In many areas of the world the church is growing by leaps and bounds and the crying need is always pastors, experienced mature leaders to tend the flock! Maybe He's calling some of you here, some of you young men, to that very calling, to shepherd His flock. Maybe He's saying to you: do you love Me? Then give your life to pastoring; feed My sheep! But beyond that, nearly all of us have a little flock for whom we are responsible, whether it's our family, our own children, or our Sunday School class or our Pioneer Club or our Bible study, some little flock of His sheep for whom we are responsible. And Jesus' challenge is the same, "Do you love Me? Then love them! Feed them! Shepherd them! Care for them the way I, your Great Shepherd of the Sheep, care for you!" So, here Jesus was giving Peter:

3. the renewed charge of leadership Three times he had denied. So, three times Jesus let him affirm, "I love you!" and, in essence, said, "You fell but it no longer matters. You are forgiven. You are restored. I put YOU in charge. I TRUST you! I entrust you with My sheep!" Now there's a word of encouragement for me when I fall, when I fail, and for all of us because we all fall! He will not hold it against us! He is willing to trust us again. He will not keep us from serving, lay us aside as useless on the shelf. No matter how far we have fallen, if we are now humble and we love Him, He has a place in His program for us to serve! He is a God of the second chance! And the third and the fourth! And, by the way, that's the same grace He calls us to extend to others when they fail us, to really forgive them, to lay aside the hurt they caused and to extend to them the grace of trusting them again.

That's what Jesus came for this day, to lift Peter out of the ashes of failure and humiliation and extend to him that marvelous grace. But in the process, He also gave him:

III. An Ominous Revelation Of The Future (18-23) For here we have:

1. Jesus' prediction of the manner of Peter's death (18-19) I don't think anyone really understood what Jesus was saying at the time, not even Peter. It did sound ominous. In old age he would lose his own freedom of will; someone else would determine what happened to him and would make him go where he didn't want to go. There he would stretch out his hands. It sounded like martyrdom; it sounded like being led to death. And John, who wrote this Gospel late in the first century, maybe 20 years or so *after* Peter actually died, is reflecting back to Jesus' words and can see clearly now that Jesus was indeed predicting the kind of death Peter would die and how it would glorify God. But no matter whether he understood it at that moment or not, the call was clear, "Follow Me!" That meant to death. That meant to take up the cross, to serve Him until death, no matter what. But notice:

2. Peter's concern over the future of John (20-22) Peter was feeling lonely in that moment. Jesus had in essence said, "You're going to die for Me!" And Peter's response was, "What about him! Does He have to die for You too?" And Jesus response was clear, "My will for His life is not your business; it is Mine! If I want him to die in old age in his bed, that's My right. You have only one responsibility - to follow Me, to do what I tell YOU!" Have you ever asked something like that? "How come I have to go through this and so-and-so doesn't?" Have you ever looked around from the lot that God has given you in life and wanted to complain to Him about how good other people have it? They don't have to suffer what you're putting up with. But Jesus says, "That's my business. Who are you to judge another man's servant! You have only one responsibility. Accept the plan I've laid out for you to serve My purpose and follow Me!" At the same time, we have:

3. John's clarification of a false rumor about himself (23) John was already an older man when he wrote this. He was the last of the apostles to die, somewhere around 90 AD and the only one who was not martyred. Because of Jesus' words "IF I want Him to live until I come..." people had started to look for His coming based on the timing of John's life, to assume Jesus had to come back before he died and he was getting old! But John wants to re-emphasize that that wasn't true. Jesus did not say that would be the case. He only said, "IF it is, that's MY business." And then finally at the end we have:

IV. A Closing Word By John (24-25) A two verse epilogue, if you will, in which:

1. he verifies the truth of what he's written In other words, He's swearing to the truth of his writing as an eyewitness, as one who lived through it, who saw the miracles and heard the words and wrote them down exactly. And at the same time:

2. he explains the limitations of what he's written He chose only to include certain important things from Jesus' life in his account. There were many others. And he uses what I'd call a slang phrase to make his point: "the whole world couldn't hold enough books to write it all down". He means that in three years there was SO much more that he didn't and couldn't tell. To us it means not to treat this book as a simple history book. It is an account of chosen key events which prove that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. It tells us what God has decided we need to know, not everything.

And you may have noticed that I deliberately left you hanging a moment ago when we were talking about Peter. I never did tell you what John already knew had happened to him. It seems that Peter stayed in Jerusalem for some years and then began to travel, as did all the other apostles. There is no Scriptural record of it and even the early church fathers tell us little, except this: somehow Peter and Paul ended up together in Rome in the 60's AD when that mad emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of the city and he started to slaughter them wholesale. Both men were said to be in the Mamertine prison in Rome and each one wrote a final letter from there. We have them in our New Testament as 2 Timothy and 2 Peter. Paul, because he was a Roman citizen, was held and later beheaded. But Peter was sentenced to the more common fate of crucifixion. So, one day, he was led out of the prison and up the Vatican Hill on the west bank of the Tiber River to be crucified, just as Jesus was led up Calvary's hill. Upon reaching the place of execution he is reported to have told the soldiers that he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord and he begged them to crucify him upside down instead. And there, face down, Peter, the one-time denier, glorified Jesus to the end. Jesus had said, "Follow Me!" and He did, all the way to a cross! I don't know whether Jesus has a cross for you like Peter or a dying in old age like John. But I do know you have to leave that with Him. He has only one command for you, "Follow Me! No matter where I lead, no matter what may happen. I am your living Lord. Follow Me and I'll meet you in glory!"

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Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

Wash One Another's Feet: Humility - 13:1-17

The last hours that Jesus had together with His disciples were spent in an upper room as they celebrated the Passover together for the last time. While they ate and talked together during this final evening, Jesus shared with them His last words. Last words are important. The things you say to the people you care about when you know you're about to die are the deepest things of your heart, the things you consider it most important for them to know. We are privileged that John records five entire chapters worth of the things that Jesus said that night and we have them to treasure for ourselves. These are likely the most famous last words in all of history. They are certainly the most valuable and we'll devote ourselves to studying them in order to deepen our hearts' passion for our Savior. There are 10 sections in this discourse and each one seems to have a particular phrase that stands out, a phrase that is familiar to us as Bible readers and one that seems to summarize the content of that section. We begin today in Chapter 13 by looking at:

I. John's Introduction To This Discourse (1-3) Make no mistake:

1. Jesus knew the importance of these last hours He knew the time had come for Him to leave this world (**1a**), that this was His last time with these men in whom He had invested the last 3 ½ years of His life and ministry, that this very night He would be arrested and, on the morrow, crucified. According to verse (**3**), He knew that He was about to leave earth and return to the Father and since God literally had put all things into His hands, He chose to do the absolute most important thing He could do with these moments:

2. Jesus showed His disciples the depth of His heart's love for them (1b) He had loved them all along. They were His own; they belonged to Him, but this night He wanted to love them to the uttermost, to show them the full extent of His love. That's what these words that we have in these chapters are; they are words of love. They are Jesus pouring out His heart to us, saying, "I tell you this because this is how much I love you!" These chapters are not simply a bunch of commands to obeyed and promises to be claimed; these last words are Jesus shouting to us, "I love you with all My heart, so please listen to what I am saying. It is important! I am saying it to you because you NEED it!" Listen, John was sitting there that night; he heard every word and this is his assessment looking back on it. That night was a night of deepest love and these words are words of deepest love. Receive them from the Savior who loved you enough to tell you these things!

However, the evening did not start out exactly the way one would hope that such a serious night would. The Passover meal involved then, and still does, a whole series of special ceremonial, symbolic actions which will only distract us now if we focus on them. However, one is worth noting. The various dishes and pieces had been prepared and the first cup of wine had been served to all the men as they reclined around the low table. As they finished this cup, the host was expected to get up and perform a ceremonial washing of his hands, but instead we read about:

II. Jesus' Action Which Shocked His Disciples (4-5) Their jaws dropped. They were absolutely floored, stunned speechless, as they watched Jesus take off his tunic and begin to wash their feet. Now there's one more piece of information you need to understand. This action:

1. it was prefaced by their prideful arguing - Luke records something that actually happened at the beginning of the supper. **Luke 22:24**,...*a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.* Can you even imagine it? Hours from the Cross and here they are around the table, beginning their last meal by arguing with each other about who is the greatest disciple, which one should be in charge, like a bunch of schoolboys clamoring to be "king of the hill". The thought of their selfish pride is appalling to us, although it's not like that kind of dispute doesn't happen among His followers in our churches even today - it does! But it must have broken Jesus' heart. **Luke 22:25-27**, *Jesus said to them, ...you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.* My guess is that it was at that very moment that Jesus abruptly stood up from the table, and instead of washing His hands as they expected, took off His robe, tied a towel around His waist and began one by one to wash their feet. It was absolutely shocking because:

2. it was an act that displayed abject humility Israel was a dry and dusty place. Streets and paths were unpaved dirt lanes and people did not wear socks or have enclosed leather shoes like we do; they wore simple sandals tied on with thongs. You could take a full bath and simply walk across the street to your neighbor's house and your feet would be dirty. So, every house had its basin of water near the door with a towel for the washing of feet. If guests came, it would be the job of the lowest-regarded person in the house to wash their feet, a servant or slave if there was one. If not, then the children and if none, the guests would be forced to wash their own because the homeowner would certainly not do it. It was the job of a lowly servant, a slave. Any person of any level of rank or importance would never do it. They certainly would never stoop to do it for one another, so there they lay round the table with their dirty feet. But now here is Jesus, their Lord and Master, the Son of God, naked to the waist, on His knees with a basin and towel, doing the job of the lowest servant, washing the dust of the street off their feet. The magnitude of this act was not lost on them so it is no wonder that the very first one He came to, Peter, raised an objection. You see:

3. it was an act that required submission Peter had to lift his feet and give them to Jesus to wash. He had to receive that act of humility, but it was tough **(6-7)** "Lord, what on earth are you doing?!" Peter stammered. And Jesus said, "I'll tell you later, give me your feet!" You see, humility:

a. it is hard for us to understand Humility is not the way the world works! Rabbis and Teachers and Masters, don't wash feet! Board chairmen and CEO's and managers don't clean toilets! Elders and teachers and pastors don't sweep floors or shovel snow or put out the trash! We could never imagine the President fixing us eggs for breakfast. Humility is not the system we're part of. We clamor for the top and when we get there, we leave the bottom to the bottom people! *Charles Treptow was in a building downtown. When he went into the men's room, he saw a man who seemed overdressed for the job he was doing. In a neatly pressed business suit, he was going from one urinal to another, using small scissors to remove the soggy cigarette butts. He smiled and greeted Charles, who commented, "I wouldn't want to have your job." "Oh, no, sir. I guess not, but it has to be done. It looks bad when customers come into the restroom. Makes people think we don't care, so I clean them up every day." "Do many guys throw their cigarette butts in the urinals?" Charles asked as the well-dressed man checked the stalls. "Well, every morning I pick six, eight, twelve out of every urinal!" "Why do they do that?" Charles asked. "Oh, they're just lazy...or they don't care. Maybe they weren't taught any better when they were growing up, or maybe they just do it for meanness. They probably never had to clean up after themselves," he said. Charles had finished and was about to leave. He asked one last question: "You been working here long?" The reply was startling. "Oh, I don't work here. I have an office across the street." "You what!" Charles exclaimed. "You don't work here, but you clean up the restroom? Why do you do it?" "Because of the next man who comes in here--I want him to notice that this place is clean and that someone cares." "Even if he throws a cigarette butt into the urinal you just cleaned?" Charles was getting a little edgy. "That doesn't matter," said the stranger. "Just as long as this facility is clean for an hour, or maybe two. And if the next guy who comes in here notices that the restroom is clean, maybe that will make an impression. Just maybe he'll leave the restroom a better place when he walks out..." After Charles washed his hands, he found himself using the paper towel to wipe up the water splashed around the sink. After throwing the paper towel in the trash, he stooped over and picked up a wet piece of paper from the floor and threw it away. Once outside, Charles saw the other man whistling as he straightened his tie and headed across the street to his office. Says Charles, "I departed a wiser and more alert man in the kingdom of God." [Parables, Etc. Dec 1995. Page 2.] Powerful examples of humility shock us and even move us, but much of the time:*

b. our flesh wants to resist it (8) Peter didn't want his feet washed by Jesus. Why? He thought it a shame, an ignominious dishonor that he could not be part of! But Jesus said, "If you want ME, this is part of the package. If I am Lord, you have to do what I say even if it goes against everything inside you; now give Me your feet!" And Peter's resistance broke. He couldn't bear the thought of losing Jesus; he loved Him too much so:

c. Peter eventually submitted completely (9-10) Now he's overboard the other way, "I want you, Lord; wash all of me if that's what it takes! Give me a whole bath!" And Jesus has to tell him, "You're missing the point!" You see, this foot washing:

(1) it was not really about cleansing at all. You realize, of course, that in that day they didn't have individual bathrooms, right? No pipes, no running water. They had public baths where there was a water source. So, every once in a while, you'd walk a few blocks to the bathhouse and get all clean. Then you'd put your sandals on and walk home on the dirt street. So, when you got home, you'd only have to wash your feet! He's teaching us this: **We're already cleansed** spiritually; we're made pure by Him. Our sins have been washed away because of His death on the cross. So, we need only to yield our feet to Him; we need only shake off our foolish pride and submit to Him in order to have part in His work. This powerful object lesson:

(2) it is really about surrendering our proud preconceptions, and we all have them. We'd never do this and we'd never do that! If we want to be part of what Jesus is doing in the world, pride has to go and we have to be willing to do absolutely anything He wants.

The silence is almost deafening as one by one Jesus goes to each man and washes their feet. Then He finishes and goes back to the table and the teaching moment is set. We have:

III. Jesus' Command To Us (12-17) The command stands out clearly: **Wash One Another's Feet**. Now what on earth does He mean? Is it that the washing of feet should be something we do when we gather together the same way we celebrate the Lord's Supper? A few churches have taken it literally to mean that and to this day they have foot washing services. There's nothing wrong with that; I've done it twice and it really is a humbling experience, even today. But it wasn't what Jesus was getting at. The early church knew what He meant. In **1 Tim. 5:10** Paul commended the type of woman whose habit is ... *showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds*. By washing feet, Jesus:

1. He provided us a binding example of humble selfless service to others, a live demonstration of what it means to ... *serve one another in love* - **Gal. 5:13**. It was the word *serve* and the concept of *servant* that Jesus wanted to imprint in their minds, not the physical act of foot washing. And even though you and I weren't sitting there that night, we still need to understand that this was not just something Jesus did for the disciples. He has done it for all of us!

a. He has "washed our feet" This simple act points to a much bigger act of servanthood. Look with me at **Phil. 2:5-8**. He "washed our feet" by taking off His heavenly glory and wrapping Himself in a human body and then putting Himself in the lowest place by allowing Himself to be hung on a cross as a common criminal in our place! He did it all for us! He, God the Son, the Lord of Glory, emptied Himself of all but love, He laid down everything to serve us by saving us! But Paul's point was back in verse 5, *Let THIS mind be in YOU!* You see:

b. His act obligates us to follow Him in doing the same That's what Jesus said in **(13-14)**. "You have to do what I did. It's not optional! It's not merely that you ought to take Me example to heart and try to be like me if you can. Look at the verb. It's not the kind of *should* that means it would be nice if you do it. It is the kind of *should* that means you are obligated! You are bound! I did all this for you! I became a servant and served you! You have no choice but to do the same if this means anything at all to you!"

c. to do otherwise is to esteem ourselves greater than Him (16) To say, "I'm not willing, I don't want to!" is to say that I am better than Jesus Christ, that I deserve better than Jesus Christ, that I am more important in my own value system than Jesus Christ! Jesus did what He did that night and He did what He did on the cross:

2. He did it so that humility would characterize our lives (15) "I've given you a living, visual illustration of humility, of servanthood. That's how I want you to live always! Humility is to be your hallmark forever! Now what does humility mean in practical day to day terms. Well, I believe that Paul explained it pretty clearly in the two verses just before he said, *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*. - **Phil. 2:3-4**. There are four simple principles in those verses that define humility. First:

a. we never strive to get our own needs met ahead of others You've never lived until you've stood in line in a third world country. Whether it's to get on a bus or to get waited on by a clerk, everybody literally pushes and shoves to get ahead of one another, to be first. That's selfish ambition; it's just normal to them, but it should be absolutely abnormal to us. To thrust others aside, to ignore their needs and strive for my own first, should be actually repulsive to us. It's not like our Savior. Second:

b. we never think that we are better or more worthy than others Paul said, *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?* - **1 Cor. 4:7**. Absolutely everything about who you are and what you have is a gift from God. It is simply a choice of His grace that you are not sitting in a pile of rubble in Haiti this morning or begging on the streets of Calcutta. If we have the mind of Christ, we see all people as people with the same needs and hurts and value as ourselves; we hold no vain, empty notion of glory about us. Third:

c. we always esteem others to rank above ourselves Notice he didn't say that we see ourselves as the worst or least of all people. Humility is not thinking that we are dirt, that we are worthless. That's simply lie-based thinking. We're all the same; we're no better and no worse. God loves and cares about us all. But in our thinking, we CHOOSE to rank others above us, to think about them and their needs and problems as a having a higher priority than our own. Or to say the same thing another way like verse 4 does:

d. we always focus on others rather than ourselves Look at the similar terms down in **2:20-21**. Humility is to take a genuine interest in the welfare, the things, the needs of others, in the things that concern Jesus, rather than our own things. It is to be always all about them, not about us. If the things of Jesus are your first priority, then others will be too. I know it will embarrass him, but I can't think of any better human example of this than our own Pastor Jim. If you know him, you know that he is always thinking about you first, always offering to help you, to do things that need done before you get a chance, going out of his way and sacrificing his own time and energy because you need something, willing to do the most menial thing and to help at the most inconvenient time. That's what Christ meant when He exhorted us, *Wash one another's feet!* We may be failing miserably, just as the disciples were at the very moment Jesus said this, but it is never too late to confess our sins and to ask Him to change our hearts.

Vernon Grounds, who was then the president of Denver Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, challenged the graduating class of 1973 with the truth of John 13:15, "Wash one another's feet!". Dr. Grounds told the graduates that he was going to present to them a tangible symbol that could help them in their future ministries. As the classmates filed quietly to the front, they wondered what it could be--a special Scripture verse, a little book, an inscribed medallion? To their surprise, it was a small square of white terry cloth. One graduate, who went on to serve as an overseas missionary, says, "We were commissioned to go into the world as servants. That small piece of towel, frayed and grubby from years in my wallet, is a constant reminder of that moving moment and the truth that our basic call is to serve." Go out today and always wash one another's feet.

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

One Of You: Apostasy and Denial - 13:18-30, 36-38

In this series of messages, we are examining together Jesus' last words to His beloved disciples during those hours they had together in Upper Room the night before He was crucified. We're studying them because He revealed these things out of a heart filled with love as the most important things he could leave us with. His first lesson as we enter John 13 was powerful. He modeled the complete humility He wanted them and us to have by washing his own disciples' feet and then commanded them: *Wash one another's feet!* Yet even as He knelt with the basin and the towel, there is another fact that is becoming foremost in His mind. He hints at it back in verse 10, even before He really starts: *...you are clean, though not every one of you!* And when he's done with the humility lesson, He returns to explain that thought directly at verse 18. We dare never forget the sad fact that:

I. One Of Jesus' Disciples Betrayed Him That Night (18-30) Read (18-21). Did you hear His voice tremble even as the awful words came out? *Listen, listen! One of YOU is going betray Me!* Beside Him, reclining all around the table, lay 12 men. Chosen men. Men He had prayed about selecting to become His own disciples. Men whom He had walked with through 3 ½ years of ministry up and down the land. Men into whom He had poured every ounce of Himself to prepare them to lead the Church He would build. Men whom He had come to love as deeply as His own family and with whom He planned to share a Kingdom forever. How it must have wrenched His heart to say the words, *One of YOU will betray me - tonight!*

1. Jesus warned them all that one of them was a traitor They needed to know. It was important. And I have no doubt that they were as absolutely stunned and saddened to hear it as He was to have to say it, but not nearly as stunned as they soon would be. In a couple of hours, they would be prayerfully resting in the dark in the Garden of Gethsemane. And a mob would come upon them, a mob with soldiers holding swords and clubs and torches, a mob that was bent on seizing Jesus and dragging Him away under arrest. And at the head of that mob, leading them on, would be one of their own number, Judas, the son of Simon, *Iscariotes*, a man from the town of Kerioth, one who had been shortly before eating with them around the table. It would be like us seeing one of our Elders rush in here this morning with an AK47 shouting "Allahu Akbar" and threatening to spray the congregation with bullets and suddenly realizing that all along he's been, not an elder of the church as we thought, but an undercover Al Qaida operative! Jesus knew they would be shocked, blown away, devastated, tempted by the Enemy to think that the foundation of their whole faith in Jesus was destroyed, that it was all a hoax, a pipe dream. So, He told them about it before it actually happened because:

a. He wanted to reassure them that this was all in God's plan He did that, in verse 18, by quoting a scripture, **Ps. 41:9**, *Even my close friend whom I trusted; He who shares my bread has lifted up His heel against Me!* He's saying, "That was written 1,000 years ago, not about David only, but about Me and about this night and about My betrayal. Though it surprises you, it has not taken God by surprise. It is a part of His plan that He has known all

along. Like the arrest and the crucifixion, it has to happen. This is not Satan winning the battle; this is God doing what He said; He's in control!" Look at verse 19:

b. He wanted this betrayal to confirm their faith instead of shaking it When Judas came running up with mob, He wanted them to be able to say, "Look, it's happening exactly as Jesus said it would; He really IS the Messiah! He really IS God! This is all happening just as He planned!" In reality:

c. He wanted to further confirm His own deity He wanted them to be convinced, according to verse 20, that HE was the ONE God sent and that by receiving Him and following Him, they had indeed followed God! He is who He claimed to be even though these things were happening.

What Satan wanted to use for evil, Jesus planned to turn around for good and in hindsight as they thought afterward about this saying and all the other things that had happened just as Jesus said, their faith was indeed confirmed and strengthened. But there at the table in that moment they were clueless as to what He was trying to say. So, Jesus said it again plainly in verse 21, *One of YOU is going to betray Me!* (22) Their jaws were hanging open, blank looks on their faces. And finally, they began to stir. The other gospels tell us that they began to ask one another who it might be and each in turn asked Jesus, *Is it I, Lord?*, but He did not answer. It was as this buzz was still going on that:

2. Jesus specifically identified Judas as the traitor (23-26) Jesus did not point out Judas before the whole group. Rather:

a. He whispered it privately to John as all were asking "Is it I?" John was reclining next to Jesus and Peter was across the table going, "Ask Him! Ask Him!" So, John leaned back against Him and whispered quietly to Jesus, "Lord, who is it?" And Jesus whispered back, *It is the one to whom I hand this "sop", this "piece", that I'm dipping in the dish.* Now please realize that this action was another part of the Passover Seder ceremony. The host at one point would take a piece of the lamb's flesh, wrap it in unleavened bread and dip it in a dish of bitter herbs. He would then pass it to the guest next to him who would break off a piece to eat and pass it on around the table. Judas must have been sitting to Christ's left and as He dipped the "sop" into the dish, He handed it directly to Judas. Thus, John would know who Jesus was pointing out, but nobody else would notice anything strange. But John doesn't tell the whole story. It was at that very moment that:

b. He warned Judas personally one last time - Mt. 26:23-25 The warning was public, out loud. But Judas was the last to say, *Surely it is not I, Rabbi?* just as Jesus was handing him the sop and Jesus whispered back quite literally, *You have said it yourself.* In other words, *Yes, it's you!* Do you see what He's doing? He knows that Judas has already been to the chief priests and agreed to betray Him for 30 pieces of silver. He knows that he's about to leave and go get the soldiers and lead them to the garden. He wanted Judas to know that He knew! But Jesus loves Him and is trying to pull him back from the brink of the abyss, from losing his soul for all eternity. He's quietly shouting, "Don't do it! You will regret that you were ever born, that you ever existed at all! You will burn forever! Turn back!". But Judas ignored that last appeal, took the sop without responding and in doing so:

c. Judas made his final choice to yield to Satan (27a) Satan entered him and took control. Look back to verse (2). Satan had already literally *put it into his heart* to betray Jesus. The idea was there, the opportunity in place. But now he chooses, he yields, he says "Yes" in his heart, and Satan takes over. The deed is now fixed and both he and Jesus know it. Judas knows he is discovered and he jumps up from the table and runs out. (27b-30) The other disciples have no clue what is happening, but when Jesus says, *Do it quickly!* it becomes apparent to us that:

d. Jesus set in motion the events leading to His own crucifixion He's saying, "Hurry, get the mob and bring them; don't be late!" It is apparent that He pressured Judas early in the supper, not only to root him out so that He could have time to freely share His heart alone with the 11 genuine disciples who loved Him, but so that everything would happen on schedule according to His plan. He looked like the victim that night, but He was in charge of it all! Now let's stop for a moment to ponder Judas; this is for us:

3. a most sobering lesson How can it be that one so privileged, so close to Jesus, so apparently one of His chief followers through and through, one who had perhaps even cast out demons and healed the sick in His name when he was sent out with the others, how can it be that such a one can turn on Christ, betray Him and be lost?! The sobering lesson is that **Apostasy happens!** Simon the Magician of Samaria believed and was baptized by Philip and followed him everywhere, but he later turned away and became an enemy of the faith. This has happened again and again from that night down through the ages. There have always been those who to every appearance seemed to be the most sincere followers of Jesus who apostatize, who turn away from Him and repudiate everything they once professed. You probably know some of them! Look with me at **Heb. 6:4-8**. There are those who understand the truth and know the Word and profess to believe it, who taste the blessings we enjoy, who see and experience the power of the Holy Spirit at work and yet they come to a point where they make a choice to reject it all and walk away. They leave the faith and say, "I don't believe that anymore" or "that's not real" and some even become enemies of the faith they once professed and they stay that way to the end of their lives and are lost forever. Now that shakes us! How can they do that;

how is that possible? Could it be true of people I know and love? Could they be apostates? Or worse, could it happen to *me*? Well, before I answer that let's look at a second fact Jesus brings up that complicates the matter:

II. All Of Jesus' Disciples Denied Him That Night (36-38) After Judas left:

1. Jesus warned them that He would be leaving them (33) and Peter picked up on that in (36). It is extremely difficult to harmonize the exact order of what was said when that night, but whether this discussion was continued at that moment or picked back up at the end of the night, it is important that we turn back to Matthew's account in order to see that it was not just Peter whom Jesus spoke to:

2. He then warned them that ALL of them would fall away - Mt. 26:31 They would all trip over a stumbling block personally and fall, not some day, but that very night! In the garden when the mob showed up, they would all forsake Him and flee to save their own lives. Jesus told them ahead of time they would do it and even that the Scripture in Zech. 13:7 predicted it, that it was part of God's plan, just like Judas' betrayal! But instead of listening and taking it seriously:

a. Peter insisted that HE would never deny Jesus (37) - Mt. 26:33 Can you hear the pride? "I will die for You! No matter what anybody else does, I WILL NEVER be unfaithful to You!" And he was not alone in that attitude:

b. all the disciples proudly joined him - Mt. 26:35 None of them believed what Jesus was saying. None of them could conceive that they would possibly ever deny Him. And we're like that too. But none of us has ever faced a mob with swords and clubs; none of us have been arrested and sentenced to death for our faith like our brother Shoiab Assadullah in Afghanistan was in January; none of us has ever been told to renounce Christ or die as our brothers and sisters have in many places in the Muslim world or in China. None of us has ever been tortured for days by the secret police or had a gun pointed at our head and been offered an immediate choice to live or die. It is easy to boast of what you will "NEVER" do, while reclining at a table or sitting in a pew. I think those words *YOU WILL ALL* should take us back. They tell us that apart from the supernatural power of Christ, we all have a breaking point! They tell us that if it were not for Christ's keeping us, that none of us would stay faithful to the end! But they didn't get it, especially Peter, so:

3. Jesus specifically predicted Peter's thrice-repeated denial (38) "Before tomorrow morning, YOU will deny knowing Me three separate times!" You all know the story of how Peter did just that, how he was brave enough to follow Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but there when he was confronted by people three times he cursed and swore that he never knew Jesus. And then a rooster crowed and what he had done hit home like a ton of bricks and he ran out into the night and wept bitterly. But, fortunately for us, that sad prediction was not all that Jesus said to Peter that night. Turn with me to **Lk. 22:31-34**. Oh, see the love of our Savior. He told us what was really happening in Peter's case and why it was different from that of Judas.

a. He explained the limited nature of Satan's power Satan has to ask permission to shake our lives, to bring in events like what they experienced in the garden that knock us to our knees and blow away all the stuff that's unimportant to us. Just like he had to ask God for permission to test Job! And God chooses sometimes to say "Yes", to let him do his worst to try to show that our faith isn't real and that it will blow away like so much chaff in the wind when we're pushed to the limit. But Jesus:

b. He confirmed the reality of Peter's faith and His undergirding of it "I have prayed for you; I am the One holding you up; your faith is NOT going to fail! I will not let it! You will deny knowing Me and that will break your self-centered pride, but in your heart you will STILL believe. Your faith is genuine!" And:

c. He assured Peter of his and their repentance and return "You will be sorry afterward for what you did and you will repent of it and ask forgiveness and you will return to following Me. This will only be a momentary stumble for you! And so will the rest, so when you recover from your fall, strengthen them!" Yes, apostasy happens. Some people, like Judas, do fall away from the faith and NEVER return. But here is:

4. the most crucial lesson: Perseverance is true! The writer of Hebrews went on to say, "Yes, some apostatize and end up burned, *but we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.* - **Heb. 10:39**. Genuine faith perseveres. If our faith is true, if it is real, if Jesus Christ has really come to dwell in our hearts and transformed us and regenerated us, then we will continue to believe to the end, no matter how many times we stumble and fall. We will persevere because we are kept by the very power of God. Jesus said: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*" - **Jn. 10:27-30**. Why do some, like Judas, fall away forever when they seem in every way to be one of us? The truth is they're not! It's not real! Their faith, whatever it was, was not saving faith that brought about a permanent transformation of the heart. If it was, they couldn't undo it, His Spirit would move them to repent when they stumbled. They would come back; they would still believe in their hearts, even though they tried to run away like Jonah!" Listen! If your salvation is real, you cannot lose it! No sin, no fall, no denial, no failure, no lapse,

can take it away from you because Jesus has prayed for YOU that you will be with Him in heaven and you will be; your faith will not fail. You will persevere despite all your failings and how badly you feel about them. This message, just like Jesus' words, is not meant to create doubts, but rather to give assurance to the majority of those who follow Him. However, if your salvation is NOT real, God knows that and you probably do too. Judas had been thinking about betraying Jesus for a long time. He had explored it. He had made a bargain ahead of time. He knew in his heart that he wasn't like the rest, but He ignored Jesus' plea and warning and chose to go ahead and sealed his fate. He could have stopped. He could have repented right then. He could have confessed his awful sin and been forgiven and joined the ranks of the truly faithful. But instead, he made a deal with the devil and lost everything. Listen, just because you prayed a prayer when you were a little kid or went forward in some meeting or raised a hand does not guarantee heaven. Is your heart genuinely transformed? Are you resting completely in Jesus and in Jesus alone to save you? If not, repent now; it is not too late to heed the warning!

But how can we tell the difference between an apostate and a backsliding genuine believer? We can't. Later that night Judas and Peter don't look much different, do they? While falling away is going on, only GOD knows who's real and who's not. It only becomes clear to us later on. One hangs himself in agony; the other dries his tears and goes back to being what he always was and becomes the leader of the church. *In his Bible commentary Adam Clarke [on John, end of chapter 13] tells this story from the reign of Queen Mary of England. Hard as it is for us to believe, it was an era when those loyal to the pope burned all the Protestants they could convict for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation. A poor man who had received the truth of Christ in theory, but had not yet felt its power, was convicted and sentenced by the Queen's tribunal to be burned alive. While they were taking him to the place of execution, he was very pensive and melancholy; and when he came within sight of the stake, he was overpowered with fear and terror, and exclaimed, "O! I can't burn! I can't burn!" Some of the attending priests, supposing that he wished to recant, spoke to him about recanting. The poor man still believed the truth; he felt no disposition to deny it. But he did not feel such an evidence of Christ's acceptance in his own soul that would enable him to burn for it! He continued in great agony, feeling all the bitterness of death, and calling on God to reveal himself through the Son of his love. As he was praying, God broke in upon his soul and he was filled with peace and joy in believing. He then clapped his hands, and exclaimed with a powerful voice, "I can burn! I can burn!" He was bound to the stake, and (to use Mr. Clarke's expression) burned gloriously, triumphing in God through whom he had received the atonement. God causes those with true faith to persevere to the end, whatever it may be; He always shores them up in their faltering along the way.*

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

A New Commandment: Love - 13:31-35

What a night Jesus' disciples must have been having. It was surely unlike any Passover meal they had ever eaten before. At the very outset Jesus astonished them by taking off His robe and washing their feet to teach them the humility He wanted from them. Then He shocked them by saying, *One of YOU shall betray Me!* and soon Judas got up and rushed out into the night, leaving them all shaking their heads and wondering what was going on. As the evening wore on, He took in His hands the bread, and at the end, the cup of wine, and talked about His own death and how they should remember it always. That's what the other Gospels focus on, but John recalls the precious words Jesus spoke all the way through and he remembers that:

I. When Judas Left, Jesus Began To Prepare His Disciples For His Own Departure That's what the entire conversation was about that night. At the very outset:

1. He tried to shape their view of the awful events to follow (31-32) You know, those are the kinds of verses that we tend to just read over and pay little attention to, because we see the words as some kind of "God-talk" that we don't really understand or need to. Let's not make that mistake, but rather, pause there for a moment to see what Jesus is really trying to tell them. First off, I think He's saying that with Judas having left:

a. what is about to happen is now as fixed as if it was already completed The whole process of the events of that night and the next day is now set in motion. Judas is going to the High Priests. He knows where Jesus will go after supper and he will lead the mob straight to the garden and that will lead to an arrest and trials and to the crucifixion. These are the events He meant in which this glorifying would happen, yet He says *NOW* and uses the Greek aorist tense to indicate that this process, these events, are already complete! In other words, they are fixed and unstoppable. They will occur and that has to be accepted and understood; they have to see from God's perspective, not from their earthly appearance. That's why Jesus says that:

b. what is about to happen would bring glory to God and to Christ Jesus' dying looks to all appearance as though God failed, as though He failed. God's own Messiah is killed by wicked men! Where is the glory in that? The one who claimed to be God, to be the Christ, hangs pitifully on a cross and expires! Where is the glory in that? It's in the fact that God saved the world through that cross! It's in the fact that Jesus brought us all to heaven by that cross! Paul caught the glory and said, *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* - Gal. 6:14. The most awful events of history are actually the greatest act of love the world has ever known! God so loved the human race that He sacrificed His Son to

save them! Jesus loved us and washed us from our sins with His own blood! Ever after generations of believers down through history to this day have looked at the cross and cried, "Glory! Glory to God!" That is what Jesus is trying to tell them, difficult as it was for them to grasp that night. And He's also clearly explaining that:

c. what is about to happen would happen immediately, at once. In just hours the mob will arrive in the garden. Jesus will be arrested, taken back into the city and there will be two trials, all before morning. By 9 AM Jesus will be hanging on a cross on the hill of Golgotha and by 3 in the afternoon, less than 20 hours from this moment, He will be dead. There was no more time to prepare; this meal was IT! And so, in what little time Jesus had left:

2. He tried to help them understand the larger view of what it meant (33)

a. He spoke tenderly to them in a new relationship: For the first and only time that we have recorded, He called them: **My children**, "my little ones". It was a term of endearment that John caught right away and adopted for himself. He used it in his ministry later in the churches and repeatedly in the letters we have from him in our New Testament. *My dear children...* It meant, "You are more to Me than followers. You are more precious to Me than associates or fellow workers. You are more dear to Me than even friends. You are my very children, my own flesh and blood whom I have brought forth spiritually." John was overwhelmed by that thought. He wrote, *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! - 1 Jn 3:1.* And that doesn't mean just them, dear friends! *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. - Jn. 1:12-13.* We are ALL the very children of God since we received Christ; God loves us as daughters, as sons. He is not just some heavenly Monarch who runs the world; He is our very Father in heaven! He is tender toward us, gentle with us, and would have us crawl upon His lap and lean upon Him! And so just as you would do with dear children that you love:

b. He told them He was leaving and that they could not go with Him. The pattern they had known of following Him around, of walking on roads with Him and eating meals with Him, is now over. He's telling them that **they would be alone**, without His physical presence, for the first time. They would be on their own now and would have to trust Him without seeing Him. It was a scary thought and they didn't really understand what He meant. When He had told the Jews the same thing back in chapter 7, they thought He meant that He would leave Judea and go to some foreign area. Peter wasn't much better (36); he was still thinking of a physical place. But Jesus simply and patiently:

c. He assured them they would follow Him later But Peter's still saying, "Whaddya mean I can't follow You! I would follow you anywhere! Into prison, into death!" And that's when Jesus predicts his rooster experience but He doesn't leave it at that. The familiar comforting words of chapter 14 are the conclusion of this little discussion and while we'll study them next week, let's simply say that at that point:

d. He explained to them that He was going, not to a physical destination, but **to the Father's house (14:2) and that He would come back later and get them (14:3)** That's the big picture. "Through the events that are about to happen, I'm going to leave you for a good while. I'm going to heaven, to the Father, to get a place ready for us and then I will come back and get you and take you there too!" That's how Jesus gently breached with them the idea of the whole church age, that He would leave them to finish His work on earth and when it was all done, He would come a second time. Not what they wanted to hear! One of them sadly confessed three days later on the road to Emmaus, *We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.* They wanted Jesus to be King, here and now, to rule and change the world, not to go away to heaven and come back later!

But even though they didn't grasp His going away, Jesus knew what they needed most.

II. With Himself Leaving, Jesus Bonded His Disciples To One Another And to do that:

1. He gave to them a new commandment (34) A new commandment. A new rule of life to follow. Just as God had given Israel 10 commandments to govern their lives, now Jesus gave His people one, and only one: **Love one another**. In one way it wasn't exactly *new* in the sense of them never having heard it before. It was even in the Law, *love your neighbor as yourself!* Jesus had told them long before that all the Old Testament commands relating to people could be summarized in that one command. He had gone even further and exhorted them to love their very enemies! That was radical! Yet this was a fresh command to them for several reasons. First of all:

a. it was a new order of love He desired The Holy Spirit is careful to have John use the Greek word **agape** to reveal what Jesus meant here. You know how loosely we use the word *love* in English. Kirsten loves ice cream, so love can mean to like or enjoy something or someone. Your girlfriend says, "I love you", and you feel this rush of passion as your hormones race, so love can mean romantic attraction. Or we can tuck our little child in at night and say, "I love you!" So, love can mean that family bond of caring that we naturally have. But the Greek language is not like English; they had separate words to indicate all of those things and they used them freely. However, God led the Biblical writers to use the one word that the Greeks themselves rarely ever used; you can't find it hardly at all in Greek writings until Jesus' day. Christians literally gave this word, *agape*, its meaning. It is a love that goes beyond human instances of caring. One source says it *represents divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing, active, voli-*

tional, and thoughtful love... it was used by the early Christians to refer to the self-sacrificing love of God for humanity, which they were committed to reciprocating and practicing towards God and among one another. C.S. Lewis describes it as the highest level of love known to humanity—a selfless love, a love that was passionately committed to the well-being of the other. [Wikipedia]. Agape is defined by the Cross. It is the love found only in the character of God which caused Him give His only Son to die as a sacrifice to save a world that had rejected Him. It is a caring that continues despite any cost, a commitment that perseveres without any reward, and it is a choice that is pursued without any obligation. God places that love, His own love, in our hearts by His Spirit. Jesus wanted that new order of love to spring into being and flourish among His followers. Second, it was fresh because:

b. it was directed toward a new object The commands to love neighbors and enemies still stand, but they are one-sided. You do the loving; they do the receiving. There is no sense of something coming back in your direction. But the Greek word for **one another** is reciprocal. Each of us is to love the other and the other to love us all at the same time. The church is to be an entire community where this unearthly love of God is flowing back and forth between all the members of it in every direction, where all the believers are caring for each other's well-being, putting each other's interests first and even sacrificing for one another all the time. And since we know the church is soon going to be composed of vastly different people, there will be Jew and non-Jew, people from all ethnic groups, men and women, rich and poor, slave and free, all loving each other without distinction. All those things that divide the rest of the race fall away and we are like one big family stretched out all over the world, the very family of God, all so vastly different but welded together into one by His Spirit and loving each other deeply with God's love. And wherever a group of us meet locally, we replicate a small segment of that vast family. Paul wrote, *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.* - Gal. 6:10. We always display love to all the people around us whenever we have the opportunity, but in the family of believers it's happening constantly, all the time, in all directions. This is a new thing; there is nothing like this anywhere on earth. Thirdly, it was fresh because:

c. it was demonstrated in a new measure. Jesus said, **as I have loved you!** Now He's back to referring to the cross which is about to happen, in the past tense! They didn't realize it at that moment. It would be a number of days more until they would fully grasp it, but His loving them meant Him laying down His life for them! A little while later that evening He repeated and explained Himself in **15:12-14**. "Love is laying down your life for someone; that's what *agape* means! And that's what I'm doing for you; now do the same for each other!" Love is Jonathan, protecting David, defying his own father King Saul and giving away his future throne, going to David while he's hiding in the wilderness to encourage him and saying, *Don't be afraid...My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you.* - 1 Sam. 23:17. Love is those early believers in Acts sacrificing for one another: *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had... There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.* - Acts 4:32-35. Love is the way the Galatian believers treated Paul: *Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself... I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.* - Gal. 4:14-15. Love is radical! It is picking up a cross; it is dying to self every day and meeting the needs of the other the way that Jesus did! And:

d. it was expected to be perpetual The Greek of verse 34 says literally, **keep on loving one another!** It's not a once and done thing; it's not a thing that has limits; it's a command that is to characterize the whole of our lives! It is a way of life, just as Paul wrote the Ephesians: *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* - Eph. 5:1-2! "You do the same! Give yourselves up for one another! That is a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God! Live that way!"

Now Jesus concludes His commandment in verse **(35)**:

2. He explained it would impact the world If they would obey and live this way and become a community of people who practiced radical love toward each other continually:

a. this practice would distinguish them anywhere in the world All men, any human being anywhere, would notice it because it would be SO different from anything they had ever seen before. Human beings don't live like that, not in the natural. It is a supernatural way to live and people would be drawn to it, to wonder what it is that makes that kind of living happen. And the intent is that:

b. this practice would identify them as being Christ's followers The followers of Mohammed bow down on their faces toward Mecca five times a day or cover their heads and faces if they're women. The followers of Sikhism wear turbans on their heads. The devotees of Hinduism make offerings of rice and flowers to their gods and the disciples of Buddha sit and meditate. But the followers of Jesus love each other with His radical love; that's how HE wanted to be known throughout the world.

When we live that way the community around us will sit up and take notice. They will be drawn to us and to Him. People will give their lives to Christ; they will want to be part of His body because they see the way we love each other - or else they'll be completely repulsed by it. Radical love has always been the hallmark and the trademark of the true church. Around 200 AD an early Christian author named Tertullian wrote in Rome during a time of persecution to defend Christianity. He said: *[Our offerings are used] to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. "See," they say, "how they love one another", for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; "how they are ready even to die for one another", for they themselves will sooner put to death.* Much of self-centered Roman society was repulsed by the selfless love of the Christians, but they KNEW they were Jesus disciples. Love was their defining mark and it is still to be ours today. And if it is, it will touch and impact our world as it did theirs. John was so taken with this new commandment that it became his life's theme. You read it over and over in his New Testament letters. *Church tradition says that when John was evidently an old man in Ephesus, he had to be carried to the church in the arms of his disciples. At these meetings, he was accustomed to say no more than, "Little children, love one another!" After a time, his disciples wearied at always hearing the same words and asked, "Master, why do you always say this?" "It is the Lord's command," was his reply. "And if this alone be done, it is enough!"*
[\[www.biblepath.com/john1.html\]](http://www.biblepath.com/john1.html)

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

My Father's House: Hope - 14:1-14

What an intense time these last hours in the Upper Room were for the disciples. Jesus had given them an astonishing lesson in *humility* followed by a command to *wash one another's feet*, then gave them a stern *One of You...* warning about *apostasy and denial* that ended in Judas leaving abruptly. After that, He proceeded to tell them that He was leaving and gave them a *new commandment* to *love one another*. But they could not grasp the fact that Jesus was leaving and Jesus could not leave Peter's question of 13:36 unanswered, *Lord, where are you going?* So, in those beautiful words in the first half of chapter 14:

I. Jesus Explained That He Was Going To The Father's House (1-3) The term *heaven* is a fuzzy, unclear thing for many people. Some picture it is some state of bliss that people enter when they die, a kind of nirvana where we are at peace with the universe. Others think heaven is a mythical place that modern people don't believe in. But Jesus said clearly that:

1. it is a real place It is an actual location to which you can go. John was taken there in a vision and saw it all! It contained a city, a huge city half the size of the United States and equally as high with walls and gates and foundations. He saw it measured with a measuring rod; it has real dimensions. It is as real as New York, Chicago or Philadelphia. It is the place where Jesus came from when He came down to earth in the body of a baby and it is the place where He went back to as He ascended into the air after His resurrection and left His disciples. Jesus said:

a. it is the home where our Father dwells In Greek it is His *oikia*, the house that he lives in. Just as you have a house where you live that you call, "my house", or "my home", the Father has a house, a place where He dwells in all His glory. In his vision, John saw Him there, seated on a glorious throne above a crystal sea of glass surrounded by an emerald green rainbow and all the hosts of heaven worshipping Him. Of course, He is always present everywhere all the time, but this is the home where His Presence dwells in all its fullness and, Jesus said:

b. it has many rooms for all His children The King James used the word "mansions" which spawned all the Gospel songs about heavenly mansions and makes us think of heaven as a kind of huge housing development with giant buildings like you might see up in Bucks County or in the stone mansions of Chestnut Hill. But the word is really "dwelling places", "places to stay, to live". Try painting a different mental picture. In Bible times, as in many places today (India, for instance) a whole extended family might live together in one big house belonging to the patriarch, the father of the family. But in that house, there would be separate living chambers for each of the sons and their families, for the aged parents, for the servants and so on. We'd call it a compound and perhaps it would have a central courtyard in the middle. Jesus said, "My Father's house is a compound so big, so huge, that it has *many* rooms, many dwelling places, enough for all of the millions and millions of His children who will ever believe and more! As the Newsboys sing, *It's a big, big house with lots and lots of rooms!* But the best news is that:

c. it has a place specially prepared for us In it there is a place, our own personal portion, our own eternal living space set aside, reserved and made ready for our arrival. Jesus Himself is there, right now, today, personally seeing to all the preparations. Imagine what it must be like! And the good news in verse 3 is that:

2. Jesus will return to take us there to be with Him forever Of course, His primary meaning is that He is coming again, that He will return one day, perhaps soon, and call all of His children up to meet Him in the air and return to

heaven with Him. We call that the Rapture of the Church and we live with our minds fixed and looking forward to that. But until that day, one by one as we die, He still takes us to that place. Paul said that to die is *to depart and be with Christ which is better by far*. At death, we go to the place where Jesus is, to the Father's house. So, His real point is: "You will come to the Father's house and you will be with me where I am. You'll remain with Me there, forever, that's My plan and purpose, even though we have to be separated for a little while." The reason He told us this is that:

3. we are to live resting in this HOPE The disciples were about to be scattered, to see Jesus arrested by a mob and tried and scourged and crucified. Then they would see Him again for a few days, alive after His resurrection, and He would leave them. Events like these could shake them to their very core; circumstances like this could destroy their faith. Jesus said, "Trust ME! I'm going to die and rise and leave. This is all part of My plan to save you. I'm going to the Father's house and you're coming too. You'll be with Me forever. If this was not true, I would have told you! Trust ME, no matter what circumstances hit you in the next few hours, no matter if it seems that all hope is lost and gone, no matter if it seems you will die!" We are to continually live in HOPE! And hope means that:

a. we confidently trust that Jesus has told us the truth If it was not like this, if the Father's house were not real and waiting for us, He would have told us! We trust Him and so:

b. we patiently wait, expecting it to happen Look with me at **Rom. 8:24-25**. Hope means we know with absolute certainty that something is going to happen, although we don't see it right now, so we wait, we endure through everything that happens, confidently knowing that at God's perfect time, it will happen!

In AD 125, a man named Aristides sent a letter to an acquaintance to give this explanation for the rapid spread of Christianity: "If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby." He did exactly that! He went to the Father's house! What circumstances do you face this day? Do they seem impossible, overwhelming? Does it seem that you will die? Even if you do, you will only leave this place to go to the place where He went, the place prepared for you, to the Father's house, to be with your Savior forever! Look forward to it! Live in hope! Now in His next words:

II. Jesus Declared The Way To The Father's House (4-6) The word *way* means a *road* or a *path*. To go to a place, you have to know the way to get there. But when it comes to going to the Father's house, Jesus said that:

1. He Himself IS the way It's not a set of directions like turning left or right and driving so many miles. It's not a process you complete. You can't get there by doing good deeds, by refusing to do evil. You can't get there by being religious, by saying prayers, by chanting mantras, by self-denial, by making offerings or by giving to the poor or by accepting certain doctrines. ***The path is to be joined to a Person.*** Jesus Himself IS the way, so going to the Father's House requires knowing Him, having a personal relationship with Him! People say that they seek after truth and try to figure it out, but:

a. He is the source of all truth He IS the truth. In Jn. **18:37** He said...*for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*" People are trying to figure out what's true, to find out how to get life, what to do to live after they die. But:

b. He is the source of eternal life He Himself IS life! All life comes from being connected to Him. Look with me at **1 John 5:11-12**. That's exactly what Jesus was saying, "Know Me and you have the way, know Me and you have the truth, know Me and you have the very life of God! Knowing Me is life eternal!" Moreover, Jesus said that:

2. He is the ONLY, the exclusive way to the Father There are not many ways to heaven. It is not true that the Muslims have one way and the Buddhists have another and Christians have another. It is not that you have your way of believing this or that or doing this or that and I have mine and we all end up in the same place. There is only ONE way to the Father's House and His Name is Jesus. No one can get there without Him. No exceptions, not here nor in the mountains of Tibet nor the jungles of the Amazon nor in the projects of New York City. That's why we have to tell the whole world!

Now Jesus goes on from the Father's House to talk about the Father Himself **(7-11)** Here is another wonderful truth:

III. Jesus Revealed The Person Of The Father In verse 8 Philip expresses:

1. our human thinking: we wish to see the Father Somehow, we get the idea that Jesus is for us, Jesus loves us, Jesus died for us, but the Father we're not so sure about. He's a Holy God who hates and punishes sin. Can we really stand in His presence; can we really live in His house? "If only we could see the Father with our eyes, just once, just one glimpse, that would do the trick. We could face anything! Then we would KNOW that He is for us." But Jesus' answer astonished them, "Here I am, don't you recognize Me?" You see:

2. Jesus was the Incarnation of the Father John wrote in **1:18**, *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.* In Jesus the Father was walking about in a body of flesh. Look what Jesus said:

a. the Father, though in heaven, was IN Him and He was IN the Father The Father literally lived in His person, in His body. They were One. So:

b. the Father spoke through Him, speaking His words His words were the very words of God. And:

c. the Father lived through Him, doing His works His actions were the very acts of God. The point was to give them and us assurance that:

3. we who have seen Jesus have seen the Father! "The Father whose house you're going to is standing right here in front of you telling you that you're going to His house!" Or in our case today, since we've known Jesus, we've known the Father! We are reconciled to God. We have a place waiting for us in His house! We're safe, we're sure, we can face anything! We can live in hope because we KNOW the Father through Jesus! And lastly as we close this portion of the discourse, we have:

IV. The Promises Jesus Gave Us Because He Went To The Father (12-14) There are three of them. First, He says:

1. we will do what He was doing because He lives through us Everything Jesus said about his relationship with the Father is now true of our relationship with Him. Just as the Father, though in heaven was IN Him, now Jesus, though in heaven, is IN us and we are IN Him. He literally lives IN us. And just as the Father spoke through Jesus, Jesus will speak through us, speaking His words, if we choose to let Him. And just as the Father lived through Jesus' body doing His works, Jesus will live through us, doing His works, if we let Him. We will do what He was doing. He will live out His life through us, even though locationally He is in heaven. In fact, He promised at the end of verse 12 that:

2. we will do even greater things than He did while on earth Not that we will do greater or more impressive miracles than He did, but the scope of what we do will be greater. After Peter's first sermon 3,000 people believed and after the second there were 5,000. By the end of Paul's life there were believers in literally every major city all over the Roman Empire, the whole Mediterranean world. Today the Name of Jesus is worshipped in literally every country on the face of the earth, even if only by a few. The things Jesus *began* to do, He planned to continue doing through us and bring to completion! We can expect it. But here's the best assurance: just as the Father *always* heard Jesus and gave Him whatever He asked because He always did what pleased the Father, just so Jesus says in verses 13-14 that:

3. He will do whatever we ask Him in His Name for the glory of the Father Of course, you realize that isn't a blanket promise to get anything we want. It is not: "Ask me for a new car, a new house, a million dollars, anything your mind could wish, and I will give it." Rather it is this: "If I am living through you and doing My work, then you can rest assured that I'll give you whatever you need as long as your desire is solely and only to glorify the Father!" "In My Name" is not a formula where you say "in Jesus' Name" and tack it onto whatever you want. "In My Name" means, "For My sake". "Whatever you ask, whatever you need in the process of doing My work and carrying out My will for the glory of God, I will not fail to give it to you. Even though I am going away, Trust Me!"

Listen, Jesus went back to the Father's House and He's there right now preparing an eternal dwelling place for each one of us who know Him. And His plan is, whether we die or He comes back first, that He will take us there to be with Him and the Father forever. That hope energizes our lives! While we're still down here, He's living inside us, speaking through us and doing His work through us every day, as we yield ourselves to Him and allow Him to do it. And as we do that, as we seek His glory and build His Kingdom, He'll give us whatever we need, whatever we ask for, so that we might serve Him. There is no limit to what He will do through us or what He will supply to us! So, we can face anything that comes our way, absolutely anything! If we live, He lives through us and if we die, we are in the Father's house with Him. Let me share with you the testimony of an anonymous believer, dated January 22, 2002. *Born to a Saudi family, in Saudi Arabia, and living very close to Mecca, I grew up with strict principles and traditions of Islam and the Arab culture. As a teenager I went to the mosque five times a day in obedience to my parents. One night, while I was asleep, I had this horrible dream of me being taken into hell. And what I saw there brought me real fear and these dreams kept coming to me almost every night. At this point I was really wondering as to why I should be seeing hell in this manner. Suddenly one day, Jesus appeared to me and said, "Son, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. And if you would give your life to Me, and follow Me, I would save you from the hell that you have seen." This came as a surprise to me, for I did not know who this Jesus was. Of course, He is mentioned in the Koran... He is stated as one of our prophets, but not as a Savior who could save us from hell. So I started looking out for a Christian who could give me some advice about this Jesus I have seen and possibly get one of the Christian Holy Books, which I now know is the Bible. But it was a difficult task for me to get any Christian to speak to me about Jesus. As you would know, Christianity is totally banned in Saudi Arabia and if a Christian is caught witnessing to a Muslim, he could be almost sure that he would be beheaded. Then the Lord led me to an Egyptian Christian who was sick. I prayed for this man's healing and this man gave me a Bible. Then I, by myself, started reading the Bible. By this time Jesus had become a close friend to me. Soon I started witnessing about the experience I had with all my family relations and friends. Soon the authorities were informed that I had converted to Christianity, and I believe this was done by one of my family members. As it states in the Koran, if someone would turn away from Islam, he is a traitor to the faith and he should be executed. So I was taken into custody and tortured. They told me that I would be beheaded if*

I would not turn back to Islam. But I had already made my decision that I would never turn back. So I told the authorities I'm willing to die for Jesus and that I would never come back to Islam. After much torture and imprisonment, I was sentenced to be beheaded. They gave me a date and a time and I told them, "You go ahead and execute me. I'm going to heaven to see Jesus. But I pray that what you would do to me would stay in your minds and not give you rest until you come to Jesus." The appointed day and time came for my execution, and I was waiting with much anticipation, yet very much strong in my faith in Jesus. Generally, the executions are carried out on the set time and date. But to my amazement, no one turned up. One hour lapsed, two hours went by, then it became three hours, and then the day passed by. And no one turned up. Then two days later, the authorities turned up and opened the doors and told me, "You demon! Get out from this place!" I also noticed that the main person who was determined to get me beheaded was not present when they came to release me. I asked them where this guy was. And with much hesitation they replied that his son had died on the same day they planned to execute me. Although I continue to go through much persecution, one thing I know is that the Lord's hand is upon me. Friend, if you really know Jesus and are confident in the hope that He has given you of a place in the Father's house, you can face anything.

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

Another Comforter: The Holy Spirit - 14:15-31

As we continue our study of what Jesus shared with His disciples in the Upper Room that Thursday night before the cross, you'll remember that Jesus had told His disciples clearly, *I am going away; I am leaving you*. Peter then asked, *Lord, where are you going?*, and in the first half of chapter 14 Jesus answered that question: *I am going to the Father's house to prepare a place for you and one day I'll take you there to be with Me where I am*. That was the first huge promise Jesus made that was intended to keep them through all the horrible things that were about to happen. But the next concern on their hearts is obvious, "But how will we survive; what will we do without Jesus? We'll be all alone!" Jesus knew this fear that was rising in their hearts and addressed it before they even had a chance to express it. He gave them a second huge promise:

I. The Promise Of The Holy Spirit (15-21) Verse 18 seems to address that rising concern of their hearts, "He's leaving us; we'll be like orphans, all alone with no one to care for or help us!" So, Jesus reassures them, "NO! I'm going away, but I won't leave you like orphans! I won't leave you alone! I will send Someone to take My place with you...I will send the Holy Spirit!" I don't think any of us fully comprehend the magnitude of that simple promise or of the privilege we have as people who actually live in the fulfillment of it, who actually HAVE the Holy Spirit! The promise of the Holy Spirit is, first of all:

1. the promise of a *paraclete*, that's the Greek word in verse 16. It is variously translated as **counselor, comforter, advocate, or helper**. It literally means "one called alongside", someone who will be *with* me in whatever I'm facing, to help me in whatever way I need. If I'm in a courtroom, I need a lawyer, an advocate, someone to plead my case. If I'm in a funeral home, I need a comforter, someone alongside me with an arm around to comfort me in my grief. If I'm in a quandary of circumstances and don't know what to do, I need a Counselor with Divine wisdom to show me. If I'm crushed under the pressure of my situation, I need someone alongside me with the strength to hold me up and impart to me the strength to stand. To have the Holy Spirit means that no matter what I face, I have Someone who is with me to impart to me whatever I need to face it! I am not an orphan; I am not alone. I am not left to depend on my own resources. I have a *paraclete* in whom is everything I need! Secondly, the promise of the Holy Spirit is:

2. the promise of Jesus' permanent presence Jesus said, "I'll give you *another* counselor". That is, "while I was with you, I was your *paraclete*, the One who was with you, your Divine resource. Now I have to leave bodily, but I'm going to give you ANOTHER, Someone to take My place, to be to you what I have been and He, the Spirit, will be with you forever! He won't ever leave, won't ever go away as I've had to." In fact, in verse 18 Jesus says, "I will come to you!", that is, "I will come to you in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, and in Him I will be with you forever. We will never be separated. I will be with you always, even to the end of the world - in Him!" Thirdly, the promise of the Holy Spirit is:

3. the promise of personal indwelling Look at the end of verse 17, *you know Him for he lives with you and will be in you!* Throughout the whole Old Testament era, the Holy Spirit had been present and at work in the lives of God's people. He was *with* men like Moses and Joshua. He came *upon* people like Miriam and Deborah and Saul and David. He came *upon* the prophets. He was even *with* the disciples as Jesus had sent them out. They did miracles in His Name; they healed the sick and cast out demons. That was the power of the Holy Spirit at work through them. But now there was to be a change. Whereas before He was with them and came upon them in times and ways that pleased Him, now after Pentecost He would be *IN* them. He would indwell us, literally live inside our bodies permanently! Paul said we who are joined to the Lord are made one with Him in Spirit; His Spirit is joined to our spirit, which means He is *IN* us. The Resource that we need, the Counselor, the Comforter, is no longer out there, somewhere. He is right in here, in our spirit, in our mind, in our body, always accessible, always in the midst of everything we're in. What a promise! Then Jesus goes on to give here:

4. the promise of His resurrection and of His life imparted to us (19) He promises, *you will see Me!* "You'll watch Me hang on a cross. You'll see them pierce My side. You'll see them lay me in the tomb. But don't give up hope; trust My word: **YOU WILL SEE ME! I WILL RISE FROM THE DEAD; I WILL LIVE.**" And here's the promise: *Because I live, YOU will live too!* "I will impart My life to you." When? Verse 20, *On that day!* What day? "The day of Pentecost, the day I send the Spirit! I will impart My very life, the eternal Divine life of God, to you through My Spirit who will join with your spirit and give you My very Life!" *Rom. 8:11, If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.* When? No, not just some day in the future when we get our new bodies but right now in this body! His life is our life! Now that's hard enough for us to grasp and we know the whole story, which they didn't, so He gives them yet another promise:

5. the promise of full realization (20) "On that day, the day the Spirit is actually given, the day of Pentecost, that's when you'll really understand. You'll understand, not how all this can be, but that it actually is! Once He's in you, you'll realize that we are all One, You and I and the Father, through the Spirit. You'll know that He is in you and so I am in you!" Paul said, *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* - *Rom. 8:16.* We have an internal witness. We know it's true. We know Jesus is IN us and we are God's children! The Spirit in us tells us it is so! And greatest of all:

6. the promise is for all genuine believers (21) It is for ALL who love Him, not just for a few, not just for some, not just for the disciples or for leaders, but for all. Peter said in *Acts 2:38-39, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.*" It is for every genuine believer! *Many years ago, a young Chinese convert whose given name was Lo (spelled L-O) became greatly excited when he first read Matthew 28:20 in King James English. Glowing with the joy of his newly discovered promise from God, he exclaimed, "Look, missionary, it says, 'Lo! I am with you always!'" Because he didn't know any better, he took the word "lo" to be his own name and took the promise to be direct from God to him.* But while we laugh at his grammar mistake, he actually had the right understanding, didn't he? Jesus meant for us to take His promise personally! His promise of the Holy Spirit is direct from Him to YOU, whatever your name is. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell and reveal Christ to everyone who truly loves Him. But who are those? He says they are the ones who obey Him, who do what He says. He started by saying that back in verse 15. Real believers are not those who say they believe, but those whose *actions show* that they believe, those who obey what He has said. If you truly love Him, His spirit lives in you and you *will* obey Him.

Oh, what a promise Jesus made when He gave the Promise of the Holy Spirit! But then He went on to talk about:

II. The Program Of The Holy Spirit (22-24) The "other" Judas, the son of James, who is also called Thaddeus in other Gospels, interrupted Jesus with:

1. the question in verse (22) "If you're the Messiah, the King, why show just us? Why just show Your disciples? Why not show everybody? **Why not show the whole world?!** Isn't that what the Messiah is supposed to do?" The question makes sense. But Jesus doesn't choose to answer it the way he asked it. His:

2. the answer, in essence, is that **full revelation comes only by indwelling** Visibly showing Himself alive to the world wouldn't make much difference. The way He planned to show Himself to the world was by indwelling people and transforming them! So, He explains that:

a. God will only indwell believers, those who love Him (23) The Father and the Son will come in the person of the Spirit and permanently live, dwell, inside those who truly believe. But:

b. He will not inhabit those who do not love Him (24) He's not going to live in people who don't love Him, and because of that, they won't be able to comprehend Him, to know Him. Jesus said:

c. they are unable to receive the Spirit (17) Unbelievers can't see the Holy Spirit; they can't know Him. Jesus will not give them His spirit; He will not reveal Himself to them until they are ready to repent and acknowledge Him as Lord.

So, there's the program for this age. Jesus shows the world He is real by living in us and living through us so that others will come to Him. And then they too will receive His Spirit and KNOW. One at a time. Each individually. That's the plan. Then Jesus goes on to explain:

III. The Purpose Of The Holy Spirit (25-27) The Holy Spirit does three important things in our lives. First, as He did for the disciples:

1. He will remind us of what Jesus has taught Peter and James didn't have notebooks and pencils and write down every word Jesus spoke. John didn't have a laptop that he carried around typing up notes on Jesus' sermons. When the Spirit came, He reminded them of the many things Jesus had taught; He brought them back to mind and they wrote many of them down so we could have the Gospels. Of course, He does the same thing for us. We read what Jesus taught in the Bible; we read God's Word day after day and the Spirit reminds us of it at just the right times when we

need it. We sometimes call this the process of **illumination**, bringing the Scriptures to mind, helping us to understand them and apply them to the very situation we are in at the moment. He will do this for us! God speaks to us through His Spirit. And not only that, Jesus said:

2. He will teach us all things we need to know There were a lot of things the disciples needed to know but Jesus didn't have time to teach. The Spirit added to what Jesus taught. That's why we have the rest of our New Testament. The Holy Spirit showed Luke and Paul and Peter and James and John and Jude other things that they and we, the church, needed to know. We call that process **revelation**. Today, of course, the Holy Spirit is no longer giving us new Scriptures, but He is continuing to personally reveal and unfold the plan of God in our lives step by step individually as we need to know it. Paul said the Spirit teaches us all things, the deep things of God. He gives us the thoughts of God that we need to have. He gives us the words God wants said, the actions God wants lived out as we yield to him and let Him live through us. And then Jesus said the Spirit:

3. He will give us Christ's perfect peace We always yank verse 27 out of its context and quote it as though it is referring to peace as a "thing", as though it simply means that He would make them calm in the face of what was going to happen. I think He's saying, "I will not leave you as orphans, but I will leave you with peace, My peace, the person of My Spirit!! If you think about it, peace is the result of our minds and emotions being totally under the control of the Holy Spirit. Peace is when we think like God thinks and feel like God feels about all that is going on. It's the Divine calm that passes all human understanding, the calm that knows all things are under control and going as planned. That peace comes from Him being in us and in control of us. He IS our peace.

Now I don't know whether you realize it, but this is really the first time Jesus has actually talked with His disciples about the Holy Spirit. He saved this discussion and this wonderful promise until His last hour with them. So as the chapter closes, He tells them why He shared this precious promise of the Spirit with them:

IV. The Purpose Of Jesus In Sharing This Promise (28-31) First:

1. it was to give the disciples joy (28) He was leaving and they were sad, stricken because of it. If they understood that He was going to the Father and that the Spirit was coming, they would be glad. He told them moments later in *John 16:22, Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.* That permanent joy would be the result of the presence of the Spirit. Second:

2. it would verify the disciples' faith later on (29) And it happened just like Jesus said. After the Spirit came, Peter stood up and said in **Acts 2:32-33, God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.** When the promise came to pass, they recognized it as the fulfillment of these very words Jesus spoke and it confirmed their faith in Jesus. They knew He had sent the Spirit just as He said He would! Finally:

3. it was to give the disciples hope though time was short (30-31) He had only a few more precious moments. He was already getting up from the table to clear things away in the room and leave. In just hours Satan was coming to the garden to do his worst. But before they experienced all of that, Jesus wanted to leave them with this blessed assurance: "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. I will send you My Spirit to be your Counselor, your Advocate, your Comforter. The time grows short...trust Me."

The story is told in Beams of Light of a timid prisoner who committed a minor infraction and was sentenced to spend the night in a dark, isolated cell, deep inside the prison walls. The inmates feared the silent, total darkness of that cell almost as much as death itself. As the man was led down to it, the dank and loathsome air seemed to choke him. The heavy door clanked shut, and he knew a long, lonely night was before him, far beyond the sound of any human voice. As he sank to the floor in despair, he thought he heard the sound of footsteps. Then a voice said softly, "I'm the prison chaplain. I knew you could not stand it alone, so I've come to be with you. I will be here as long as you are." Because the grateful prisoner knew that another person was with him in the darkness, his lonely chamber became a place of rest. My friend when the circumstances of life seem awfully dark and you feel awfully alone, when despair rises up within you. Jesus says, "I knew you could not stand it alone so I've come to be with you; My Spirit is in you. And I will be here as long as you are!"

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

I Am The Vine: Dependence - 15:1-17

We continue to study those precious last words that Jesus shared with His disciples in the Upper Room that last Thursday night before the cross. Remember that in chapter 14 Jesus assured His disciples of their future home in the Father's house that He was leaving to prepare and then He assured them that He would not leave them alone, that He would send them another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to live in them and be with them forever. Now in chapter 15 Jesus moved on to address the issue of relationships. He knew that this band of men and those who would later follow them would form a distinct community. Out of all the world, they would be the people of God, His assembly, His Church. So, in this last hour with them He wanted to define for them the relationships that would characterize their lifestyle from here on as His follow-

ers, first their relationship with Him and then with one another. Of course, they are now us, so we begin the chapter by learning about:

I. Our Relationship To Christ And to explain it He used a common but special image to describe it visually: **The Vine And The Branches (1-8)** Vineyards and the keeping of grapevines is something visible everywhere in Israel. In fact, the symbol of the vine was God's special symbol for the nation of Israel. He describes her as His vine or His vineyard in many passages of the Old Testament, for instance: *Psalm 80:8-9, You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.* A great golden vine, the national emblem of Israel, was displayed on the very front of the Temple itself. But His vine, His people Israel, had brought forth bad fruit, Isaiah said. Hosea declared that God's vine brought forth fruit for itself. She was a fruitless, faithless vine that was about to be cut down. So, there is no way that the disciples missed the symbolism when Jesus said that:

1. He Himself is the true Vine: Israel was false. She was not being His people. So, God was now planting another Vine in the world in the person of His Son. The vine is **the living organism of people that God is growing in the world**, Jesus' followers, the Church, the very people of God. And this figure of the vine shows us that they are not merely a group of people who believe a doctrine or join an organization. They are a people formed out of a living, personal union with Him. Now notice carefully that:

2. He is the whole Vine. He is the trunk, the branches, leaves and fruit, the whole thing! So, **we are the little branches of Him!** Do you understand what I mean? We have no separate identity apart from Him! It's not Him *and* us. God has one Vine, Jesus, and we are all the hundreds of little leafy branches He is sprouting from His trunk. Paul used a similar concept. He said that all together we are the Body of Christ. Christ has ONE body; He IS the Body. But we are all individual members or body parts of that one body. It's the same idea. Now His point in using this analogy is that:

3. the life of the Vine flows into and through the branches (us) to produce fruit The life-giving sap comes up from the roots of the vine through the trunk and out into each branch causing it to live and sprout green leaves. So, His life is flowing into each one of us who have been joined to Him; that's how we live. We get life from Him. And the sap in this analogy is **the Holy Spirit** whom He has placed in each of us. His life-giving Spirit is IN us and flows through us for a purpose, which is to produce fruit, grapes! That's what vines are for! They're not like flowers which are supposed to look pretty; they're supposed to produce grapes for the owner's use, so that he can have wine to drink. But any good farmer knows that you can't just let a vine grow untended all by itself or it will eventually produce less and less. That's why Jesus said:

4. the Gardener who owns the vineyard, **(God the Father) cuts off dead branches which have no life and so bear no fruit** On this vine of God's, there are branches that seem like the other branches, but they're dead. No sap is flowing into them, so they are not green and living and they don't bear any fruit. Any vine-dresser knows these dead branches have to be cut off the vine and thrown away or burned. Well, in God's vine there are also some people that look like the rest of us, but they're dead. They have no connection to the Vine; the Holy Spirit does not live in them. They profess to be followers of Jesus, they go to church, but they have no real spiritual life and so they produce no real spiritual fruit. Judas Iscariot would be the case in point that evening and it's quite possible that the disciples thought of him instantly when Jesus said this. He was with them, but He wasn't one of them. Jesus had said earlier that Judas was not "clean" and in verse 3 He repeated that all of them were clean; none of them were dead branches. Listen, across our community and our country and our world there are people who sit in churches, at least occasionally, and who would say when asked, "I am a Christian", but who have never met Jesus Christ personally. They don't have His life, His eternal Spirit dwelling in them. They are professors of Christ but not possessors and Jesus Himself warned that there would be many like that. In the end, these dead branches are cut off from the tree and they get burned, unless they find true salvation first! But this is vastly different from another thing the Gardener does:

5. He also prunes living branches to bear more fruit You see, that's His goal. **He wants much fruit!** So, he takes a good, living branch and he clips off a little where it tries to grow too many leaves or too many sub-branches here and there. I remember when we used to grow tomato plants in our back yard. One of our members now in heaven, old Sam Weisel who used to grow 100 tomato plants, taught me forty years ago that when you plant your tomato plants, you have to watch and every time you see a new third branch starting to grow out of the middle of a joint, it's called a sucker and you have to pinch it off. If you don't, the plant will pour its energy and nutrients into that branch and make lots of leaves but little fruit. Left to itself, that tomato vine becomes a huge bush of branches with small fruits. However, if you pinch off the suckers so that all the life goes into the main stem, it brings forth huge, heavy tomatoes. And that's what God is interested in; He doesn't want a pretty looking vine with bushy symmetrical branches; He wants a heavy crop of fruit, so He has to prune us! Now how does He do that? Well, here's a little note: the word *clean* in verse 3 is the same word translated *pruned* back in verse 2. In vineyard terminology *cleaning* is what we call *pruning* the vines. Jesus is saying, "You've been pruned! I've cleaned you!" But look at how: through *the Word I have spoken to you!* Jesus had been pruning them by teaching them! His words had addressed their wrong ways of thinking and convicted them of their wrong ways of acting. That's why we need a daily habit of being in the Word of God! As we read it God is always at work reshaping us, trimming off places in our thinking and our acting where we're shaped wrong, where we're grow-

ing in a fruitless direction, where our flesh is controlling the way we go about life. He is constantly busy working on us through His Word, shaping us one stage at a time, more and more closely into the image of His Son. And you know, from the plant's perspective, pruning has got to hurt! It's not pleasant to have things clipped away or pinched off! It is often a painful process for us. God frequently uses difficult circumstances, other people, and even suffering to make us ready for His Word to do its prescribed work and clean us of the stuff He wants out of our lives. Hebrews 12:11 says, *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* Pruning is never pleasant at the time. It hurts! But remember, He does it for a purpose; He's looking ahead to the harvest and He wants a lot of fruit. He wants tomato plants hanging full with huge ripe juicy tomatoes or apple trees hanging full with luscious red delicious apples. So, what does that mean in our case? What is:

6. the nature of the fruit He desires? Well, if you search for the word *fruit* in the New Testament, you'll find that in a couple of references it refers to our:

a. character: In *Phil. 1:11* Paul prayed that we would be *filled with the fruit of righteousness*. And you're familiar with the 9-fold fruit of the Spirit in *Gal. 5:22, love, joy, peace, patience...* and so on. Those are character traits. When the Spirit is flowing through us our character becomes like that of Christ; we think and act in the ways that He did. That is one kind of fruit God greatly desires to produce in us. But sometimes the term goes further and refers to our:

b. behavior: In *Col. 1:10* Paul prayed that we would please the Lord by *bearing fruit in every good work*. Not only by displaying a godly character but by actively going about doing good, like Jesus did according to Acts 10:38. Look at His 3 ½ years of ministry: He helped people, healed people, comforted people, fed people and taught people. But why should we live a life like that? He told us that as we let our light shine before people, that as we go about doing these same things He did, that people would see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. They would become worshippers of our Heavenly Father! You see, ultimately fruit is about:

c. reproduction, isn't it? Fruit contains the seeds which grow new vines. For purposes of this analogy, the fruit represents the increase over the original. In biblical terms, *a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies and produces a crop that is 30, 60 or even 100 times that which was sown*. Paul wrote in *Col. 1:6* that *all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit*. New converts are coming to the faith; new believers are being added to the church; the church is multiplying and increasing in size! The branches on the vine are hanging low with new grapes! His life flows out through us, through our character and our actions and our words to bring others to faith and make them part of the Vine! That is the natural result and the whole purpose of the process! That's what He wants! But why?

6. much fruit glorifies God Old Sam had the best and biggest tomato crop of anybody I ever knew. The crop gave him a reputation in the community. People said, "What a gardener!" You see, much fruit brings glory to the Gardener and that's what God wants. It is to His glory that we, his church, are living and growing and producing much fruit, winning many to Jesus Christ. That's why verse 7 says **He will give whatever we ask in order to get it!** If what we ask is focused on His goal of fruit-bearing, He'll give us whatever we need. We can bank on it! But this whole illustration boils down to a single point:

8. The Point: We are called to ABIDE in Christ That's the old KJV word in verse (4) but it seems to say so much more than *remain*. Jesus says, *Abide in ME!* It means that:

a. we must remain connected in absolute dependence upon Him The branch can't produce any fruit at all by itself. The life of the vine flows through the branch and into the fruit. A disconnected stick can't produce fruit; that's why, when Aaron's rod budded, it was an astonishing miracle! In and of ourselves without Him we can't bear any fruit at all. It is all His doing. The life of good works He intends for us to do must never be simply our own best efforts but the result of His Spirit living through and empowering us! OK, so how do we make sure of that?

b. that connection of dependence is maintained by personal intimacy The branch has to *abide* in the vine, to remain deeply connected and attached with its central core open wide to the supply of life-giving sap the Vine supplies. That's our calling, to abide, to remain deeply connected to Christ with the core of our being yielded wide open to the life-producing power of His Spirit who will produce the fruit. That means the Word of God; that means prayer; that means time spent in His Presence communing with Him. *S. D. Gordon tells of a spring storm that broke a large limb on his cherry tree. Although it hung by a very slender strand, to his surprise the blossoms came anyway. Later some fruit began to grow as it did on the other branches. He noticed, however, that only the branches in full contact with the tree bore "much fruit," while the partially severed branch produced only a sparse supply.* Our connection is everything! The more deeply we abide, the more fruit we bear in our character, in our deeds and in our converts. How deep is your connection? How thorough is your dependence on Him? How much of His life are you letting flow through you or are you just pursuing your own goals and dreams, living the way you want? We are called to abide in Him! And as we learn to abide, it will impact:

II. Our Relationship To One Another (9-17) and that's what Jesus goes on to talk about next. He says:

1. we are to abide in His love (9) [Read 9-11] Here He sets up a paradigm for us. The way the Father loved Him is the way He loves us. The way He was able to deeply abide in the Father's love is the way we are to deeply abide in His love. And the way:

a. we abide in His love by obeying His commands (10) Jesus drank so deeply of the Father's love for Him that it permeated every moment and situation of His life. He was so full of the Father's love that He could only do what pleased Him; He would run to do the Father's will, to keep His commands. Now, Jesus says we are to abide in His love, to drink so deeply of His love for us, to be so aware and so full of it, that we can only do what pleases Him, that we run to do His will, to obey His commands! Our deep, deep conviction and experience of that great love is what causes us to bear the fruit of good works and people won to Christ. And, Jesus adds:

b. as we abide in His love, we give Him joy and our joy is completed (11) Living out of His love in obedience fills Him with great joy in us. It thrills His heart. But it will also fill us with a deep and abiding joy, His joy, the joy He had in doing the Father's will. That joy will be ours; our joy will be brought to fullness and completeness as we live a life saturated with His love fleshed out in doing His will. And that will lead us to complete the third part of that paradigm: The Father loved Him. He loved us the way the Father loved Him and so He says that:

2. we are to love one another the way He has loved us (12) That's His command. If we love Him, that's what we'll do. His vine, His people will be an assembly unlike any other in the world, a group who are so filled with His love that they love each other the way He loved them. How is that? They love each other:

a. sacrificially (13) - He gave His life for us, so out of His love we lay down our lives for each other. Not just literally being willing to die for each other when persecution comes, but laying our lives down for each other day after day in a myriad of small ways where we die to self and choose our brother or sister instead. And His people love each other:

b. intimately (14-15) - He shared His heart with us; that's what He's doing here in the Upper Room. We are not just servants He owns and orders around. We are close confidants; He shares the secrets of His heart with us. He shows us what He's doing, His heart, His plan. He is intimate with us and includes us in His purpose. So out of His love we will develop a deep intimacy with one another as we together pursue His purpose. We will have a bond of fellowship deeper than anything the world knows as together we bask in His love. And that common purpose of His heart is actually what He has already said:

3. He has chosen and appointed us to go and bear lasting fruit (16) Eternal fruit. Souls touched by His love through us and drawn to find salvation in Him. He chose us for that purpose and to that end. He has sent us to that end. He'll give us anything we ask in prayer, anything we need - to that end. That's His heart; that's what He's about and as we abide in His love that will become our purpose. Then Jesus again repeated His key point:

4. The Point: We are commanded to love each other (17) Pure and simple: love each other. It's not optional. It's not only if we want to or only if it's easy. It's not selective where we love only a few but not some others. It's not a request; it's a command, an order, and if we love Him, if the Holy Spirit life of the Vine is flowing freely into and through us, we'll do it.

Corrie ten Boom is well known for surviving the notorious Ravensbruck Concentration Camp, while her sister, Betsie, who was with her in the Camp did not. Their story is told through the book and the movie, "The Hiding Place", which I highly recommend. One writer who maintains a web page all about Corrie writes, *"When I was in college in the early 1970's, I had the privilege of going with a group of friends to hear Corrie ten Boom speak. One memory I have is of a visual illustration using a glove; it just lay on the podium as she spoke when I saw her. At the right time, she said, [and here I quote from Corrie's book, Messages of God's Abundance] 'I have a glove here. It can't do anything but if I put my hand in it [The writer adds...as she is sharing this in her own words, she puts on the glove...], it can do a lot, writing, sewing and much more. Now I know, of course, that it isn't the glove; it's my hand in the glove. You and I are like gloves and the Holy Spirit is like the hand - it can do a great deal. If I ball my fist in the middle, the glove flops limply. Each finger has to be filled. Thus, the Bible says with practicality, 'Be filled with the Spirit'. Then Corrie goes on to pray, 'Thank You, Lord, that the fullness of the Spirit is for every child of God. Please show me if there is a small part of my life, or perhaps even a big part, that is not open to Your Spirit. Thank You that Your Holy Spirit is willing to fill my life to the fullest, just like sunlight fills a room that is open to its light. Listen, Lord, to anyone who says: 'I am throwing the curtains wide open! Fill every corner and make me like a glove that is able to do anything through Your strong hand that fills every finger' Thank You so much. In Jesus' name, Amen.'* The writer concludes, *'What a wonderful memory, I'm glad I had that experience.'*"

[<http://www.squidoo.com/corrietenboom>] Are YOU having that experience? Are you abiding, staying so well-connected to Jesus, the True Vine, that the life-giving sap of His Spirit is flowing freely into every portion of your life, empowering everything you do and bearing abundant spiritual fruit? If not, why not make Corrie's prayer your own today.

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

If The World Hates You: Persecution - 15:18-16:4

We continue to study together these precious last words of Jesus that we have from the Upper Room that last night before the Cross. Having given His disciples the assurance of their home in the Father's house and the promise of the Holy Spirit in Chapter 14 and having illustrated their utter dependence on Him by the figure of the Vine and the Branches in chapter 15, Jesus now turned His attention to talk about what their future would hold. Do not miss the significance of the fact that His very first words on the subject in verse 18 were, *If the world hates you...* The picture that Jesus painted of what a life of following Him would look like is vastly different from the picture that we have in our minds. To one degree or another, all of us here have bought into assuming that the life of a believer is supposed to be peaceful and happy and prosperous and even healthy. It's been preached from our pulpits and on our TV's: "Obey God and He will bless you and give you a wonderful life!" That's the picture Israel had, because those are the promises Israel was given; God promised her that if she would obey Him, He would bless her with all of those things so that all the unbelieving nations of the earth would be drawn to Him. Sadly, it didn't work because she didn't obey. But those are not OUR promises today as part of the Church and that is certainly NOT the picture that Jesus painted for His disciples that night. He declared plainly that:

I. The Unbelieving World Hates Us (18-19) Mark that last phrase: *the world hates you!* If you lived in Central Asia or in Pakistan or in North Korea today, I wouldn't have to explain this to you; you would be experiencing the truth of it in your life every day. You would KNOW what it is to be hated for what you believe. However, the fact that you happen to live in a time and place where right now you are NOT experiencing it does not mean that Jesus' words are not true. Let's begin by understanding this term *world*, what does it mean? In scripture:

1. the world is a series of Satan-invented systems of living which are followed by the mass of unbelievers on earth Look with me at **Eph. 2:1-3**. From the time that Adam handed him the keys to dominion over this earth by obeying him and sinning, the devil has busily invented *ways of this world*, cultural systems of belief and behavior that keep human beings enslaved to him and insulated from the knowledge of God. For example, more than a billion people are caught up in a system of life that began 3,000 years before Christ called Hinduism. It has been ingrained in them for countless generations that there are millions of gods and goddesses to be worshipped, that people are born into classes or castes that can't be changed and that the only way to escape the suffering of this world is to do good so that you're reborn to live another life in a higher station and to keep up this endless round until you "graduate" out the top into Nirvana and dissolve into oneness with the energy of the universe. Another billion and a half have been steeped for the last 1400 years in a system called Islam and to them it is utter blasphemy to say that Jesus is God and to worship Him, a crime punishable by death! In remote regions of the earth there are dozens of tribal peoples who have lived by a code of revenge passed down from their ancestors and who live in terror, appeasing evil spirits with sacrifices to this day. The Jews of Jesus' day had developed their own system of Pharisaism which was riddled with false beliefs about God and even YOU were raised in the midst of a more intellectual cultural system which believes that man is basically good and that God, if He exists, simply weighs our good and evil behavior after we die and rewards us accordingly. The huge majority of the people on earth are completely engulfed in one or more of these systems, these ways of understanding the world. It's actually a kingdom, the "kingdom of this world," that Satan rules. Before God saved us, WE lived the same way; we were part of the system, trying to satisfy the self-centered desires of our sinful hearts in the ways our culture taught us. But now, Jesus says:

2. we no longer belong to this system like everybody else all around us does. And we didn't simply "opt out" of participation, **we were chosen out of it** by Jesus Himself. God swooped into our lives and *rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves* - **Col. 1:13**. We have a new King and we are part of a new kingdom and we live out of a new value system of behavior based on love. We are different from the world around us. Now you would think people would look at how different we are and be drawn toward us and toward God because of what they see, and some are, but only if their hearts are open and the Spirit is drawing them toward Christ. By and large the reaction is the opposite.

a. people are shocked that we refuse to live as they do Look with me at **1 Pet. 4:3-4**. They are shocked that you won't get drunk with them, that you won't sleep around like they do, that you won't lie and cheat for them and you won't worship whatever gods they do! So, they literally blaspheme you. They speak evil about you; they mock and reproach and curse you and they lie about you. All over the world, Christians are the despised minority and they are called the "infidel unbelievers", the "betrayers of our religion", or those who are trying to "steal our souls". In the former Soviet Union it was widely held and literally believed that "Baptists" eat babies and drink blood in their secret ceremonies. The term *Christian* itself (which simply means an adherent or follower of Christ) was in the beginning a term of disdain and scorn which the pagans at Antioch coined to goad the believers there, but instead they accepted it with pride and we've been wearing it ever since! When people see that we're different, they are many times outraged and heap abuse on us. Why? The answer is in **Jn. 3:19-20**. Put simply:

b. people are angered because we reveal their deeds as evil We are the light in this dark world and people who live in darkness hate light, because it shows them what they truly are. If we are right, then they are wrong; if we are

good, then they are evil, if we are true, then they are false and deserving of the utmost condemnation. And people don't like that; they hate that and that's why the world hates us. Therefore, Jesus said:

II. We Must Expect To Be Persecuted By The World (20) What I'm telling you may be kind of hard for you to accept. Surely people are better than that! Jesus said, "In case you have any doubts, just look at what happens to Me!" Here is the best man that ever lived, the purest, most righteous, most loving man that ever walked the earth. Here is the One whose miracles backed up and verified all His godly words, 100% of the time. And how did the world system react to Him? It called Him a criminal and crucified Him! His warning is clear:

1. how the world reacted to Jesus is how it will react to us We are not better than Him! We don't deserve more than Him. He is the epitome of everything about us and if that's what the world did to Him:

a. to expect a better reaction to us is foolish, wouldn't you agree? To think that the world is going to receive us warmly and be all glad about our message and easily join us in our faith is like walking into a terrorist camp with a personal gift, anticipating a friendly discussion over tea about giving up a life of terrorism, and planning on walking back out alive! It's naive! We're soldiers in a war between two kingdoms. We must EXPECT persecution! Paul said, *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted - 2 Tim. 3:12!* Expect it! Plan on it! And if it doesn't happen, remember this:

b. to receive a better reaction is simply God's grace! We happen to live in a 400 year interval of history in a country which happens to have been, up until now, majority Christian, at least in name and culture. So, we haven't experienced much in the way of persecution firsthand. But why did our founding fathers come here? Most of them were fleeing from persecution for their faith in Europe and seeking religious freedom! So, they created a society which prizes freedom of religion. It is purely a gift of God that we live in such a place and time; we are unbelievably blessed to miss out on what our brothers all over the world are experiencing, yet we need to realize that the situation in which we live is merely a quiet lull in the progress of world history! The US is rapidly becoming a post-Christian society like Europe already is. We have tremendous tolerance for every kind of religious belief or moral lifestyle, EXCEPT Bible-believing Christianity. We're already seen as bigoted and archaic and there are people that hate evangelicals and what we believe with a vengeance. I am confident that unless God sends a mighty revival in this land to hold it back for another while, it will only get worse. There will come a day when we or our children or our grandchildren or our great grandchildren will begin to understand and experience the kind of pressure that real believers have known down through the ages all over the world. Expect it! Be ready for it! But why? Why is it like that? Verse (21). Because:

2. the world hates the Name of Jesus which we bear It's uncanny. Somehow the world is not inflamed by the mention of the name of any kind of god or prophet or religious leader, but mention the name of Jesus and venom spews forth. Paul testified, *I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. - Acts 26:9.* It's that Name! Satan hates it and he has built that into the systems of the world, so that whenever anyone becomes zealous for their system, they hate the Name of Jesus. Even here you will meet people, some very religious people who belong to organized churches, who say "Believing in GOD is the important thing; this 'you have to believe in Jesus' bit is too narrow!" And out come the claws! Peter said, *...if you suffer as a Christian [because you are called a follower of Christ], do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. - 1 Pet. 4:16.* That's exactly what you want the world to know you are! The truth is, Jesus said, that:

a. though they may be religious, they do not know God As **Rom. 10:2** puts it, *...they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.* They don't know Him and no matter how many times they bow down or rock back and forth while they pray or walk on their knees for miles on a pilgrimage, they are completely ignorant of God and, in fact:

b. because they hate Jesus, they actually hate God (23) You can't have one without the other. They may profess to love God and be zealous for Him, but they actually hate Him because they hate Jesus and His followers. Now, of course, the most immediate people that Jesus is talking about, and a good case in point, are the Pharisees and the chief priests who have spent the last months trying to find a way to kill Him!

c. the Jewish religious leaders that Jesus faced had no excuse Verse (22):

(1) they should have received Jesus' teaching He pointed out their sin very clearly and plainly told them that they were following their father, the devil, And:

(2) they should have believed because of the miracles (24-25) They should have watched Jesus heal the lame man and rejoiced in the power of God, instead of plotting to kill Him. They should have fallen at His feet when He raised Lazarus from the dead, instead of plotting to kill them both. They saw all of these mighty miracles that proved that Jesus was God come in the flesh, but:

(3) they hated Jesus anyway. They hated him **without any cause** as **Ps. 69:4** predicts. That's what we can expect. The world hated Him without a cause, it still hates Him without a cause and it will hate us without a cause, simply because we believe. That's why we must expect persecution. But here's Jesus' real point:

III. Jesus Expects Us To Testify In The Midst Of Persecution (26-27) There's His purpose in allowing it! It is as we remain true to Jesus and testify about Him in the face of suffering that the greatest advances are won for the Kingdom! The early church turned the whole Roman Empire upside down while suffering under severe persecution. The church in China went from several million to over 100 million in the last 50 years, the greatest success story Christianity has ever known, and the driving factor in all of it was intense persecution! In fact, house church pastors would write to us in the west, "Don't pray for the persecution to stop! Pray for us to remain faithful and testify in it!" But how can we do that? Where can we find the strength? Jesus said:

1. this is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit He testifies to us and we testify to the world. In **Mt. 10:18-20** Jesus put it like this: *On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* HE will do it through us! That's His plan! Now Jesus went on to explain that:

2. persecution will occur over a wide range of severity (16:2) Many times:

a. it may take the milder form of ostracism To be put out of the synagogue was an awful penalty in Israel; it was to become an outcaste of society. That is still true today in many places. This week I got this note concerning Kyrgyzstan: *Pray for all Christians in the village of Shapak. There are four believing families in this village. They are being persecuted. About three months ago a Christian man died in that village and Christians were persecuted badly during his funeral. Ever since people are treating believers so badly. All the villagers are against the believers. All the believers are depressed, but God's almighty hands are restoring them and giving them strength. 5-6 people (Muslim leaders and village leaders) in the village are stirring up the villagers against believers. They are not letting people connect with them. Now they are planning to close all ways for believers. They are forbidden to participate in all social events; village leaders are forbidding their neighbors, relatives and friends to visit or even talk to them. Believers are not allowed to use public transportation. Spring is coming, and the leaders of the village are trying to prevent Christians from doing any farming. They think that by doing all these things they will cause them to deny their faith. But God's love is always there in these tough times; they say that God is bringing believers of the village to real unity. Previously they had stopped even visiting each other because they go to different churches, but now they often visit each other, pray together, and encourage and support each other. Pray for God's provision for our dear brother and sisters in Shapak. Men plan to do evil, but God is the One in control.* What we've seen over and over is that if the believers will stick it out and not run away in these situations, but will endure and keep testifying, that within a couple of years whole families and even whole villages will come to Christ! Of course, at times persecution:

b. it may take the deepest form of being killed It began with James and Stephen. Paul says, *On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.* - **Acts 26:10.** Down through history followers of Jesus Christ have frequently been imprisoned, beaten, tortured, exiled, thrown to lions, burned at the stake, hanged and shot, simply for being Christians. How many workers in Afghanistan or Yemen have been kidnapped or killed in recent memory? Yet the truth has always been, as Tertullian wrote about 200 AD from the thick of it, *We spring up in greater numbers the more we are mown down by you: the blood of the Christians is the seed of a new life.* We must be prepared for that if we are faced with it, be ready to take up our cross and do what Jesus did, die for the redemption of the world if God wills it! Jesus said that:

3. persecution is evidence of the persecutors' ignorance of and great need for God (3) Jesus had compassion on them. From the cross He cried, *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!* - **Lk. 23:34.** Paul said it about himself, *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.* - **1 Tim. 1:13.** The world hates and persecutes us out of ignorance and unbelief, but the world is who Jesus died to save. And:

4. He warned us ahead of time so that we would not be shocked and stumble in our faith when it happens (16:1, 4) If you thought the Christian life was going to be a bed of roses when you signed up, I'm sorry to tell you that somebody sold you a bill of goods. We're not to think it strange when the fiery trial of persecution comes; it's the norm and we need to understand that Jesus wants to use it to His glory.

Peter exhorted us, *Resist [Satan], standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.* - **1 Pet. 5:9.** Here's the latest news: *Pakistan's only Christian cabinet member, Shahbaz Bhatti, was assassinated by gunmen on March 2, 2011. Shahbaz was the only remaining government advocate for Christian Asia Bibi, who was sentenced to death last November under the blasphemy law.* • *Muslims in Ethiopia's southwestern city of Jimma burned two churches and the homes of a pastor and an evangelist on Wednesday, March 3.*

They also severely beat a Christian convert. In the Asendabo district of Jimma, a Muslim mob burned two churches and a pastor's house after leaving their daily teaching at the mosque. • Members of the Islamic radical group al-Shabab killed a Christian convert in the Somali capital of Mogadishu on Jan. 26. The Islamists murdered Abdirahman Hussein Roble after accusing him of spying and evangelism among Muslims. He is the 24th Christian to be killed by Somali Islamists since 2009. Beloved, the world hates us! Everywhere our brothers and sisters suffer greatly, yet they stand firm in their faith and the church grows. We must be ready to do the same.

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

Now I Am Going: Peace - 16:5-33

For the last seven weeks we've been studying together the Last Words which Jesus spoke to His Disciples in the Upper Room the night before He was crucified. In essence, this discourse was Jesus saying "Goodbye" to them. Throughout the course of the meal, He has said to them things like, *I will be with you only a little longer...where I am going you cannot come.... I am going [to the Father's house] to prepare a place for you.... I am going to the Father.... I am going away and I am coming back to you....* Then, as we saw last week, Jesus declared clearly that the world would hate them and they could expect persecution. It was a hard lesson to hear and on the heels of it, Jesus said again in 16:5, *Now I am going....* You can almost picture here:

I. The Impact Of Jesus' Words Of Parting Upon His Disciples (5-7) As He was speaking to them and revealing more and more, especially this last about suffering:

1. they were overwhelmed with grief at the news of His leaving You can hear them thinking, "OK, if the world is going to hate us and reject us and even kill us, how on earth are we going to accomplish anything? How will anyone ever believe in You? How can we go on without YOU? Why can't you just STAY and accomplish Your purpose with us, like we've been doing?" Their grief over His leaving was so deep that:

2. they were unable to grasp the good of His larger plan It was absolutely necessary for Him to leave. In fact, it was for their good, to their benefit, that He was going away, that He would not be physically with them on earth any longer! They couldn't conceive it, but as long as Jesus remained on earth, He had limited Himself by the taking on of a human body. He could not be with them all at multiple places at the same time. He could not be in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. He could not be with every one of them wherever they were, let alone with all of us so:

II. He Pointed Them To The Broader Ministry Of The Holy Spirit "He needs to come! That's why I have to go away, so that you will no longer be relying on My physical presence, but on His spiritual presence. And when He comes, He will have a two-directional ministry. First of all":

1. the Spirit will have a ministry of conviction to the whole world (8-11) If it was the disciples' job to convince people that Jesus died for their sins and that He's alive and they should come to Him for salvation, the church would never have gotten off the ground! Paul explained that, *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.* - 1 Cor. 2:14. We could talk until we were out of breath and nobody would fully understand or receive what we were saying. They can't; the Bible says that in their natural state, human beings are spiritually dead, cut off from God and from spiritual understanding; they are without God and without hope in the world. Our task would be impossible without the Holy Spirit! But Jesus promised that when He came, He would do what we cannot; He would have a ministry of conviction to unbelievers as we share with them. He would convince them internally of truth in three areas. He would convict them:

a. about their sin of not believing in God's Son We can tell them the message that God loves them so much that He sent His Only Son to die in their place, that He sacrificed His dear Son for them and ask how they could ignore such a gift, but it is only through the Holy Spirit that they become convinced of the truth of **John 3:18**, *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.* The Spirit of God takes the words of truth and sinks them deep into the soul so that a person *knows* "I stand condemned before God because I have not believed!" Then, the Spirit convicts them:

b. about the righteousness of God's Son whom they can't see We can tell them that He was the pure, innocent Lamb, without spot or blemish, who didn't deserve to die, that in Him was no sin and He knew no sin, but He was made to be sin for them and to bear their sin. Yet He is not here for us or for them to see. Only the Spirit can take those words and show them Jesus as He really is, so that they *know* the truth of 1 Pet. 3:18, *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.* And then the Spirit convicts them:

c. about their coming judgment by God's victorious Son We can tell them that one day they will stand before Jesus Christ as their Judge, that the Cross proves His victory over Satan and that one day every sinner will face

eternal punishment just as Satan will. But only the Spirit can take those words and make them *know* their lostness so that they fall on their knees in terror and cry out as the Philippian jailer did, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* Now, that conviction happens all over the world. It happened to Saul on the road to Damascus. It happened to a *man named Genesius who lived in Rome about 300 AD, during the reign of the cruel Emperor Diocletian who persecuted Christians severely. He was hired as an actor to entertain in the arena by pantomiming a Christian baptism before the Emperor. But in the midst of his act, he saw a vision of angels which convicted his heart and suddenly he stopped and shouted in earnest, "I want to receive the grace of Christ that I may be born again. I want to be set free from the sins which have been my ruin." Then he turned to Diocletian, "Illustrious Emperor, believe me, Christ is the true King!" Diocletian became furious and ordered him ripped with claws, burned with torches, and then beheaded. Just before his death he is said to have cried out, "There is no King but Him whom I have seen. I adore and worship Him, and for His sake, even though I be slain a thousand times, I will always be His. Torments are not able to take Christ from my mouth, nor from my heart. Bitterly do I regret that I detested His Holy Name in holy men, and came so late, like a haughty soldier, to adoring the true King."* That same conviction happened to me 2000 years later on the other side of the earth! That's the work of the Holy Spirit; He's the One who would break through the world's hatred of Jesus and bring men to Christ! And at the same time Jesus said that:

2. the Spirit will have a ministry of communion to all believers (12-15) Please note that there is a word missing at the end of verse 13. In the Greek it literally says:

a. He would guide them into all THE truth This is really the promise on which our New Testament is based. Look back to **14:26**, *He will remind you of everything I have said* - that's how we got the Gospels, the historical portion of the New Testament. It also says, *He will teach you all things* - that's how we got the Epistles, the doctrinal portion of the New Testament; the Holy Spirit gave all the things that Paul and Peter and James learned and taught later. And now here Jesus says, *He will show you things to come* - that's the prophetic portions like the Spirit giving John his Revelation. And there we have it, our whole New Testament, all THE truth that would be delivered to us once for all for all time. The Spirit would cause it to be given, written and recorded, so that we would have it. But Jesus' primary point about the Spirit is that:

b. He will make the things of Christ known to us personally Jesus could not be everywhere to talk and commune with each of us personally all the time in His physical body on earth. That's why He left and sent the Spirit who now lives within each one of us wherever and whenever we are and, 1 Cor. 2 says, the Spirit communicates the thoughts of God, the thoughts of Christ, to our minds. In fact, it says that *we have the mind of Christ!* The Spirit of God is always talking to us, planting the thoughts of God in our minds, showing us what He wants, teaching us what we need to see, illuminating our understanding of the Word. We have a personal intimate communion with Christ through His Spirit that we could never have all had if He had remained in His body on this earth!

But, of course, the understanding of all of that was lost on them that night. Their grief did not seem to be comforted. So, Jesus then gave them another truth to hang onto:

III. He Assured Them Of Their Joy After His Resurrection (16) I'm sure He meant it positively, that He was saying, "Listen, I am leaving you but you WILL see Me again!" But their minds could not grasp it and:

1. the disciples displayed continuing confusion (17-18) The language implies that this questioning back and forth between them went on for some time. Indeed, some of it had likely been going on through the evening as Jesus was speaking and, of course, they were eating, and there were long pauses in the conversation that were not recorded. They just could not grasp what Jesus was trying to tell them; they could not comprehend it, especially this confusing phrase, *in a little while you will see me no more; then after a little while you will see me*. So:

2. Jesus gave a clear explanation (19-22) They may not have understood it right at that moment, but within hours they would see clearly what He was saying. That's why He told them to listen carefully. He was telling them that:

a. they would have a time of grief because of His death It would begin that very night as He was arrested and they were scattered. It would deepen in the morning as He was condemned in the public square and crucified. By tomorrow afternoon they would see Him laid in a tomb and their hearts would be overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. But He was assuring them that:

b. they would soon see him alive Sunday would come! The third day He would rise again as He promised and they would see Him **and their pain would be lost in joy**. Just like a mother forgets the horrible pain of childbirth because she is filled with the joy of the new child in her arms, their time of sorrow would forgotten and lost in the joy of seeing Him alive! It was this promise of His certain resurrection that He wanted most of all to instill in them, to assure them that He would live, that He would rise. To encourage them NOT to believe their eyes as He was crucified and laid in the tomb, and give up in despair, but to wait only a little while and see His promise fulfilled in resurrection life! When the women got to the empty tomb, the angels told them, *"He is risen as He said!"* and Luke adds, *"Then they remembered His words!"* They didn't comprehend it that night, nor the next day, but oh, on Sunday this promise came flooding back into their minds and faith was born. They believed in the risen, living Christ and their lives were never the same! Nothing could take away their joy! Not all the persecutions they would endure, not all

the hatred and even martyrdoms that would come. They took the Good News to the ends of the earth and gladly died for the joy that was set before them, the joy of belonging to the Living Christ who had given them His very Spirit! And He went on to explain to them that:

c. they would have a new level of privilege in praying (23-28) Now that Jesus would rise and go back to heaven, they and we would have a new way to pray, a new practice. Instead of running to wherever Jesus physically was to ask for something like the disciples did, we now ask the Father in Jesus' Name anytime, anywhere. We don't need a priest; we don't need any offering or sacrifice; we don't need any intermediary to go between. We go straight to the Father in prayer; we come directly into His presence in the Name of His Risen Son. And Jesus didn't mean that He Himself would be in heaven and ask the Father for us! That's not what His ministry there is about! He said the Father Himself already loves us because we love Jesus! So, we come to Him in the Name of the Son He loves, as followers of the Son He loves, as believers in the Son He loves and He answers us in the name of the Son He loves and gives to us what we ask, and by doing that, He fills us with joy. We come to the Father in Jesus' Name, for His sake, and time after time we receive in Jesus' Name, for His sake. Again, it is better for us that He said, *Now I am going....*

You see, what Jesus desperately wanted that night was this:

IV. He Wanted To Leave Them With Peace but they just couldn't grasp it. Look at:

1. their last confident assertion (29-30) Their mouths were running. "Yes, yes, now we get it! We understand it all now. We believe You. You're the Christ. We're ready to face anything!" And look at **Jesus' final reminder (31-32)**. "No, you still don't get it. In a few hours you're all going to run away like scared rabbits dashing into their burrows! You're going to leave Me to face it alone." He knew how hard what they were about to face was going to hit them and He so wanted to prepare them to be able to face it.

2. Jesus' words that night were intended to give them peace (33) Earlier that night He had said this: **14:27**. All that He told them that night, about the Father's house, about the Holy Spirit, about the awful things they would face and how the Holy Spirit would overcome them, all these beautiful words were to give them peace. Now what is peace?

a. peace is the calm absolute confidence which God has Look with me at **Phil. 4:6-7**. Peace is an attitude or an attribute of God. When God looks at all the turmoil in the world, does He worry? Does He get anxious? Does He wonder how it's going to all turn out? Does He fear that this might happen or that might not happen? Of course not! He looks at everything in the universe with the calm that says, "It's all under control. I am in charge and everything will always go like clockwork according to My plan!" That kind of calm, that kind of peace, is beyond human understanding and yet, Paul says:

b. it pervades our hearts and minds when we entrust all things to Him When we make the conscious decision to stop being anxious, present our situation to Him and rest in His control, that same Divine peace of His will quiet our thoughts; it will soothe our emotions; it will guard and protect us mentally and emotionally from all that the world can throw at us so that we face it with a calm acceptance just like God does. That's what Jesus was trying to tell His disciples that night and what He's trying to tell us right now. You see, here's:

3. our destiny: in this world we WILL experience tribulation Not just *trouble*; that sounds too minor in English. We will experience suffering and pressure and persecution. There will be times like that dread night when our world seems to be turned upside down and the enemy appears to have won the day. As long as we walk this sod, tribulation will embroil us. But:

4. our courage to face it lies in this one thing: Jesus defeated the world! The world arrested Him and tried Him, mocked Him and scourged Him, nailed Him to a cross and buried Him and at last, put a seal on the tomb as if to say, "There! That's the end of that!" But on Sunday morning, Jesus re-entered His body, transformed it and brought it to life, walked right out through the graveclothes that bound Him, out of the tomb that held Him and called an angel from heaven to roll away the stone so His followers could look in and see Who really won. Forty days later, after appearing to hundreds of people and convincing them of the truth that He is alive, He went out to the Mt. of Olives and rose up into the air out of sight and all the way into heaven where He sat down with the Father on the throne of the universe to rule it forever and ever. Why? Because He won! Because He conquered! Because He defeated all that the world had to throw at Him and accomplished His purpose through it all! And if He defeated the world through a cross, then we can face our tribulation with courage, born out of that same calm assurance that He is ALWAYS in control.

Elisabeth Howard graduated from Wheaton College and left for Ecuador to serve as a missionary among the Quechua Indians. In 1953 she married a fellow missionary named Jim Elliot and they served together in a remote station where their little daughter Valerie was born. When Jim and four of his coworkers were speared to death during an attempt to contact an unreached jungle tribe in 1957 her life was changed forever, but she stayed and continued working with the Quechua and in October of 1958 God opened the door and she actually went to live among the Waorani people who killed her husband, together with her 3 year old daughter and Rachel Saint. She stayed and worked with them for 5 years until

1963 when she returned to the States. The tribe has been transformed and many are believers; their story is told in the movie *End of the Spear*. Elisabeth, now 84, has led a long, full life as an author, speaker, and radio host. Most of us are familiar with the depth of her teaching and wisdom. As one thoroughly acquainted with suffering, who had by then lost two husbands, Elisabeth said this in 1977: *"If we do anything to further the kingdom of God, we may expect to find what Christ found on that road - abuse, indifference, injustice, misunderstanding, trouble of some kind. Take it. Why not? To that you were called. In Latin America someone who feels sorry for himself is said to look like a donkey in a downpour. If we think of the glorious fact that we are on the same path with Jesus, we might see a rainbow."* Jesus said, "In this world you WILL have tribulation, but take courage and choose My path anyway. And as you do, rest in this and be at peace: You can't lose; I have already won!"

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

Protect Them From The Evil One: Victory - 17:1-19

As Jesus and His disciples were leaving the Upper Room that Thursday night, He finished His last instructions to them in chapter 16. And now as we come to chapter 17, either just before they left or somewhere on the way out of the city, Jesus did what we would expect Him to do. He stopped to pray with them. And what a prayer it is! This is the true Lord's Prayer. The one we call the Lord's prayer is really the Disciples' prayer, the prayer He taught *them*; this prayer is His own. It is sometimes called His great High-Priestly Prayer, because in it Jesus prayed in the same way that the Jewish High Priest would pray as He would enter the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement each year. In the process of making atonement for the nation, the priest prayed to Jehovah once for himself, then a second time for the priesthood saying, *'the seed of Aaron, Thy holy people'*, and finally a third time for the people of Israel. Following this pattern, as Jesus was going to the cross to make a once-for-all atonement for the world, He prayed first for Himself (1-5), then for His disciples (6-19) and finally for all those who would believe in Him and become God's people (20-26). But please don't miss the depth of what we have before us. In John 17 we enter with Jesus into the Holy of Holies; we listen with the disciples as our Great High Priest pours out His heart to the Father about that which was most important to them both, the salvation of the world. It was a holy moment. The story is often told of A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, who was discovered early one morning by his friend F.B. Meyer, sitting at his desk weeping with his arms wrapped around a globe of the world, hugging it to his chest and praying for the salvation of the lost. In John 17 we walk in on Jesus doing the same, only with the real item instead of a minute representation. He literally prayed for the world, for you and me, but as He began:

I. Jesus Prayed For Himself (1-5) Read (1). Don't gloss over that; let's think for a moment about:

1. the meaning of Jesus being glorified This is not the first time He has said it that evening. Look back at **13:31-32**.

There is a two-sided reciprocal process going on. On the one hand:

a. the Son brought glory to the Father How? Look at verse **(4)**. Jesus brought glory to the Father **by completing the work the Father had given him to do**. And what work was that? He's talking about **providing salvation for the world through the cross**. Almost every time John uses the word *glorified* relating to Jesus, it points to His death and the resurrection that followed. Compare **12:23-24**. Now the hour had come for Jesus to glorify the Father *by humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!* He brought glory to the Father by dying for the sins of the world, thereby bringing millions upon millions to worship Him, to fall down before Him singing their own version of *Thank you, O my Father, for giving us Your Son...*, or as Paul exclaimed, *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!* The Son brought the Father an immeasurable amount of glory by being obedient and dying and finishing the work of saving all of us! Now here's the other side of the coin:

b. the Father gave glory to the Son How? First, **by raising Him from the dead**. Then by **exalting Him to heavenly rule and saving all who would believe through Him**. *Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* - Phil. 2:9-11. Because He glorified the Father by being obedient unto death, the Father glorified Him by exalting Him to the highest place, giving Him all authority in heaven and earth and declaring that... *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* - Acts 4:12. All of that is wrapped up in that simple phrase in verse **(1)**. So here's:

2. what Jesus is really asking; He's praying:

a. "Do it, Father!" "Bring it on. Let it happen now! Take Me tonight to the trial and tomorrow morning to the judgment hall of Pilate. Take Me up the hill of Calvary. Take Me to the Cross and through all those awful hours of agony. Take Me to the death of the cross and raise Me from the dead so that You will gain all those worshippers, all those millions of children who will give you glory forever!" Look at what He says next in verse **(2)**. He's praying:

b. "Give eternal life to all whom you've given to Me!" "Father, out of all the human beings on the planet that My death can save, there are those who belong to you, those who will believe. I want to rescue them from spiritual death of being separated from Us and from the eternal death that awaits them in the future. I want them to have the

very self-existent, indestructible, ceaseless being that WE have. I want them to live, like WE live, to share in our eternal existence. I want to give them our Life!" And then look at verse (3). That word *know* is the key. His heart is saying:

c. "Let them experience truly knowing You and Me - this is life!" "Father, I want them to KNOW us, to enter in- to OUR fellowship, into the oneness that WE have with each other! I want us to walk with them and talk with them and tell them they are our own! I want them to commune with us, heart to heart and mind to mind forever, the very purpose for which We created them! Let them be joined to Us as one forever. So now Father..."

d. "Complete it by restoring Me to heavenly glory with You!" (4-5) "Finish it! Raise Me from the dead; lift me up to heaven and exalt Me to the highest place once again! Set Me back on the throne of the universe with You once more to rule forever! Finish the work and bring all Our children home!"

Listen, in the last hours of His life on earth, Jesus prayed to die so that every last person who would ever believe might have their sins laid on Him, be forgiven and share His life forever! Or to make it more personal, as the songwriter put it: *when He was on the cross, I was on His mind!* He was thinking about me! He was praying for me! I was the joy that was set before Him that caused Him to pray that He might *endure the cross, scorning its shame and sit down at the right hand of God* - Heb. 12:2. Hallelujah! Now consider this: we're just the opposite of Jesus. We're big on being glorified in Heaven with Him, but not so big on completing all His purpose for us on earth, especially if it involves suffering! Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church who wrote "The Purpose Driven Life," found a Bible verse that he says he would like as his own epitaph: Acts 13:36 *...when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep...* He says that he prays to serve all God's purpose, to complete all God's will, everything that God wants to do through him and *then* die and enjoy the glory. That's not a bad way to learn to pray. That's how Jesus prayed! Too many of us are focused on OUR eternal reward instead of on HIS eternal reward, His glorious inheritance in the saints! He counts His inheritance, not in gold and jewels and mansions and crowns, but in people! In receiving all that have been given to Him in every generation until He comes! So, giving them to Him needs to be our life's purpose in the generation in which we live. What are YOU living for? How are YOU praying? Well, now we come to the second part of this great prayer, the part where:

II. Jesus Prayed For His Disciples (6-19), for the 11 men gathered right there around Him, His own trusted and trained few. These men were to form the core of the church that Jesus was going to build; they were the foundation layer of the plan God was going to implement for the rest of human history; they were the ones who would begin the process of taking the Good News of Jesus to the uttermost parts of the earth. Jesus had invested 3 years of intensive personal discipleship training in them and now it's finished and look how he prays (6). He says:

1. He had revealed the Father to these whom God had given Him God chose these men. Remember, He spent the whole night in prayer before He picked them; God told Him who He wanted. God gave them to Him and for 3+ years He had revealed the Father to them. In situation after situation, in healing sick people and opening blind eyes, in stilling storms and multiplying loaves of bread He had shown them the Father so completely that He had told them just hours earlier, *Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father!*

a. He had brought them into a genuine faith (7-8) "Now they really believe! They are sure that You sent Me and I came from You. They have accepted My words as Your words. They believe!" Moreover:

b. He had brought them to belong to the Father (9-10) "Father, they are Yours! They belong to You. You picked them out and gave them to Me and I brought them to believe. They gave their hearts and lives to Me and that means they belong! They are Mine and they are Yours! Ours!" And He prayed for them now because:

c. He was leaving them behind in a world which hated them (11a) "Father, I'm leaving this world and going back to glory with You, but they'll still be here! I can't bring them with Me right now. And this world hates them and will assault them and try to assimilate them or kill them! So now I'm not praying for the world, but for them!" And here's what He prayed:

2. He now appealed to the Father to "keep" them (11b-12) The NIV *protect* in the Greek is literally *keep*. It is that same word we always sing about the shepherds at Christmas time in fields where they lay *keeping* their sheep; in the Old Testament we read a number of times about people *keeping* sheep. Jesus described Himself back in chapter 10 as the Good Shepherd and us as His sheep and declares that He is going to lay down His life for His sheep! He prays, "Father, for these last years I've kept this little band of sheep!" In fact, He literally says, "I've kept them and guarded them". There are two different nuances of meaning here. The first word means:

a. to watch over them carefully, to always have them under your watchful eye, to never let them out of your sight or take a break where they're left alone and see that they are safe and have everything they need, the way that a good shepherd is constantly watching his sheep, leading them to green pastures and still waters. Even as Ps. 121:3-4 (NASB) says about God, *...He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.* Then John's second word means:

b. to protect them safely from any assault When the hired hand who doesn't own the flock sees the wolf coming, he abandons them and flees, Jesus said. But the good shepherd stands between the flock and the wolf with his spear and puts his own life on the line to protect the sheep and even dies to save them if he must! Jesus prays, "Father, for these 3 years I was right here with them; I was vigilant over them constantly and I protected them completely. I haven't lost even one! Except Judas whom You knew was always a son of destruction and who went to destruction in order to fulfill the Scriptures. But of the real sheep, I protected every one!" And look how He did it:

c. this protection is accomplished by the mighty power of His Name The concept of a name means more than just the word by which someone is identified. In fact, back in verse 6 and again in verse 26, Jesus literally said, *I have revealed YOUR NAME to them*, but the NIV translates it simply, *YOU*. My point is that a person's name means all that the person is, their being, their strength, their reputation. To invoke the name of God is to call on all that God is, on His whole person. Jesus kept His disciples safe through the mighty power of the Father's Name, the Name that the Father had given Him. What Name was that? Well, the Father's Name was four Hebrew letters, YHWH, so sacred that the Jews wouldn't even pronounce it and the vowels have been lost to us. We mispronounce it in English as Jehovah; it is probably something more like Yahweh. But the Name God told Joseph to give His Son was YHWH combined with the Hebrew word for salvation, *shua*, *Yehoshua* or shortened, *Yeshua*, Jehovah-salvation, which comes out in English as *Jesus* and He was given it because He would save His people from their sins! In the Name of Jesus, in the Person of Jesus, is the salvation of the world and Jesus is the salvation of Jehovah; their Names are one in His Name. We're told it is the only Name under heaven that saves men. We're told that one day at that Name every knee in the universe will bow. And it was by the almighty power of that Name that Jesus kept His disciples safe. So, here's:

3. what He was asking the Father to do for His disciples "Father, I kept them while I was here, but now I'm coming back to heaven. Father, now I commit them to YOU! Protect them by the power of our Name as they're in the midst of this awful world!" But protect them from what? There are some specific things Jesus mentions. First, He was asking the Father:

a. to prevent them from dissolving into disunity (11b) Jesus had formed them into a cohesive band, yet how many times had the Twelve argued with each other over things like who was the greatest? Can you imagine how hard Satan would work to pick them apart and divide them from each other once Jesus was gone? You can see him try it early on in Acts 6 over food distribution and again in Acts 15 over circumcision, even between Paul and Barnabas over whether Mark should join them on a missions trip! Jesus is praying, "Father, prevent these men from that! Make them one the way You and I are one!". Second, He asks Him:

b. to secure them from perishing like Judas (12) He wanted none to be lost, not one of them! He wanted them all kept eternally by the Father's protection and He was confident that the Father would do that. Look at **10:27-30**. Satan can't destroy them; they are kept safe in the Father's hand! Third, He asks the Father:

c. to guard them from being lured back to the world's evil (14-16) "Father, they don't belong to this world any more than I do, but they're stuck in it and I know the Evil One is out there prowling about like a roaring lion looking to devour them. And even though he can't destroy them, he would like nothing better than to deceive them and to lure them back into the lifestyle of this world where they don't belong. He will try to get them to commit sexual sin and tell them it's OK. He'll try to seduce them back into living in the pagan way of the people all around them. Father, protect them against that!" And then asked Him:

d. to keep them dedicated to their mission of declaring the Truth (17-19) The word *sanctify* really means *to set apart*. The request is *set them apart unto the Truth, that is, to Thy Word*. "Father, I'm sending them out into this hostile world on a mission, just the way You sent Me here on a mission. That mission is to declare Your Truth to the whole world! Keep them set apart to that! Don't let them forget what they're here for. I have dedicated Myself to the salvation of the world. I'm going to the Cross. Keep them dedicated to continuing our mission and saving the world!" Can you imagine what would have happened if the Apostles had had the kind of moral failures that the modern church sees?! Can you imagine what would have happened if they had decided that God's Word could be reinterpreted to fit the morals of the time in which they lived? Can you imagine what would have happened if they had forgotten their calling and were content to just love Jesus personally and live a contented, pleasant life and die? There would be no church! The whole foundation layer would have been destroyed! That's why Jesus prayed for God to keep them! And He did it! But here's one last thought. Jesus prayed this, not privately, but in their hearing because:

4. He wanted them to experience His complete joy in their victory (13) "I want them to hear Me pray this and understand that You will do what I asked and be filled with the same joy I have in knowing that You will answer! They WILL be one! They WILL never perish! They WILL not be lured by the world's evil and they WILL never abandon their mission! They will be victorious over all the power of the Evil One through Your power! You will keep them!" Hallelujah!

So, what happened to these men? The protection Jesus prayed for was obviously NOT physical and the unity was NOT locational. James was martyred first, slain by the sword of Herod Agrippa in Jerusalem early in Acts. Origen of Alexandria writes about 200 AD that the apostles had divided up the work of evangelizing the world between them. Peter chose Turkey, but eventually went to Rome, the very capital of the Empire, and was crucified upside down under Nero. Andrew took the Gospel to the Ukraine and southern Russia and was crucified in Greece. John in later years oversaw the churches in western Turkey and was exiled to suffering on Patmos, however he was freed and became the only one to die a natural death. Philip was scourged and executed at Hierapolis in west central Turkey after demonstrating the power of God over the local pagan deity. Nathanael or Bartholomew joined him there until his death, then later went to Armenia, the north of Iraq and Iran and was eventually skinned alive near Baku on the Caspian Sea. Thomas took the Gospel to Iran, Ethiopia and eventually all the way to southeast India where he planted the church before being later speared to death near Chennai on the east coast. Matthew or Levi took the Gospel to the continent of Africa and was killed with a spear or an axe in Ethiopia. James the Less labored in Egypt but in the end is said to have been thrown from the Temple in Jerusalem by Jewish leaders and clubbed to death. The other Judas, also called Thaddaeus, went to eastern Iraq and Iran and was crucified at Edessa in Syria. Tradition says that Simon the zealot traveled west into North Africa and even as far as Britain before being killed. Do you see? They did what Jesus did! They said, "Father, bring it on! Do it! Complete the work that You have given me to do even if it means my suffering and death in order that You might have millions of people receive eternal life." Their deep joy and confidence in Jesus' victory caused them to embrace His mission to their very deaths, to spread themselves out and take the Gospel to the ends of the earth as they knew it. Not one of them ever fell into apostasy or was lured back into the world and no matter where they traveled, they always remained one in heart and in their common faith. Jesus' prayer for them was answered! They were protected from the evil one and all the millions who've become part of the church through history have come through their faithful witness. You're here because of them! So, will you join them? Will you rest in that complete joy of Jesus' victory and pray, "Father, complete through me the work You've given me to do, no matter what the cost, that You might be glorified through using me in saving the world!"

Famous Last Words: The Upper Room Discourse - Jn. 13-17

That They May Be One: Unity - 17:20-26

Today we come to the end of this series of messages and to the end of this most important discourse in Jn. 13-17, the precious last words that Jesus shared with His disciples the night before He died, which I've been trying to imprint on your minds through using His well-known key phrases. We also come to the end of Jesus' great high-priestly prayer in John 17. I remind you again that this prayer is holy ground. Jesus is baring His heart to the Father before His disciples and us. We saw Him first pray about Himself in verses 1-5 and heard Him pray to go to the cross to give eternal life and the knowledge of Himself to all those who would believe. Then we watched Him intercede for His disciples in verses 19-26, asking the Father that they would never be divided, never perish, never be lured back into the world by the evil one and never abandon their mission to reach the world. And now, in the last six verses:

I. Jesus Prayed For All Those Who Will Ever Believe (20) That simple phrase includes anyone who has ever believed in Jesus Christ. Every person that has ever come to believe has come through the word, through the testimony and the teaching of the apostles, which we have now recorded for us in the Scriptures to preserve it. We have a name for all those who have ever believed; HE had a name for them; He called them His CHURCH! Jesus ended His petition that night by praying for the Church. But before we move on there are several things I want you to notice in that verse. First, when He said, *my prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe...*, it seems clear to me that:

1. all that He prayed for His disciples, He intended for all of us When He prayed for their unity, He didn't mean it to apply just to them; He prayed it for all of us, as you'll hear him explain in the next verse! When He prayed that not one of them would be lost, He meant it for us too! When He asked the Father to protect them from the evil one, He asked it for us also! And when He pleaded that they would never abandon the mission He sent them on, He was pleading it for all of us! You see, as Jesus came into the Father's presence that night, He prayed as the High Priest prayed in Israel; He prayed as the living representative of the entire people before God. Every time the priest came into God's presence he carried the children of Israel with him on his shoulders, their names engraved upon two onyx stones, and he also bore them upon his heart, their names engraved on 12 gems inside the breastplate of his vestment. Actually, Jesus wasn't like the high priest; the high priest was simply an earthly picture of Jesus! Jesus came that night to the Father with all of us upon His shoulders and all of us upon His heart, so when He prayed *for all those who will believe*:

2. He prayed out of His vision for the church through history Paul actually shared that vision with us. Look at **Eph. 5:25b-27**. Christ loved the whole Church and sacrificed Himself to get her. Why? So that through all the centuries of history He could nourish and cherish and grow her by adding more people and so He could perfect her, washing away every spot and blemish, stain and wrinkle, until one day she stands complete, until He presents her to Himself at His coming, a radiant, glorious Bride united with Him forever. When Jesus prayed that night, He didn't simply see 11 men standing around Him; His mind was engrossed in the scene we have in Revelation 5 where His glorious church is gathered before the throne of God in white robes and they sing, *You are worthy... You have redeemed us to God from every tribe and language and people and nation!* His mind was on Rev. 19 at His own Marriage Supper where the Church, His glorious bride dressed in white, is presented to Him complete at last! When He prayed, He prayed for

those gathered round Him that night, He prayed for the early church that would shake Jerusalem and turn the Roman Empire upside down, He prayed for the church that would sweep across Europe and become an empire. He prayed for the church that would grow cold and dark through the Middle Ages and would be torn in two by the purifying fire of the reformation. He prayed for the church that would be raised up on every continent through the great missionary endeavors of the last two centuries and He prayed for the multiplied millions of His followers in Asia today who will yet take the Gospel through all the hardest places on earth back to Jerusalem where it all started! All of these could Jesus see that night as He prayed, so here is the best news of all:

3. He was praying for ME! Oh hallelujah, I was there that night! He bore me on His shoulders into the presence of God to pray for ME! He carried me upon His heart that night to ask all that He desired for ME! This is not merely Jesus interceding for millions; this is Jesus pouring out His heart for ME to the Father before going to the cross! As the chorus of Dave Bolling's beautiful song puts it, *It was for me He cried, for me He died, for me He shed His blood upon the tree. It was for me He came, for me His shame; For me, oh praise His name, it was for me!* Hallelujah!

Now what was it that Jesus prayed for me? For us? Well, the first thing on His heart which He asked for at the greatest length was the same thing He asked for His disciples:

II. He Prayed For Our Unity With One Another (21-23) For the first thousand years until the "Great Schism" in 1054, there literally was one church! All believers were simply Christians. Afterward, there were two churches, Roman and Greek, east and west, until the 1500's when the Protestants broke away from Rome and formed all kinds of their own denominations. Somehow, I don't believe Jesus ever intended that there would be literally thousands of denominations among His followers as there are today and that we would represent ourselves to the world separately from one another. One counselor has described the current state of the church as "multiple personality disorder in the body of Christ"! Yet this division is something Jesus has had to allow and even orchestrate, simply because in many periods throughout history large portions of His church have become cold, dead and apostate and He has repeatedly had to have groups of faithful believers break away from them and start over again in order to preserve the Truth. For instance, one branch of our own church roots is a group of people who split from First Baptist of Glenside in the 1920's because it became liberal and refused to honor the Word of God at the time. But then, 90 years later, First Baptist became Resurrection Community Church and a church of evangelical believers once again. However, the damage was done; we remained separate churches and today Resurrection Community has disbanded. That's a little mini-view of what has happened within the whole body of Christ; we have been split so much, so long, and so far from one another in our beliefs and practices that there's no putting it back together now in the sense of one combined organization. It's a good thing that's not the kind of unity that Jesus was praying for; He prayed for spiritual unity. In fact, in verse 21:

1. He prayed our unity would be like that of the Father and Son *Just as I am in You and You are in Me...* Try to imagine that! The oneness of being, the full unity of purpose, mind and heart that the Father and Son had, He prayed that kind of unity would be ours, that we would literally be ONE and He said it three times in those few verses! Can that possibly be? Well, listen to **Acts 4:32**, *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.* They became extensions of one another. They were together as often as they could be; they were always praying with one another. They were continually involved together in ministry. When one was arrested, they all gathered and prayed until he was released. And when one had a problem or a need, they all saw it as their own and pitched in to help however they could. They freely gave and used their money and possessions to meet each other's needs because they became like the Son who said to His Father back in verse 10, *All I have is yours and all You have is mine.* Why was that? Because [verse 21] *You are in me and I am in You!* "We're one; we're the same!" That's the unity Jesus prayed for us to have! By the way, don't bother trying to drum that up somehow, as though we can simply decide to be one with each other. That's not how it happens. There is a profound thought that Jesus expressed in verse **22**; be careful not to gloss over it:

2. He gave us the glory that the Father gave Him to create that unity You know, honestly, I pondered that phrase a good while and kept asking, "What does that actually mean? What is *the glory* that He gave us?" And my eyes were drawn back to verses **(1b-2)**. The glory that the Father gave to Christ is declared in verse 2; He gave glory to Christ by granting Him authority over the whole world to be the only means of salvation! Salvation is not found in any other. There is no other Name, no other person, who saves. Christ is the Savior of the world and all the millions who have eternal life have been given it by Him! And He turned around and basically gave that same privilege to us! He gave us:

a. the present glory of being His means of saving the world If you'll allow me to paraphrase the Great Commission, Jesus said, "Since all authority has been given to Me over heaven and earth, now I'm sending you! Go save the world! Make disciples of all the nations!" Even when He chooses to appear to someone in a vision or dream like He is doing for thousands of Muslims these days, the person is almost always immediately connected to a believer who can explain to them the whole message. WE are the means Jesus has chosen to save all who will ever believe; the only way anyone can come to Him is through hearing the news from us! We literally hold the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven! We actually determine who gets in and who doesn't by who we tell! What an awesome privilege! But oh, what a serious responsibility! Jesus gave us that glory while we are in this world, then He also gave us:

b. the future glory of being exalted as His sons forever As Jesus prayed in verse 5, He was confident of that heavenly glory to which He would soon be restored as God the Son. And in like manner, *...as many as did receive him to them he gave authority to become sons of God -- to those believing in his name - John 1:12 [YLT]*. We who believe have been granted the authority of being His sons! Jesus was sent by the Father to *bring many sons to glory!* And look with me at His future plan for us in **Rom. 8:18-21**. The whole universe is anxiously waiting for that day when God unveils and reveals His sons and daughters in all the splendor of His glory as says, "Look, these are My Children; these are My glory; these are what the whole world, the whole universe, the whole plan of history, the sending of My Son have been about! Behold them in all their glory!" And then as the chorus says, *The universe with joy will ring when grace has won the day; As all creation joins to sing, "Praise God who paid man's way!"*

That's the glory He gave us! But look back to verse 22. He gave it to us in order that we might all be ONE! When our hearts are caught up with the glory of the mission He's given us and the ultimate heavenly glory that will be ours, all our differences melt away and we find ourselves being ONE. When we're focusing on our favorite doctrines or espousing the music style we prefer in worship or obsessing over what color to paint the sanctuary, we divide quickly! But just put people on a mission team together and watch the differences disappear! If you want true unity, focus on the heart of God for the world and you'll find it! Jesus prayed for unity to come from that and the reason it works is that:

3. His indwelling us is the means of creating that unity (23a) The Father being IN Jesus made them one. His being IN us makes us one! Jesus lives in each one of us in the person of the Holy Spirit, so we have ONE Spirit! We are all the same, all united at the core of our very beings! So why don't we see it? James said, *What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? - 4:1 (NASB)*. It's our flesh! Our own self-centered ways of acting and thinking. When we yield to the Spirit and walk according to His direction and in His strength, we are one! When we choose to walk according to our flesh, we quickly end up in conflict with one another! Of course, Jesus understood that and that's probably why:

4. He prayed that our unity would be brought to a perfect completion (23b) Jesus realized there would be struggles in this area, that there would be times and seasons of dividedness in His church, but He prayed that the Father would eventually perfect that spiritual unity, bring it to a full completion. I hope that what we see today is part of the Father's answer to that prayer. Once a month I spend a wonderful time praying with an Assemblies of God pastor, a couple of Episcopalian rectors, a Lutheran pastor, a Catholic priest and a deacon, a Baptist and a bunch of Presbyterians, all of whom love Jesus and by the time we leave after praying for our community and the world and one another, our hearts are deeply knit. We know we have a ton of differences but we know we are one in Jesus and His mission. 25 years ago I wouldn't have done that. 25 years ago you didn't see that in this area. I would like to think that in some ways the church in this generation is waking up to a new kind of unity, the kind Jesus prayed for us to have. But why was that so important to Him?

III. He Prayed (twice) That Our Unity Would Impact The World You see, according to **(21b)**:

1. our unity convinces the world that Jesus truly is God's beloved Son and according to **(23b)**

2. our unity convinces the world that we truly are God's beloved people What would you think if 10 different people tried to talk to you about the same basic thing, but each one told about it with a different slant and none of the 10 would have anything to do with each other? You would dismiss the thing out of hand! That's how people feel when they see us come to them divided and separated from each other. But when we come united, with one heart and mind, despite all our differences, people are moved! Our unity in coming to them with the same heart, with the same message, holding hands together, is a powerful witness. People look at it and think, "Man, something must really have happened to them all! This Jesus must be real!" and:

3. the result is that they believe in and worship Him and join us! Like Paul said, when someone sees us telling the same story in unity *...he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner... and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" - 1 Cor. 14:23-25*. Our unity impacts the world...and so does our disunity! That's why it's so important!

Now there are still two more things that Jesus prayed for us. In verse 24:

IV. He Prayed For Our Eventual Union With Him In Heaven (24) Oh, listen to that! There is our guarantee of heaven! Jesus told the Father that:

1. He wants all who belong to Him to be with Him forever He asked that all of us would be with Him where He is, in heaven. He prayed that each one of us who are given to Him would be in His personal presence, that He would have us with Him for all eternity. He said, "I want it!" He wants us. He wants us in heaven and we shall be there! And not only that:

2. He wants us to fully behold His eternal glory He prayed that we would see Him high and lifted up, seated on the throne of the universe with the Name that is above every Name, that we would see Him shine in all His splendor, that we would see all the angels and all the redeemed of all the ages gathered round His throne crying "Here I am to wor-

ship..." and casting their crowns at His feet! If you read Rev. 4-5 and see all the peoples of the earth in all their splendor bowing before the throne of God and of the Lamb, that's what Jesus prayed for, and we know He'll get it and we'll be there to see it! Job put it well, *...after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* - **Job 19:26-27**. Hallelujah! Then finally, as Jesus closed His prayer:

V. He Prayed For His Empowering Union With Us On Earth (25-26) Did you hear that? As He closed:

1. He prayed that we would be filled with the Father's love *I pray that the love YOU have for ME might be in THEM!* What a thing! The very love of the Father for the Son! That infinite, eternal love -- in us! But how is that to be? Paul says, *...God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.* - **Rom. 5:5**. That's why:

2. He prayed that He might come to personally indwell us by His Spirit *...that I Myself might be in them.* Jesus prayed that the day would come when He would personally live inside every believer and when the Spirit came 50 days later, it happened. From that moment on every believer is now indwelt by the very Spirit of Jesus. Listen, Jesus wanted you to be with Him in glory forever, but while you're on earth He wants to be in you! Personally! He never wants to have one moment of separation from you, rather He wants to go with you through every minute of your life, filling you with Himself so that you are able to live a life of love and love others as He loved us! And, of course, the result of that will also be unity!

THAT THEY MAY BE ONE. It's the thing that was most on His heart the night before He died. He wanted us, his followers, to be one despite the things that divide us. In his book *The Mark of the Christian*, Francis Schaeffer told that Hitler, during World War II, ordered the union of all religious denominations in Germany. A Brethren group became deeply divided over the issue. One segment obeyed and suffered little persecution, but gradually their spiritual vitality was weakened. The group that resisted stayed vibrant, but many died in the concentration camps due to their stand. Following the war, feelings between these groups were sharp. Tensions were high. An elder of one of the groups told Francis Schaeffer that they knew the problem had to be resolved. So leaders of both groups agreed to get alone in a quiet place to ask God to show each one where he had failed to keep Christ's commands. After several days of heart-searching, they met together. "And what happened then?" asked Schaeffer. "We just were one!" the elder replied. What will it take for Jesus to see the answer to His prayer in our own lives, in our church and in our community? Maybe we need to search our hearts too! To see where we're divided, where there's spiritual pride, to see what Jesus wants to cleanse us of, so that we can be unreservedly ONE!

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

I think all of us like exciting stories, especially if they are true. And there is no more exciting story than the story of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a story that began on Easter Sunday morning as the disciples first saw the resurrected Christ and believed; it is a story that has continued through 2000 years of history. It is a story that is filled with courageous and bold leaders and amazing exploits, with common ordinary people who gave their lives, and with miracles and powerful movements of the Holy Spirit all across the world. And it is a story that is still being written today in your life and mine and millions like us on every continent of the globe. I would say, without exaggerating, the chapter being written in our lifetime is probably the most amazing one yet. Jesus is doing things with His church in our day greater in scope than He has done in all of history. In fact, it may be the final chapter before He returns! To read the middle chapters you'll have to delve into the history books and biographies that have been written. It is a rich exploration which I wish we all had time for. But the very first chapter of the story of the church God chose to have written down for us and preserved in Scripture by a disciple named Luke. We call it the Book of Acts or the "Acts Of The Apostles" and that's what we'll be studying together for some weeks to come. But before we begin, let's get an overall perspective in our minds by thinking about:

Jesus' Program For This Age He spelled it out in **Mt. 16:18**. After Peter declared for all the disciples that great lesson, *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,* Jesus told them what His whole program was about: *...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.* Those five words, *I will build my church*, are His purpose statement. "I will build myself a great assembly, a body of believing worshippers who confess that I am the Son of God, and nothing on this earth will be able to stop Me!" That's what Jesus has been about from that resurrection morning until this one, building His church. It began by giving His followers a repeated:

1. the command - Mt. 28:19 *Go and make disciples of all nations...* "Go build My church. Everywhere you go, share about me and make disciples, baptize them in My Name and teach them everything I've taught you so they will go and disciple others. Don't stop. Go to the very ends of the earth. My glory is to be declared in all the earth." That is the purpose and the mission of His followers in the world, to build and build, to grow and grow the Church, not to sit and soak, not to put up buildings in His Name, but to build Him an ever-widening community of worshippers who believe that He is the Christ. The Book of Acts describes:

2. the process - Acts 15:14 (NASB) James said: *"Simon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking [out] from among the Gentiles [the nations] a people for His name.* That's what He's been doing down through history. That's His passion, taking out from among all the peoples of earth a brand-new people for His name, the Church. And Paul expressed:

3. the goal - Eph. 5:25-27 *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, ...and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish...* When He's all done and the church has been fully built, she becomes a fully matured Bride. And He is going to stop History by His return, glorify her and make her radiant, and present her to Himself in heaven. And John tells us what that looks like:

4. the result - Rev. 7:9-10 *...before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."* That's the Church! Worshippers from all eras of time, from all peoples of earth, all praising and serving Him together. That's what He's building out of us and through us. That's the goal all of history is rushing headlong toward. And it all began here in Acts with 49 days:

The Days Of Preparation - Ch. 1

7 weeks. That's how long Jesus chose to wait after He rose before launching the Church publicly. They were important days. For 40 of them Jesus Himself actually remained on earth with His disciples after His resurrection. We call it:

I. The Post-Resurrection Ministry Of Jesus (1-8) 40 seems to be the number of preparation. 40 years Moses was in the desert being prepared to be the leader of Israel. 40 days He was on Mt. Sinai with God being prepared to give the Law. 40 days Jesus spent in the desert in warfare against Satan preparing to launch His public ministry. And 40 days Jesus spent with His disciples to make them ready to begin to build His church. Those were important days, both for them and for us. During those days, Luke tells us that some very significant things happened. First, Jesus:

1. He gave us sure proofs: that He is alive (1-3) Jesus was not planning to stay on earth; He was going to leave and return to heaven. Yet the core of our faith is that He is alive. We serve a risen Savior, not a dead man. How would His followers know that for sure? How would we who come thousands of years later know that it is true? The answer is

that He spent 40 days, more than a month, with a group of men He had chosen, men who knew Him, who had been with Him for three years before His death, men who could not be mistaken or fooled. And He walked with them and talked with them and taught them and ate meals with them. For 40 days they touched Him and hugged Him and He put His arms around them. John put it like this in *1John 1:1-2*, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at [or gazed at intently] and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life [Jesus]. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.* He proved it to them in an undeniable way, a way that can't be disputed, a way that caused them to go out and stake their very lives on the message that He is alive, to give themselves up as martyrs for His sake. That's how convinced they were! And they shared it with others who shared with others until it was shared with us! And like the generations before us, we go out and give our lives to build His church and are willing to die for Him if it comes to that, because we're convinced He's alive, even though we've never seen Him! Paul said the church is *the church of the LIVING God!* And today we can sit here and know that with full assurance because of those critical days of preparation when Jesus revealed Himself to the apostles! Then during those days Jesus:

2. He made a promise: the Holy Spirit will indwell us (4-5) John made this comment much earlier in *John 7:39*, *Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.* Jesus Himself had said in the Upper Room, *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment...But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.* - *John 16:7-8, 13.* Now, Jesus reiterated that promise and clarified that it would happen in just a few days. The Holy Spirit, the very presence of the living God, would now come and baptize them all, immerse them all, indwell them all, transform them all. And when Peter stood up to preach, he made it clear that this promise is for every believer in every time and every place - **2:38-39**. For 2000 years people have been testing that promise and no matter what their land, their language, their skin color or their station in life, rich or poor, young or old, no matter when or where they live, when they repent of their sins and accept the truth that Jesus is alive, the same thing happens all over again; they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He comes and lives in them and they are transformed into brand new creatures by His power. It works in Irian Jaya and in Guinea and in Glenside. It worked in 30 AD, in 300 AD, in 1300 AD and it works in 2000 AD. That's what makes us part of the Church of the living God. *1 Cor. 12:13*, *...we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body...* the Church. Everybody who's in the Church Jesus is building has the Spirit. Now, lots of people are in church buildings and in organizations which are called churches and don't have the Spirit, but everybody who's in the REAL church, the one Jesus is preparing to present to Himself, has the Spirit! And it is His Spirit which bears witness with our human spirit that we are children of God, that gives us assurance that we are saved. That promise was made most clearly during these days. Thirdly, during these days Jesus:

3. He stated a principle, one that we would do well to heed. He said that **we will never know the time schedule** on this building project (**6-7**). They were still stuck on their Jewish idea of the Messiah who was coming to restore Israel's kingdom and let her rule the world, not a Savior who was planning to build a Church. And Jesus told them straight out: "It is not for you to know. The Father has set times and dates by His own authority and He is never going to tell you!" He's not going to tell anyone. When it's time to quit working on the building, the whistle will blow, or rather the trumpet will sound, and we'll all get raptured into His presence for the presentation and THEN He'll return and set up the promised Kingdom. But we'll never know when! And yet, time after time people and organizations, even ones who are true believers, set dates and get disappointed. During these days of preparation Jesus warned us clearly NOT to do that. And then during these days:

4. He revealed His plan Verse 3 says over these 40 days He spoke with them about the Kingdom of God, That is, He taught them. Some of that teaching was in Lk. 24:44 and following, where in the Upper Room He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and explained what was written that He would suffer, rise again and that repentance and remission of sins would be preached to all nations in His name. Matthew 28 says He gave them that same plan on a mountain in Galilee. Here he met them out on the Mount of Olives and in verse (**8**) He reiterated the plan one more time. In those words, we find:

a. our power: it is derived from the Holy Spirit The Spirit's presence lives in us to give us power. Power for what? Here also is:

b. our purpose: to be witnesses unto Him What is a witness? Someone who tells what they have experienced. What have we experienced? Him! The living Jesus who died for our sins and rose again and whose Spirit lives within us! That's our purpose. How is the world going to know that His is alive? They look at us! They listen to our words and look at our lives and they see Jesus. How is that possible? By the power of the Spirit. As we yield to Him, His power speaks the words through our mouths, His power does the works through our hands. As Paul said, we're living letters, known and read by all men! When they see Him in us, they believe and the church is built! And here also we have:

c. our perspective: This process will advance **from Jerusalem** through Judea and then Samaria and on **to the ends of the earth**. And notice that this verse is not a command to *go and be witnesses*. It is a firm statement of fact. "The Spirit will come; you will receive power and you will be witnesses to the ends of the earth. It will happen. You can't help yourselves! The Spirit will drive you to it! That's the plan. That's what I'm going to do with My church and when it's all done, I'll come back. But right now, it is time for Me to leave." And so next we read of:

II. The Ascension Of Jesus (9-11) He literally floated up through the air until the clouds hid Him, showing them that He was going into heaven. And that is important for two reasons. First:

1. it certified His permanent departure For 40 days He'd been appearing and disappearing. He would meet them here or there and stay and then leave. He would suddenly appear or suddenly disappear. But the ascension told them that was over. He was leaving now for good. He was going back to heaven to the Father. He wouldn't be showing up tomorrow or next week or next year in the flesh anymore. He was gone now for the duration. But it also:

2. it clarified His pending return The angelic messengers made it clear. He's gone but He's coming back! And the way He's coming back is no mystery; it's exactly the way He left, in a body, coming down out of the clouds of heaven! His coming is not some vague veiled reference to an obscure idea or wish; the same Jesus, alive and well, will come back in the same body just the way He left to stand upon the earth and rule the nations! And if anybody says, "Look he's there; that guy says he's Jesus reincarnate!," don't believe it because when He comes every eye will see Him and He'll be coming down from heaven just like this! That knocks out every false pretender; there won't be any mistakes! So, Jesus spent 40 days preparing His disciples and then He left - for good! And for 9 more days they were all alone. What did they do? **(12-14)** Their preparation was not done quite yet. In these last 9 days there were also three very important:

III. The Lessons For The Disciples and for us. The first one is that:

1. in building the church all things wait on the timing of the Father Jesus told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait until the Spirit came, so they went back and waited. And chapter 2 says that when the Day of Pentecost was fully come (the day God had chosen), the Spirit came. That is one of the primary lessons of God: waiting. In building the church you can be sure of one thing: we don't control the timetable; God does. The times and the seasons are under His control. The opening and closing of doors is His. The church is built in His time and in His way. And even though we have grand visions and plans and ideas and dreams, we must learn that in all of it we are really just waiting on what God is doing, when He is doing it and being His instruments to use when He's ready. The second lesson is that:

2. in building the church all things are accomplished through prayer Jesus didn't tell them to go back and pray but they went back and prayed anyway. It was a lesson they had learned. Jesus had told them, *... how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*" - Luke 11:13. That's what they were doing in those days. They prayed for the Spirit to come. They prayed every day in the upper room and went every day to the Temple to worship and praise. In the church, all things of any eternal value are accomplished through prayer. Prayer is not ONE thing we do; it is THE thing we do. We pray and then He moves through us to build the church! And finally, the third lesson is that:

3. in building the church all of us in our variety are one There were 11 apostles Jesus had chosen. There were women who had followed and supported Him. His mother Mary was there. His brothers who hadn't even believed Him before His death were there. And verse 15 says that the group of believers was at times as large as 120. And they all prayed as one. There were no distinctions. When Peter spoke to them in verse 16, he called them "Brothers". They were all brothers and sisters in a common family. That's how it is in the church. **Gal. 3:28**, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*. In the church, in Jesus, nobody's higher or lower, better or worse; the ground is all level. All are sinners saved by grace and transformed into saints by the Holy Spirit. That's the truth, but putting it fully into practice will take them another 10 years, as we'll see later.

So, that, in a nutshell, is what Jesus is about. It's what His followers are to be about as the main purpose of their lives. But quite frankly, we're often about other things in our lives, aren't we? *About 255 BC there lived a girl by the name of Helena. She was the daughter of an innkeeper on the Turkish coast, from a lowly background. It is said that from her childhood she adored Jesus. The Roman Emperor Constantius I conquered that region, saw her and took her as a concubine. After 19 years she was banished, that is, divorced and sent away, so Constantius I could marry another woman and consolidate his power. But she had a little son and it is said that she taught her son about Jesus. In the year 306 he became the Emperor of Rome. His name was Constantine. In 312 on the eve of a great battle Constantine had a vision of the cross and heard the words, "In this sign conquer". Constantine adopted the faith of his mother; he became the first Christian Roman emperor and a year later issued The Edict of Milan which ended the persecution of Christians in the Empire and gave everyone freedom of religion. Helena has been described as such a devout servant of God that in 324, when she was nearly 70, she made one of the first pilgrimages to the Holy Land. She marshalled experts to search for the true cross in Jerusalem's neglected rubble, and they believed they found it on the location where today thousands come each year to reflect on Christ. But beyond that, Helena encouraged her son to build churches, appoint Christians to high govern-*

ment posts, and adopt a Christian calendar. While Constantine was not entirely successful in turning the Roman Empire toward Christianity, his mother's legacy has survived intact. She was later canonized as a saint. As writer Evelyn Waugh said, "Helena was a lonely, resolute woman with a single concrete, practical task clear before her--to turn eyes of the world back to the planks of wood on which their salvation hung." [Virtue, Mar/Apr 1996. Page 47.] This innkeeper's daughter, this captive human trophy, this divorced single-parent ex-wife, was an instrument greatly used of God to build the Church of Jesus Christ because that was her vision. Will you make it yours?

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The Coming Of The Holy Spirit - Ch. 2

Nine days those early disciples waited. Jesus had left them to return to heaven. Every day they went to the Temple and worshipped Him, praising Him that He was alive (Lk. 24:53). Every day they gathered in the Upper Room and perhaps other houses to pray together and ask for the coming of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised. They probably didn't bother to look at a calendar. They were so filled with joy they hadn't even noticed that the day Jesus rose was the day of the Jewish Celebration of Firstfruits where the first barley sheaf of the harvest was waved as an offering to the Lord. 49 days, 7 weeks, had gone by. But then this 10th day came, which was the 50th day after Jesus' resurrection. And by Divine coincidence it happened also to be the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, which means 50 days after the Firstfruits are offered. But this day of Pentecost was unlike any other, in fact this day is perhaps the third most important day in all of history after Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. On this 50th day, the Holy Spirit comes and the Church of Jesus Christ is catapulted into existence, which changes the course of history forever. In Acts 2 we read the story of three things that happen on that day. First:

I. A Promise Is Fulfilled (1) The NIV doesn't do this verse justice. The word *came* is literally *fulfilled*. This Pentecost was a day of fulfillment. Just as the Passover was finally fulfilled when Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us and just as the Celebration of the Firstfruits was finally fulfilled on the third day when Christ rose from the dead, the firstfruits of those who slept in death, so exactly 7 weeks (or 50 days) later, the Feast of Weeks (or as the Greeks called it: Pentecost) was finally fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit to birth the Church, which became a living offering of two loaves, Jew and Gentile, together presented to the Lord. So, it fulfills the Old Testament symbol. But it does more than that:

1. Pentecost fulfills the promise of the coming of the Spirit Jesus had promised repeatedly that the Holy Spirit would come. He explicitly told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit Who would come in just a few days. So here is the fulfillment of that promise **(2-4)**. Two amazing signs were given so that they would recognize what was happening. First:

a. they heard the sound of wind They didn't feel it, but they heard its sound, loud and overpowering like a hurricane blowing or a tornado or the gale that nearly sunk their boat on the Sea of Galilee. They knew right away the sound of the wind, but it was not a physical wind; it was the wind of the Spirit. Jesus had said the coming of the Spirit was like the blowing of the wind when He taught them. In fact, the very word, both in Hebrew and Greek, for *wind*, for *breath* and for *spirit* is the same word. To say, "it is the wind" is the exact same words that say, "It is the Spirit!" Now, back in **Gen. 2:7** God breathed into Adam the "wind (breath) of life" and he became a living soul. On the evening of His resurrection when Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room, He did a very strange thing while he was with them. **John 20:22** says *...he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* It was a symbolic act, a prophetic act. Just as the Father breathed His breath into man and gave him physical life, Jesus was saying "Soon I will breathe My Breath, My Spirit into you and give you MY spiritual life!" The sound they heard was the sound of the very breath of God breathing the life of His Spirit into them. But there was another sign. As they heard the deafening sound of wind:

b. they saw the sight of fire It wasn't actual fire, but they saw what looked like a great pillar of fire that appeared above them and then it separated into a host of individual little flames or tongues of fire and these then appeared to come down and rest upon each one of them individually, probably on their mouths. Yet instead of feeling the sensation of burning, they suddenly felt uncontrollably moved to speak! The symbol was plain. The Holy Spirit had come down on Jesus in the form of a dove at His baptism. John had said of Jesus, *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit AND FIRE!* Fire was always the symbol of the presence of God. The pillar of fire, the burning bush and now tongues of fire that energized their tongues so that they were suddenly empowered to speak His praise, to be witnesses, just as Jesus had said. This indeed fulfilled what they had been waiting for; the Holy Spirit had come and He had come to stay and to dwell in each one of them forever. But it does even more than that:

2. it begins the fulfillment of the plan of God by the church The coming of the Spirit was not the only thing Divinely arranged on that day **(5-13)**. Now, think about this for just a moment. Where is the only other place in all the Bible where anything like this happened? In Gen. 11 at the Tower of Babel! What happened there?

a. at Babel: after the flood the human race was starting to follow after evil once again. They were unified by a common language and lived in only one area and they had united themselves once again in a common rebellion against God. So, what did God do? He came down there and suddenly **the unified race was divided into all different languages**. They couldn't understand one another anymore. And the effect of that was that they moved

away from one another and ultimately populated various regions of the earth and developed their own cultures as we see them today. Acts puts it like this, **17:26-27** And why did He do it? Not as a punishment but as a preventive measure. It controlled the development of evil in the world in some measure and it was for their salvation. It was a divide and conquer strategy. They were divided into a host of language and ethnic groups so that they might be reached and redeemed one at a time until, at last, all of them had some who worshipped God. So now think about what happened:

b. at Pentecost: Now God's people are all gathered as one body and:

(1) the unified church is suddenly given the gift of speaking "all" languages But at the very same moment:

(2) prepared representatives of "all" peoples are in Jerusalem They are from *every nation under heaven!* Now that obviously is an expression of amazement and not meant to be literally accurate. I don't think there were any Chinese or Africans there. But there were Jews there in Jerusalem who had been born and raised in every area of the Roman Empire. They came from way over East in Persia and from down south in Arabia. Some were from up north in Asia Minor and Crete, west into Greece and from all across North Africa. Many of these were Jews who had moved back from these lands where their ancestors had scattered to live in Jerusalem. Others were visitors for the Feast from as far away as Rome itself. Some were actually members of other peoples who had converted to Judaism. But they were all there; it was as though representatives of the whole Roman world were present in Jerusalem just for this moment and through this miracle:

(3) they hear God's praises in their own languages and believe! They hear the believers speaking languages they'd never learned, their own home languages. And they hear them telling as witnesses about the wonderful works of God and they are utterly amazed and confused. And by the end of the day, many of them give their lives to Jesus Christ. There is a point God is loudly trying to make here:

c. point: the church is now empowered by the Spirit to reach all peoples Remember Jesus' plan? *I will build my Church. Go and make disciples of all nations. When the Spirit comes you will receive power and will be witnesses unto Me unto the ends of the earth!* Well, here it is, already happening in miniature in one day, the church empowered by the Spirit to reach all the peoples of earth with the good news of Jesus. The Church is not only born, but it is launched headlong into its mission and purpose! And all its very first members are a picture of the way it will end up; they're individuals God has prepared from among every people to receive His Son. That's how it began. That's how it is to be built and that's how it will end, with all peoples worshipping Jesus Christ.

And now on that day, a second important thing happens:

II. A Sermon Is Preached (14-40) An entire crowd is gathered together because of hearing the loud noise and they find these believers speaking in their own languages and Peter stands up and preaches a sermon. Like any good sermon, it has three points (Ha) and I'm going to give them to you in a nutshell. First, he gives an:

1. explanation: "These guys aren't drunk! It's only 9 in the morning. **This is the fulfillment of prophecy (14-21).** Joel **2:28-32** said that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit on His people and they would prophesy. Well, this is it! This is a God thing." Then Peter moved to:

2. evangelization: (22-36) He said: "I have important news:

a. you Jews killed Jesus right here in Jerusalem just 7 weeks ago. Remember? **But** I have wonderful news: **He rose from the dead** just as the Scriptures said He would. He's alive! And:

b. Jesus has now sent His Spirit He did this! **and** guess what: **He is** the Messiah you've been waiting for and right now He is **Lord!** Wow! You killed the Savior God sent you! And this is the proof it was Him!"

So, then Peter moved to:

3. exhortation: Their hearts were smitten with conviction of their horrible sin. And they cried out to him, "What shall we do?!!" He urged them: **save yourselves! (37-40).** He said anyone anywhere, even you, can be saved:

a. through repentance of sin and commitment to Jesus... We recognize the vileness of our sin and we cry out to Him and commit ourselves to Him as our Lord. Eventually we publicly declare ourselves His follower through baptism. And when we cry out to Jesus:

b. we receive two things: **forgiveness of sins** before God (justification) **and life by the indwelling Spirit!** That's the Gospel!

And out of God's miraculous signs and Peter's powerful sermon, a third momentous thing happens:

III. The Church Is Born (41) Imagine that in your mind; **3,000 believe!** They completely bypass the "small church" phase and the apostles have 3,000 people to care for in one fell swoop. Can you imagine if that was us? What would we do? We wouldn't know where to meet. We wouldn't have any idea how to organize this mob. But fortunately, the Holy Spirit is the

one in charge of building the church. And they simply did what came “naturally” to them through the Spirit. Let’s look at what God put into them in verses (42-47) First, notice that **They have:**

1. a hunger for the Word of God through the teaching of the leaders (42) They couldn’t get enough of it. They wanted to know more. They wanted to learn everything that Jesus had said and taught. They wanted to re-learn how to understand the Old Testament and see where things were said of Jesus there, the things the Apostles had come to understand. They wanted it day after day. They lapped it up like a man dying of thirst. When the Spirit of God comes into our lives, He gives us a hunger to learn the things of God. At the same time, they have:

2. a hunger for fellowship together, and that means **breaking bread** with each other **and praying together (42)** They all had homes and they gathered in those homes together to eat meals and talk about their faith and to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and to pray about what was happening and how to share their new-found faith with their families and others. They wanted that. They wanted to be together with the others who believed to support one another and be built up by each other. When the Spirit of God comes into our lives, He gives us a hunger for fellowship; we want to be among the people of God. Thirdly, they share together in:

3. an awe at the mighty working of God among them (43) God continues to confirm their new-found faith by doing mighty things through the apostles. **Mk. 16:20** says, *Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.* They shared with others and Jesus worked with them. He confirmed their message by doing miracles through His power. We see one of those in chapter 3 where they heal a crippled man. Now we could get into a big discussion about sign gifts and all of that, but my point is that wherever the Spirit of God moves His people to share the Word, He is always powerfully at work with them and miracles happen. People’s lives are changed; they are broken, born again, transformed. Amazing answers to prayer happen. Opportunities come that we would never dream of, when we’re about His work of building the church, so much so that we stand in awe! Then notice that they have:

4. a new view of their possessions (44-45) They didn’t all sell their houses and live in a commune but they quit thinking of their material things in a selfish way. They saw them as gifts from God. And they shared them with one another. They sold things and gave to those who were poor. They took money out of their accounts and helped those who needed food. They opened their homes to those who needed shelter. It wasn’t planned; it all came from the Spirit of God. When the Spirit of God comes into our lives, our whole view of what’s important changes. We learn to hold possessions loosely, to use them for His glory, to give unselfishly. And they had:

5. a new passion for worship and a joy in their lives (46) Now, they didn’t all quit their jobs, but they did all find time to come together every day to worship at the Temple. When the Spirit of God comes in, you have a passion to praise God, to glorify Him for saving you and for all He’s done. You want to worship from the heart. Your life has a new joy that nothing can squelch. And finally notice that they have:

6. a testimony that continually drew people to faith (47) Other people watched them at worship, talked to them about what was going on and every day they talked to people about Jesus and what He had done for them and every day more and more people chose to believe and become part of the church. They didn’t plan evangelism campaigns and hold revival meetings. It just happened out of their daily lives. When the Spirit of God comes in, His perspective and goal is to build the church and if you just yield to Him, He’ll use you in ways you never imagined to touch the hearts of people.

And do you know what’s really amazing? Wherever the church is born all over the world, the effects are the same! When the Holy Spirit comes into their lives, whether it’s in Central Asia or Sumatra, people hunger for teaching, they desire fellowship with one another, God does wonderful new things and they begin to worship with joy and to love others and give sacrificially. And others are drawn to their new faith. The Church grows. It just happens. The Spirit of God does it. But most of the time, we read this chapter and feel like Pentecost is over. It’s done. It was a special thing for a special day, once in all history. Today God does things in a nice orderly regular fashion. We put together doctrines to explain that tongues aren’t a normal thing for today. They weren’t a normal thing for then either! They only happened three times in Acts. But the truth is that wherever there are people whose hearts are sold out to God’s purpose of planting His church, the Holy Spirit is doing mighty things, even today. *In 1999 the Advance newsletter reported this true story: Two Korean believers traveled to a village in a predominantly Islamic country in Central Asia to pray for the people of that village. Although the pair could not speak the local language, they were invited to pray for a lame old man. When the old man was healed and stood to his feet, the workers knew someone had to explain what had happened. One began to tell -- in her own Korean language -- about God and the risen Christ, and the people assembled actually heard her in their own language.* [It’s a new twist on the tongues phenomenon!] *More than 40 people decided to follow Jesus that day in that village.* We might be tempted to ask, “Well why doesn’t God do things like that here for us?” Maybe we would do better to ask ourselves, “How fully have we yielded our lives to the control of the Spirit of God and made His passion of building the church our passion?” If we would dare to let our lives get consumed with Him and what He’s about, there’s no telling what He would do!

“I Will Build My Church” - The Book Of Acts

The Gospel In Jerusalem - Ch. 3

Hebrews 2:3-4 really summarizes the story of the early days of the building of the church. ...*This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord [Jesus], was confirmed to us by those who heard him [the apostles]. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.* Acts 2:43 says that after the day of Pentecost many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. Miracles, extraordinary events that could only be from God, occurred on almost a daily basis as God displayed His power in the life of His church. In Acts 3 we merely have the story of the first miracle that was recorded, and perhaps it was written down for us as an example of the rest, to illustrate the way that God has throughout the centuries used His power, not for personal gratification of believers but for the purpose of building His church. In the beginning of chapter 3:

I. God Displays His Power By Healing A Lame Man (1-10) The early believers continued to use the Temple as a site of worship. One afternoon Peter and John were going up there and at the gate they saw this crippled man begging and he asked them for money. I don't know whether you've ever had that experience. Beggars are not a common sight in our country, except that maybe some of us commute and meet folks downtown who try to panhandle for small change, often to feed their drug or alcohol habit. But beggars have been common through history and they are common in many places of the world today, people who have no way to provide for themselves and are reduced to simply standing or sitting in the streets in public places and asking passers-by for money in order to survive. When we were in Kyrgyzstan years ago, we were in the open-air bazaar shopping one morning and there was Gennady, sitting in a wheel chair. Gennady is about 50 years old and has bright blue eyes but he has no legs. In that culture he can't work. So, every day he sits in the bazaar in his little cart and a little box hoping people who pass by will give him a *som* or two so he and his wife and daughter can eat that day. That's how he lives. He's just a 20th century version of this man in Acts 3. Every day a few friends would carry him to the gate of the Temple so pious people going in would take pity on him and give him a few spare coins to live on. Since he was there every day and always asking, I'm sure it was often annoying to people going in. You know how you feel at Christmas time at the mall when the Salvation army bell-ringer is outside the entrance and you have to go past him to get in or out! You can't give every time! I'm sure some saw him as a daily nuisance. Others maybe felt guilty for not helping him. But Peter and John had a different response:

1. a response of Christian compassion (1-6) When he asked them for money, they looked at him in verse 4 and they didn't see a nuisance; they didn't see a free-loader on society. They saw a human being living out a tragedy, suffering every day of his life. And they didn't just walk by. Their hearts were moved. They were moved the way Jesus was moved when He looked on the crowds and saw the tragedy of their lives, that they were like sheep without a shepherd, with no one to care for them and He had compassion on them and healed their sick and taught them. The disciples had seen them as a nuisance and said, "Send them away so they can go find themselves something to eat." But Jesus had said, "YOU feed them" and then He made a way by multiplying their loaves and fishes. Before, they might have seen this man the same way, but now the same Spirit who lived in Him lived in them and they are filled with compassion for this man's suffering. When we know Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit has come to live in us, we can't look at suffering people the same way. John said, *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? - 1 John 3:17.* If the love of God lives in us, we have a:

a. our natural inclination to focus on people who are suffering. Look with me at the words of Jesus in **Mt. 25:34-40**. Now just forget about prophecy and the end times and all that stuff. This is the story of how Jesus separates out the peoples of the world at His return into those who know Him and those who don't know Him. And what's the difference? The righteous who knew Him saw people who were hungry or thirsty and fed them and gave them drink; they saw people who had no place to stay and took them in; they saw people who were sick and tended them and some lonely and wasting away in prison and visited them. It came so natural to them that they had to ask "When did we do these things to You?" and He replies, "When you did those things to human beings, you did them to ME!" Christians have always, from day one, been people who naturally (or I should say supernaturally) looked with great compassion on the needs of suffering people and did something about them. This man was a beggar; he was poor and Christians naturally have compassion for:

(1) the need of the poor It is the Christians who have started World Vision, Compassion International, Food for the Hungry, Samaritan's Purse, the TEAR Fund and a host of other organizations that rush to help the poor and suffering of the world. It is Christians who started the rescue missions and the homeless shelters and the soup kitchens in the inner cities. It is not the Muslims; it is not the Hindus; it is not the Buddhists; it is not the humanists. To them suffering is just an expected part of life. It is Allah's will, bad karma, the way of life or nature's way of weeding out the lesser fit specimens in the race. But we see poor, suffering people as jewels made in God's image and we are filled with compassion to help them. And we are also moved by:

(2) the need of the infirm The sick, the crippled, the handicapped, the victims of war. In the Middle Ages I'm told that the church in Europe was nearly wiped out by the black plague because the Christians were the only ones who would tend the sick at the risk of their own lives, and of course they caught the plague and many died. It is the Christians who have built the hospitals and sanitoriums and the clinics and the leprosy hospitals and

started organizations like Rainbows of Hope for the children. It is normal for us to have compassion on the infirm! If we don't, if we push hurting and suffering people out of our minds, we grieve the very Spirit of God who lives in us. And look again at verse 6. What is:

b. our normal response to those in need?

(1) we share whatever we have been given by God Peter didn't have any money. His pockets were empty. But he had been given power and authority and a special gift by Jesus to heal the sick. And so he said, "What I have I give you...rise up and walk". Now leave the miracle aside for just a moment and isn't that what we do? We don't have infinite resources. Our pockets are sometimes empty. But we share whatever it is that God has given us and we trust Him to meet the person's need. We do whatever God has enabled us to do and we do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. We can't feed all the hungry children, but we can sponsor one. We can't comfort all the sick people but we can visit one or two. The point is that we freely make what we have available to God to meet the needs of others who are suffering. However, let me also point out another principle:

(2) we share in a way that meets the genuine need Peter could have gone and found money somewhere to give the man to keep him alive one more day. But the man needed to know Jesus and needed to walk so he could care for himself. Sometimes what needy suffering people ask you for is not what's best for them. You know the old saying, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Sometimes a person is just so helpless that all they need is the immediate just to stay alive, but often we can give them something in the name of Jesus that will change their lives for the better forever, not just for today. Years ago, a man named Mike Baer developed a ministry called Joldosh where he took teams of Americans into Kyrgyzstan three times a year to help believers there learn how to start a small business for themselves. A lady named Usara and her husband were in that program and received a small loan and a lot of knowledge and proceeded to start a successful copy machine business that supported them and their church. You see what I'm talking about. Simple handouts are not always the answer; helping people in a way that will change their lives is the wise target of our compassion. Anyway, let's move on to talk about this:

2. a miracle of Divine healing (7-10) Now, remember this man had been lame from birth (verse 2). He had never walked a day in his life. But suddenly at Peter's command he is not only walking but leaping and praising God all the while. No wonder the people were amazed! What we have here is an example of:

a. the New Testament gift of healing Jesus said in **Mk. 16:17-18** that one of the signs that would accompany believers was that *they will place their hands on sick people and they will get well*. Just as Jesus had the gift of healing people at will, by touch or by command, so it appears that that gift was given to the apostles and to others in the early church. Not many people seem to have been given it, nor does it seem to have continued to be a normal thing down through the years. There may be some believers that have it today and there are certainly some who are given it momentarily in some special circumstance. But I'd rather point out:

b. God's continual practice of healing in answer to prayer. Down through the centuries God's people have cried out for the sick and He has not always chosen to heal, but many, many times He has, in unexpected ways just as miraculous as this lame man walking. They have cried out for provision and He has sent miraculous answers. They have cried out for protection and His very angels have surrounded His people visibly. He does it today. He does it in my life and yours and through the prayers of this congregation. But here's the point:

c. God's primary purpose in healing, whether instantaneous or by slow recovery, is **to glorify Jesus (13)** That's why He does it! That's ultimately why He heals and provides and protects and does all the other awesome things He does, to glorify the name of His Son Jesus, that people might believe and be saved and become worshippers and followers of Him. You see, what the second half of this chapter teaches us is that:

II. God's Display Of Power Builds The Church (11-26) That's always His primary purpose. It's what He's about. So, now this man is leaping and praising and causing a ruckus and a whole crowd gathers together and they figure out that this man is healed and Peter seizes the opportunity to preach to them and I'll recap his sermon for you real briefly. First:

1. Peter gave an explanation: this power is from Jesus (11-16) "It's not me. I can't heal anybody. But I believe in Jesus, you know, the man that you recently took and crucified! But God raised Him from the dead and He's alive and I called on His power to do this. He did it; give Him the credit!" Then:

2. Peter gave an exhortation: repent and turn to Jesus (17-19) "Repent, change your minds about Jesus! Receive Him as your Savior and you'll find forgiveness of your sins. Plus, He is the Messiah, the One God plans to send to rule the world. He is coming back again. So turn to Him and be ready." And then:

3. Peter gave justification: He said **the Scriptures point to Jesus (20-26)** "Moses talked about a special prophet God would raise up: it's Jesus. All the prophets said things about this and they point to Jesus. Even when God told Abraham, "Through your seed all peoples on earth will be blessed", the word *seed* was singular and that was about

Jesus! And here you are and Jesus is doing it!" That was his sermon and the result of that sermon was first that he got arrested (imagine that - we'll talk about it next week). but at the same time:

4. God gave multiplication: new believers are added to the church (4:4) The number of men grew to about 5,000. At least 1,000 to 2,000 were brought into the true church of Jesus Christ by faith through the healing of this crippled man.

That's why God heals! That's why God does miraculous awesome things on the earth. He is glorifying the name of His Son Jesus who said, "I will build my church." So many times, we just want God to fix everything in our lives so that we can be healthy and comfortable and have everything we want and have a life full of happiness. And most of us don't have it. Instead, we get grace to endure. And we learn and grow and find Him sufficient. But when we go forth to share the news of Jesus, God so often accompanies that with wonderful answers, mighty signs of His presence. And the more our hearts are set on His purpose and the farther afield we're willing to go and the more difficult the setting in which we're willing to proclaim Him, the more wonderful the things He is willing to do to show the power of His name. The Book of Acts is not just something that happened 2000 years ago. It is being lived out right now in many cultures throughout the world. All over the Muslim world God is giving people visions and dreams in which they see Jesus and people are coming to faith. Last weekend at a conference on Kyrgyzstan, we heard the testimony of a woman who we had prayed for in 1998 whose husband was going to divorce her because she hadn't been able to have a baby and when workers there showed her Jesus, they cried out together to Jesus for a baby and in two weeks she was pregnant. Today her husband is a believer and their miracle child Mirgul was climbing around on the platform and they have surrendered their lives to be missionaries to the Batken region where there is only one small church. God answered your prayers in a mighty way. Let me close with this story that was told by Galen Burkholder of Global Disciples to our Perspectives class: *Some years ago in a little village in Nepal in the foothills of the Himalayas there was a poor farmer whose wife was very sick. She was also pregnant. Nothing helped. He took her to the village shaman who chanted and did all his rituals and she only got worse. He took her to the shaman in the next village who did all his rituals and she was not helped. He took her home to his hut with no hope that she would live. At that time one of the young men from his village caught a ride on a truck to another village far away to find work as a carrier for an expedition that was climbing Mt. Everest. In that village was a medical missionary who invited this young man into his clinic along with some others to be his guests. He told them some simple stories about Jesus and taught them a few simple Christian songs. But soon a lady in critical condition was brought in. The men asked the doctor, "Will Jesus heal this lady?" He wisely replied, "I don't know, why don't we ask Him?" So, he laid hands on the lady and prayed to Jesus and she was healed. The young man was tremendously impressed and the whole time he was carrying packs up and down the mountain he told himself those stories and repeated the songs over and over. He was thinking of the man in his village with the sick wife. When he got back, he went right to the man's hut. His wife was barely alive. He told the man everything he could remember about Jesus and how he saw Jesus heal the sick woman. The man asked, "Would Jesus heal my wife?" And the young man replied as he had learned, "I don't know, why don't we ask Him?" So, the two laid their hands on the wife and prayed to Jesus to heal her. And He did. In a few days she was well. The two of them rejoiced in Jesus and sang their simple songs. And the man was so full of joy that he began going around his village - guess why- looking for sick people. And he would tell them all he knew about Jesus and they would ask whether Jesus would heal them and he would say "Let's ask Him" and people would be healed. Soon there was a church meeting in that village and the man began to devote less time to his farming and more time to telling about Jesus. He went to the next village and the next. By the time a white missionary arrived in the area there were churches meeting in 7 villages! But that's not all. The healed woman delivered a healthy baby, a son. Unlike his parents he now had the opportunity to learn to read and write. The worker who came gave the man a New Testament which the son would read to him. In fact, the son would then travel with his father from village to village to hold the Bible and read it and the father would preach about Jesus. The boy became the first one from this region to receive an education. He went on to graduate from a Bible school and went home to his people. Today in that region there are more than 100 little village churches and this boy is a leader among them and is now beginning discipleship and leadership training programs for his people. God will do anything to glorify the name of His Son Jesus and build His church. The day of miracles has not passed. And we'll see more of them if our hearts are focused on His purpose.*

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The Power Of God - Chs. 4-5

It's easy for us living here in America to fall into thinking that growing the church is simply a building project to planned, but Acts 4-5 serve as a powerful reminder that building the church is a cosmic battle. We have a great and powerful enemy, the enemy of God and the enemy of our souls, Satan himself. The scripture says, *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.* - 1 John 5:19. As we build the church, we are taking back his turf and he doesn't like it. In His great purpose statement in Mt. 16:18, Jesus declared: *I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH! And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;* that is, they won't prove strong enough to stop it! That's not a slogan for a building campaign; it's a battle cry! We are fighting a battle for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ on many fronts, in Glenside, in Philadelphia and to the ends of the earth. And the Enemy fights back. He lashes out at us. In fact, the more impact we make on the lives of people for the Gospel, the more intense the reaction becomes. And we rapidly

become aware, as that early church in Jerusalem did, that we cannot fight this battle in our own strength. We rely upon the power of God and that's exactly what we see in these two chapters. First, we see:

I. The Power Of God In Emboldening His Church (4:1-31) The lame man had been healed that day and a huge crowd had gathered. Peter had preached a second powerful sermon and just as he gets through the invitation we have:

1. the sudden arrest of Peter and John (1-4) The Sadducees, who didn't like that Peter was preaching the resurrection, and the soldiers of the Temple Guard pushed their way through the crowd and arrested them. They dragged them away and put them in jail overnight, intending to bring them before the entire Sanhedrin, the Council of 70, in the morning for trial because of the disruption they had caused. The next day when they had gathered, they brought them out and asked a loaded question in verse 7. How did you heal this guy?! And so, we have:

2. the bold testimony of Peter and John (5-12) Wow! What an answer! They were standing before Annas and Caiaphas and all those others before whom Jesus had stood, the very ones who had condemned him to death! And see how bold they are! "You killed Him but He's alive! And it is by His Name, the name of JESUS, and His power that this 40 year old man who's been lame from birth is healed!!" Where did they get that answer, that boldness to tell the truth at the risk of their own lives? Look at verse 8! From the control of the Holy Spirit and by His power! Remember what Jesus had promised? *But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* - Mat. 10:19-20. This is the first fulfillment of that promise, but it's good for us too. I doubt whether any of us have ever been arrested or spent a night in jail for anything, much less for our faith. Yet there are times when we do stand before people in critical situations, people whom we know don't agree with us or like what we believe. They aren't the Sanhedrin; they may be relatives or coworkers or kids at school but that same fear comes over us. Fear of embarrassment or fear of alienating them or fear of being rejected, maybe of losing our job. But we also have resident within us the power to speak in spite of fear in the person of the Holy Spirit. And if we will in that moment call out to Him and yield to His control, we'll be given exactly the right words that He wants us to say. Look at:

3. the impact of their bold testimony (13-22) Read 13-14. They were amazed at these *agrammatotai kai idiotai*, ungrammared idiots, unschooled ordinary men, who knew so much because they had been with Jesus and had done an actual miracle. How can you argue with a miracle that everyone has seen? It impacted even their enemies. So, they huddled together and decided to let them go, but to warn them sternly not to preach any more in Jesus' Name. To which they replied in **verse 19**. More boldness and so they went back to where the church was gathered together and told their story. And the church fell on its knees and began to pray. And I want us to look at:

4. the prayer of the church in the face of opposition (23-31) It's amazing. First of all:

a. they recognized God's sovereignty (23-28) God's in charge. Not the Sanhedrin. Not the Devil. Even all the forces that were gathered against Jesus only did what God had determined they were supposed to do ahead of time. Often, as soon as we hit trouble, as soon as we see opposition, we begin to think the Devil's in charge and God's on the run. But it's not so. He's ALWAYS IN CONTROL! The forces that oppose us in life, whatever they are, are ultimately under the control of God. They can't do one thing to us that God doesn't choose to allow. Read the first chapter of Job. God says, "This far and no farther, period!" You are not being tossed about in a world out of control, even when it seems like it. Twila Paris wrote: *God is in control, We believe that His children Will not be forsaken. God is in control, We will choose to remember And never be shaken. There is no power Above or beside Him. We know, oh God is in control.* That was their confidence and it should be ours as well and then look at this:

b. they prayed for boldness, not deliverance (29-30) We pray to get out of trouble, don't we? They prayed for boldness. Who were they thinking about? God. His Name. His Glory. His reputation. That was all they cared about. We so often think about us. We're scared; we want out of trouble. But persecution is a normal part of the Christian life; we're told to expect it. Paul warned us in 2 Tim. 3:12, *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* We signed up for that when we got saved! But when we know that God is in control of it all, we can do like they did; we can pray for God to make us bold in Jesus' name. We can pray for Him to show his power in mighty ways in people's lives. We can pray for Jesus to be glorified and quit worrying about ourselves. And look at what God did:

c. God granted their desire (31) The place was shaken. And they got the boldness they asked for and went out and shook the city some more! That's one prayer you can count on God answering, "Lord, give me boldness through your Spirit to share the good news of you with others!" He'll give that boldness and also the opportunity to use it!

Now the second thing we see in these chapters is:

II. The Power Of God In Purifying His Church (4:32-5:16) The writer now goes on to describe:

1. the sacrificial lifestyle of the believers (4:32-35) Their attitude toward material things changed. They saw that everything they owned belonged to God and they started to be obedient with it. They quit living for themselves and dug

deep into their pocketbooks to help one another. They sold things, houses and lands and gave the money to help the poor. They sacrificed and gave away large amounts. You have recorded here:

2. the godly example of Barnabas (4:36-37) who was from Cyprus and evidently owned a field. He sold it and gave the money to the apostles so they could divide it among the widows and the poor who didn't have enough to eat. And he was not the only one doing this kind of thing; many others were too. And it is in contrast to that that we read about:

3. the hypocritical act of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-4) What did they do? They sold a piece of property too. But they kept a part of the price of it for themselves. Was anything wrong with that? No. It was theirs. In fact, it was a truly generous act. So, what was wrong? They lied. They told Peter they had only sold it for what they gave away. Why? So they would look as generous as everyone else. Were they worried about the poor? No, they were worried about themselves, about their reputation. They wanted everyone to think more of them than they actually were, so they lied. The early church wasn't perfect. It was reluctant; it was sometimes full of argument and division and at least once it had hypocrites in it, just like people say it does today! But if this kind of deception and dishonesty had continued right from the beginning, there is no telling what kind of corruption the church could have fallen into. So, rather unexpectedly we read of:

4. the powerful intervention of God (5:10) What did He do? He struck them dead, one at a time! Why? Because they had thought they could lie to the very Holy Spirit who lived inside them! They thought they could have the Holy Spirit in them wherever they went and lie and get away with it. Were they believers? Yes, I think they were. I think they were believers like the ones over in Corinth who were dishonoring the Lord's supper and God struck them with weakness and sickness and, Paul says, many died. I think they were believers that committed the "sin unto death" that John talks about in his first letter and God had to take them home early as a disciplinary measure to guard His Name because they were dragging it through the dirt! Would God do that today? I don't know that He hasn't! How many Christians have paid heavy, heavy prices for knowingly disobeying the Spirit of God? I wouldn't doubt some have gone home early. But look at:

5. the tremendous impact on the church and the community (11-16) A tremendous awe and respect seized both the church and the community. The believers said, "Man, we aren't going to play games with God. We're not going to live with one foot in the world and one in the church. Jesus, take it all; I'm yours all the way!" And the community looking on said, "Man, I'm not going to become one of them unless I really mean it. I'm never going to go and mingle and pretend I'm one of them unless I really am, lock stock and barrel!" And yet they did. Hundreds more came and believed anyway. But no pretenders came. They didn't come thinking they could keep their sin, that they could hold on to their mistress and keep cheating their customers and live pretty much any way they wanted, if they would just raise their hand and say, "I believe in Jesus". They came knowing it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God but that's whose hands they wanted to be in anyway. God's power was keeping His church pure. And this passage ought to give some real second thoughts to believers today who are choosing to sin and know it! Hypocrisy is not something God tolerates very long. It always comes out. And the price can be heavy. He is still jealous for the purity of His body! Then the third thing we see in these chapters is:

III. The Power Of God In Protecting His Church (5:17-41) As the ministry continued and the church grew and miracles multiplied and crowds continued to come, the anger and jealousy of the Jewish leaders grew until they decided to arrange:

1. the deliberate arrest of the Twelve (17-18) They rounded up all of the apostles and arrested them, figuring that if they could remove and silence the leaders that the movement would disperse. So, they put them in jail overnight again. But what they didn't figure on was:

2. the miraculous release of the Twelve (19-25) Whew! God opened the jail and when they went to look for them the next day, not only were they not in the jail, even though the doors were locked and the guards in place, but somebody ran in and said, "Hey those men you arrested are over in the Temple teaching again!" God stepped in to protect His church! He demonstrated His mighty power and it really set them back. In January a small home group of 19 was meeting in a village in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Their leader was a young man named Shafkat who had come there to start a church. But the local religious leaders didn't like it and at the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, they managed to stir up about 1,000 people. They literally dragged out Shafkat and three others and were about to actually kill them when at that moment the police arrived and intervened, saved their lives and placed a guard around their house. That was God, because over there the police are often worse criminals than the criminals! It was a miracle. Sometimes God intervenes very directly like that; sometimes it comes in other ways as we'll see in a moment. Next, we have:

3. the re-arrest and trial of the Twelve (26-33) The leaders went to the Temple and arrested them again, but this time quietly and peaceably and brought them to the Sanhedrin. They said, "We told you not to teach in Jesus' Name

any more but you keep doing it!" Look at their answer in verses **29-32**. Boy, did that rile them up. They were furious and wanted to kill them on the spot. But again we see:

4. God's intervention and re-release of the Twelve (34-40) This time it was through a wise old leader, Gamaliel, Paul's old teacher, who had been thinking deeply about it. Look what God moved him to say in verses **38-39**. "Let's be careful here. We might be fighting against God!" Sometimes God will protect us through making a friend out of an enemy! Sometimes He'll move someone we would never expect to come to our aid. Anyway, that speech persuaded them and they decided to release the apostles. But before they did, they had them flogged (verse 40). Don't read that lightly; that's what they did to Jesus before they crucified Him. They had them publicly whipped with a cat-o-nine-tails until their backs bled and *then* they ordered them to not teach in Jesus' Name any more. That would have been it for many. That said, "Next time we'll kill you". It's only one step to a cross. But look at:

5. the attitude of the church in the face of opposition (41-42) Hallelujah! They left bleeding but rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for His Name and they never stopped! What does that mean? Did they enjoy the flogging? No. Were they masochists that enjoyed pain? No. Did they want to get flogged again? NO. What were they thinking? If being a Christian is a crime, then convict me; I'm glad of it! If being a follower of Jesus is a shame and a disgrace and a terrible thing, then I'm guilty and I'm glad the world can see it and convict me of it. Peter said, *If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.* - 1 Pet. 4:15-16.

As believers we need to accept that we are in a battle, that the Evil One will try to discourage us and get us to quit any way he can. He wants us to sit back and focus on ourselves and enjoy life and let the rest of the world be lost. Ted De-moss writes: *"In the course of my job selling insurance, I walked into an apartment building one day to call on a man whose name had been sent to my office in response to a direct mail program. I went to the door of his third-floor apartment and knocked. The man spoke through the door without opening it, 'Who's out there?' I had learned in selling insurance that you never say, 'The insurance man,' because people might not open the door. So, I just cheerfully replied, 'I'm Ted DeMoss...' The man inside bristled defensively, 'If I open this door, I'll throw you down those stairs. Now get away from my door!' Since I sincerely thought he had inquired about insurance, I persisted. 'Mister, I'm not going to hurt you. Please open the door. I've got to talk to you.' I fully intended to talk with the man about insurance, but when he opened the door, I realized there was no point in that. Before me stood a man with a white beard who looked like a thin Santa Claus. I hadn't been in the business long, but I knew he was too old to buy any insurance I might sell him. Looking directly at me, he demanded, 'I opened the door. Now, what do you want to talk about?' 'I want to come in and talk to you.' 'What do you want to talk about?' he snapped. I persisted. 'May I come in?' As I spoke, the Spirit of God impressed me to talk with this man, a complete stranger, about Jesus Christ. At age 25, I had never done that before. Finally, he stepped aside and said, 'Come in, then.' I entered, and we both sat down on the couch in the living room. Looking straight at me, the elderly man asked curiously, 'What do you want to talk about?' I paused for a moment, then said the only thing that came to mind. 'I want to read the Bible to you.' He consented. 'I don't have a Bible,' I said weakly. 'Do you have one?' He looked puzzled for a moment. 'I don't know whether I have a Bible or not. I've been blind for many years.' I asked if I could look around the apartment for one, and he agreed. After a brief search, I found a Bible covered with dust on top of a stack of books. Walking back to the couch, I opened the Bible to the third chapter of John and began to read slowly. The further I read, the more scared I felt. My Christian friends had never told me what to do next. So, I read slower and more deliberately until I got to verse 18: 'He that believeth in Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.' I finished that verse, praying silently for the Lord to give me wisdom as to what I should do. I looked over at the old man, and what I saw shocked me-- his beard was wet with tears! God had indeed spoken to this man through His Word. 'Sir, would you like to invite Jesus Christ into your life right now, right here?' I asked softly. The man nodded thoughtfully, 'Well, I would like to do it right now, but not here.' 'Where do you want to do it?' 'I want to do it with my mother.' Mentally, I was scratching my head. The man had told me he was 81, and I thought, 'What do I say now?' I decided to ask, 'Where is your mother?' 'In the kitchen,' he pointed. Thinking he had a picture of her hanging in the kitchen, I supposed he wanted to go there for sentimental reasons. We made our way back to the kitchen, and to my surprise, there was his mother sitting in a canvas-backed chair. She was 98 years old and an invalid. I can still hear the old man's words as if he were speaking them today, 'Mother, God has sent a man to our home.' I had gone on this call thinking the insurance company had sent me, but I quickly realized that what he was saying was true. 'He's been reading the Bible to me, and I'm going to accept Jesus Christ.' I have never heard anyone scream like she did in my life! When she regained control of her emotions, the aged woman said an amazing thing: 'Mister, I don't know who you are, but I have prayed for my boy every day for over 80 years.' Her son and I got on our knees, and I had the joy of praying with him and seeing him come to Christ. [Paperclip, Oct 1992. Page 8.] We can give up and quit and live in fear. Or we can choose to trust God to embolden us and then, if and when the backlash comes, we can trust God to protect us. Not that we won't suffer at all, but that the process of our suffering will be used by Him to build the church, to bring others into the joy of salvation.*

“I Will Build My Church” - The Book Of Acts

The First Martyr - Chs. 6-7

Last week we saw how our Enemy fights back as the church advances. We saw the first persecution of the church. But there is another way that Satan will attack the church. If he cannot frighten or discourage its people or take away its leaders, he has another strategy. He goes to work from the inside to divide it! It's an age-old strategy: a house divided against itself cannot stand. And it's in this context that we see arise:

I. The First Officers In The Church (6:1-7) Let's look at:

1. the problem that developed (1) The church was growing at this point almost beyond count, definitely more than 5,000 and perhaps up to 10,000. Imagine the problems that arose in caring for the needs of so many! One was this: among their number were quite a few who were widows, women who had lost their husbands, women who were probably older and had very little, if any, income and no relatives to care for them. There was no social security system and the church felt a responsibility to care for and feed its own so they developed some means where every single day these widows were being helped with food or money. It was the “meals on wheels” of its time and a tremendous example of ministry for us! However, even though the believers there were one in heart and mind, they came from two different backgrounds. Some were natives of the land of Israel whose primary language was Aramaic, while 2:5 tells us that there were many Jews who had been raised in other lands who had moved to Jerusalem to live and many of the first converts came from this group. So, of course, their primary language was Greek. Now, there already is the potential for division; you know that it's hard to relate to a person who doesn't speak your language well. But the Greek-speakers began to notice something: the widows who spoke Greek were being overlooked or forgotten in this daily distribution. Why, we don't know. Maybe it was just the size of the task; there's a good chance that those in charge of the program were Hebrew-speakers and didn't know all the Greek widows. Maybe there was a bit of cultural prejudice lingering in their hearts that God needed to deal with. In any event, the Greek-speaking brothers began to murmur, to mutter under their breath, to secretly complain about their Hebraic brothers. Bad feelings began to divide them and eventually these were expressed and when the Apostles saw it, they knew they had to do something. So here is:

2. the proposal that was made (2-4) Look at this wonderful recognition of the diversity of gifts! Some are given the gifts and the calling of teaching and preaching, of studying the Word of God and interceding in prayer. And that should be their primary focus. Those who are called to that kind of leadership, those we might call pastors or elders or teachers today, should not feel that they have to do everything themselves. They should concentrate on that most important thing. It is not that “serving tables” is unspiritual or unimportant. Widows' lives depended on it. But there are people whose primary gifts are serving and helps and organization; so, we should identify those people and turn the responsibility for that kind of ministry over to them and let them go to it! For example, one of our men who would never preach a sermon came over to our house to close a two foot hole in our living room wall where we took an old air conditioner out. What would have taken me a half day he had done in about an hour and we were sitting drinking iced tea! He has a gift of carpentry. One of our ladies has a gift of working with kids; where it would drive me nuts. Some of our musicians can lift our hearts to the throne in a moment through their musical gifts. A whole team of our ladies so wonderfully organize and provide luncheons when there's a funeral or make church dinners happen; you don't even want to know about my cooking! And we have a whole team of people whose gift is to go each month and visit our elderly and shut-in folks and love and encourage them. It would be crazy to think that I have to be them or they have to be me; rather, the body needs us ALL to exercise our gifts. So, the plan was to choose seven men to be in charge of meeting this need, men who were known to be spiritual, known to be in love with Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, but who also had the gift of wisdom to handle this need.

3. the people that were chosen are listed in verses (5-6) Stephen, Philip and five other men who all seem to have Greek names were chosen, probably all Greek-speakers! They felt these guys would not only be sensitive to the needs of the Greek-speaking folks, but would also not be prone to neglect the Hebraic folks! So, they prayed over them and committed them to this work and look at:

4. the effect that it had (7) The church grew better and faster when everyone focused on their own ministry and the division was gone, and even numbers of their former enemies, the priests, saw God at work and came to Christ! There's a principle in there somewhere. Paul said, *From him the whole body... grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.* - Eph. 4:16. When each one of us does what God has gifted and called us to do, He grows the body!

Now two of these men developed their gifts and their ministries way beyond where they started. Philip later became a powerful evangelist and was the first to take the Gospel to Samaria in chapter 8. Stephen had much the same gift and was using it right there in Jerusalem. And it was he, not one of the apostles, who soon became:

II. The First Martyr In The Church (6:8-7:60) On Memorial Day we honor those who have given their lives in the service of our country, to protect our freedom. Stephen is the first of that long line of the faithful we also need to honor who have given their very lives because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Martyrs, witnesses faithful unto death. Their blood, it

has been said, is the seed of the church because it is often the very death of His servants that Christ uses to build His church all the more. It began with:

1. Stephen's arrest (6:8-15) Stephen began to pioneer the approach that would later be used by the Apostle Paul throughout his journeys. He went into the synagogues, particularly those of Greek-speaking Jews like himself, and shared during the teaching time that Jesus was the Christ. The members of one synagogue (or several, depending on how you read the text) got really upset with him. In fact, Saul or Paul was from Cilicia; it's likely he attended this very synagogue and was among those who heard Stephen. A few verses later we find him among those who stone him so he was no doubt there with the others who got upset. Why?

a. the true reason: they could not refute God speaking thru him (8-10) The Spirit of God gave him such wisdom and understanding of the Old Testament that nobody could out-argue him, nobody could refute what he was saying about Jesus. So, in their frustration and anger, at last they seized him and dragged him in front of the Sanhedrin, and because they didn't have anything to really accuse him of, they lodged a:

b. the false accusation: They persuaded some men to distort his words and level two false charges. They said: **He speaks against the Law and Temple (11-15)**. Now there is nothing more sacred to the heart of a devout Jew than the Law of Moses and the Temple in Jerusalem. Speaking against those things is blasphemy, a slander against God Himself! It is a crime worthy of death! And so, when the high priest (who was still Caiaphas!) asked him whether those charges were true, he gave a lengthy explanation. We have:

2. Stephen's sermon recorded for us in **(7:1-53)** Though there is a lot of valuable information in it, particularly if you're a student of the Old Testament, I'm simply going to summarize it for you, like I did with Peter's two sermons in the earlier chapters. Again, like any proper sermon, he has three points! First:

a. He affirms the law (1-43) To us this message sounds strange; it seems like he's going back and recounting the whole story of the Old Testament from Abraham on. Our western minds think, "Why would he do that? They already know it!" But it's an affirmation. He's telling them he believes it, that he believes what the Old Testament Scriptures say. First:

(1) he affirms the patriarchs (2-16) He declares that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph is his God too; he's not promoting some foreign god, but rather "the God of our fathers" who appeared to them. Then:

(2) he affirms Moses and the law given through him (17-38) He tells the story of Moses' whole life in detail, from floating in the basket in the Nile to leading Israel through the Red Sea on the way out of Egypt. He's saying, "I believe it all; I affirm it. I accept the Law given by God to Moses. Moses gave us living words, the very words of God!"

(3) but then he points out that **the Israelites rejected both Moses and the Law (39-43)** They began at Mt. Sinai by making a golden calf idol and they continued that idolatry right through the time they were taken captive to Babylon. The Israelites rejected the Law of God, not him! That was point 1. In point 2:

b. He affirms the Temple (44-50)

(1) he affirms the Tabernacle (44-45) He says that God gave the directions to Moses for its making. It lasted all through the conquest and the judges until the time of David. But David wanted to build a permanent Temple and:

(2) he affirms the Temple (46-47) David enjoyed God's favor and he wanted to build it, but finally his son Solomon built it. It was from God.

(3) but, he points out, even **God says the Temple is only symbolic (48-50)** Even Solomon admitted that no temple made with hands could contain Him. If you read Is. 66:1-2, God Himself says it! The Temple was never meant to house God or contain God, but to be a place where His Name was remembered. Then he moves to point 3:

c. He accuses the leaders (51-53) He turns the tables and charges the Sanhedrin as the leaders of the Jewish nation. He says: ***You disobeyed the Law, killed the prophets, murdered the Christ and are now resisting the Holy Spirit!*** What an indictment! It made them absolutely furious. They ground their teeth and seethed in anger! And that's what led to:

3. Stephen's martyrdom (54-60) Now remember this is the third time that Christian leaders have stood before the same Sanhedrin in a short period of time. In chapter 3, Peter and John stood there and defied them openly and they were dismissed with a warning. In chapter 4, all 12 of the apostles stood before them and defied them and they were dismissed with a flogging. Now here stands Stephen the third time and he defied them even more boldly than the others. You know the saying, "Three strikes and you're out." There was only one place left to go for them. Death was the only avenue of punishment remaining. And what really pushed them to it was:

a. his vision before dying (55-56) He looked up and God lifted the veil between heaven and earth. He saw a vision of Jesus in all his glory. And he pointed to the sky and said, "Look, I see Him. There's Jesus. There He is in all His glory. He's in heaven and He's standing at the right hand of God!" Therefore, HE IS GOD! God has many times seen fit to do this for dying saints. He will often lift the veil and let them see the other side just before they cross over. He'll let them see Jesus and the angels waiting, hear the music, see the lights of glory so that they slip into His presence with joy and not fear. He doesn't always do it, but He doesn't have to. He did it for Stephen and we can see it through His vision. That's what sustains us in the face of death. Jesus is there in the glory waiting for us, waiting to receive us. He promised us, *I'm going to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that you may be where I am!* That's death for the believer. We go where Jesus is! We need not fear those that kill the body because to die is to depart and be with Jesus which is better by far. Are you ready to die? Do you know you belong to Him and that He's waiting for you? If I saw that vision, that would be enough for me, but it was too much for those Jewish leaders. It was the worst blasphemy they ever heard. They put their hands over their ears so they wouldn't hear any more and they grabbed Stephen and dragged him out of the city and began to pelt him furiously with stones. And look at:

b. his attitude in dying (57-60) It is like a mirror image of the Lord Jesus:

(1) he had absolute confidence "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit"; "Lord Jesus receive my spirit". That's how we go out of this world, absolutely confident, expecting Jesus to be there in that instant, that our spirit will be with Him! We have a confidence with which to face death that the world never can have. Listen, you may not be stoned by a mob, but this is where the rubber meets the road. For some of us it won't be too long until we cross that river and even the youngest of us will get there in a few years. We'll stand at the brink of death and we'd better be sure whose hands we're putting our spirit into! But if we know Jesus, we can close our eyes with confidence knowing we'll slip safely into His arms! And look what else:

(2) he expressed complete forgiveness "Father, forgive them." "Lord, don't let the sin of killing me be on their hands because I forgive them". What a way to die. Pagans don't die like that. Atheists and humanists don't die like that. They would die under a hail of stones kicking and screaming and cursing and hating. Stephen displayed the supernatural love of Jesus and made intercession for the very ones who were killing him. And he fell asleep; he slipped into His presence. That's not natural; that's Jesus.

We might be tempted to think, "What a sad thing! What a tragedy! What a waste of the life of such a godly man!" But do you know what the ultimate effect of his death was? 8:1 says there was a young man standing there, glad to watch him die, and his name was Saul. Saul was fired up by this event to become a fierce persecutor of the church. He hauled many Christians off to prison and to their deaths. Until one day he saw the very thing Stephen had seen. He saw the glory of Jesus in heaven and it knocked him to his knees and he became a believer. Jesus told him, "I've been poking and goading you and it's been hard for you to kick against it, to resist it!" What was pricking his conscience? Years later he testified that he told the Lord, probably with tears, *And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.* - Acts 22:20. Stephen's death stuck with him all his life. He couldn't get away from it. It prepared him to meet Jesus and, in that sense, it gave the church the greatest missionary it ever knew, the apostle Paul. The ultimate effect of his dying agony was that the church was spread to the very ends of the Roman Empire. His blood was, in a very real way, the seed of the church. *George Otis tells the true story of one incredible night in 1983. In a small Muslim village in the North African country of Algeria, God came and through a series of visions, dreams, and angelic visitations, brought each and every household face to face with the reality of His Son, resulting in 450 conversions. There were no missionaries working in this village. There was no reason, from the human perspective, for the miracle to happen in this place at this time. Later it was discovered that a Spanish missionary named Raymond Lull had visited this spot. Lull was known as the first missionary to Muslims. Where the village now stands was the place he had been stoned to death for preaching the gospel--600 years ago! Lull had written that Islamic strongholds would not be conquered by force, but only "by love and prayers, and the pouring out of tears and blood." We can imagine that as he was dying a martyr's death, he was praying for the Muslim people. God answered Lull's prayer six centuries later. [SBC Life, Jan 1997. Page 3.] God doesn't waste anything, especially not the deaths of His saints which are precious in His sight. Are you willing for Him to use yours? Are you ready to say like Paul did, *I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death? For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.* - Phil. 1:20-21?*

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

The Gospel Goes To Samaria - Ch. 8

The martyrdom of Stephen proved to be a very important turning point in the history of the church. To this moment the church had enjoyed a relative amount of freedom. Its leaders had been harassed twice but the believers themselves had continued to meet freely and openly and their numbers had grown astronomically. However, after Stephen's dramatic confrontation with them that day, the Sanhedrin could stand it no longer. The rulers could no longer wait and hope that this

sect of the Christ-followers would die out. They had to squash it and right now, before it did any further damage. And so, as we move into chapter 8, we read how for the first time:

I. The Church Is Persecuted In Jerusalem (1-4) The Jewish leaders were not accustomed to this. They were older men. They dealt with questions of the law and the Temple, not campaigns of violence and arrest. But among them was a young man named Saul and he was absolutely furious at what Stephen had said. He quickly emerged as the leader of this unpleasant task and he undertook it with a Nazi-style vengeance. He set about destroying the church one household at a time. He would ferret them out house by house, arrest them and drag them off to trial and to prison. Now let me point out two things about this persecution. First notice:

1. its intensity and the suffering of the believers (1-3) It is so easy to read those words, but they are so far from our experience that they mean little. Suppose Christianity was suddenly declared illegal. And when you go home today the police show up at your house. They say, "You were seen in a Christian church today; you're under arrest." And they drag you out and throw you in the car, and take you off to jail. Your family is dragged off separately. You don't know what happened to them. Your house and possessions are left standing for looters. You don't know whether you'll be stoned to death like Stephen was or not. You'd be terrified; your life destroyed. I hope it never happens here, but let's not minimize the suffering they endured because it is happening every day to believers just like us in China, in Sudan, in parts of Indonesia and scores of other places. In 1997 Turkmenistan passed a law requiring all religious organizations to register but banning any from registering who have less than 500 members. Thus, every Christian church in the country was suddenly illegal; almost all were closed or confiscated. All foreign workers were deported and pastor after pastor was arrested, tortured and imprisoned. The church, even today, is no stranger to persecution. And word about such things spreads quickly. Once they get one or two of us, the rest of us will contact each other as fast as we can. What will we do? I know what I'd do! My family would be in the car with whatever they could grab and be out of town as quick as I could get them there, looking for a place in the country to hide! That's what they did. The believers fled wholesale from Jerusalem into the countryside of Judea. Some went further north to Samaria. Where once they would gather in meetings of thousands at the Temple, now they are scattered throughout dozens of towns and villages trying desperately to reassemble their lives, find places to live, get jobs and hoping the authorities don't come after them there. The suffering was intense. But look at:

2. its effect and the purpose of God (4) It had just the opposite effect of what was intended. Instead of renouncing their faith, these believers took their faith with them and they shared it! Little house churches sprang up all over the place! And instead of the believers being all in Jerusalem, now where were they? Scattered throughout all Judea and Samaria, two provinces! The root of the word *scattered* is the verb *to sow seed*. In their scattering, God was planting the seeds of His church! And do you remember what Jesus had predicted in 1:8? Where would they be witnesses? You see, they didn't go on their own. It was exciting there in Jerusalem. A lot was happening. The meetings were thronged. They had the Apostles teaching them. They forgot all about Jesus' last command to go into all the world. So, God sent them out the hard way! That seems to be a pattern for the church throughout history. We become satisfied, in-grown, focused on where we are and what we're doing. So, we forget God's command, the mission God has given us to build His church among those beyond our reach. And God has to break into our lives with powerful reminders, often with suffering, to thrust us out into the harvest He has planned! It is true repeatedly in the history of the church. It has been true in our own century many times that the suffering of the body becomes the seed of a great harvest; just look at China. And it is often true in the life of a local church; God often has to do something as a wake-up call to get us to look outward beyond our walls to the fields that are white for His harvest. It's a whole lot easier to just listen and obey, but one way or the other, He WILL build His church.

Now the biggest immediate result of this tragedy is that:

II. Philip Preaches The Gospel To The Samaritans (5-25) That is actually an amazing statement in itself when you think about:

1. the tremendous barrier that had to be overcome (5) In **Jn. 4:9** *The Samaritan woman said to [Jesus], "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)* Why not? There were seven centuries of prejudice and bad blood between them. Samaria used to be the northern Kingdom of Israel, but the Assyrians conquered it and carried a lot of the population away and brought many of their own people to live there and intermarry. So, to the Jews, they were an impure mixed race of half-breeds. In Nehemiah's time the Samaritans fought the rebuilding of the Temple. In fact, they later built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. They fought against the Jews during the Jewish war of independence in the first century BC and the leader of the Jewish forces in return destroyed their Temple and the city of Samaria. In Jesus' time they were living under a forced Roman peace, but there was no love lost between them. Samaritan villages refused to receive Jesus, and his disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy them! For believers of Jewish background to consider preaching to Samaritans, to even think that God might love Samaritans and want them to be saved, was almost beyond comprehension. It carries much the same connotation as saying to us that God loves Nazis and terrorists and we should all care about them. It was a huge cultural barrier. The people God wants to send us to are often on the other side of the tracks from us culturally! But maybe Philip, being a Greek-speaker and probably raised somewhere other than Jerusa-

lem, didn't have as big a barrier or maybe he caught on to what God was doing. Anyway, he was given courage to tell the Samaritans about Jesus Christ and look at:

2. God's power displayed through Philip (6-8) Philip started out being in charge of food distribution in Jerusalem, but now God developed him into a true missionary evangelist. And God got confirmed his message to them in a very special way. He did miracles through the hands of Philip. Handicapped people were healed. Demons were cast out, all in the name of Jesus and that really got their attention. You'll see why that was so important when you read about:

3. the "conversion" of Simon the sorcerer (9-13) In this city in Samaria there was a leader named Simon. He was a sorcerer, an occult practitioner, who basically claimed to be the very agent of God. He called upon demonic powers and was able to do signs and wonders of his own. Some of them were pure deception. Others were empowered by Satan himself. And the whole region was so spiritually ignorant that they were amazed by his powers and thought they were from God. That is, until they met Philip and saw real miracles, miracles that could only be from the hand of God! When they saw that the true power of God in the Name of Jesus was so much greater than what they had been following, they believed in Jesus and openly declared their faith by being baptized. Dozens came, maybe hundreds. It touched the whole city and filled them with joy! Even Simon himself realized that the power he was facing was the true power of God and he followed along with the crowd. He gave assent, at least outwardly, to be a follower of Jesus and was baptized too! But it seems that here in Samaria God withheld something:

4. the giving of the Holy Spirit (14-17) Remember what a barrier there was with the Samaritans. When word filtered back to the apostles and the few believers who were left in Jerusalem of the revival in Samaria, they were surprised; they could hardly believe it. They sent Peter and John to check it out firsthand and see. What they discovered was that these Samaritans had believed and were committed to Jesus but they had not received the Holy Spirit; they hadn't been regenerated; He hadn't come to dwell inside them permanently. Now that was unusual. Ever since the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first came, everyone in Jerusalem who believed INSTANTLY received the Spirit. But it didn't work for the Samaritans. God withheld it. So, Peter and John did the only thing they knew to do. They did what they had done back in Acts 1. They prayed for God to send the Holy Spirit. And then they began to put their hands on each one. And as they did, He came! No doubt there was some evidence of that; perhaps they spoke in another language as they did at Pentecost, or gave testimony that they sensed the difference. But He came. Now there are two important things we need to know:

a. this delayed coming of the Spirit is a transitional exception It's not God's normal method. It's not how He did it up to that moment and it's not how He's done it since. The Holy Spirit lives in you the moment you believe. It is something God chose to do once, at this very special time for a special purpose. Why? Because:

b. it broke down the barrier between Jewish and Samaritan believers God did a similar thing when the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household in **10:44-45**. They were Romans, pure Gentiles. And the lesson Peter learned from that is the same one he learned here; compare **11:17**. God gave His one Holy Spirit to the Samaritans and to the Gentiles who believed, the same as He did to the Jews. Without that, the old prejudices might have remained; the old wall of separation might have stayed in place. But by letting the Spirit come to Samaritans through their Jewish hands, God declared, "These people are MY people just like you are; there is no longer any difference. All of that prejudice must now be laid aside." Paul said, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* - *Gal. 3:28*. Even Samaritans! It was a hard lesson and it took years to fully learn as we'll see. Now, unfortunately in the next verses we see what we might call:

5. the "reversion" of Simon (18-24) You notice it says that Simon believed and he was baptized but it doesn't say that they laid hands on him and he received the Spirit. Rather he was awed by this new kind of power and tried to buy it for himself. But Peter told him he was basically lost and unsaved and full of sin. The Spirit didn't live in him! He was still looking to get power and have people be in awe of him. Peter warned him to repent. But he didn't; he turned away and became an enemy of the Gospel. His name is mentioned repeatedly by early Christian writers. He went on to become the leader of a false cult and declare himself to be the very incarnation of God. Some credit him with being the founder of the doctrine of the Gnostics that the New Testament speaks so strongly against. One tradition says he died when he predicted he would rise from the dead and had himself buried alive at Rome but couldn't quite pull it off. How sad! He is a stern reminder of Hebrews 6 about those who taste and who see and who know and come SO close, but fall away and it is impossible to renew them again to repentance because, to their loss, they have crucified the Son of God afresh. But look what happens after all this:

6. the apostles minister in Samaria (25) All the way home Peter and John now stop and preach in Samaritan villages. God's lesson worked, didn't it?! That's how the church was planted in the region of Samaria. But God wasn't done with Philip yet. In the rest of the chapter, we read about how:

III. Philip Preaches The Gospel To An Ethiopian (26-40) The way it happens is this:

1. God's arranges a Divine appointment (26-31) First:

a. He prepares the messenger (26-29) Philip has been up north in Samaria and God tells him to head south on the road that goes out to the coast down by the old site of Gaza. There he sees a man riding in a chariot. It turns out that this man is the royal treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia, but Philip probably doesn't know all that yet. The Spirit says, "Go walk next to that chariot." Now, Samaria is 40 miles north of Jerusalem and they meet at Gaza 50 miles southwest of Jerusalem. So who left first? God had Philip leave at least a whole day before the Ethiopian left. It was a Divine appointment. God MADE his path cross that of just the right person. Now at the same time:

b. He prepares the recipient This man has met Jewish people in Ethiopia. He's come to believe that the God of Israel is the true God. He has even come 700 miles in a horse-drawn chariot to go to the Temple to worship. Of course, he can't get in. First, he's a Gentile, so as close as he can get is the outer court where all the buying and selling of animals is going on and you can't even pray properly out there. Beyond that, he's a eunuch, a castrated male servant, and the Law of Moses says that folks like him aren't permitted in the congregation. But somehow, he was able to buy a copy of the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah (30-31). Now, what are the odds of meeting a man in a chariot in the desert who is longing to know God and is reading his Bible and asks you to help him understand it? This is a God-thing, a Divine appointment. Sometimes God works in mighty displays of power to reach blinded hearts who've been deceived into false religion. But often God saves people by preparing and sending you into appointments that He's arranged in your path with people that are seeking and ready to hear about Him! Especially if you take the initiative and ask Him to do it! So, up hops Philip and:

2. Philip explains the Scriptures (32-35) Of all things, God has this man reading Isaiah 53, which is such a vivid description of the sufferings of Christ and ask, "Who is this talking about!" And Philip could simply say, "Let me tell you about Jesus!" And no sooner does he blurt out the story of who Jesus is and what He did than:

3. the Ethiopian is converted (36-39) Read verse 37. It's probably in the margin of your Bible because this sentence is not in some of the early manuscript copies, but its contents are everywhere through Acts and the New Testament.

a. he believes with his heart He trusts that Jesus died for him, that Jesus is His Savior. And immediately:

b. he gives testimony through baptism He wants to tell the world, so they stop by this pool or creek and go down into the water and Philip baptizes him in front of all his retinue of servants as a follower of Christ, and then suddenly disappears. This miracle of disappearance confirms the man's new faith and fills him with joy on his way home. Irenaeus, one of the early church fathers, comments that he became the first missionary to the Ethiopians and I'm sure he did! He went home and told everybody about the name and the power of Jesus! And Philip? Well, he:

4. Philip ministers along the coast (40) He reappears at Azotus, about 20 miles north, and heads north, stopping in every coastal village to preach the Gospel until he comes to Caesarea, where he settles down to live. So, look what God has done. One church has now resulted in dozens of small worshipping groups throughout all Judea and Samaria and it has sent at least one person all the way to Ethiopia!

God is still in the business of making Divine appointments. He's still preparing people to receive the Gospel and He's preparing us to encounter them. The question is whether we'll have courage to be obedient and share. *After being hit by a beer bottle thrown by a passing motorist, Nashville police officer Tim Sullivan began pursuit of the car--not knowing the situation was an answer to prayer. As he pulled the motorist over, Sullivan saw the driver was crying and upset. "He'd been married 18 years, and his wife had decided it was time to get a divorce," says Sullivan. A field sobriety test revealed the driver was sober, and Sullivan concluded the man hadn't seen the police car when he threw the bottle, so no citation was given. However, Sullivan, who had just prayed that week for a witnessing opportunity, saw a divine appointment. He shared the plan of salvation. "The man realized if he didn't do something with his life he was going nowhere," says Sullivan. "We talked about what Christ could do in his life. The motorist called my house a couple of days later and told my wife it was probably the most important time in his life, being stopped by me."* [SBC Life, Nov 1995. Page 10.] If you'll pray and ask Him, God will give you opportunities to share your love of His Son. Most of them won't be this dramatic, but He has prepared people out there, hurting people, seeking people, many of them from the other side of the tracks, people you wouldn't expect to be receptive. And if you'll listen to the Spirit, He'll use you in their lives.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

The Conversion Of Saul - Ch. 9

In chapter 8 we saw how persecution began against the church in Jerusalem and drove the disciples out of the city, but God used it to bring the Gospel to the towns of Judea and Samaria. However, God's design is always bigger than our vision. His eyes were already set on the regions beyond. In the last verse of chapter 8 He had already sent Philip on an initial preaching tour in the villages up the entire coast of Palestine until he reached Caesarea. God had plans for a harvest for the Kingdom in that area very shortly as we'll see. But at the moment there is something even bigger in His sights, something beyond the 30 mile radius of Judea, beyond the 60 mile radius of Samaria, even beyond the 90 mile radius of Galilee. They are fixed 140 miles northeast on the Roman province of Syria with its capital city, Damascus. That's like us

in Glenside targeting the city of Scranton or York! Some of the believers from Jerusalem had actually fled that far and were already living there. But even that was not far enough. God was already thinking in long range terms of “California”, of Greece and Rome and Spain beyond. And enroute to that purpose, God did what is probably the greatest miracle of the Book of Acts:

I. The Conversion Of Saul (1-31) Do you remember:

1. his intense persecution from chapter 8? Well, now it is even worse! **(1-2)** He wanted to kill them all, all those wicked Christians. He wanted to stamp out every last one in the world and managed somehow to get permission to extradite them from as far away as Damascus if he found them there! Well, you're familiar with the story of:

2. his dramatic confrontation (3-9) That light from heaven was more than a light; it was the glory of God bursting upon him. In 1 Cor. 7 he says plainly that Jesus himself appeared to him, but it was in heavenly light so bright that it blinded his eyes and drove him to his knees. And He says, “I am Jesus; this mad pursuit you're in, this vicious anger to follow and slay my followers: you're after ME!” What a revelation! The guy you thought was dead and his followers were all fakes and cultists is alive and he's God like he said! There is only one possible response: “Lord, what shall I do?”! And with that surrender, Saul the persecutor became a disciple of Jesus Christ. Now, what I really want to point out in this is:

3. God's glorious purpose (10-19a) For three days Paul doesn't even eat or drink anything because he's praying so hard, really praying for the first time in his life! But Ananias knows Saul's reputation. He knows the reign of terror he's been inflicting on believers in Jerusalem. He even knows why he's come to Damascus. It's hard for God to convince him that Saul is now one of us! And you know that we're much like Ananias, don't you?

a. we have trouble believing God could transform someone We put limits on God in our minds. We think, “Surely that person will never be saved.” Saddam Hussein? Never! Yassar Arafat? It couldn't be! I heard a WWII correspondent who was present telling the story live on the air of some high German officers who were tried for war crimes after the war and sentenced to be hanged. One of them whose name I can't even remember had the particular reputation of being a cruel butcher. He did not limit his reign of terror to the Jews, but on Sundays he loved to raid Christian churches with his Gestapo officers and hang every last person from a handy tree outside. Only he didn't use rope; he used piano wire to cut their throats as they hung, and he would laugh the whole time. A monster! This man, when the noose was put around his own neck, was asked if he had any last words. And he quietly said this, “Yes, I do. I put all my faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom I have come to believe in these last few weeks. I can only pray that He will have mercy on my wretched soul and forgive the horrible things that I have done.” And as our jaws drop, our unbelieving minds cry, “It can't be, he's a fake, it can't be real, it's only a deathbed conversion...” We cannot believe that God would save such a person! But he saved Paul and that lesson was not lost. Paul himself wrote it in 1 **Tim. 1:13-16**, *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.* In other words, if God could save me, then God can save anybody; I am living proof of His power to save! To save persecutors, war criminals or maybe that person in your life who you think is so resistant that you don't even pray for them anymore! That enemy, that boss, that neighbor, that relative, that parent, that husband, that child who is so far from the truth, who is so against what you believe, even that one, God can save! Will you pray for them in faith, believing it can be so? But there's another powerful lesson here:

b. God has sovereign purpose for those He saves (15) “This man is a particular tool I've selected for a particular purpose; I need someone to spearhead missionary outreach to the world and this guy is it!” Look with me at the full text of what Jesus told Saul there on the road in **Acts 26:16-18**. “I'm going to save the nations of the earth through you; that's your job!” That was the last thing old Jewish, “I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews”, Saul wanted to hear, but it didn't matter now. Jesus was Lord and if God wanted to save heathens through him, that was OK! And by the way, did you know that God has that very same purpose in saving you! How do I know? Because that is His purpose, period, that every people, tribe, tongue and nation might hear of His glory and worship Him! And you have a part in that purpose just like Paul did. You may not be an apostle (in Latin they translate that word as *missionary*). You might be an intercessor who prays for those who go. You might be a short-term team member or a giver to the work or one who welcomes internationals in your home or one who builds a missionary's house, but that's still God's purpose in saving you! He's going to build His church all the way to the ends of the earth! Anyway, now we come to Saul's:

4. his early ministry (19b-31) Luke leaves out some of the story of it, but here's a brief outline. First Paul:

a. he testified immediately in Damascus (19b-22) After only a few days of gleaning all he could from the believers there, he began to go publicly into the synagogues and declare his new faith. “Jesus IS the Son of God and I

know because I saw Him!" What an impact that must have had! The Jews were confused and no doubt a little angry. He was a traitor to them now. Next:

b. he spent time alone in Arabia This is the part Luke omits, simply *...when many days had elapsed (23a)*. But Paul says in **Gal. 1:17**, *...nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus*. In fact, it was three years, he says, before he went up to Jerusalem in verse 26. That three years was split between Arabia and Damascus. Arabia was a sparsely populated desert. He went there, not to preach, but no doubt to listen, to get away by himself and get to know Jesus, to re-study the Old Testament and adjust his understanding. Likely it was there in Arabia in that time alone that his theology was developed. Who knows but that the wonderful doctrines in Romans didn't come out of those days with God! At any rate:

c. he returned to Damascus and was forced to flee (23-25) When he got back, he had grown so much that he was very powerful in arguing against the Jews. And like Stephen, they couldn't refute what he was saying, so they simply decided to kill him. They hatched a plot, but he learned of it. Notice that now he has followers of his own, disciples, people he's led to Christ. The church has grown through Saul from those first few seeds which were planted in Damascus and God's purpose is accomplished. So now the disciples lower him at night on a rope through a window and down the city wall to make good his escape. And he went and:

d. he ministered in Jerusalem (26-29) Good old Barnabas, the encourager, the one who is easy to convince, who is open and willing to listen and willing to believe that God can do anything. He puts his reputation on the line and brings Paul into the fearful fellowship there, brethren who clearly remember the zeal with which he persecuted them! And they are reconciled. And now Saul begins to do the same thing he did in Damascus. He's a Jew and when he goes to the synagogue, he stands up and preaches that Jesus is the Son of God and not only that, he proves it from the Scriptures. Eventually, the anger of the Greek-speaking Jews is riled up like it was against Stephen and they make an attempt on his life. But the leaders don't want to risk another martyr so:

e. he is sent home through Caesarea to Tarsus (30) in Asia Minor. And for 7-10 years he stays there, quietly serving Christ on his own. We read nothing about it; we don't know what happened, but I'm sure the church is planted there by him. Is there a lesson in all this? Maybe it is this: you don't become the Apostle Paul overnight, do you? Moses spent his 40 years as a shepherd; David spent 10 years being hunted in the wilderness. God's most useful servants are molded and shaped over long periods of time and through varieties of experience that usually include suffering. There is no other way. Saul had periods of fellowship, of solitude, of shared ministry, of solo ministry, of success, of failure and even of opposition, and God used all of these over a long period of time to produce the kind of leader that Paul became. Don't expect Him to take a shortcut with you, or with your spouse or your kids or even your pastor either! But out of this great miracle of saving a persecutor:

5. God ends the first wave of persecution (31) Look where the church is planted now, in Judea, Samaria and Galilee. It had known a time of growth, then a time of persecution which thrust it out into these regions and now it enjoyed a time of peace where there was strengthening and encouragement and growth both in numbers and in maturity. God has seasons for His church, that He uses to mature it and to build it. Those early days in Jerusalem were not the norm; we tend to think that the church should always be in great expansion and filled with exciting miracles, but the truth is that there are seasons in the work of God, just as there are seasons in the year and they're all needed to grow the church. Well, now Luke has run ahead in the story a little bit, so he backs up to look at what was happening, while all this was happening to Saul, in:

II. The Continuing Ministry Of Peter (32-43) Peter had developed sort of an itinerant ministry at this point, going out to the towns and villages and visiting the scattered believers and the little churches they'd raised up and teaching them. As I said at the beginning, Philip had sown some seeds in the towns north along the coastal plain, but in these verses, we read the story of how:

1. two miracles extend the Gospel to the coastal plain Both are familiar stories. In the first incident:

a. the healing of Aeneas impacts Lydda and the plain of Sharon (32-35) Lydda is about 15 miles northwest of Jerusalem. There Peter meets a paralyzed man and heals him in the name of Jesus. Well, the news of that spreads, not only throughout the town of Lydda, but all up and down this whole coastal plain, called the plain of Sharon. And:

b. the raising of Dorcas impacts Joppa In fact, word of Aeneas' healing spreads 10 miles further northwest to Joppa, where they have a problem. A beloved sister named Dorcas has died **(36-43)** So, they send for Peter and when he gets there, he sees how vital Dorcas was to the fellowship there and how much they missed her and he turns to the body and commands her to rise in the name of Jesus and she does! Imagine the impact of THAT, the glory that the name of Jesus received! And how the word spread! Now from these experiences let's draw:

2. two conclusions about miracles First:

a. they are done in the providence of God God doesn't choose to heal every paralyzed person, nor does He choose to raise every saint from the dead back to live on this earth again. If He did, we'd have no sick believers and there'd be billions of us, because we'd never die. These are extraordinary miracles, things that God chooses to do in a specific time or a specific place with a specific person. And God has his reasons for doing them. Very often that reason is not so much for the benefit of the person involved. Rather, as in this case:

b. they are done for the purpose of God: to build His church (35, 42) Through these two mighty acts of power, people in these two villages and all up and down the coastal plain heard the name of Jesus and believed. The church was planted in a dozen new villages and a great harvest of souls was gathered into the Kingdom.

Is God still doing those things today? Sure, He is. Reports come in all the time. Does He still convert His enemies? *While workers in one restricted-access country conducted a retreat for new Christians recently, they noticed one young man constantly writing in a notebook. When the workers asked retreat participants to share testimonies, the young man stood up and said he had been sent to spy on the meeting and give a report to authorities. Then he told the group that he himself had now become a believer. Praise God for the way His spirit still works in the hearts of even those who have made themselves His enemies. Pray for Him to use this young man to bear powerful witness to God's power to change hearts. [Advance, 5/31/01]* Who knows, this man could be the next apostle Paul in that region! Does God still do miracles like Aeneas and Dorcas? *A Christian worker ministering among refugees in Central Asia was invited recently to pray for a sick woman. Upon entering her tent, the worker saw a frail old woman lying so still the worker wondered if she was dead. The worker prayed in the name of Jesus for the woman and for the other refugees in the camp. Days later, the worker learned that the old woman had recovered so much she was able to walk and that two days after the visit relief groups had come to give out food ration cards. The worker reported: "People in the camp said 'God has seen us. He heard that foreigner's prayer!' They all gave glory to the Lord for the food that was sent." Praise God for showing Himself powerful for this elderly woman and the other refugees. Pray for them that the good news of His love would spread throughout that camp and draw many to salvation in Jesus Christ. [Advance, 5/31/01]* You see, the Book of Acts is still being written. The story of the building of the Church of Jesus Christ is still in process! We're helping to write it around the world and some of the most exciting things are happening over there. But that story is still being written here in Glenside also. Would God save hard cases here? Would He do powerful things to show His glory here? I think so. The real question is two-fold. First, do we have the faith to ask Him? Or have we resigned ourselves to believing that things can't be changed, that people won't be saved. And the second is this, do we really care? Do we really care that Jesus Christ gets the glory of having vital living growing churches full of followers in Glenside and its surrounding community; do we really care that every neighborhood has a testimony and a witness for Christ in it, do we long to see people find Christ and have their lives transformed. Or have we become content to simply enjoy our suburban lifestyle and go about business as usual. All of these folks lived for the Gospel; Jesus Christ was the center of their life and their clear primary purpose in life was to expand His Kingdom, not to prosper or to achieve the goals of the people around them. If you want to experience God in a powerful way, you have to get on board with what He's doing and make it the center of your life. But when you do, watch out, because God will do more than you are prepared to ask or think.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts **The Great Lesson: God Is No Bigot! - 10:1-11:18**

When the Church began, there was one great problem in it that kept it from expanding. That problem was so deep that it was not fully resolved and settled in that generation for nearly 20 years. It keeps cropping up over and over until Acts 15, more than half-way through the book. That problem is so pervasive that it has resurfaced again and again in the body of Christ repeatedly throughout the history of the church. It is always the problem that ultimately keeps the church from expanding and it is a problem so pervasive that it is almost built into the very fabric of all human existence.

I. The Great Problem: is Human Ethnocentricity Human beings tend to be ethnocentric. That is:

1. we inherently value persons of our own ethnicity (of our own **race** because they look like us, of our own **culture** because they act and think like us, and of our own **language** because they talk like us and we can understand them. Often, they share a common history; they come from the same roots. In essence, they ARE us; everyone else is a "them", an outsider. Human beings almost unilaterally see the world that way; we divide it into "us" and "them". Ultimately there are barriers between *us* and *them* and the more of these characteristics we don't share, the greater the barriers. Now, of course, it is God who created these differences in the human race. He "invented" all the peoples of the earth at Babel. He designed it that way. But into what God designed to be a beautiful diversity, Satan breathed a lie: "We are better than them." So:

2. we easily develop prejudice toward persons who are different We judge them as having less value, and ourselves as being superior in some way. I am not just talking about prejudice between blacks and whites here in the US; it's all over the world and often much more bold. The Iraqis hate the Kurds; the Arabs hate the Jews; in Africa the Hutus and the Tutsis have had war. In Kyrgyzstan there is tension between the Kyrgyz and the Russians. And even

where there is not hatred or tension, there is still a barrier of superiority. Years ago, my daughter and her team of seven in Kyrgyzstan rode four hours on horseback with their Kyrgyz friends way up into the summer pastures high in the mountains. There they stayed in a yurt, a felt tent. They ate the feast they were offered, the lung of a sheep filled with boiled curdled milk and sheep brains for dessert. These people had never seen an American. They had no technology. They didn't make any money but then they didn't need any because they lived off their flocks like Abraham did 3,000 years ago. They probably had little idea of anything going on in the outside world. They went to the bathroom outdoors behind a bush. In our minds, we'd call them what? Primitive? But now turn around and put the shoe on the other foot and think like them. "Here to my mountain comes a 23 year old American girl (and she's not married yet - there must be something wrong with her). She dresses in funny clothes. And she has no idea how to ride a horse, something any mountain child could do! She needs to be led like a child and we laugh at her. She talks funny; she can't even speak our language. And she dislikes the sweetest taste on earth, the taste of our sheep. She wouldn't begin to know how to kill one, let alone to skin it or carve it or cook these delicacies. She'd never last a week up here on her own. She's PRIMITIVE!" You see, even though we may be nice about it, inside we ALL feel that WE are superior to THEM. Look at James' example in **Jas. 2:1-4**. You all look pretty nice here this morning. Suppose Eddie the homeless guy you see up at Burger King comes in and sits down. Or maybe some teen with bright red hair and earrings in his nose and lip. You may not have enough guts to tell him where to sit, but you certainly will make a value judgment based on appearances. We inherently value people who are like us and de-value the others! Now:

3. for Israel it was compounded by being God's chosen people In **Deut. 7:6** God says to them, *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.* What a wonderful blessing, to be God's treasured possession! The exact same thing is said to be true of us as believers! But what does our human nature say that means? That all other people are less valuable than us! God loves and cares about us more! And Israel took this so far as to regard all people other than Jews with disdain. They lumped them together in one term, *Gentiles* or literally, *peoples*, meaning "anybody but the Jews". In Jesus' day they wouldn't go into the house of a Gentile, they wouldn't eat with a Gentile, they wouldn't touch a Gentile, and to make matters worse, Israel was a captive people being ruled by Gentiles, the Romans, so they hated them all the more. All the first Christians were Jews initially, but when they got saved, their cultural feeling toward Gentiles didn't go away. They could hardly conceive that God would even save one or forgive his sins! What a deep-seated problem! But in this chapter, we have:

II. The Great Lesson: God's Pan-ethnocentricity (10:34-35) We may be ethnocentric (valuing our own people) but God loves ALL peoples. You see:

1. God does not value persons by external differences He has no favorites. He is not a "respector of persons" as the KJV puts it. Literally, He does not receive persons by their faces, by their appearance. It doesn't matter whether they're white or black or yellow, whether they live in South America or China, whether they use cell phones in an office or plow rice paddies with water buffaloes, whether they are brilliantly educated or illiterate, whether they have green hair and ripped jeans or a three piece suit. God doesn't value people by any of those things. They are ALL created in His image. He looks upon the heart, Samuel says, and so:

2. God receives to Himself true worshippers from all peoples Anybody who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved and forgiven and become a child of God. In fact, He WANTS that to be the case; He has decreed that it will be the case. But how do you teach that lesson to a bunch of people who all their lives have thought themselves superior? Well, Acts 10 -11 is the record of:

III. How This Lesson Was Taught To The Church

1. it began with the vision of Cornelius (1-8)

a. who he was: a seeking Roman (1-2) He was a centurion, the commander of a regiment of 100 men, originally from Italy. He had been a worshipper of the gods of Rome, but in years of being stationed in Palestine he had come to learn and believe from the Jews that there is only one true living God and he was seeking that God with all his heart, praying regularly each day and giving to help the poor. So, God gives him a vision (**3-4**). Now, in there is a:

b. the lesson: God is already at work among the peoples Notice that:

(1) He hears the prayers and sees the hearts of sincere seekers Does God hear the prayers of unbelievers. Sure, He does! And the ones who have sincere hearts, who genuinely want to know Him and not just use Him to solve their problems, He listens to and remembers and:

(2) He sends those who will bring the Gospel to them In (**5-8**) the angel tells him to send for Peter who is down the coast at Joppa and listen to his message! That's the missionary process, whether it's in Mongolia or North Hills. God has prepared people out there. He's already been at work in their lives. In their hearts He has put a desire to know Him. And then, in the course of His time, He puts you and I or someone else into their lives to share the Good News about Jesus and boom, they believe! Some of those people are just like us but some are very different! Some look different and speak different, especially where we live. There are 50,000 Muslims

in Philadelphia; there are hundreds, likely thousands, of international students in our schools; there is a huge Hispanic community. There are whole Korean communities and Cambodian communities and the Buddhists even have a temple in Glenside. But among all of them, as well as among our Anglo-suburban neighbors, God has prepared people with seeking hearts that He wants us to discover and share with. So, Cornelius sends off three men to find Peter at Joppa, but meanwhile this same lesson:

2. **it was illustrated in the vision of Peter (9-29)** Peter is up on the roof and has a hunger dream. To summarize it:
 - a. **three sheets full of animals** come down from heaven and Peter says, "I can't eat those! They're unclean!" But God says (15), **"Eat! I call them clean!" (9-16)**. This dream is repeated three times and Peter is scratching his head and trying to figure out what on earth this crazy dream meant and why it was repeated three times, when all of a sudden:
 - b. **three men arrive** Cornelius' messengers show up and knock at the door and God says, **"Go! I have sent them!" (17-20)** And Peter is pretty smart; he knows how to put three and three together! Three sheets of unclean animals, three unclean Gentiles at the door and God wants me to go with them? Maybe there's a lesson here! So, he listens to the story of who Cornelius is and how he had this vision and had sent them to ask Peter to come to Caesarea and speak to them and the next day he goes. He never would have gone before, but now he gets:
 - c. **the lesson: "I should not call any man unclean!" (21-29)** As he enters Cornelius' house, look what he says in (28-29). Did you hear that? "Nobody is common or unclean. I'm not better than anybody. God doesn't love me more than anybody else. All people can have a place in His kingdom and I have to give up my prejudice!" He's got it, but just to drive it home:
3. **it was confirmed visibly by the Holy Spirit (30-48)** Cornelius tells Peter about His vision and Peter tells him the lesson we already looked at:
 - a. **the lesson: God wants to save non-Jewish people (30-35)** "Now I realize how true it is! God wants to save everybody, not just me or people like me." And so, for the first time ever you have:
 - b. **the Gospel presented to non-Jewish people (36-43)** Peter tells the story of Jesus, who he was and how He died for our sins and rose again on the third day. And as he is giving sort of an invitation (43), they believe his words in their hearts and suddenly:
 - c. **the Holy Spirit is given to non-Jewish people (44)** Just like He had come to dwell in the Jews at Pentecost in Acts 2 and in the Samaritans in Acts 8. And that:
 - d. **the lesson made a powerful impact (45-48)** They were astonished. God saves Gentiles and Jews alike and gives them the same Spirit. As Paul would later put it, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* - Gal. 3: 28. What a radical concept! It went against everything their culture had ingrained in them, but God had shown it clearly to be true. Yet even still:
4. **it had to be proven to the Church (11:1-18)** Doesn't it always? Even when God works powerfully in your life and reveals wonderful things to you about Himself, you still have to deal with:
 - a. **the accusation of the critics (1-3)** There's always somebody who wasn't there and their first response is to criticize you. So, Peter explains the whole thing again:
 - b. **the explanation of Peter (4-16)** He tells about how he saw the sheet and the animals and heard God's voice and right then the three Gentiles were at his door because of the angel in Cornelius' vision, and how he went and preached the Gospel to these Romans and, as he did, God sent the Holy Spirit on them just like He did on us... And instead of continuing to criticize, the whole church grasps:
 - c. **the conclusion: God has granted life to all peoples! (17-18)** Even the Gentiles! Even those who we've always thought he hated and who we've learned to hate, or at least to dismiss, even to those we've been prejudiced against. God has granted life even to them! And it's my role to be out there among them so that the ones in whose hearts God has been at work can hear and believe!

You know that great problem of people thinking they're better than others is never going to be solved in the world until Jesus comes; it's etched into the heart of man. And it won't be solved in the church either until we recognize it in our own hearts and allow God to eradicate it from us. *Tim Stafford writes: "When my wife Popie was in the sixth grade, she was a member of the popular crowd. Every Friday night she and her friends gathered at the country club to drink Pepsis and do the twist. Popie led the list of girls to be called before school to see what everyone was wearing. One day her teacher asked her to stay after school. When they were alone, she asked Popie if she had ever heard of India's caste system. Popie said no, so her teacher explained it to her. She drew a little sketch on the blackboard, explaining that a Brahman, in*

the top caste, could not even allow an untouchable's shadow to fall on him. 'You and your friends,' said the teacher thoughtfully, 'remind me of those Brahmins.' Popie did not cry. She did not even let the teacher know how those words affected her, but they did, deeply. She was shocked. She had never realized the ugly meaning of the word 'exclusive.' She had never thought about the way she and her friends affected those who didn't belong to the popular crowd. That brief conversation changed Popie's life. She became one of the most inclusive persons I have ever met. Thirty years later Popie could remember her teacher's words as though they were spoken yesterday." [That's Not What I Meant! by Tim Stafford. Zondervan, 1995.] Kids are notorious for being ethno-centric, developing cliques like this of people just like themselves that are acceptable. We adults often become better at hiding it, but our prejudices remain. Sometimes they come out in racial slurs and ethnic jokes or in wicked thoughts that secretly cross our minds. Sometimes they're denominational prejudices; sometimes they're socio-economic; sometimes they have to do with gender. And God still needs to teach each one of us that great lesson that He is no bigot! He has no favorites. He doesn't regard any human being or any type of human being as better or worth more than any other. He loves and wants to receive them all. So must we.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

Expansion, Protection and Judgment - 11:19-12:25

It has now been about nine years since Stephen was murdered in Jerusalem and the first great persecution began, scattering thousands of believers out into Judea and Samaria, then Galilee and as far north as Damascus. But God saved Saul the persecutor and gave the church rest and so dozens of little churches sprang up in the towns and villages of Palestine through Philip and Peter and many others. Now, by the middle of chapter 11, God is ready to take the next step:

I. The Expansion Of God's Church to Antioch (11:19-30) Antioch lay 300 miles to the north of Jerusalem. It was the third largest city in the world, after Rome and Alexandria. It was beautiful and carefully planned out, yet immoral and full of wickedness, but God had a purpose for it of which its founders never dreamed. Antioch was to become the headquarters for world missions in the first century. It is here that we see:

1. the planting of the first purely Gentile church (19-21) Antioch had a large Jewish community and the first believers to flee there in the early days did try to reach them, but evidently with few results. However, now, having been emboldened by the news of the conversion of Cornelius the Roman centurion at Caesarea in chapter 10 and the fact that God proves He is willing to save pure Gentiles, new workers came to Antioch and began to preach directly to the Greeks. And God had prepared a great harvest in that city. Huge numbers of them gladly became followers of Jesus Christ and the church was born there. But wherever the church is born, it must also be taught and brought to maturity. So, we read of:

2. the discipling of the new church through Barnabas and Saul (22-26) The mother church in Jerusalem sent them a sound teacher, Barnabas, to disciple and grow them. He was impressed with the work of God there, but people were coming to the Lord so rapidly that he realized he alone was not enough. And then he realized that Antioch was right around the corner, less than 100 miles, from Tarsus where Saul had been sent. Saul was a powerful teacher and really knew the Scriptures, so Barnabas went and got him and together they spent an entire year there in Antioch just teaching these new believers who had never even read the Scripture before, who had no acquaintance with God's mighty works in the Old Testament. They had to relearn their whole way of thinking. They had believed in many gods, capricious gods. Now they had to learn all about the one true God who is constant and faithful. They had no knowledge of right and wrong; they came from a culture where the vilest practices were accepted. Now they had to learn how to live. And it took a while. By the way, new believers need that. More and more we discover that even here, the folks coming to Jesus have NO religious background; they don't know the simplest things that we take for granted. They need people to take them under wing for six months or a year and disciple them, teach them line upon line and answer their questions and help them learn to make godly decisions. If that isn't done, Satan chokes out the word and they fall away. That's why we try to hook up new believers one on one with more experienced ones to disciple them. You know, YOU could do that! We need people who are willing to give an hour of their time and their lives once a week to root and ground someone else. Now, as an aside, another thing happened there:

3. the new name, "Christians", was attributed to believers there (26b) Now, that is significant. The name *Christian* means *of the party of Christ, or the followers of the Christ*. The Jews referred to them as a "sect", a heretical branch of their faith that had turned into a cult. They called them Nazarenes because Jesus was from Nazareth. The believers called themselves followers of the Way. But the Greek unbelievers in derision criticized them, calling them Christians, Christ-followers. The Greeks saw that they were not Jews, but something entirely different. And the believers accepted this term of mockery because it fit and they began to wear it proudly. Peter wrote, *If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed!* But there's something important under the surface here. Rome had recognized Judaism as a legitimate and legal religion in the empire. As long as believers were lumped into that category, they had some legal standing. However, if Christianity is NOT just a branch of Judaism, then it is an illegal religion and its followers may legitimately be persecuted, as we'll see in a moment! The last thing we see in this chapter is:

4. the new church connected with others in the bond of love (27-30) We read in history that there were severe famines in various parts of the Roman Empire during the reign of Claudius. The crop failure in Judea was particularly severe and those believers who lived there were suffering. The commerce in Antioch was still prospering and the believers there still had plenty. But their hearts were touched by the suffering of their brothers and they raised an offering. Every one of them gave what he was able, as God had given to him, and the result was a sizable sum. They sent Paul and Barnabas down to Jerusalem with it to turn it over to the elders there for distribution. Now, these churches were 300 miles apart. They didn't know each other personally. But when one part of the body suffers, the others suffer with it! Or at least that's the way God has designed it to work. We Americans are so individualistic by nature and that creeps into our churches too, particularly us independent churches. We don't build relationships with one another and we don't think about what happens to one another. We each are involved in our own little kingdom and we're more likely to erect fences out of our minor differences than to send an offering to meet another fellowship's need. But that's not the way God intended it to be. The principle of loving one another and caring for one another's needs is not just for individuals; it also applies to individual churches and entire regions of churches! Now, in chapter 12 we go back to Jerusalem and pick up what's been happening there about the same time, and we read about:

II. The Protection Of God's Servant, Peter (12:1-19a) It is at this moment, ten years after Stephen's death, that:

1. the second wave of persecution begins in Jerusalem (1) This Herod is Herod Agrippa I. His grandfather, Herod the Great, had tried to kill Jesus at His birth. His uncle, Herod Antipas, had beheaded John the Baptist and tried Jesus at Pilate's request. True to his heritage, this Herod set out to please his Jewish subjects now by destroying the church. So, he arrested some of the leaders and we have in verse 2:

a. the martyrdom of James, John's brother (2) One ancient writer, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, says that, as James was led to the place of martyrdom, his accuser was brought to repent of his conduct by the apostle's extraordinary courage, and fell down at his feet to request his pardon, professing himself a Christian, and resolving that James should not receive the crown of martyrdom alone. Hence, they were both beheaded at the same time. [Foxes Book of Martyrs] Even in his death, James led someone to Christ. But the Jews loved it! Finally, they had a ruler who would eradicate these horrid Christians! And Herod loved that they loved it, so he had his SS men go out and snag Peter:

b. the imprisonment of Peter (3-4) He was in a prison, behind locked doors, guarded by 16 soldiers, two of which were personally chained to his wrists. Herod didn't want to violate the Jewish holiday and offend them, so there Peter languished in jail for perhaps a week. But the church was not idle and in verse 5 we see:

2. the intercession of the church for a persecuted believer (5) The church mobilized and went to prayer. It touched their roots. James had already been executed and Peter was going to be next. They began to storm the gates of heaven for their brother who was the victim of this persecution. Now, just maybe there's a second lesson here about caring. So many of our fellow believers around the globe today live in places where they are persecuted, where they are arrested, imprisoned and even martyred. We hear about it sometimes and take a moment to pray, maybe. But look at how these folks prayed:

a. it was continual: they prayed earnestly They loved Peter and cared about him. They didn't just go about their lives. They got on their knees and begged God for his release. Did they not pray for James? Is that why he was martyred? No, I'm sure they did pray for James. But it seems that he was arrested and killed very quickly. That was how God planned to take him home. Peter was kept in jail for a few days and they had time to find out and to mobilize, so they prayed with all their hearts; they prayed for hours; they prayed long into the night. And notice:

b. it was corporate: they prayed together They didn't sit at home and pray as individuals. A ton of them gathered (verse 12) at Mary's house, John Mark's mother's place, and they prayed together. They stormed the enemy's gates together in prayer. And notice:

c. it was specific: they prayed for him They had an object; they wanted Peter freed! So, they didn't pray generic, "God bless..." prayers. They had a man they prayed for by name and they determined to see the matter through to the end for him. And look at:

3. the miraculous deliverance God wrought (6-11) It was so unreal that Peter had to pinch himself to see whether it was real or not! The chains fell off, the door opened all by itself, no guards woke up, and he was led by an angel! Wow! What a tremendous miracle! God is still able to do those, you know! That's what they were praying for. So, when Peter shows up, look at:

a. the simple joy that should have been theirs (12-14) Rhoda realized right away what a miracle it was! She recognized Peter and went running off in exuberant joy to tell everyone that God had set him free. She was so overwhelmed with joy that she forgot to open the lock and left him standing out there! That's the joy every one of them should have had but instead look at:

b. their hesitation to believe God's answer (15-17) They said, "You're nuts! Peter's locked in prison (even though we're here praying for him to get out!) Well, maybe they killed him and his spirit is here..." When they finally quit bickering and opened the door they were astonished. They were amazed! They had been praying all night for his release and when they got what they prayed for, they weren't ready to receive it. They had real trouble believing God would do the very thing they prayed for.

Sometimes we can hardly believe that our praying will make a difference. But it does! Jesus said, *Whatever you ask in My name believing you will receive!* What if God would move us to pray like they did? A few years ago Ruth Ashlock's cousin Grace Morillo was captured when her plane was hijacked by Colombian guerillas and we and a lot of other churches went to prayer and after several months she was set free unharmed. This spring we prayed regularly when Regina Madonna's sister Maridol and her daughter Alexa, were kidnapped by armed men in the Philippines. I don't even know whether she is a believer, but after 4 months they were set free unharmed because people prayed! It makes a difference when the church prays together, consistently and specifically! There are dozens, probably hundreds, more cases like that which could use intercessors. There are many modern day "Peters". Who will pray for them? You can. Subscribe to Voice of the Martyrs magazine or look at their website www.persecution.com or check out Open Doors USA at www.opendoorsusa.org. The responsibility to pray for those parts of the church which suffer is truly ours, even though we're not the ones going through it...yet. But look at:

4. the fury of the persecutor (18-19a) How mad Herod must have been! He looked everywhere! He personally examined the bewildered guards. And when he could not get an answer, he showed no mercy, but rather had them executed! And that leads us to what we read about in the last part of the chapter:

III. The Judgment Of God's Enemy, Herod (12:19b-25) Now, just let me point out three things. First, mark carefully:

1. the danger of destroying the church If you will compare verses 1 and 23, it literally says that Herod *stretched out his hand* against the church and so God *put forth His hand* against Herod and struck him! Look with me at **1 Cor. 3:16-17**. The word *you* is plural; it refers to the church. God is building His church. Anyone who stretches out his hand to destroy the church sets himself against God and God will eventually destroy him if he doesn't repent. The ancient historian Josephus says that immediately Herod doubled over with intestinal pain. Five days later he died in total agony, his bowels probably obstructed by roundworms. Persecutors seal their own destruction! That has been shown time and again throughout history! Yet people do it, because they get caught up in:

2. the deathtrap of human pride Josephus says that Herod appeared that day for his audience in robes made entirely of pure silver that shone marvelously in the morning sun. It was so bright that the people stood in awe. In their superstition and also in their desire to get the grain they needed in this time of growing famine, they flattered him. They stroked his pride. They called him a god. And he loved it. But pride always goes before destruction, Solomon said! Around the world today, God still has some enemies, some Herods. Some of them are trying to stamp out His church in China, in Indonesia, in Sudan and many other places and I wouldn't want to be in their shoes. But some of them sit in the hallowed halls of Washington DC. Some of them are elected senators and representatives and appointed judges who arrogantly believe that the message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone has no place in this land. It doesn't belong in our schools; it doesn't belong in our moral decisions. They want to take the credit that rightfully belongs to God for creating and preserving this nation and proudly deify man with it by saying WE did these things ourselves. Let me tell you, I wouldn't want to be in their shoes either. Yet I must be careful, lest that kind of arrogant pride that takes credit for what God has done, that makes me think that I can care and provide for myself in life, should be found in me, but sometimes it is and it is still a deathtrap! Herod never lived to learn what every other persecutor in history eventually learns:

3. the futility of trying to destroy the church (24) The Word of God continued to grow and spread in spite of persecution. It always does. It always will. Mao Tse Tung, in trying to eradicate the church in China, grew it to be the largest church on the face of the earth, more than 100 million strong. The Ayatollah Khomeini who so radically championed fundamentalist Islam and repressed the church, literally drove thousands of Iranians into the arms of Jesus Christ and into His church.

Jovo Jekic was 105 years old in 1996. He lived at that time in Petrinja, Croatia, which was in the war zone occupied by rebel soldiers. "Old Brother Jekic" as he is affectionately known in the area, was 26 years old in 1917 when he immigrated to the United States where he found work with the Ford Motor Company. In 1919, Jovo was invited to a church where he heard the gospel for the first time. Some people took a special interest in him, and he trusted Christ as Savior. Soon, he became convinced that he should return to his native Croatia with the message of Christ. Through the years, Jovo faced much opposition--from the established churches, then the Nazis, later the Communists, and in just the last few years, from rebel factions in the Yugoslav civil war. When he was already over 100 years old, he started holding Sunday services in his home after soldiers had closed the local church. It wasn't long before the soldiers came calling. They forced their way into Jovo's house and took him and his daughter out into the yard. There they told them to renounce their belief in Jesus Christ and to stop holding services, or else they would shoot them. Brother Jekic looked the soldiers in the eye and said, "Go ahead and shoot me because I am going to do what God wants me to do." Then he said to the leader, "I know where

I am going when I die, do you?" The rebel soldier's face turned ashen. He spun around and walked out of the yard. God used Jovo Jekic to start 17 churches in Croatia. Because of him--and because of a handful of faithful Christians in a little church in Detroit many years ago--hundreds of people in Croatia have found faith in Jesus." [Europe Today, Oct-Dec 1996. Page 4.] My friend, that same faith is required of us. Compared to them, the mocking we might endure at our workplace or school seems small. But to be His disciples Jesus said we must take up our cross. We must follow Him after the example of these early believers, even if it means death. Thank God we are not experiencing this here, but it should still do two things in us. It should move us to examine the reality of our own faith and it should move us to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters, so many of whom suffer in the way Jesus said the church normally would. Let's think about them and pray for them.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

The Mission To The World Is Launched - Ch. 13

Chapter 13 is a key turning point in the Book of Acts. Let me share with you four:

I. Important Transitions Which Begin With Acts 13 First of all:

1. the church's focus shifts from the Jews to the peoples of the world The church began in Jerusalem; all its first converts were Jews. The church spread out into Judea and Samaria and Galilee, where most who came to faith were Jews. Even the folks who first went as far as Damascus and Antioch worked with the Jews that were there. The big question that had to be answered (and it was in chapters 10-11) was "Can God save other peoples who are not Jewish?" But now that hurdle has been crossed and the focus from here on is primarily on ministry to non-Jews, to the other peoples. At the same time:

2. the church's base of operations shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch It is no longer the church in Jerusalem where the apostles have remained that is central to the work. They are consulted for doctrinal issues and are helped financially, but the church at Antioch in Syria is now the headquarters of the world Christian movement.

3. the church's central leadership shifts from Peter to Paul Peter has been the key figure in the first half of the book. But now Paul will emerge as the clear leader and theologian in the church. The rest of Acts is the story of his three major missionary journeys and his life-career as a missionary. And most importantly now:

4. the church's strategy shifts from evangelism to missions In the beginning, the believers simply shared their faith wherever they went. That was the natural process of evangelism. If they moved from Jerusalem out into Judea or Samaria, they shared their faith and a little church was planted. If they moved north to Caesarea or Antioch, they shared where they were and the church was born in those places. But now they adopt a new strategy, which we call missions, deliberately ***sending out workers to plant churches in key centers across the Roman Empire which could then evangelize their own region and reproduce*** by normal evangelism. Evangelism is kind of like giving everyone in the sanctuary a candle and lighting only the first one in front and letting it naturally pass from one to another. Missions is like sending an usher down the aisle to light the first candle in every pew and then let it pass naturally down the row. The church is lit in 1/20th of the time. That's the mission strategy: choosing key urban centers in every region of the Roman empire, then sending workers to plant the church in each so that by evangelism the entire region can be reached. The workers, meanwhile, move on to another region! That was the strategy Paul developed and we're still using it today. It's been refined and complicated a bit by the many support roles that missionaries may be in, but at the bottom line, we still send workers to plant the church in key places among each people group and let the church grow to reach its own people while workers move on to other strategic targets. Now let's look at:

II. The Missionaries Sent Out By The Church At Antioch (1-3) Let me point out three things. First:

1. this church developed gifted leaders and released their best In the beginning it was Barnabas who came to Antioch as their teacher. Then he went and got Saul and the two of them spent a whole year developing and maturing the church. And now look, there are five of them! Three more have grown to leadership status in that time. What a healthy sign, a church maturing and developing leaders from within! But look which ones they sent out! It wasn't, "Well, who can we spare..." They didn't selfishly cling to their two most mature and experienced people; they didn't say, "We need Barnabas and Saul right here!". Instead, those are the very ones they were willing to release! The work of mission is the most demanding part of planting the church throughout the world and it demands the very best folks that we can send! Then note that:

2. these leaders sought God's will and were sensitive to the Holy Spirit They were fasting and praying and worshipping together already. It was their habit. Why? They wanted to know God. They wanted to hear from God. They wanted to carry out His will. And so, when the Holy Spirit spoke to them, they were able to hear Him. They were listening for His voice, for His direction. Here's a challenge for us elders and leaders. They weren't just throwing out ideas and shooting from the hip. They sought God's will and sensed His leading clearly. Let me give you an example. Years ago, the Steering Committee of the Kyrgyz Partnership in Kyrgyzstan met for two days of retreat. They basically

prayed for two solid days and God gave them a unified vision for the Kyrgyz church. But to choose their leader, they went to prayer and after a long time they went around the room and asked, "Who did God tell you should be our leader; what name did He put in your mind?" And one after another, every last person said, "Henry". And Henry was American, not Kyrgyz, and he had only been on the field two years! Nobody went in there thinking about him for that position, but they listened to God and God told them who He wanted. What a lesson for us! Then notice that:

3. these missionaries were called by God and set apart by the church God made it clear, to both them and the others, who was to go. And the church laid its hands on them; it set them apart for the special work God had for them to do. The church recognized the call of God on their lives to that special work, laid hands on them and sent them off to do it. We'd call it commissioning. Among us there are those God has planned to call beyond the realm of ordinary outreach in our own community. There are those He's planned to use in that special work of reaching the ends of the earth where nobody knows Him and we need to be listening to Him, recognize His calling upon their lives and send them out!

And so, it was in this prayer meeting at Antioch that the mission to reach the world began. In the rest of this chapter, we see the beginnings of that effort. First, we see:

III. The Church Planted On The Island Of Cyprus (4-12) Cyprus is a large island over 100 miles wide and half that long, situated in the corner of the Mediterranean between the shorelines of Palestine and Asia Minor, about 50 miles off the coast from Antioch. It has always been important to trade and sailing in that region and even today some of our missionaries have lived there and used it as a hub for ministry to the Middle East. It was Barnabas' home, so they had some familiarity with it and chose to start there **(4-6a)**. On the east end of the island lay the city of:

1. Salamis and it must have had a Jewish community and several synagogues where they could start. What I want to point out is **the itinerant nature of the work**. They never stayed in one spot very long. Even in this one city they spoke in several different synagogues over the course of a couple weeks. Then they set out on a hundred mile walk to the capital city at the other end of the island. Surely, they stopped overnight in villages and spoke to people but basically the point was to move from one key point to the next and plant the Gospel. From Paphos they would hop north to land at Perga and go inland to another large city named Antioch, the capital of the region of Galatia, then to other key cities. It was going to be a vigorous task and it eventually proved too much for John Mark who came along as a helper and he left them and went home in verse 13. The pressure involved in this lifestyle is evident. But at Paphos we see:

2. Paphos: the demonstration of the power of God (6-12) It's like the last verse of Mark's Gospel, *they went out and preached everywhere and the Lord worked with them confirming His Word with signs of power*. The Roman proconsul was eager to hear; he was one of those folks God has already prepared, but Satan didn't want him to listen and used this Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus to try to turn him away and keep him in darkness. Paul saw it so clearly and the Holy Spirit grabbed control of him and told him what to say. The sorcerer was immediately struck with blindness since he loved the darkness. Can't you just see him going, "I can't see, help me, help me, where am I..."? And that clinches it; this Roman governor believes in Jesus on the spot! Wouldn't you? Now, that's just one incident; I'm sure other things happened there and a church was planted because Barnabas later went back to visit the churches that were planted on the island. But the record moves on to tell in more detail:

IV. How Paul Planted The Church In The Region Of Galatia (13-52) which is the central part of Asia Minor, modern Turkey. What we see here is pretty much a typical pattern of how Paul operated over the next several years and what happened as a result. First:

1. he chose a strategic place: Antioch (of Pisidia) (13-14a) This Antioch was the capital of the region and was a large, important commercial center. If this region was to be touched, this was the place to start. Paul knew that if the church was started at Antioch, it would radiate outward from there. Next:

2. he began with the most prepared people: Jews and God-fearers (16) Imagine trying to tell someone who has never heard of Jesus who He was and what He did. Once outside of Palestine, most people were pure Gentiles. They knew nothing of the Scriptures, the stories and people and concepts that are so familiar to you and I. They worshipped many gods and knew Greek mythology like you know Bible stories. They would say, "Another god, one named Jesus?" and you would have to start with, "There is only one God", a foreign concept to them. It is so much easier to start with somebody who believes there is one true God, who understands what sin is, and so on. But God had made some advance preparation for this problem. Beginning after the Jews were taken as captives to Babylon, He began to disperse them further and further from the Holy Land. They followed the lines of commerce and trade. Communities of Jews sprang up all over the Mediterranean world. Wherever there were 10 families they would start a synagogue. They would share their belief that there is only one God with the non-Jewish people around them and over time some of them began to attend the synagogue and worship the one God of the Jews. We call them "God-fearers". These people had the background to understand who Jesus was and what the cross was about. So, Paul started with them and:

3. he used an acceptable platform: the synagogue (14b-15) Paul had the credentials of a trained rabbi. I guess the news of his life change hadn't gotten this far. It was natural for him to be invited to teach in the synagogue, so he took advantage of that natural platform provided to him as a starting place. Then:

4. he conveyed the message in understandable terms Because he was talking to Jews, he talked to them in a way they would understand and identify with. First:

a. he affirmed a common heritage and Jesus as its fulfillment (16-26) When you read (16-26), our minds wonder why does he go back and tell the story of the exodus and the conquest of Canaan and the judges and David again? They know those things like the back of their hand. Why? He's saying, "I believe those things; I believe the same things you do; I am not from some strange new cult." The point is verse 23. Jesus is not some new strange teacher; He is the fulfillment of the promise God made to David, the One we've been waiting for. And then:

b. he shared about Jesus' death and resurrection (27-31) How he was crucified but rose again and that there were many witnesses who saw Him. Then:

c. he reasoned with them from the Scriptures (32-37) as to why this had to be so. And then he quotes passages of Scripture. The Book says this had to be. It is a fulfillment of the Scriptures. And then came the invitation:

d. he urged them not to reject forgiveness through Jesus (38-43) "Forgiveness is yours if you'll receive it, but watch out that you don't reject it!"

And his approach worked. They listened. Their hearts were touched. A number of them talked further with him. He was invited to come back. But it was TOO good. They talked about what he had said all week. They talked about it all over town. So, the next week the whole town showed up and that produced an adverse reaction that almost invariably happened wherever he went:

5. he turned to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected his message (44-49) The Jewish leaders were jealous of the crowd and now tried to discredit him. So now, having a base of a few believers with some Scriptural background, he turned away from the synagogue to direct ministry to Gentiles and they were glad. Many of them believed and among them were these Jewish converts who could teach them the missing pieces from the Old Testament. And in weeks, the church began to spread throughout the whole region. But inevitably Paul:

6. he eventually faced opposition that forced him to leave (50-51) The Jews always proved to be Paul's enemies in the end. This time they stirred up some important people with their complaints and got him thrown out of town. This happened almost everywhere he went. Yet despite having to leave so suddenly and so soon:

7. he left behind a joyful and fruitful fledgling church (52) that then began to reproduce and plant other churches. It is to the churches of this region that Paul eventually wrote his first letter that was recorded in Scripture, the letter we call Galatians.

And for the next decade of his life this same story virtually repeated itself everywhere Paul went. He'd start with the Jews, go to the synagogue, gather a few believers; they'd get mad, he'd start reaching Gentiles, they'd get really mad and persecute him one way or another and within a short while he'd move on leaving a little church to grow on its own in very difficult soil. Not exactly the way I'd plan it if I were God, but it sure worked! But just so you don't go home saying, "That sermon was about missions strategy; it didn't have anything to do with me!", let me just point out that maybe some of this applies to you too. God has key people prepared in your life's journey who are equipped and prepared to hear and understand the Gospel. He's got his Sergius Paulus's everywhere. Ask God to show you who they are in your life and lead you to them. Then find an acceptable way to share about Jesus with them. Find something you have in common; find some time or occasion where you have the right and the privilege to speak. Share about Jesus without all the religious terms you're used to. Tell the truth in a way that relates to their life. Some may get mad and want you to go away, but some are those that are good soil and they will receive that seed that you plant and they will believe and have eternal life and be filled with joy. Our missionary in Michigan sent me this note: *Hey, I just had a great experience at the end of last week. I was elected school board president last week and met for breakfast with the outgoing president, a man just turned 40. He's been a good friend for three years and a man of high integrity but I didn't think he was a believer. In the last three weeks he's asked me very specific spiritual questions that I didn't have time to really answer at a meeting, so I came to breakfast primed with my "Share Jesus Without Fear" New Testament. Wow, ripe fruit just asking to fall off the tree. We did practically no board business but spent two hours with a Bible between us and by the time we finished and headed to a meeting with the Superintendent, he was absolutely sure of his new salvation. My husband is the one who usually does this, but this time God gave ME the incredible privilege. And He'll give it to you too. Start asking Him to show you His strategy for you!*

“I Will Build My Church” - The Book Of Acts

The Dangers Of Gospel Work - Ch. 14

Paul and Barnabas are in the middle of their first missionary enterprise. They were sent out by the church at Antioch in Syria and they first went to the island of Cyprus. After planting the seeds of the church in Salamis and Paphos they sailed to Perga and went directly inland to the other Antioch, the capital of the province of Galatia. There Paul was run out of town so he crossed the “county line” eastward to Iconium. There they plotted to kill him so he crossed another province line eastward to Lystra, where they actually stoned him. And finally, he went on to Derbe. It almost sounds like a catalog of all the kinds of bad things that can happen to a missionary! And indeed, that’s how I’d like to study this chapter. I’d like to use it to examine some of:

I. The Evil Forces That May Be Directed Against Us (1-20) because we are involved in Gospel work. They are faced by our brothers and sisters across the world on the mission field and they are faced equally by those who are engaged in reaching their own city or their own neighborhood for Christ right here. One thing you don’t see in the text that the Enemy often uses to keep people from proclaiming the Gospel is sickness. Paul later revealed the reason he went to Antioch in *Gal. 4:13*, *As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.* It is said that Perga was a low, swampy place plagued with malaria. Maybe Paul caught it. At any rate sickness was what drove Paul away from Perga and kept him from really planting a church there. All you need to do is to read Job to see how the enemy tries to use sickness as a weapon against the servants of God. But he also has many other tools at his disposal. For instance:

1. the poisoning of minds against us (1-2) The Greek word means to cause a person to think and feel evil toward someone, to embitter them toward someone. Those who don’t want us sharing the Good News will often speak bad words about us or start rumors to dissuade others from listening. In all of the former Soviet Union, the communists spread the rumor widely that Baptists were a sort of cult where they kill babies and drink blood, to keep people away from them. It was widely believed and in fact still is today! Those who don’t like James Dobson’s nationally known ministry accuse him of all kinds of things from being in it for the money to spreading hatred toward gay people. And people who don’t like you sharing about Jesus at work will label you a “fanatic” or a “religious nut” to discredit you. You can expect that; Jesus said, *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.* - *Mat. 5:11*. Don’t be surprised; I think this is the most common kind of opposition we face. But sometimes it gets kicked up a notch to:

2. the stirring up of people against us (2-4) Sometimes simple discrediting moves on to actually stirring up people to work against us, inciting them to take actions to stop us. One winter the Islamic mullahs in the Jalalabad region of Kyrgyzstan were so upset about people coming to Christ that they actually stirred up a crowd of almost 1,000 people to physically take action against a house church there. Muslim fanatics in Indonesia are doing the same thing there, stirring up people to act against the Christians. Years ago, when we wanted to create our parking lot, some community folks tried to stir up the zoning board to prevent it. Today, those folks are our good friends, but we are not immune from this. Some who refuse to believe may stir up the bosses at work to stop you from having that Bible study at lunch, or the administrators to stop you from having that Christian club after school. A neighbor can stir up the other homes to shun you. And though it’s hard for us to imagine where we live, sometimes it moves to:

3. the deliberate plotting of harm toward us (5a) We’d never sit down and think, “How can I hurt someone?” So it’s hard for us to imagine that someone might do it to us. They did it to Jesus. The Jewish leaders planned for a long time how they could arrest him and kill him. In Iconium and lots of other places they deliberately plotted to hurt Paul. And there are those that may actually do it to us; they may sit down and actually plan a way to discredit us, to silence us, to get us fired, to damage our property, or to drive us out of the community. Often that kind of plotting involves:

4. physical abuse and intimidation toward us (5b-6) Paul’s ministry was full of not only threats but actual beatings, arrests, imprisonments and worse. Christians and their leaders in China, Indonesia, Sudan, the Middle East, parts of Mexico and many other places suffer those very things today. But you don’t have to look that far. Those who’ve begun Christian work in inner city Philadelphia are used to it; over the years colleagues have told me that their lives have been threatened, their windows smashed, their tires slashed. In our relative comfort, we feel like these things can’t be toward us, but they can and we must be aware of it! On the other hand, Satan can use an entirely opposite strategy. Instead of moving people against us, he can cause us to be:

5. being welcomed with a wrong understanding or motive (8-18) In Lystra the people saw the power of God but credited it to their false Roman gods! They made Paul and Barnabas out to be gods and quietly prepared to worship them. Now, the missionaries didn’t figure this out because they didn’t speak the local language which everybody was talking in until somebody later translated it! People can appear to receive us and our message, but do it for the wrong reason or without understanding. They may listen to us and associate with us because we are Americans and they are aware of the financial help they can get from us, just like some followed Jesus because they wanted Him to keep on multiplying more loaves and fish. People, even here, may be warm to us because they hope to get something from us, because they need a handout, because they need sympathy, because they need a friend, because they have a ro-

mantic interest and want someone of the opposite sex, because they want to use us somehow. We have to beware of this false acceptance and strive hard against it, just like Paul and Barnabas did. Not just to make sure Jesus gets His proper glory, but also because when this false acceptance is rejected, it can turn sour very rapidly as it did for them. And finally, we need to understand that Satan's ultimate objective is:

6. the taking of our very lives (19-20) That would have been the end of Paul's ministry if God hadn't raised him up. The thief comes to kill. The more effective we are in the service of God, the more he would like to see us dead, dead on the highway, dead in an accident, dead by a bullet, either stray or intentional, dead by a disease, dead any way he can arrange it. Of course, our lives are in God's hand and we won't die a minute before He chooses to allow it, but that doesn't stop the enemy from trying! And it's a scary thing when we begin to seriously realize the intent of the Enemy against us! And that's why we have to talk about:

II. The Vital Processes That Prepare Us To Face These Forces Now, think about it. Here were these small groups of people that had come to faith in Jesus in Antioch and Iconium and Lystra. And in each case the whole town is already stirred up against Christians. They have literally been born into an atmosphere of opposition from moment one of their faith. They have had little time to mature. How will they face this army of enemy forces arrayed against them and the suffering they could cause, without falling away? Well, Paul and Barnabas knew what they needed and it is exactly what we need **(21-22)**. There are three important concepts in verse 22 that we don't want to miss:

1. we must have our souls confirmed by truth They went back to all those cities, to those small bands of disciples, and did the most necessary thing. They confirmed their souls; they literally propped them up or reinforced them. How? Compare **John 17:14-19**. We are protected from the effects of the evil forces the enemy marshals against us by the truth of God. It is the truth that keeps us holy and set apart to God. So, in each of these places they went back and taught them. Jesus told us to do it: *make disciples...teaching them everything I have commanded you...* We must be rooted and grounded in the Word of God. We must know what is true and be able to recognize error. My friend, if you do not have an appetite for the Word of God, if you are not feeding on it and absorbing it, you have no basis on which to stand in the evil day! If we are to stand firm, we must know what the truth is. Then:

2. we must be encouraged to abide in the faith [that is, in the truth] in spite of all the obstacles or the temptations we face that would seek to turn us from it. Jude wrote, *Dear friends... I felt I had to write and urge you to [earnestly] contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.* - **Jude 3**. Jude said it's a struggle, a fierce and agonizing wrestling match to hang on to what you know to be true when everybody around you is teaching things that are false. We need to recognize that there will come along those who will try to lure us from the faith, those who will try argue us away from the faith, those who will try to scare us away from the faith. We must expect that and our response must be to endure! To abide! To stand unmovable as Paul exhorted Timothy, *...evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue [abide!] in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* - **2 Tim. 3:13-15**. God commands us to endure, to hold fast, and we must come with the mindset of tenacity, with the God-given, Spirit-empowered, determination to let nothing in this world separate us from the love of Jesus Christ because nothing in this world has the power to do it! Then, here's the real key:

3. we must be taught the inevitability and the necessity of suffering They taught those new believers something very different from what we tend to teach today, even to our own children. They taught them that the path we're following which ultimately leads to the Kingdom, is filled with hardships and suffering through which we must inevitably pass. It will be that way and it has to be that way! "Come to Jesus and He'll solve all your problems" is not found in the Bible! "Come to Jesus; He wants His children to be healthy and happy and to enjoy all the good things of life" is not in the Bible. "Come to Jesus and He will always protect you from suffering and danger" is not in there either. What's in there is this. Suffering:

a. it is a normal and expected part of the Christian life Look what Paul said in **2 Tim. 3:10-12**. Paul modeled a life of God's power to endure suffering at Antioch and Iconium and Lystra before these new disciples. They watched him. And the punchline is in verse 12. It's not just for him; it will be the lot of all who will live godly! Suffering for the sake of our faith is normal; it's expected. Jesus said the world would hate us like it hated Him. His teaching is filled with that theme. When you sign on with Jesus, you're not signing up for a joyful cruise to heaven; you're enlisting to fight in a war to extend His glory to the ends of the earth and you expect to get shot at! It's picking up a cross and following Jesus out to Golgotha so that your suffering and pressure and persecution will extend His salvation to the world! That's the normal Christian life! But in it, God has purpose:

b. it produces His character in us Look at **James 1:2-4**. It is through these very trials, these very sufferings for His sake that Jesus Christ produces His character in you. It is only through suffering that you become mature and complete, that you are changed from glory to glory into His likeness. That suffering is the fire which melts and shapes us for glory. And it does more:

c. it proves us genuine and brings glory to Christ - 1 Pet. 1:6-7 When you stand through all these trials and sufferings, it proves that you're the genuine item, that you're the real deal, that Christ really lives in you. And in that day when it's all over, it brings Him, not you, great glory. Your momentary trials and afflictions are producing an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all! When it's all over at last, all the peoples of earth will fall at the feet of Jesus and give him the glory due His Name, because through our sufferings His salvation was extended to the very ends of the earth!

Now that's the kind of teaching we need in order to stand in a hostile world. That's the kind of teaching that propelled the Gospel to the corners of the Roman empire in the first century and that's what will be required of us if God is to use us to transform Glenside.

And when Paul and Barnabas were all done strengthening the churches we have:

III. The Conclusion Of The First Missionary Enterprise (23-28) First:

1. they appointed recognized leaders for the new churches (23a) They laid hands on elders. Young's translation (YLT) says, *and having appointed to them by vote elders in every assembly...* The point, I think, is that together Paul and Barnabas with these new assemblies chose the most mature and experienced of their number to be their leaders. Then:

2. they entrusted them to the Lord's care (23b) There was little else they could do to provide continuing care and help. They simply let go; they trusted that God would take care of His own as He had taken care of them and:

3. they came home to report and be rejuvenated (24-28) This time they stopped to preach in Perga, but from there they sailed home to Antioch to report to the ones who had sent them out what God had done and how their intercession had borne tremendous fruit. More than they could have dreamed. At least seven and probably many more churches had been planted. The island of Cyprus and the province of Galatia to the north had a solid Christian presence and the range of the penetration of the Gospel into the world had doubled. How they must have rejoiced! Paul and Barnabas stayed there a long time. They'd been gone now 3-4 years and it took a good while to recover from the hardships and rigors of life on the missionary trail. It still does for missionaries today. The pressures they face can be intense and the time at home is invaluable both for us and for them.

But even at home and at rest, the lesson of suffering must not be forgotten. It doesn't go away. It is normal. It is inevitable. There will be more to face. *Richard Wurmbrand endured 14 years of imprisonment and torture in Romania between 1948 and 1964 because he was a pastor and refused to deny the Lord and turn in his coworkers. He's with the Lord now but his ministry, Voice of the Martyrs, serves the persecuted church around the world. He wrote these words: "Here comes the great need of preparation for suffering which must start now... I remember my last confirmation class before I left Romania. I took a group of ten to fifteen boys and girls on a Sunday morning, not to a church, but to the zoo. Before the cage of lions, I told them, 'Your forefathers in faith were thrown before such wild beasts for their faith. Know that you also will have to suffer. You will not be thrown before lions, but you will have to do with men who would be much worse than lions. Decide here and now if you wish to pledge allegiance to Christ.' They had tears in their eyes when they said, 'Yes!' We have to make the preparation now, before we are imprisoned.... Nobody resists who has not renounced the pleasures of life beforehand. [Let The Nations Be Glad, Piper, p. 80-81].* My friends, know that you too, will suffer if you give your heart to taking the Gospel to this neighborhood and to the ends of the earth. Jesus said so. Decide here and now whether you really want to pledge allegiance to His cause; don't wait until you're in the midst of it.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

The Question Of The Law - Ch. 15:1-35

The expansion of the church of Jesus Christ always creates theological problems as it encounters the traditions and practices of the cultures it invades. For instance, in many of the Greek cities of Paul's day, the cheapest meat was meat that had been offered as sacrifices in the pagan temples. When people came to Christ, they faced the issue of whether they could continue to eat meat that had first been sacrificed to idols or whether that was idolatry. It sounds simple enough, but Paul had to write at length about that issue in 1 Cor. 8 and elsewhere. American Indian believers today wrestle with whether they can use drums in worship because in their traditional religion drums are associated with the spirit world. Almost the same issue. When the Gospel came to the Masai of Kenya a few decades ago, many of the men had multiple wives and children by them. They had to wrestle with the question of whether a believer in Jesus Christ could continue to have more than one wife. And if not, then what would happen to the other wives and children? What would you tell them? It sounds simple, but their church leaders met to seek God over this issue and study the Scriptures and they came to a decision. In studying the Bible, they decided that God's ideal is to have one wife and that men should not seek to marry additional wives, but there were many people in the Bible who belonged to God who had more than one wife, so it must be left up to the individual to decide whether to continue to keep more than one wife. However, if he did, he should not be a leader in the church according to Timothy and Titus. Yet if he did not keep them as wives, he must still provide for them and their children in every way according to Thessalonians. Pretty good answer, isn't it? And the church has grown in that

culture because of it. Acts 15 is almost exactly like that. It is the record of how the church faced and solved a serious theological problem, a landmark issue that threatened to divide it.

I. The Huge Issue That The Church Faced is in (1-5)

1. the immediate issue is circumcision There were thousands of believers who were Jews before they believed and were circumcised and kept the Old Testament law and offered sacrifices. When they believed, they kept on doing those same things, seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of every one of them. Some of them had even been Pharisees before and nobody ever told them they had to stop keeping all the regulations they had been used to. They joyfully did every one of them out of their new love for Jesus. But now there are thousands of Gentiles out there who believe in Jesus yet live very differently. They don't do ANY of those things that have always been so important to the Jews. They are not circumcised, so they don't have the sign of the covenant. They offer no sacrifices, keep no feasts, and observe no dietary laws. So, some of these, especially those who had been Pharisees, said, "Wait a minute. This is not right. These folks are told they can believe in Jesus but they don't need to do ANY of these important things." And they went up to Antioch to the seat of the Gentile church and began to teach two things:

a. its premises:

(1) non-Jews must be circumcised to be truly saved "It isn't that non-Jews can't be saved, but that when they are saved, they should essentially enter into our heritage and become Jews through circumcision, take on the lineage of Abraham and his blessing. In fact, if you choose not to obey God and do this, you cannot be truly saved." Furthermore, when the church sent representatives up to Jerusalem to speak to the apostles and elders about this, these folks insisted in verse 5 that:

(2) non-Jews must be required to keep the law of Moses "They have to live like we do; they must do all the things God has commanded Israel to do." Now, this issue has likely been brewing for some time before it broke out at this level. Why? Where does it come from? It has two:

b. its roots: The first is:

(1) the carrying on of tradition from the past These people had given all their lives to the study and observance of the law with meticulous care. To them it was not only the command of God, but a way of life. It was ingrained in the core fibers of their very being. To think that it didn't matter, that somebody could simply believe in Christ and ignore all those things is almost incomprehensible. The second thing going on is:

(2) the fear of losing cultural identity If the non-Jews don't have to keep the law to please God, why should the Jewish believers do it. Soon you'll have a whole church that is identified with the Gentiles. The world is mostly non-Jews. As they come to Christ in masses, the whole hope and heritage of Israel will disappear. So, they decided the better way was to take Christians everywhere and make them Jewish!

Now the issue of circumcision is long-dead for us. For most of us it's a medical decision, not a spiritual one. The issue of law-keeping is dead too. None of us would think about offering a Passover lamb or a guilt offering, even if there was a Temple to offer them in. That's because of the decision the church made in this very chapter! But underlying this specific issue is:

2. the ever-continuing issue which we call **legalism**. Whether the issue of the day is circumcision or meat sacrificed to idols or multiple wives or any one of a hundred other issues, its root is the idea of legalism. It has two:

a. its premises:

(1) outward behavior is defining proof that salvation is genuine People who believe in Jesus Christ must prove it by behaving in certain ways. Now, that's not a totally unscriptural idea. Jesus said that we would know people by their fruits. There are lots of places which make it clear that continuing to live a lifestyle of sin is evidence that you don't really know the Savior. But all of us display sinful behavior on a regular basis and if you push this idea too far, you end up with a gospel of grace PLUS works. You must believe BUT YOU MUST ALSO DO the right things to keep in the favor of God. And instead of the things being the evidence that you are saved, the things themselves actually help to save you! The line between the two is a very subtle one! The second problem is that:

(2) non-scriptural boundaries can be set to define godly behavior A lot of the things that we choose to define godly behavior don't come directly from the commands of God in Scripture; they are things that we ourselves set up outside of or around what the Scripture says. For instance, in many of our lifetimes in American culture the Church has often loudly proclaimed things like these: Christians must never drink any alcohol. They must never dance. They must never go to movies. Men must not have long hair (or beards). Women must not wear pants (or jewelry or makeup). Is any one of those things in the Bible? No, though people have tried to twist some few verses into saying them. Have they been held by the church at large around the world? No. Yet for years the Gospel preached by the evangelical churches in America was, "Now that you are saved, you must not do the following things....and if you do them, we don't believe your conversion is real; don't fellowship with us." But if those things are not in the Bible, where did they come from? The same place legalism always comes from:

b. its roots: First, they come from:

(1) the carrying on of traditions from the past “I think it because I was told to think it and I have always thought it, so I teach my kids to think it, but I never examine it to see if it’s true. I read a King James Bible because my daddy and his daddy and his daddy before him did and if it was good enough for him, it’s good enough for me (even though I can’t understand the words).” Music is perhaps the most current issue in the church where a similar debate goes on. “This modern Christian stuff, especially Christian rock music, is all wrong. The hymns I sang growing up are godly and spiritual.” And what’s really going on is that, just like these believing Pharisees, we set up standards for acceptable behavior that are from our tradition or heritage and not from the Scripture and then want to force others to follow them. And the other thing that drives us, just like it did them is:

(2) the fear of being swallowed up by the world If we’re not visibly different, if we don’t look different, if we don’t sound different, then we’re “worldly”. We’re just being swallowed up by our culture and our message will pass away. That’s legalism. The issues vary in each culture and in each time period, but legalism we have with us always and that is the real issue that the church is always facing. Now let’s look at:

II. The Compelling Testimonies That Were Put Forth (6-18) in this historic conference that they had over this issue.

First, there was:

1. Peter’s testimony (6-11) You remember the story of how Peter had the vision of the sheet and all the animals back in chapter 10 and then was led to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, to preach the Gospel. His point is that on that very day:

a. God chose to save uncircumcised Gentiles by giving them His Spirit It wasn’t Peter’s choice. He wouldn’t even have been there! But God gave the Holy Spirit to these uncircumcised Gentiles who believed, just like He did to the Jews. God showed clearly that He chose to accept them without circumcision, simply because they believed the message about Christ. Then secondly, Peter added this thought:

b. salvation for all people is purely of grace; legalism is adding works It is grace that saves us, Jew or Gentile. When we add anything to it that we must DO, we are putting forth another gospel, a gospel of WORKS. That’s what Peter had to say. Then Paul stood up:

2. Paul’s testimony (12) His point is that **God chose to do miraculous signs and wonders among the Gentiles** in order to save them. How he had struck the sorcerer blind to save the Roman proconsul in Cyprus, how He had healed crippled Aeneas over in Lystra, tale after tale of miracles that God had chosen to do, just to save pure Gentiles, who were born again, transformed and brought together into worshipping little churches all over the region of Galatia. It was the story of a movement of God where people had no background and no knowledge and it thrilled the listeners. Why would God do such a thing if these folks were all unacceptable without circumcision! Then James stood up. This was Jesus’ brother and by this time the most respected leader in the Jerusalem church.

3. James’ testimony (13-18) He quotes Amos 9:11-12 where God says that at the return of Christ there will be believing Jews and ALSO believing Gentiles. His plan is for all the remnant of the peoples of the earth to bear His name.

James’ point is: this is exactly what we’re seeing God do today. **Our experience agrees with Scripture!** It’s valid! And these are the key thoughts when we see people who are believers who have different customs and practices from us or who don’t do things we think they should do, things that have been a real part of our lives. Has God put His Holy Spirit in them, are they truly born again by faith in Jesus? Is He obviously at work in their lives and ministries? Does what they’re experiencing agree with the Scriptures? What is it that makes me recoil back from them and want to insist that they do things my way? Is it really Scripture or is it merely a tradition that I’ve come to hold dear and want to enforce on everyone else? And if I take a hard look at myself, more often than not, it is. Look at:

III. The Wonderful Decision That The Church Made (19-35) First:

1. the decision was announced right there in **Jerusalem (19-21)** James spoke for the church and gave us two important principles. First:

a. no additional behavior may be required for salvation Whether it is circumcision for Jews, eating meat for Greeks, the use of drums for Indians, multiple wives for Masai or anything else. The message is simply and always, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*. That is for all people for all time. However, he made it clear that in every situation:

b. behavioral limits must be carefully considered You can’t just say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and do anything you want!” You must carefully consider the behaviors you choose and their effects. You may wonder why he chose to mention the four things he did. These are specific things that have been a regular part of Greek life. They bought meat in the idol temples regularly. Sexual freedom was a normal part of life and sex in the temples

was part of pagan worship. Eating meat with blood in it and even blood itself never phased them. Now it's obvious that some behaviors:

(1) some are clearly commanded in Scripture Sexual immorality is simply and purely wrong because God says so. It's all over the Bible. That was an aspect of their lives that needed to change, not in order to be saved, but because they were saved! And God had told Noah not to drink blood because the blood was God's chosen symbol of life; it would ultimately represent the precious blood of His Son. On those issues and many more, we can go to the Scripture and get clear advice on how we should live as believers. We should not steal; we should be honest, not lie, etc. etc. But some behaviors:

(2) some are necessary to prevent offense toward the Gospel Who was it that stirred up trouble and persecuted the believers in Galatia? The Jews! So, James said it would be wise to avoid doing things that would offend them in order that they would be reached with the Gospel and would not oppose it so vehemently! Get your meat somewhere else, not because you have to, but because it'll help your neighbors come to faith. Drain the blood out first before you eat it, not because it's a legalistic issue, but because no Jew will ever believe you know God. Paul explained this at more length in **1 Cor. 9:19-23**. Paul lived differently when he was in Jerusalem than when he was in Galatia. In Jerusalem he went to the Temple and made vows and shaved his head and offered sacrifices like the Jews, to reach them and not create offense. In Galatia he ate whatever they ate and never asked them to do any of these Jewish things, to reach them! It's not that he was hypocritical; he recognized what things were genuinely commanded and which were areas of freedom and he chose to limit his freedom in either direction to reach people!

And so, the leaders in Jerusalem made the decision not to require the Gentiles to be circumcised or to keep the law. Then:

2. the decision was conveyed to the churches (22-29) They wrote their decision out in a letter to all the Gentile believers and sent men along as witnesses to go back to Antioch to confirm it along with Paul and Barnabas. It was shared with other churches throughout that whole region. And look at:

3. the joyful reaction of the churches (30-35) They were full of joy that their freedom in Christ was not to be enslaved by the traditions of their brothers. We're still living by that decision today and enjoying that freedom, praise God!

Perhaps the best result that can come out of studying this chapter is for us to search our own lives for those areas where we've become legalistic, where we've taken things that are really our own traditions and have insisted on imposing them on others. Maybe not to the degree of making it a divisive issue in the church like these folks did. Maybe just inside my own mind in the way I think about others. *Paul Powell writes: "Two of the most famous Christian preachers were contemporaries during the 19th century. D. L. Moody was a great American evangelist. Charles H. Spurgeon literally took Great Britain by storm through his powerful preaching of the gospel. Moody went to London to meet Spurgeon, whom he had admired from a distance and considered to be his professional mentor. However, when Spurgeon answered the door with a cigar in his mouth, Moody fell down the stairs in shock. 'How could you, a man of God, smoke that?' protested the great American evangelist. Spurgeon took the stogie out of his mouth and walked down the steps to where Moody was still standing in bewilderment. Putting his finger on Moody's rather rotund stomach, he smiled and said, 'The same way you, a man of God, could be fat!'" [Open Windows, Oct-Dec 1995. Nov 5.]* Our issues may be different, but those kinds of things are inside all of us. We need to live in freedom and let others live in freedom without imposing on them a yoke of unnecessary bondage to our traditions.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

The Gospel Goes To Europe - 15:36-16:40

In the 20 years since the day of Pentecost, the Gospel has still not spread beyond Asia Minor, less than 1,000 miles from Jerusalem. From a human perspective, that's pretty good progress, actually! However, God's perspective is to the uttermost parts of the earth, the whole world, and that's where He wants to keep the eyes of His church focused. It is in this chapter that the Gospel makes the jump and lands in Europe and the ultimate result of that is that the peoples from whom my ancestors and many of yours come, not only heard it, but in the centuries that followed became the custodians of the faith to pass it along to us today. We pick up the story in chapter 15 as:

I. God Launches A New Wave Of Missionary Outreach (15:36-16:10) which we call Paul's second missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas have been home in Antioch for a good while now and they decide to go back to those areas where they'd preached in Asia Minor:

1. its intent: to strengthen the new churches (36) They thought they would encourage and confirm and teach, maybe push on a bit farther or extend the territory a little more, but they never dreamed what God had in store for them. But as they prepared to start out there was a:

2. the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (37-41) Hey, even apostles argue! John Mark had deserted them once and Paul didn't trust him yet (though in later years he did). Barnabas was Mark's cousin and insisted on a second chance. And what is noteworthy is that they couldn't resolve it. It was not a matter of biblical right and wrong, but of making a wise decision about the work and on this issue, neither felt they could give in. The division grew very sharp between them to the place where they decided to actually part company, even though they'd been a team for years. You know, that's not ideal, but it is real. It happens. Even to missionaries, pastors, elders, and sometimes family members. Sometimes we come to those places where the issue is so important to us that we can't in good conscience give in. But instead of fighting one another and becoming enemies, they simply decided to find new partners and work separately. They split the areas they touched on their first journey in two, so Barnabas took Mark and went home to the churches on Cyprus, while Paul went overland back to the churches of Galatia to strengthen them. They agreed to disagree, divided their labor, took new workers with them and in that way multiplied the work. And God blessed even this division and used it to build the church! Sometimes He does that! When there can't be complete unity, God even uses separation to build His church, as long as the parties have sincere hearts and a right attitude toward Him and one another! So, Paul and Silas went overland visiting the churches through all of Syria where the church at Antioch was reaching out, and Cilicia where Paul had labored for years on his own, and finally, they arrived in Lystra in the province of Galatia where they met a young man named Timothy. What irony! Paul is delivering a letter that says to all, "You don't have to be circumcised" and at the same time we read of:

3. the circumcision of Timothy (16:1-5) Why did Paul do that? Not for salvation, that's for sure! But so that he could get a hearing among the Jews in the area where they were going and not offend them. It was a personal change, a personal sacrifice he made because he wanted to; he literally became as a Jew to the Jews, so that by that means he might save some. Hudson Taylor grew his hair long and braided it and wore Chinese dress because he wanted to reach the Chinese and that's what it took. Sometimes you're going to have to do things you don't personally need to do or want to do, even things that hurt, things that require sacrifice, in order to remove offense and relate to people in a way that will reach them. So, taking Timothy, Paul went on:

4. God's call to Macedonia (6-10) Here he was in Galatia and he wanted to take some more steps to expand the boundaries of the Gospel. The natural thing would have been to keep on pressing southwest to Ephesus and the big cities of the province of Asia. But God:

a. He did not allow them to follow their natural desires (6-8) The Spirit of God restrained them. They had learned to listen to Him and He distinctly impressed them that they should not go there. So naturally, they turned north to go into Bithynia, but again the Spirit said "No!" They didn't know what to do, so they just kept following the coast westward down to Troas, where I honestly think Paul was hoping to catch a ship home! However, there in Troas a marvelous thing happened. God:

b. He called them to launch out to the unreached regions (9-10) Macedonia! Nobody had ever thought of going that far. That was twice as far from home, nearly 2,000 miles! It was essentially on another continent, across the Bosphorus strait in Europe. And when Paul saw this vision of a man from Macedonia begging them to come over and help, he was hearing the heart of God. "Pass by those regions where the churches you've already planted can go. Don't stay in the shallow water where it seems natural to be. There's a whole world to be reached and somebody has to make a beachhead for the Gospel. Launch out into the deep and let down your nets! Come over here where no one's ever taken the Gospel!" We might hear God say, "Come over to the 10/40 window. Come to the barren deserts of North Africa and help us Bedouin; we've been so long locked away. Come over to the Middle East and help us Iranians veiled under the black cloth of Islam. Come over to the barren valleys of Central Asia and Mongolia and China where we Kyrgyz and Uzbeks and Uighurs eke out an existence. Come over to the frozen slopes of the Himalayas in Tibet where even our yak herds die in the cold and we're bound in spiritual darkness or come to the steamy jungles of Asia where we worship spirits and ancestors and have no hope." That's the Macedonian call today! And only 5% of the current missionaries in the world have been given that call; the other 95% are called to serve back in "Asia Minor", the lands where the church has already been planted. But Paul and Silas heard the call and went to Europe; that's why you're here today and we need more like Paul who will answer the call of God's heart today and go where nobody's ever gone in 2,000 years! And because they went, we see:

:

II. How God Plants His Church In Unreached Places (16:11-40) (Read 11-12) Philippi was an important city. And as we read about the church being planted there, we can discern five key elements of how God plants the church in places where there is no background and where it's never been. First:

1. God has people prepared to receive Him (11-15) Here's:

a. an example of God preparing a person The place was so pagan there weren't even enough Jewish families there to start a synagogue, but there were a few women who had come to learn about the God of the Jews and met each week to pray down by the river. Paul went there and met dear Lydia. In this idol-ridden place she was already a worshipper of the true God, a seeker. Her heart wanted to know Him and as Paul spoke to her, God opened her heart and she believed without hesitation. Oh, God has those people everywhere. All over the world. All over the

10/40 window. In your neighborhood! Those whose hearts are open and ready. We're simply sent to find them and deliver the message! Also, here we have:

b. an example of the conversion of a family as a unit Lydia and all her household came to faith at the same time; they chose together to believe. This is something we have a hard time with. Our worldview is that the individual is central. The individual makes decisions. But much of the eastern portion of the world is not like that. The family is the basic unit of society. Many times, for an individual to consider trusting Christ or making any other important decision on his own is almost unthinkable. So, they come as a group. It's not that God saves all because of one; it's that they all make a group decision to trust Him together at the same time. Sometimes it's not only families but whole villages that decide to trust Christ! Recently I read about a village in southeast Asia that was experiencing a severe drought and their crops were dying and some native Christian workers came to preach the Gospel there. The village elders met to consider this and told them that if they would pray to their God for rain and He answered them, that they would believe He was the true God and the whole village would follow Christ. They prayed for 2 or 3 days and it rained and the drought ended and the entire village came to Christ. It doesn't mean that each individual doesn't have to receive Christ. It means that they all choose to do it together as a unit. This is a wonderful way that God is planting His church in some of the most difficult parts of the world! The second way God plants His Church is that:

2. God displays His power over the enemy (16-18) Now let me take a moment to talk about:

a. the reality of demon possession because most people in the west, and maybe some of you sitting here, don't believe they're real, that maybe they are just an ancient way to describe schizophrenia or mental illness. The Bible teaches clearly that demons exist, that they are spirit beings like angels and that they seek to inhabit human bodies when they can. Ask anybody who lives in the Eastern world where they worship spirits and idols and live in fear of them whether it's real and they'll tell you it is, because they've seen it. And once you see it, you'll never forget it! I've seen it several times, once quite a few years ago in a person from a Satanic cult, writhing on the floor, frothing at the mouth, cursing and screaming. You don't forget that and all your modern skepticism goes right out the window! This slave girl had a spirit who would speak through her and predict the future. And her owners sold the information for profit. Paul knew that if he dealt with it there would be trouble. But she kept following and he couldn't let Jesus' name be associated with this demonic testimony, and what you see next is:

b. the authority of believers to cast them out He stood and said, "In the name of Jesus I command you to come out!" and it did! That authority was given by Jesus to all His followers. You and I have it. Sometimes a simple command in faith is enough. Sometimes it takes hours of praying and commanding. Sometimes it is an extended period of praying and fasting and pleading the blood of Christ over the person, but in the end the result is the same: the demonic hosts must obey the name of Jesus and leave!

You can imagine the effect this had on the public and how many were ready to believe because of it. It is often through visible displays of power like this that God will plant His church in a place the enemy has held for centuries. Whether it is public answers to prayer, defying the power of evil spirits, or miracles of healing or even an earthquake as we'll see in a moment, God will often confirm what His messengers say and prove that He is real by acts of power. Thirdly, in these hard, unreached places, God uses another means:

3. God sustains and delivers His workers through suffering (19-40) First look at:

a. the horrible treatment they received (19-24) Most of us have never been beaten with anything, much less having our clothes torn off and our bare backs beaten with wooden rods. Think of somebody swinging a 2X4 at you with all their might! They laid many stripes on them, it literally says. Then they were put in prison and their hands and feet confined in wooden stocks so they couldn't even move or care for themselves. And God chose to allow it. He often does. His workers often go through great times of suffering. That's another way He proves He's real, by:

b. the testimony of their joy in suffering (25) In the midst of it all they were full of joy, singing, praying. How can that be? Listen to **Col. 1:24**, *Now I rejoice in what [I] suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.* Now, that's a deep verse but John Piper explains: *This means, then, that Paul exhibits the sufferings of Christ by suffering himself for those he is trying to win...God really means for the church to experience some of the suffering he experienced so that when we proclaim the cross as the way to life, people will see the marks of the cross in us and feel the love of the cross from us.* And Paul said, "If I know that's going on, then I rejoice!" The other prisoners were listening; so was the jailer. They knew the suffering and they heard the singing, the joy. It is often that joyful endurance of suffering that is so unlike anything the world has to offer, that wins people to Christ. That in itself may have led many prisoners to believe. But on top of it, God worked a:

c. the miraculous deliverance God provided (26-28) An earthquake shook the prison, but the real miracle is that everyone's shackles fell off and the doors opened! Yet instead of running away, they all stayed and ran to Paul; they knew where the power was! And it made a:

d. the tremendous impact for the Gospel (29-34) The jailer's been listening, alright! He runs to Paul and falls down trembling and another whole family comes to Jesus and is transformed. I wouldn't doubt that all the prisoners did the same. Dozens were saved that day because of the suffering of Paul and Silas and then their deliverance. God can use either. In the end He brought about their:

e. the sudden release and continuation of ministry (35-40) The magistrates came down and let them out and asked them to leave the city, which they did, only to go somewhere else to preach the Gospel.

Yes, when you listen to His call to go out into the unreached places, God has some people like Lydia prepared and ready to believe. He will often display His mighty power over demonic forces and all the power of the enemy to confirm your message. But what God most often uses the most powerfully is the suffering of His people to touch hardened hearts with His love. *Judy Anderson, whose husband is the West Africa Director of the World Relief Corporation, grew up as the daughter of missionaries in Zaire. As a little girl, she went to a day-long rally celebrating the one-hundredth anniversary of Christian missionaries coming to that part of Zaire. After a full day of long speeches and music, an old man came before the crowd and insisted that he be allowed to speak. He said he soon would die, and that he alone had some important information. If he did not speak, that information would go with him to his grave. He explained that when Christian missionaries came a hundred years before, his people thought the missionaries were strange and their message unusual. The tribal leaders decided to test the missionaries by slowly poisoning them to death. Over a period of months and years, missionary children died one by one. Then the old man said, "It was as we watched how they died that we decided we wanted to live as Christians." That story had gone untold for one hundred years. Those who died painful, strange deaths never knew why they were dying or what the impact of their lives and deaths would be. They stayed because they trusted Jesus Christ. [Leith Anderson Eden Prairie, Minnesota]* That same process goes on right where you are. God allows the sufferings of Christ to flow over into your life too. And as those around you watch you singing songs at midnight when your back is bloody, as they watch you struggle through hurts and hardships with thankfulness to Jesus on your lips, they will say, "That Jesus is real! If He can do that for them, I want Him too!" Paul's life is a catalog of suffering, but it planted the church throughout the Roman Empire. And we too are called to suffer for His sake.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

The Gospel Invades Greece - 17:1-18:22

Acts 17-18 is the story of the Gospel invading a brand-new country on a new continent where it had never been before. That country is today known as Greece; then it was Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south. It is the story of the Gospel going to four strategic cities, three of which are still there today: Paul went from Philippi (last week) to Thessalonica, then to Berea, then way down (probably by ship) to Athens and over to Corinth. Each of these cities has its own story. Each was different. Each reacted differently. And we can learn something from each one. We begin with:

I. The Story Of Thessalonica (17:1-9) Thessalonica was a prosperous trade city. It was the chief port of the province of Macedonia and also its capital. And Paul headed directly there after leaving Philippi.

1. the general nature of the community as it concerns our story would be characterized as **religious (1-4)**. Unlike Philippi, here there was a large Jewish population and a synagogue. They had a powerful influence on the city. Quite a number of Greeks had been attracted to the message of the Jews and were part of the synagogue community. And because he was dealing with people who had a background of knowledge about God:

2. the presentation of the message was biblical He reasoned with them out of the scriptures which they revered and respected. He explained that Jesus was the promised Christ, the Messiah. He proved from the Scriptures that the Christ had to suffer and die and be raised. He declared boldly that Jesus is the long-awaited Christ! Now, that wouldn't have made much sense to Greeks who didn't have that religious background, but since they did, Paul tailored both his message and his method to take advantage of it. And a great number, it says, of the Greeks and even some of the prominent or leading women of the city believed. But:

3. the response of the community was opposition (5-9) They stirred up a crowd against them and tried to bring legal charges. Now, why did they do that? According to verse 5:

a. there is jealousy over people leaving their religion Jealousy. The leaders see the Gospel drawing away their followers from them and they are jealous! This is often the response when the Gospel comes to a community, a region or even a whole country where there is strong organized religion that has a powerful influence over the people. It doesn't seem to matter what the religion is. When followers begin to be drawn away in any numbers, this jealousy engenders a real hatred and:

b. there is often an open attack on the messengers Where our national missionaries Lamine and Nene Kante are in Guinea, fundamental Islam has a strong hold on the people and they have faced powerful opposition. Lamine's life has been often threatened and an actual plot to murder him was uncovered. Militant Hindus in North India,

jealous of the impact of the Christians, burned Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children to death in their car. One of the most powerful enemies of the Gospel in the former Soviet Union is the Russian Orthodox Church. It will join with the Muslims to persecute and drive out the evangelicals. Wherever the Gospel encounters strongly organized religion, there is usually a backlash as the Gospel invades the culture. Next comes:

II. The Story Of Berea (10-15) Paul and Silas left town that night and headed to the smaller, more quiet city of Berea, about 40 miles southwest. It also had a Jewish population and a synagogue, but:

1. the general nature of the community was different from Thessalonica; they were **open (10-12)**. Verse 10 says they were of more noble character. They were more sincere, more genuine, more truly interested in knowing God than in building a kingdom of power for themselves. And because of that sincerity, that openness:

2. the response of the community was reception Many of the Jews themselves believed. It was not just Gentiles, although many of them did too. There are times when an individual, when a family, and even sometimes when an entire community, have a heart to seek truth and really want to know the living God. On those occasions, note what happens:

a. there is an eagerness to hear that is born out of a true desire to know. In some places seekers will sit for long hours to hear Bible stories, to ask questions. They will request someone to come and stay with them to teach them more. In Irian Jaya, the village of Pubuan sent messengers to our missionary Dan Lunow and the Sougb church he had established there, begging them to send someone to their village to teach them about Jesus! That is not unusual! Several villages in Kyrgyzstan have asked for workers to come and teach them. Some individuals will ask you to tell them instead of you trying to find a way to tell them and them resisting it. These are prepared people, like Lydia, like the eunuch in chapter 8, people in whom God is already at work drawing them. And in such cases:

b. there is often a thorough examination They had deep respect for the Bible and went back and checked out Paul's message every day to see for themselves that it was true. Often, sincere people take some time to come to Christ; their very sincerity causes them to think deeply and examine carefully what they're being told. But once they are convinced:

c. there is often a real movement of people to Christ As in Berea, many will come to Jesus in that town, in that region, in that family. These folks are the good soil where real fruit is born, 30, 60 and 100 fold. But:

3. the enemy can always import trouble (13-15) Berea was an open place, but their Thessalonian neighbors were still so jealous and angry that they came over and made trouble for Paul in Berea and he had to leave! Satan doesn't give up his turf or his followers easily. Oftentimes where there is no trouble, he will import some from outside. The first person I ever led to Christ was my lab partner in college. The second was a high school classmate who went to the same college. And the three of us were sitting in a lounge and I was trying to do a bit of discipleship and follow-up but other students came by and began to listen and began to raise objections and to interrupt and argue and we had to quit and leave. The semester ended and I never did get a further opportunity. A young person may be receptive but their parents may keep you from ministering to them. It happens over and again. So, Paul left his partners to encourage the new believers and was whisked away some 200 miles and now we come to:

III. The Story Of Athens (16-34) Athens was the capital city of this province of Achaia and it was a different kind of place from Macedonia. As we read, notice:

1. the general nature of the community:(16-21) In a word I would sum it up as an **intellectual** community, a community on a head trip. Note that in this community:

a. there is a proliferation of idols Athens was known as the city of idols. It was filled with statues and temples of every imaginable Greek and Roman god and goddess; hundreds of them covered the city's central hill, the Acropolis, and lined the main roads. It was said of Athens that it was easier to find a god than a man. It was so extensive that it shocked and distressed Paul. They were inclusivists. Instead of being devoted to one particular god and depending on him or her for protection as many cities were, they figured, "Why be exclusive. Let's worship every god we can find; we'll appease them all so as not to offend any!" It was Pluralism, "Everybody worship whatever they want" - to the extreme. And idolatry always multiplies; there are always new gods to worship. I can't help but think that we're a society that spawns even cults that worship UFO's and believe that aliens from other planets are coming to take them away and commit mass suicide! At the same time:

b. there is a proliferation of ideas There were philosophers everywhere, Epicureans, Stoics, all kinds who believed all kinds of things. There was an Areopagus, a Mars Hill society, where the elite would sit around and debate philosophy and history. Verse 21 shares the prevailing intellectual climate of the city. They were into logic and reason and the process of debate. Educated, brilliant, intelligent, well-read. It almost sounds like many in our generation of Americans! But these are often the hardest people to reach because:

c. there is a pride that hinders belief They called Paul a “babbler”, literally a “seed-picker”, a guy that just picks up bits and pieces of what he hears and parrots them back. When he mentioned the resurrection of the dead in verse 20, many of them mocked him. You’ve seen that before in people that pride themselves in their intellect; you’ve felt the disdain when you tell them you actually do believe that the world didn’t evolve but was created, or that there is a literal heaven and hell. They know better; they have advanced beyond such archaic beliefs. You’ve met them. A lot of them run our educational institutions! Some of them run our seminaries and lead major denominations. This group actually invited Paul to their meeting to share his ideas. Now, with this type of an audience, Paul used a different:

2. the presentation of the message Since they don’t know or regard the Scriptures, Paul used an approach that was more **natural (22-31)** and we sometimes miss the significance of how he started out, because we don’t know the whole story. He began with:

a. the use of a redemptive analogy (22-23) A redemptive analogy is something that is already found in their culture, something they already know and respect that can be used to illustrate the Gospel. The Kyrgyz paint the doorposts of their yurts red and once a year they sacrifice a lamb and eat the whole thing in one night; they won’t break any of its bones. What a perfect opportunity to share the story of the Passover and how the lamb represents Jesus. The Sawi people of Irian Jaya used to make peace with their warring neighbors by giving the son of the chief to their enemies and as long as he lived there would be peace between them. And Don Richardson used that analogy to explain Jesus, God’s peace child, and plant the church in that culture. In his walking around the city Paul found an altar without any idol attached to it that had an inscription, *agnosto theo*, to the *unknown God*. That means nothing to us, but these folks knew where that altar came from. Six centuries earlier, the city of Athens lay under a severe plague; people were dying everywhere and sacrifices to all of the gods of Athens had failed to halt it. The Pythian Oracle told the elders of the city to send to the island of Crete for a wise man named Epimenides who would solve their problem. When Epimenides arrived, he reasoned that the plague was because of some other god not represented by all the idols in the city. So, he took a bold and daring step. He asked for a flock of sheep to be kept from feeding and then brought to him at dawn. He gathered the elders and then prayed something like this, “O thou unknown God. Behold the plague afflicting this city! And if indeed you feel compassion to forgive and help us, behold this flock of sheep. Reveal your willingness to respond, I plead, by causing any sheep that pleases you to lie down upon the grass instead of grazing...And those you choose, we sacrifice to you-- acknowledging our pitiful ignorance of your name!” Then the hungry sheep were released to graze on the hillside but miraculously, a number of them almost instantly lay down instead of grazing. An altar was built on each of those spots and the sheep was sacrificed. The altars were not inscribed with the name of any god, but simply “to the unknown god”. By dawn the next morning the plague’s grip on the city was already loosened and within a week the sick had recovered. The city overflowed with joy and thanksgiving. Epimenides made a treaty of peace for his people and went home to Crete. They made a statue of him sitting with his head bowed. [summarized from *Eternity In Their Hearts*, Don Richardson] Over the centuries the memory of that event faded. The altars crumbled from neglect and were overgrown with vines, no doubt. But one of them remained for six centuries until Paul walked by it. It really got their attention that day when Paul said, “That unknown god that you worshipped in ignorance, that god who once saved the city of Athens, that is the God I’ve come to tell you about!” And then he proceeded to make clear:

b. the differentiation of our God from idolatry (24-31) He says, “Our God isn’t like all the idols you see in this city. He doesn’t live in temples made with hands. He is greater than the universe because He made the world and everything in it. He made the human race and we need to repent of this idea that he can be represented by something that man designs and makes. He is going to judge the world one day by His Son Jesus whom He raised from the dead!” You see, he presented the Gospel so differently to these people than to the religionists of Thessalonica! There is no one right approach. How we share with each one depends on what they know and believe and what their attitude is. To these intellectuals, Paul made a logical argument rather than a “the Bible says” kind of presentation. But, as is so often the case with these kinds of people:

3. the response of the community was indifference (32-34) Only a few got past their intellectual pride and believed. Some scoffed and the rest put it off until another day. It didn’t grip their hearts; it was only an intellectual exercise. How sad! Paul left pretty quickly and we have:

IV. The Story Of Corinth (18:1-17) Now, Corinth was the exact opposite of Athens. It had about 500,000 people and was the major commercial city of the region, situated on an isthmus between two major waterways:

1. the general nature of the community was wicked It was a city of flesh, a center of vice and moral corruption. The temple of Aphrodite with its 1,000 prostitutes topped the city’s hill. It attracted merchants and sailors, professional gamblers and athletes, all the lower types of the world. There were no standards. In fact, the term “to Corinthianize” made it into the Greek language as a derogatory phrase meaning to utterly corrupt! In verses **(1-6)** Paul tried going first, as usual, to the Jews in the synagogue and, of course, they wouldn’t listen but when he turned to the Gentiles, the regular people of the city:

2. the response of the community was what I would characterize as: **extraordinary (7-11)** First of all:

a. there was an extended time of fruitful ministry There is nowhere else up until now that Paul stayed a year and a half, and the Lord indicated clearly to him that there He had MANY PEOPLE in the city. There was evidently a considerable response. People kept on coming to the Lord out of the depths of their sin. On top of that:

b. there were noteworthy conversions Crispus, who was the very ruler or leader of the synagogue, abandoned his position to follow Jesus. Paul mentions baptizing him in 1 Cor. 1. Later on, his predecessor Sosthenes (mentioned as being beaten in verse 17) also came to salvation and went with Paul on his journey. His name is beside Paul's in the opening of that letter to Corinth. Important people came to Jesus and in this hard place:

c. there was Divine protection from opposition The Lord promised him protection in that vision. No one would attack him. That was new! Everywhere else he had enemies after him within weeks, but here by grace he continued a whole year and a half before any opposition was stirred up and when it was in verses **(12-17)**, the proconsul dismissed the case and wouldn't listen to it!

And so overall, what would seem to us the hardest place, became the most fruitful place. There are places everywhere that are more or less like that. Amsterdam has its red light district, New York its Harlem, Philadelphia its projects. Places we don't want to go, places we're a bit scared of, dark places. But the darkest of places sometimes produce the most wonderful and sustained response. For instance, in the darkness of inner-city Brooklyn with all its broken lives, God raised up the Brooklyn Tabernacle. Teen Challenge was born among the gang wars of New York City. Anyway, with that we come to:

3. the end of the second missionary journey (18-22) Paul sailed straight for home at Antioch, with a quick stop at Ephesus.

But in leaving, I want us to reconsider the lesson from these four cities. Not every place and not every person is the same. They have different characters, different problems, different things that hinder them from believing the Gospel. They require different methods of sharing. We get different responses from them, yet no matter what the response, in each of those places God still drew people to Himself. Wherever God puts you and whoever He puts you among, He can still do a work there, if you're faithful in listening and sharing as He directs you to!

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

The Gospel Spreads Throughout Asia - 18:23-19:41

As we return to our study in Acts, I want to take a moment to review what we have studied thus far. The Book of Acts is really the story of the beginning of:

I. The Transformation Of The World: A Quick Review Of Our Study In its first half we see how the Gospel is spread:

1. From Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria to Antioch - Chs. 1-12 Thousands were saved in Jerusalem as the apostles preached there and a growing church was established but, you remember, they were reluctant to move out. So, God moved them out through persecution. Stephen was stoned and Saul became the chief persecutor. Believers scattered out throughout Judea and up into Samaria. Through the ministry of Peter, the Gospel was taken to pure Gentiles, non-Jews, for the very first time at Caesarea. Meanwhile Jesus knocked Saul to his knees and saved him and transformed him into an apostle. Believers went as far as Antioch and a thriving church was established there and Paul wound up teaching there for a year. This church at Antioch then became the new center from which the Gospel would be spread:

2. From Antioch to the uttermost parts of the earth - Chs. 13-28 Paul became the leader of the missionary enterprise sent out from Antioch. He made three great missionary journeys, each lasting several years, that planted the church throughout extensive areas of the Roman Empire.

a. Paul's first journey planted the church throughout the island of **Cyprus** and then the eastern portion of **Asia Minor - Chs. 13-15**. He came home rejoicing in all that God had done, though he had suffered great persecution, even stoning. But some of the Jewish converts had a real problem with non-Jews not being circumcised and keeping the Law so Paul went up to Jerusalem to the apostles in chapter 15 to settle that matter once and for all. Then he set off on a:

b. Paul's second journey It led him back through eastern Asia Minor but then over to Macedonia, to Philippi where Lydia was saved and the jailer was converted and eventually **throughout Greece**, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth - **Chs. 16-18:22**. At last he sailed for home but stopped briefly at Ephesus, the chief city of the province of Asia, yet he would not stay. Instead, he left his traveling companions and fellow disciples, Priscilla and Aquila, there and promised to come back, which he did some time later on his third missionary journey and that's where we pick up the story today at **18:23**. Paul was headed back to Ephesus to keep his promise. Now what we see first as we pick up the story is two distinct cases of:

II. The Transformation Of Religious People - 18:23-19:7 The first is a man by the name of Apollos and here's his story.

1. a lesson from Apollos - 18:24-28 Apollos was a Jew from the huge city of Alexandria in Egypt, a center of Jewish thought and culture. He was a learned man, a trained orator. Somewhere he had come into contact with followers of John the Baptist. He believed the message of John and was baptized himself. And he believed what John said about the One who would come after him; he even knew His name. It says he taught "accurately about Jesus", from John's words and the Old Testament but had never heard the rest of the story! So, Priscilla and Aquila took him home with them and told him how Jesus had gone on to die on the cross for our sins and to rise from the dead on the third day and that now He was seated in heaven and preparing to return. And he believed without hesitation and with all his knowledge of the Scriptures became a mighty preacher of the Gospel! In fact, they sent him back over to Corinth to continue the work of building up the church that Paul had left there! But there's a lesson here we don't want to miss: ***Without faith in the finished work of Christ, religion is nothing!*** Here was a man who was deeply religious, who knew the Scriptures, who knew and talked about Jesus, even accurately, but until He placed His trust personally in the finished work of Christ on the cross for His salvation, he was as lost as Pontius Pilate! You know, Apollos is not unlike a lot of people in your neighborhood, is he? Religious, going to services, talking about Jesus, believing that He is the Son of God, but they've never really trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection alone to save them. They're still trying to be good and believe the right things and hoping that when they die, they'll have been good enough! God help us to be like Priscilla and Aquila, to quietly take sincere people like this aside into our homes and lives and explain to them the way of God more adequately! Now, by this time Paul is on his way back and nearing Ephesus and he runs into another group of John's followers just like Apollos:

2. a lesson from John's disciples - 19:1-7 A dozen more, just like Apollos, disciples of John the Baptist, knowing the name of Jesus, believing in Him as the one to come, but never having heard the rest of the story. Paul knew something was lacking in the way they talked about Jesus and he asked them whether they had received the Holy Spirit. They replied they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. They never heard about the cross, the resurrection, Pentecost or the growth of the church and so on. So, Paul filled them in on the rest of the story and when they heard it, they wanted to be baptized in the name of Jesus and declare themselves His followers and when they were, the Holy Spirit came on them with a visible sign, just like He did at Pentecost in Jerusalem and just like he did at Samaria in Acts 8 and again at Caesarea in Acts 10. But there's a lesson here: ***Without having the Holy Spirit, baptism is nothing!*** Apollos had been baptized; so had these 12. They were sincere about it, but without the Spirit of Christ coming to actually indwell you, you can go through all the religious rituals there are and still be absolutely lost! A lot of the people that live around you are living proof of it. They go to church; they have been baptized; they celebrate communion. But they've never had the life of Jesus come to live in them through His spirit and cause them to be born again. And they need your help to understand that. In fact, there is here an actual:

3. a lesson about baptism itself: You can see here two types of baptism:

a. John's baptism: a sign of repentance expecting a future experience People came to John because he called them to repent of their sins and turn away from them and get ready for the Lord Jesus who was to come. He put them under water as a symbol of washing, that they promised to change their lives and live differently and look forward to a Jesus who was yet to come to them personally. But that's not:

b. Christian baptism: a sign of identification and an inward experience It is a testimony that I have become a follower of Jesus; I am identified with Him; I am trusting in Him completely for my salvation and my future; Jesus has come into my life and I died with Him and received His new life. I am a brand new creature! That's the baptism that Jesus commanded His followers to receive and that's why, once these 12 believed and received the Spirit of God, Paul baptized them again, but now in the name of Jesus.

A lot of the folks around you have been baptized. Most were sprinkled with water as infants and words were said over them. But for most of them it was a like a "baptism of John"; it was an act of religious obedience which someone told them to do; it was a promise by them or by their parents to do better, to live better, hoping that in the future Jesus will accept them. But all the water in the world won't save anyone. Religious people, "baptized and churchied" people, need to be transformed by a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and after they have it, they need to be baptized in His Name! Now in the rest of chapter 19 we see:

III. The Transformation Of An Entire Region - 19:8-41 First, let's notice:

1. the method of ministry Paul used in Ephesus

a. he began in a synagogue (8) He always started there. Why? Because it was a **religious place**, a place where there were prepared people that already had a belief in one true God and accepted the authority of the Scriptures. For three months he wrestled and debated there and as he did, a group of disciples were won to Christ. But eventually:

b. he moved to a school (9) Why? Well, obviously he was no longer wanted in the synagogue and those who were going to believe there were now saved, but I think also because it was a **secular place**. The owner of the

school would use it in the morning to teach his students and Paul would make his tents in the morning and then rent it in the afternoon when the Greeks had their leisure time to teach his disciples. Idolatrous, pagan, idol-worshipping Gentiles are not going to come to a Jewish synagogue, any more than they're going to show up in church Sunday morning today, nor would the Jews welcome them. To reach them Paul had to go out among them, out where they were, out in an arena where they could participate. And I think there's a lesson in that for us today. Only so many are going to be won by coming in to where we are. Only so many are religious enough to feel comfortable coming to hear the message in a religious building. If we want to reach the masses, it would seem to me that we're going to have to find ways to put the message "out there" where they are, out there in a setting where they feel comfortable listening and asking questions. And in this fashion Paul:

c. he impacted the surrounding area (10) The entire province of Asia, which had been skipped by the direction of the Spirit on the second journey, was now reached over this two year period as people came in to listen and went home converted. I would also assume that Paul and his disciples made forays out into other towns and villages during this time as well. That was one key piece of the strategy. A second thing we need to understand is:

2. the spiritual battle Paul faced in Ephesus Ephesus was the center of:

a. the cult of Diana or Aphrodite, the Greek fertility goddess. So, it was a center of **idolatry** where her statues were worshipped and her temple stood, a center of **immorality** because sex with temple prostitutes was part of their very worship. It was a place of **demonization** as people invited the spirit of Diana to possess and control their bodies and became controlled by evil spirits and it was a place of **sorcery** where occult arts and practices, the casting of spells and calling on the dead and placing of curses and all that goes with it was practiced by many. It was in a very visible way a spiritual stronghold of Satan. But in the midst of that deep spiritual darkness:

b. God displayed the power of Jesus (11-12) These were not things that God does for every believer, every day, everywhere. They were extraordinary things, signs and wonders that displayed the power of the name of Jesus. Where the darkness is the greatest, God is often willing to do extraordinary things to bring people out of it. *Advance Newsletter reported that a Christian worker ministering among refugees in Central Asia was invited to pray for a sick woman. Upon entering her tent, the worker saw a frail old woman lying so still the worker wondered if she was dead. The worker prayed in the name of Jesus for the woman and for the other refugees in the camp. Days later, the worker learned that the old woman had recovered so much she was able to walk and that two days after the visit relief groups had come to give out food ration cards. The worker reported: People in the camp said "God has seen us. He heard that foreigner's prayer!" They all gave glory to the Lord for the food that was sent.* In the Muslim world God is constantly using visions and dreams of Jesus to make people receptive to the Gospel and save them. Where there is spirit worship, He defies the power of evil spirits and the power of the name of Jesus. By doing these extraordinary things:

c. God displayed the uniqueness of Jesus (13-17) There were others trying to do similar things, to cast out demons. They made a living at supposed exorcisms and there are plenty of people in other cultures that do the very same thing today. But when they saw the power of Jesus, they tried to use His Name and look at the reply, *Jesus I know and I know about Paul, but who are you!* It became very clear to everyone that only Jesus has that power over the evil one! He is unique, not one way among others, but THE way! *A terrible hailstorm struck a Buryat village in rural Russia, destroying roofs and window panes, injuring farm animals and, worst of all, ruining this year's crops. God showed himself strong, however, for the one believer in the village, whose crops were not destroyed!* [Advance - Sept. 24, 2001] Can you imagine the testimony she has been in that village! God makes a difference between us who hold the name of Jesus and the Egyptians. As we pray and are faithful in sharing His Word, He works alongside us and declares the power of His Name and His uniqueness as the only way. That kind of thing went on for two years and as you look at the text you can see:

3. the spiritual transformation that occurred in Ephesus Because of these displays of His power:

a. there was widespread reverence for the name of Jesus (17) Those who didn't believe held His name in high honor and reverence. Instead of a defiant, unbelieving attitude, there was a whole shift in the spiritual atmosphere of the city. And:

b. there was public repentance of occult involvement (18-20) Believers came forward now and publicly admitted their sinful involvement in deep and shameful occult things. They burned their books in renouncement of it all. 50,000 drachmas is the equivalent of 3-5 million dollars in America today! These people were in it deeply; they'd invested all their money and their lives in it, but they burned it all, sent it up in smoke as so much garbage, because of their newfound love of Jesus. At the same time:

c. there was financial damage to impure businesses (23-27) These silversmiths had a profitable business going. Ephesus was the center of Diana worship for the whole empire and all the tourists and worshippers who came wanted their personal little silver idol to take home and put on their shelf to worship. It was a tidy little operation

employing a whole guild of people, until so many people began to convert to Christ and stop worshipping idols. Sales fell off! They were going out of business for lack of customers, praise the Lord! That's what happens as God begins to move and Christians begin to pray. The adult bookshops and the strip clubs and the psychic readers and the bars begin to close down. Nobody goes there anymore. The town begins to be transformed! And if you sneak a peek ahead at verse 31 you can see:

d. there were friendships developed with high officials (31) Paul had made friends with, as the text says literally, *the Asiarchs*; these were the 10 most honorable citizens of the region who were put in charge of organizing for the entire province the annual games in honor of the gods and the Emperor. And some of these leading officials were Paul's friends and sought to protect him! When the Gospel really takes root in a region, it touches public officials and civic leaders.

Wouldn't it be great to see that kind of transformation happen here? That's what we're praying for. We want what happened in Ephesus to happen here. We're inviting God to do it again, to transform Glenside-Abington-Roslyn-Willow Grove, indeed all of Philadelphia! But don't forget:

4. the personal opposition that arose in Ephesus (28-41) That day there was a riot against Paul, but they couldn't find him, so they dragged his two companions into court and the crowd shouted for two hours. It could have turned really ugly and sometimes it does. Sometimes the enemies that Satan mobilizes against the growing church get pretty violent. However, in this case the Lord used a sensible city clerk to quiet the crowd, to tell them they were endangering themselves through their own irrational behavior and send them away. Satan does not give up his turf easily. Our brothers and sisters all over the world suffer persecution in various forms right now. If you really want to see our town transformed and multitudes come to Christ, expect it. It will come in one form or another. Be ready. But at the same time trust that the Lord will make a way through it all!

A pastor in Myanmar was accosted by police, mercilessly beaten in front of his wife and 2-year-old daughter, then left bound overnight in front of the village chief's house. The next morning, he was taken to jail, where he boldly spoke to guards and inmates about Jesus. He was released after his congregation prayed for him and appealed to authorities, and he continued to proclaim Christ in the community. Twenty-three people came to Christ, and the church had to add meetings during the week to accommodate seekers. [Advance - 12/20/2000] The Book of Acts is being lived out all over again in our day by our brethren in all the corners of the earth. Let's determine to ask God not to allow America to be the exception! Let's renew our determination to pray for transformation of our community, no matter what the cost.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

Paul Refuses To Avoid Suffering - 20:1-21:16

After staying for two years in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, Paul left after the riot of chapter 19 and headed back up to visit the churches in Macedonia that he had planted on his second journey and then swung down into Greece to Corinth where he hung out for three months, before heading back north to Philippi. Along the way he has been picking up both a love offering from each of the churches given to help the poor churches in the land of Judea who were suffering [we read about it in 2 Cor. 8-9], and also representatives from many of those churches to accompany him there. From there he sailed to Troas, where we pick up the story this morning because in this passage, we get two important:

I. Two Glimpses Into The Life Of The Early Church At Troas we get a firsthand:

1. a look at a local church meeting (20:6-12) In its essence, it is no different from ours this morning, a group of believers gathered on the first day of the week to celebrate the risen Christ around the preaching of the Word of God and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. But outwardly it was vastly different. Just think about:

a. the circumstances of their meeting They met at night. Why? They had no illusions of Sunday being the Sabbath day; in their culture it was a work day like every other day. Some were slaves; many worked for others and they simply were not free until evening. They had no building of their own, but they had an upper level room in a house where they gathered faithfully each week to worship and to share an evening meal. And if the truth were told, the gatherings of much of the church as it is being planted around the world today look a whole lot more like Troas than they do like Glenside! Picture a church in Jalalabad in Kyrgyzstan. It has 19 people and they sit on tushuks on the floor in the main room of a house. It's typical of the rural church movement there. Our partner Urias down in Babo in Irian Jaya and his group of 30 meet in a hut. So much of what we associate with church, like buildings and pews and stained glass and 11 AM on Sunday morning, are all cultural practices we've inherited and not really inherent to the church, so when we take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, we have to be careful not to take our Western cultural forms with it! And even here, we have to be careful not to insist too hard on things that are merely cultural tradition (like our music and worship styles, for instance) and think that our way of meeting is the only way or the best way. Anyway, also note:

b. their humanness and their dedication There was nothing perfect or ideal about the early church. They were not super-Christians, but were just like us. Their preaching ran on too long. It was hot in the room and there were lots of smoky lamps and at least one person fell fast asleep and probably there were more. He just happened to be sitting on the window sill, trying to keep cool. But do note how important being together was to them. They had been at work all day until sunset. Then they came together and they stayed up till midnight to worship and then up the rest of the night eating and fellowshiping together and they left worship to GO to work again! They were serious about their need to be together as a church body. Thousands of Christians in Korea get up at 4 AM, 5 AM or 6 AM to go to prayer meetings every day before work. The early believers in Jalalabad in Kyrgyzstan met in the middle of the night at first to avoid detection and persecution by the community, just as many house churches must do in China. Around the world the young churches like this can teach us a real lesson by their dedication to practicing their faith. It is really life to them, not just one more thing in their schedule. And maybe that's why so often:

c. the power of God is displayed in their midst Poor Eutychus died from that fall, but God restored his life in answer to Paul's prayer. Powerful acts of God like that are not uncommon in the emerging church even today as we talked about last week in studying Ephesus. God is still pleased to confirm His reality in mighty ways as His people call upon Him.

At any rate Paul and his party sailed on along the coast to Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos, and then to Miletus. Paul didn't want to get stuck at Ephesus again by visiting there, so he sent for the elders of the church he had appointed while he was there and asked them to meet him at Miletus one last time to say goodbye, and through this meeting we get:

2. a look at the ministry of an elder (20:17-35) This is Paul's message to those elders and by extension to church leaders everywhere. In it we have both:

a. the example of Paul and the admonition of Paul. The first responsibility of any elder, any pastor, any leader is to live what he teaches, to be a living example to those under his care. Paul was an example first of:

(1) sincerity and humility (17-19a) He lived as a slave to God, as God's servant. He wasn't in it for money or prestige. He was real. He cried; He wept. And he did in humility, never looking for any credit for himself, for any applause. His only desire was that Jesus would be glorified. Then in his ministry he was an example of:

(2) perseverance, boldness and balance (19b-21) He didn't quit at the first sign of trouble but continued for two years in spite of threats and plots by the Jews. Twice he says he didn't hesitate to share anything with them that was needed, even if it was difficult or hard to hear. And in verse 27 he says he declared the whole counsel of God, not biased, not focused only on one area to the neglect of others, but balanced teaching. In his personal life he was an example of:

(3) honesty, industry and generosity (33-35) He supported himself with his own hands by making tents each day. He worked hard and was honest in all his business dealings. He didn't look to get from people, but instead displayed a spirit of generosity; he was always giving to those in need, the poor, the sick, the helpless. What an example Paul is for those of us involved in the leadership of the church and the work of the ministry. Elders, teachers, leaders, I pray that each of our lives may constantly reflect these very things. Let's look at our hearts. Could we say this to our people, "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you!"? Then here we also have:

b. the admonition of Paul to those who are elders. We have two directives, first:

(1) to pasture the flock (28) We're to be shepherds who feed our sheep, that is, who lead them to green pastures for spiritual nourishment and still waters for spiritual drink. That's way more than just teaching them. It involves caring for them, praying with them, encouraging them, guiding them. It means picking them up when they're wounded and comforting them when they're sad and searching for them when they start to go astray. It means sitting alongside them in hospital emergency rooms, going with them to the cemetery, and listening to their deepest hurts and fears. It's kind of like being a parent! And our second directive is:

(2) to protect the flock (29-31) Wolves will come in among the sheep. False teachers who will distort the truth and try to lead people astray. Some will arise right from within the body. But we elders are the preservers of the true faith that was delivered once and for all. It's our job to warn our sheep when they're being led astray into popular religion, to protect them from the boatload of lies that are out there

Elders and leaders, we have our work cut out for us! But the lesson I really wanted to get to in our text this morning is:

II. An Important Lesson About Facing Suffering that we can see in Paul's life at this point. There were:

1. two things Paul knew with certainty (20:22-23, 25) First, he knew that:

a. God wanted him to go to Jerusalem It was an overwhelming conviction. He says he is literally "bound" in the Spirit to go. He knew with certainty this was God's will. The Spirit told him to go there and he was compelled to obey. He had to deliver the offering he had collected to the church there. But he also knew that:

b. suffering awaited him there when he arrived The same Holy Spirit told him that hardships and prison were waiting there for him. He was going to jail. He was going to suffer. This fact was confirmed to him repeatedly everywhere he stopped. People would tell him the Spirit had showed them the same thing. One prophet declared that he would be bound, tied up by the Jews and handed over to the Romans.

Now that's an awful position to be in, to know that obeying God means walking straight into suffering. But you and I are also put into that position in life at key points, aren't we? There comes that moment when you know God wants you to be honest and to tell the truth, but you know it will cost you your job (or in some countries maybe your life!). There's that moment when God's called you to serve in some foreign place, but you know that going means the pain of leaving loved ones and maybe living in a difficult culture or climate where life will be hard. There's that moment when you know that standing up for what you believe will draw the criticism and ridicule of everyone in the room or maybe their anger and animosity. Now there are:

2. three temptations that come when we know that we face suffering The first is simply:

a. to deliberately disobey God to avoid the pain of suffering, to turn like Jonah and run the other way, to say "I'm not doing that! There's no way!" It is to choose, unlike Moses, to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season rather than endure affliction with the people of God. It is to choose me and my needs and my safety and my protection over God. That's a pretty obvious temptation, but there are others that are more subtle. One is:

b. to confuse information with the direction of God After praying and embracing his friends Paul sailed on from Miletus to Cos, then Rhodes, then Patara, and he finally landed at Tyre (21:4). Now this is an interesting verse. In fact, based on this verse, some have said that Paul made a mistake, that the Holy Spirit was telling him not to go and he was disobedient. But I think the verse is just a one sentence summary of all that went on. These disciples also had been told by the Spirit that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem, but they assumed that meant he shouldn't go there! It's easy to assume that because you know it's going to hurt that God wouldn't want you to do it! "God couldn't possibly want me to do something that would hurt me that much!" It's a way of rationalizing our way around obedience. It's also easy:

c. to confuse the concern of friends with the wisdom of God Paul prayed with those folks and continued on to Ptolemais and then Caesarea, where Philip was still living with his four daughters (21:10-12). Agabus came to Antioch in chapter 11 and predicted a famine and it happened, remember? He spoke for God. Note he said the Jews will bind Paul and will hand him over. The Spirit had told him, not what might happen, but what WOULD happen. It's the most explicit information he's had yet. But all Paul's friends couldn't bear the thought of it and begged him not to go! It says "we," so even Luke was in on it! Your friends love you; your family loves you. And sometimes they love you so much they will beg you not to put yourself in harm's way, they'll beg you to spare yourself and them the pain of the suffering that will come. It's easy to confuse that with the voice of God, to wonder whether He's changed His mind and is telling you NOT to go through these dear ones.

How in the world do you proceed? Do you press on to your Jerusalem when everybody's telling you not to go? Well, Paul's response shows us:

3. the basic conviction we must have in order to persevere He told the Ephesians this:

a. we must value our life only according to His purpose (20:24) The Living Bible puts it like this: *But life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus--the work of telling others the Good News about God's mighty kindness and love.* My life is worth nothing if I use it to serve myself, if I use it to pursue pleasure and stay safe and pursue my own goals and die happy. The only true value it has depends upon whether I lay it down to accomplish the purpose God has designed for it. *Shortly after September 11th, the international director of People International, Clive Pritchard, sent a message to everyone stationed throughout Central Asia at a time when most other agencies were pulling out their people. He wrote, "If we truly want to deal with the refugee problem and destroy terrorism at its very roots then we need to send in Christian workers to the very breeding grounds of these 'reigns of terror.' Central Asia needs more Christian workers. Bombs and rockets will in the end only create greater hatred and more vengeance and killing. The Gospel is the only thing that can change people and change nations. The price of missionary advance in Central Asia will be very costly because it means that Christians will need to move from their comfort zones of the Western world and give their lives for the Gospel... When people come to Christ, lives change, communities are affected and even whole nations develop a new thrust and direction. This is radical yet the Gospel is radical, Christ is a radical Savior. He died so that people from all nations, tribes and tongues may experience new life... Officially I need to encourage you to be wise and not take any risks and even to ask you to come home if the situation gets too difficult. However, I must confess that I believe that when difficulties, hardships and danger come upon the people of Central Asia, that is where we ought to be. I want to encourage each of you to stay if at all possible, for these coming days may give you a unique opportunity to share Christ in a very real way.* To put the same thing in another, even more blunt way, as Paul did to the folks at Caesarea:

b. we must be ready to die for the name of Jesus (21:13-14) To obey Jesus, to follow Jesus, is worth more than life itself. That's a radical thing to say! That's a radical thing to believe. How can we say such a thing and plunge headlong into certain suffering? Well, Paul knew:

4. the tremendous consolation we have as we choose to obey

a. Jesus Himself has been there for us Paul was in exactly the same situation as Jesus was. **Mk. 10:32-33**, *They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles.* And Luke comments, *...He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem - Lk. 9:51.* Paul went to Jerusalem because Jesus went to Jerusalem. Paul went to bonds and affliction because Jesus went to a cross. Jesus wrestled over it in the garden, but He chose to go all the way to the cross to save me. How can I do any less for Him? C.T. Studd, the night before he was to sail for the Congo, had a man try to dissuade him from leaving his family and going off to what was almost certain death in the missionary graveyard of Africa. His reply has become the motto of the mission he founded: *If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.* John Piper explains it like this: *"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. This is simply a paraphrase of Mark 8:34, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' To take up a cross and follow Jesus means to join Jesus on the Calvary road with a resolve to suffer and die with him. The cross is not a burden to bear. It is an instrument of pain and execution...It would be like saying, 'Take up this rope and carry it to the gallows.' The domestication of cross-bearing into coughs and cranky spouses takes the radical thrust out of Christ's call. He is calling every believer to 'renounce everything that he has' and to 'hate his own life' and to take the road of obedience joyfully, no matter the loss on this earth. Following Jesus means that wherever obedience requires it, we will accept betrayal and rejection and beating and mockery and crucifixion and death. Jesus gives us the assurance that if we will follow him to Golgotha during all the Good Fridays of this life, we will also rise with him on the last Easter day of the resurrection. 'Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it'. 'He who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life'. [Let The Nations Be Glad - John Piper, pp. 74-75] Sure, we'd rather avoid suffering. Yet our call is to persevere in obeying Him no matter what the cost may be. It's radical! But if we sneak a peek ahead at what happened when Paul obeyed, you'll see our consolation in all this:*

b. Jesus Himself will be there with us - Acts 23:11 Jesus will stand near us too. When we go through the waters, He WILL be with us...

What is it in your life that you're tempted to run away from? Where is it that God is calling you to obey but the price looks too big, too costly? What is there that you know you need to face, to give up, to let go of, to hang in with, because that is His will? Do it. Don't run from suffering. His promise is this. He will be with you always even to the end of the age!

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

God Protects His Servant - 21:17-22:29

With Paul completing his third journey, his missionary career (as we think of it) has now come to an end. But, as we saw last time, he knew it and was prepared to face suffering and imprisonment. In China, I'm told, many of the house church leaders have had this same attitude over the years. They have expected to be arrested sooner or later and have seen it simply as a transfer of their ministry. If arrested, they simply serve a new audience inside the prison and reach those inside for Christ until they are released. That's exactly what is about to happen to Paul in this next section of Acts. He's transferring from the church planting wing of the church to the prison ministry section! As we begin at verse 17, we read first of:

I. Paul's Arrival At Jerusalem - 21:17-26 The year is around 58 AD and things have changed a lot in Jerusalem while Paul has been away these last years. It is a time of turmoil in the land, a time filled with violence and insurrection. There are Zealots and daggersmen and false messiahs on the scene. Jewish patriotism is building toward the revolt that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem twelve years later. The Romans are edgy about keeping control. And this whole situation has even impacted the church. Thousands of Jews have believed once again in the city, but they are all still zealous for the Law, still going to the Temple and offering sacrifices, while they're praising Jesus as the fulfillment of it all. It was not unlike the moment we're in today where there is danger in the air and patriotism for America is running strong even in the hearts of believers. Well, in this text there is:

1. a lesson about false impressions between brethren that could be very helpful to us. We often have false impressions of one another in the body of Christ and:

a. we must guard against them carefully because they so easily arise. Paul has spent his last 10 years or so living out among the Gentiles. He has been up to Jerusalem eight years earlier to press for the unpopular decision at that time that the Gentiles don't need to be circumcised and keep the Law. These last years had taken him all the way to Macedonia and Greece for long periods and it didn't take much for these Jewish believers to assume that

during this time, not only was he telling Gentile believers that they didn't have to keep the law, but he was telling the same thing to Jews who believed and he himself had stopped acting Jewish and was living like a Gentile. It doesn't take much for other believers to make wrong assumptions about us, especially if they don't know us or have contact with us very much. We easily judge and make assumptions about one another! I'll give you a personal example. For years I drove up and down Old York Rd. in Abington and passed by St. Ann's Episcopal Church. I saw the name and just assumed that there was a liberal congregation where nobody really knew Jesus personally. But it turns out that their pastor was a young man whom God saved out of the liberalism of his denomination and set on fire for Jesus Christ. He became my good friend until God took him home. I made a wrong assumption; I've asked forgiveness for it. We have to guard our thoughts toward one another in the body of Christ carefully. But not only that, when there are wrong impressions:

b. we must take steps to correct them because they so easily divide us! In Paul's case, James and the others recommended that Paul do something to show them they were wrong and that he did not just throw out the Law and look down upon them for keeping it. They suggested he participate in a purification ceremony at the Temple with some other men, which he gladly agreed to do. When there are false impressions, letting them continue only leads to division; we need to take steps to correct them to maintain unity. And often it is not so much words that are needed as actions. So, in Paul's actions there's:

2. a lesson about accommodating brethren who differ It is so easy to say, "I don't care what other people think; I only answer to God!" and even to take some verses out of context to try to prove it, but that's not how Paul reacted and that's not the overwhelming teaching of the New Testament. For a key passage on this check out **Rom. 14:13-15:3**. Both this passage and Paul's example in this case teach us that:

a. we must be willing to hold back from our personal liberty when that is necessary to keep from offending others. It might mean sometimes not eating meat that's been sacrificed to idols if you live in Rome or Corinth. I don't know whether Paul learned to like pork out there in Greece, but you can bet he chose not to eat it around his brothers in Jerusalem! I don't know whether he made tents out there on Saturdays like everybody else did or not, but you can bet he didn't do it around his brothers in Jerusalem! There are times I need to curb what I might otherwise do or say because I love my brothers and sisters and don't want them to think evil of me, even if they would be mistaken! And conversely it means that:

b. we must also be willing to go beyond our personal necessity when it will benefit others. Paul didn't need to go through that purification ritual. It cost him a decent sum of money and it took seven days of his time. It was really going out of his way to make the point that he still had respect for the law and was willing as a Jew to follow its rules. But He paid the price. Why? Because it was about more than just him personally. There was a big rift brewing in the church as a whole between Jewish and Gentile Churches. It would be really easy to just divide and separate and let each do their own thing. But the unity of the body was worth it to him. There are times when unity with our brothers and sisters is worth doing a lot of things we might not otherwise do!

So, did it work? Well, I think this concession on Paul's part may have been the key that opened the door for the Jewish believers to consider and listen to his writings, which show that it's OK to let go of the Jewish system of law. Whether it was Paul or whoever that wrote the letter to the Hebrews, to these very Jewish Christians, a few years later, it urged them to come outside the camp, to leave their Jewish ways and practices and not cling to the Temple. And they seem to have been ready to listen because a dozen years later, the Christians in Jerusalem left their city, abandoned the Temple and went to Pella across the Jordan, just before Jerusalem was put under siege by Rome. Those patriotic zealous Jews in Jerusalem were all destroyed, but many of the believers were spared then, perhaps because Paul made this concession now that made them open to listen to his voice. Something worth thinking about, isn't it! Now in the next section we see:

II. Paul's Arrest In Jerusalem - 21:27-40 and in it we have:

1. a lesson about God's protection in danger (27-36) Look at:

a. the opportunity Satan used against Paul (27-29) He was in the Temple going about this purification business, being quiet for once in his life. But there were some Jews visiting from Ephesus who knew Paul from there and already hated him, plus they also knew this Trophimus guy they had seen with Paul in the city and saw their opportunity to get rid of Paul. Defiling the Temple was the one capital charge the Jews could enforce. There were big signs up which said that any Gentile could not proceed past a certain point under pain of death. So, they screamed that Paul had brought a Greek into the Holy Place and that did it. Every Jew in sight grabbed him, drug him out and began to beat him! You might be amazed at the kinds of opportunities Satan will find to use against you in one fashion or another. But note something strange here:

b. God divinely kept the mob from killing him (30-31a) Now let me ask you: how hard is it for a mob to kill you? It takes only seconds. Two or three guys hold you and another one strangles you or bashes your head with a stone or they all stomp you to death. 60 seconds and you're in glory. But not this crowd. They kept beating Paul and "trying to kill him" for long minutes, long enough for a whole crowd to gather, long enough for the local commander to

hear the ruckus and assemble his soldiers and, if you read ahead, Paul doesn't even appear to be severely injured! God shielded him from their blows! And to really top it off:

c. God rescued him by a troupe of Roman soldiers (31-36) The commander who is in the Fortress of Antonia on the corner of the Temple hears the commotion, sees the mob and assembles centurions, captains of 100 who grab their men and weapons and down the steps they come right into the crowd, dozens of them pushing and shoving Jews out of the way. They're God's emergency ambulance come to rescue Paul and they literally carry him out of the midst of the boiling crowd on their shoulders back up those steps to the barracks. Doesn't God have class?! Listen, if you're in danger, God is not limited in the means by which He can save you! He can use invisible angels to shield you from a bullet or even your very enemies to protect you in their jail if need be! *Pioneer missionaries Bob and Catherine Smith were traveling around Kenya looking for a site to establish a new mission in 1932: Their truck bogged down in the mud, and they had to spend the night in an unpredictable African jungle. About midnight, aroused from sleep, Bob sensed a shaking of the ground. Gun in hand, he stepped outside the tent and was shocked to see 15 elephants moving toward him. He wondered if he, Catherine, and their two small children were to be killed before they even got their work started. He determined that he would do all he could to protect his family or die trying. As Bob checked the chamber of his rifle, he braced himself to fire at the oncoming elephants, knowing that there was no way he could kill all 15 jungle giants by himself. Before setting up their cots in the tent, Bob and Catherine had cooked supper over a campfire and piled the utensils and tin plates on a little table just inside the tent. As Bob backed up to prepare himself, he bumped the tent wall and tipped over the table: pots, pans, and plates crashed to the ground. [Immediately] the elephants, as if on command, suddenly turned and marched back into the dark jungle. Bob immediately breathed a prayer of thanks. Later Bob met a seasoned hunter who said, "Smith, if you are ever face to face with wild elephants, bang pans together and they will run every time."* [Evangelical Advocate, Jan 1996. Page 12.] He uses slingshots against giants and pots and pans against elephants. God is not limited in the means He has to protect and keep you! I hope that's reassuring to you in these days of fear in our nation! but here's also:

2. a lesson about our reaction to danger (37-40) Notice that:

a. Paul responded in a polite and gentle manner He calmly asked, "May I speak?" He didn't yell and scream like I would have. Plus:

b. he did not return angry behavior or accusations He didn't accuse his attackers and demand protection or defend himself. He didn't curse and call them names. He reacted like Peter told us to in **1 Pet. 3:9**, *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.* He actually:

c. he sought the welfare of those who were against him He asked the captain to speak to the crowd. Why? He saw it as an opportunity to share Christ with them. He wanted to see them saved!

Man, that is against everything that is in my flesh! If a driver passes me on the right and nearly hits me, my first words are not, "Bless him, Lord!" Are yours? When I see Mullah Muhamed Omar on TV, my first thoughts are not "Save Him Lord!", are yours? Jesus' first words from the cross were, "Father forgive them..." Maybe we need to live more out of Jesus' power! Well in chapter 22 we have:

III. Paul's Testimony To The Jews - 22:1-29 He quieted the crowd and spoke to them in their own Aramaic language. We won't read it but here's a quick:

1. the outline of what Paul shared Point 1:

a. I am a good Jew (1-5) I was born a Jew, trained by Rabbi Gamaliel, zealous for the law and I was so much like you that I arrested and killed Jews who believed in Jesus. Point 2:

b. I saw a vision of Jesus that blinded me (6-11) I saw this light and got knocked to the ground and I heard a heavenly voice speak to me and it was Jesus and He told me I was persecuting HIM! Point 3:

c. I was ministered to by a Jew and my sight restored (12-16) I went back to Jerusalem and this guy Ananias came, a guy who observed the law devoutly and was respected by all the Jews and when he said, "Brother Saul, receive your sight!", I could see! God did a miracle and that's why I became a follower of Jesus! Point 4: At first:

d. I sought to work among the Jews (17-20) I thought my greatest service would be in Jerusalem. The Jews knew me. They knew what I was. They could see the change in me. That's what I wanted to do; that's where I thought I would be effective, but God told me they wouldn't listen and (Point 5):

e. God chose to send me to the Gentiles (21) It was God's idea. And the second they heard this, it was blasphemy to their ears and they began to scream and it was the end of the opportunity. But let's not miss:

2. some important lessons found in this text First of all:

a. we can shape our testimony to be understood by our audience Note how colored with Jewishness Paul makes it. He has told his story before and he'll tell it again in chapter 26, but it'll be slightly different, not in the actual facts, but in what he chooses to include or leave out or emphasize. A Greek Diana-worshipper in Ephesus could care less where Paul was brought up or whether he was circumcised or trained by Gamaliel. They just need to hear about a God who's alive and appears to you and that isn't like the stone statue they worship! An abandoned single mom may need to hear about a heavenly Father who loves her while a man who's enjoying his sin may need to hear about a Holy God before whom we must all stand. We can ask God to shape our words so that His Spirit can use them to strike the specific heart of the listener.

b. God does not call us to abandon our culture Paul never stopped being a Jew. Nor did he call on Jews to stop being Jewish, but simply to believe in Jesus. Nor did he call on Greeks to stop being Greek and become Jews, but simply to believe in Jesus. His goal is to send most of us back into our cultures to plant a church that is a true expression of that culture, but that's another story. Third:

c. God may be preparing us for a purpose we cannot imagine We always have it figured out what God ought to do with us, just like Paul did. He thought he was equipped to minister to Jews and God sent him to the ends of the earth where there weren't any. We think God ought to do this or that with us and sometimes He surprises us. When I was 18, I told God the last thing on earth I wanted to ever do was be a pastor. I hated crowds; I hated dressing up. I didn't like talking in front of groups. But a year or so later I was preaching every Sunday. You tell God he made a mistake; it wasn't my idea! Don't limit Him in your life either! Then you'll notice in Acts:

d. the repeated rejection of Jesus by the Jewish people as a nation (22-23) Even after they rejected His Son, God sent His apostles back to them time and again and repeatedly say "No". This is virtually their last chance and again they violently reject. There is nothing left but for God to set them aside as a nation in his plan and go after the Gentiles who are responding. Twelve years later it happened and from AD 70 to 1948 there was not even a homeland for the Jews. As Jesus predicted, *They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.* - Luke 21:24. And so it has been to our own generation. Lastly there's a quick lesson here about:

e. the need to have all the facts before we act (24-29) The commander figures he can beat the truth out of Paul and nearly does, without taking the time to find out that Paul holds Roman citizenship! He himself would have violated Roman law and been liable to severe punishment. So, it pays to get all the facts before you act. Boy, have I learned that lesson over and over again through the years.

So, in the end, God protected Paul again. First, it was through miraculous intervention, then through the Roman soldiers carrying him out of the crowd and now through his own privilege of citizenship. You'll see it a few more times as we continue. And that confidence with which Paul faced danger can still be yours and mine today. The following letter was sent home from Heather Mercer, one of the two Christian workers who were being held by the Taliban in Kabul: *"I have seen more clearly in my time here what an exciting hour this world is in; but equally or more so what a dangerous hour. This helps to keep me sober and thankful... There are times as Paul said to his Corinthian friends that this pressure has been so great we've even sensed the sentence of death within ourselves, but even that is so we trust not in man nor in ourselves, but in Him who raises the dead... We know He is our only hope and deliverance; therefore, we are so grateful to all who call upon Him. Please remember this nation as well. Just like us, they need a miracle as well. We believe for a new day, a glorious day, to dawn for these precious people... Though at times everything in me screams otherwise, we'll soon see the purpose and glory in this mad situation. May it be to glorify our friend and to rebuild this desperate nation."*

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts **The Faith Shared Before Governors - 22:30-24:27**

Jesus made this prediction to His disciples during the last week of His life and interestingly enough, it reads almost like a catalog of Paul's life which certainly fulfills it, *But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.* - Lk. 21:12-15. Paul had already had angry hands laid on him and been run out of town. He'd been castigated in synagogues and locked in prison. But now came the time to stand before governors, before those governing authorities who ruled the land. Jesus said that the purpose of standing before them would be that of a witness to them and that's exactly how Paul saw and understood his situation. As we pick up the story, immediately after his arrest in the Temple in Jerusalem and speaking to the crowd:

I. Paul Stands Before The Sanhedrin (22:30-23:10) The Roman commander decides to assemble the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews the next morning to see whether he can figure out what Paul has done that he is so hated by the Jews. It doesn't start out well, but we can learn a lesson from:

1. Paul's fleshly mistake: responding in anger (22:30-23:5) It's good for us to see this. Even Paul was not perfect. He had flesh and sometimes he responded out of it just like we do. He'd been away for long years and didn't know the current High Priest (who evidently didn't have his robes on that morning). So, when the guy ordered him to be smacked in the mouth, he got mad and called him a "whitewashed wall", a hypocrite! It's pretty natural; there isn't one of us who doesn't make the fleshly mistake of responding in anger sometimes. That doesn't excuse it. When we feel anger rising within us, we need to immediately turn to the Spirit and ask Him to control us so that we respond in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Yet the good part is this: In this outburst, Paul was insulting the ruler of his people which was itself against Scripture, but the moment he realized it, he was convicted and confessed it as sin and asked forgiveness. That's what God is really looking for! That's why I think David was a man after God's own heart; it's not that he was sinless (far from it!), but when a Nathan pointed his sin out to him, he was convicted and confessed it and repented of it immediately. God is looking for the kind of people who are not too proud to confess their sins, little or big! Now it's ironic, but in the same scene as Paul's fleshly mistake, we can see:

2. Paul's divine wisdom: dividing his enemies (23:6-10) It became clear to Paul in that moment that he was not even going to get a chance to speak, much less a fair hearing. And now his blunder had killed any shred of a chance he did have. But at that moment, just as Jesus promised, both wisdom and words were given to him. It occurred to him suddenly, what he had always known, that half of this crowd were Pharisees who already believed in the resurrection and the other half were Sadducees who were basically the liberal modernists of the time and didn't believe in anything supernatural. And he knew how volatile an issue this was to them both, so he simply identified himself as a Pharisee with a firm belief in resurrection and like the Ammonites, Moabites and men of Mt. Seir who came against Israel in Jehoshaphat's day, they fought against one another and killed each other! Divide and conquer! It's a strategy Satan uses against the church all the time! We go out with a common purpose to serve Christ and end up fighting with each other over our pet doctrines and he wins! The enemy is always splitting churches and dividing brethren, usually over nothing worthwhile, and we don't even see who's behind it! But if we could pray for Divine wisdom and power to divide the enemies of the Gospel against each other, instead of them being united in fighting us, how the cause of Christ could go forward!

So, Paul had to be rescued from the Sanhedrin themselves who actually became violent in their disagreement over him! And now we move ahead to look at the next incident where:

II. Paul Is Rescued From His Enemies (23:11-34) First, let's notice:

1. God's comforting decree (11) Jesus himself appeared to Paul once again that night, just as He had at Corinth, to comfort and reassure him and give him courage to go on. And He gave him a decree: "You will testify in Rome. I am sending you to Rome." I'm sure Paul was wondering if this was it, if the end was in sight, if he would end up on a cross outside Jerusalem because of the mob calling for his blood, just like Jesus did. But Jesus was telling him, "No, these enemies will not harm you and no matter what the circumstances may seem to tell you, I'm sending you to Rome. Believe and trust Me!" But now we move from Paul's cell to the chambers of the Jews where:

2. Paul's enemies plot against him (12-15) More than 40 of them hate Paul so much that they are willing to give their own lives to kill him. They are willing to attack the Roman soldiers who guard him and will bring him from the barracks down into the council chambers; they are willing to face the wrath of Rome and die at the point of a spear or on a cross for treason in order to destroy Paul. They take an oath before God that they will neither eat nor drink again until they commit this murder! So, the chief priests and elders are ready to make their deadly request. But in the middle of it:

3. God reveals their plot (16-22) Paul had a young nephew at Jerusalem, whether living there with Paul's sister and family or studying there we don't know. But he loved his uncle and he overheard the formation of the deadly plot and he did the only thing he knew to do: he told Paul. Then he bravely repeated it to Lysias, the Roman commander, and as unlikely as it may seem, through the courage of this young lad:

4. God foils their plot (23-35) The commander takes the threat seriously; he's seen the violence against Paul twice already. So, he decides to send Paul out of town, to write a letter and send him to the next level up, to the Roman governor Festus who lived in Caesarea to the north. And so, that very night 470 soldiers guard Paul safely on his way out of the city and 400 of them walk while he rides! Lysias wasn't taking any chances! But isn't that ironic? First the Romans pull Paul out of the crowd and carry him on their shoulders to safety; now they give him an armed escort. Doesn't God have class!

Well, you can imagine how angry the Jews were in the morning when they found this out! Remember the king of Syria who got so mad when he wanted to destroy Israel back in Elisha's day? Every time he'd try something the Israelites would already know about it and anticipate it and it wouldn't work. And one of his generals told him, *Elisha the prophet tells the King of Israel the words you speak in your bedroom!* God would reveal to Elisha everything and foil the plans of the enemy! Here He did the same thing. The enemy had a deadly plot 40 grown men strong, but God revealed it by through one

courageous young man and foiled their scheme entirely! Let me ask you, whose plan stood? Jesus' plan or man's plot? "You're going to Rome!" or "You're dying today before I eat another bite!" I'm reminded of *Psalm 2, Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.* No man can go against what God has decreed and win! Oh, is there comfort in that! The world can amass all its resources against you to say, "No you're not; you die right here!" but if God says "You're going to Rome", you're going to Rome and nothing on this earth will stop you! Last week I read you a letter from Heather Mercer, one of the eight Christian workers who were held by the Taliban in Afghanistan. She said, "Sometimes like Paul we feel the sentence of death within ourselves, but we trust in God who raises the dead!" When the Taliban abandoned the city of Kabul, they decided to take these prisoners with them and that was disturbing news. We could only imagine they would be used as human shields or be executed as a means of revenge against America. But thousands were praying. Their home church in Texas held a 24 hour a day prayer vigil for weeks. That Wednesday morning at our pastors' prayer meeting we begged God to set them free, even as they were in transit, that He would open the door of their prison like He did for Peter and let them walk out. And then Wednesday night the report came on the news that US Special forces through tips on the ground had extricated them about 2:30 in the morning their time, somewhere in the country outside Kabul and they were free and safe! Hallelujah! If God says you're going to Rome, you're going to Rome and if God says you're going home, you're going home, no matter what your enemies say! Take comfort in that! He's in control! He will complete His purposes for you and you are invincible until He chooses to call you home! Well, as we move into chapter 24, now:

III. Paul Stands Before Governor Felix (Ch. 24) Jesus had said, *You will stand before governors* and here that is fulfilled. Now Felix' title was that of *procurator*; his job was to "procure" funds for the Emperor by whatever means necessary. Tacitus wrote about him, "He reveled in cruelty and lust and wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave." He enticed his wife Drusilla to leave her first husband and marry him and he often employed "daggersmen" to assassinate people for his own purposes. This is the character of the man before whom Paul now stands as the representative of Roman justice! First in this chapter we see:

1. Paul's public trial before Felix Look at:

a. the accusations made against him (1-9) Their fancy lawyer, after buttering up Felix, called Paul in the NIV a "troublemaker", but the Greek says literally "a disease"! A blight, a plague! Everywhere he goes he stirs people up; there are riots! He's a heretic, following a false and illegal religion, a sect, and he's a ringleader of it! And the specific charge is that he tried to desecrate our Holy Temple. Now before you dismiss those as false charges born out of hatred, let me point out that from the point of view of the unbelieving Jews, they're pretty much true. That's how they saw Paul and, believe it or not, that's pretty much how we are seen by many world governments and religious leaders even today! The government of China. The leaders of Muslim countries. The former Soviet countries. We're a spreading plague they've had to contend with. We're an illegal and unrecognized religion trying to win converts. Every place we go there are riots against us by the people or people complain about our influence. They would rather be rid of us! Even in America, I'm sure we are seen in a similar light by some of the more radical groups. We're a trouble-causing problem that needs to be eliminated! So, how on earth do you change that viewpoint? How do you help people who see us that way to see that we want to bring them the life-changing message of Jesus Christ in love? Well, you probably won't do it by making a public defense. In verses 10-21 you have:

b. the defense he presented (10-21) Instead of reading it, let me just sum it up for you. Paul says:

(1) there was no time (10-11) "I only got to Jerusalem 12 days ago. I had no time to raise trouble and start an insurrection."

(2) I made no trouble (12) "I was in the Temple, not arguing or even teaching, just being quiet."

(3) I believe no heresy (13-16) "I hold the same belief these men do that there will be a resurrection of the dead. They call us a sect, but we follow the God of Israel and respect all the Scriptures."

(4) I hold no animosity (17) against my own Jewish people. I had collected an offering which I was bringing back to help the poor in Jerusalem."

(5) there are no witnesses (18-19) "The Jews from Asia who hate me and who started this whole thing by screaming in the Temple aren't even here! These leaders who accuse me weren't even present. Eyewitnesses would tell you I wasn't causing any trouble." So:

(6) there was no crime (20-21) "I've already been tried before the Sanhedrin and even they found no crime in me; unless they want to accuse me of starting a fight between them by saying I believe in the resurrection!"

There really was no case and Felix knew it. But he didn't want to anger the Jews either, so he put off his decision and said he'd wait until the commander, Lysias, comes to tell the Roman version of the story. For the moment Paul was

safe, but nobody was convinced. The only real way to change people's minds and hearts about Christianity is one on one. And in these last verses we see:

2. Paul's personal ministry to Felix (22-27) Now let me point out some things about Felix:

a. he knew the Way He was well-acquainted with Christians and had an accurate understanding. He knew they weren't insurrectionists and rebels. He also:

b. he knew the Jews He was married to one! He had been procurator for a while. He knew how they hated Christians and were jealous. He knew they had no real case. Over a period of 2 years:

c. he heard Paul often He would send for him repeatedly and let Paul talk to him about faith in Christ and about things like righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come. Some of that was out of greed; he hoped for a bribe. But some must have been something of a genuine interest. In fact:

d. he felt conviction He was an immoral man living in lust and adultery. The thought that one day he would stand before God to be judged scared him. He trembled. In his soul he knew it was true, but he wasn't ready to give up his sin so:

e. he put off making a decision Every time Paul started getting to his heart, he'd say "Enough for now..." and put it off. And the next time and the next time and so it went on for two whole years. And that whole time he left Paul sit in jail because he wanted to keep on the good side of the Jews.

Meanwhile he was involved in continual political intrigue and unscrupulous practices like hiring and supporting robbers. When a dispute at last broke out between the Jews and the Greeks at Caesarea, Felix settled it by military retaliation against the Jews and killing them, taking them prisoner or plundering their personal property. A delegation of Jews went to Rome to Nero, the Emperor, to complain and Felix was recalled to Rome and would have suffered severe punishment if his brother hadn't been in high favor with Nero just at that time. We don't know his end but we do know that he heard the truth repeatedly and put off receiving it to his eternal loss. Procrastination is the most serious thing a person can do once they've heard the truth. *David Branon writes: "It's a good thing our local library gives a grace period before it starts charging for overdue books. My family checks out books by the dozen, and sometimes we forget to get them back on time. Recently one of my daughters passed the grace period--by more than three weeks. When I went to pay the fine, I asked if we could get credit for the grace period and pay just for the days after that. I was told, however, that once the grace period has elapsed, the full penalty is due."* Oh listen, that's true spiritual!; once the grace period has elapsed, the full penalty is due. All of us only have so long to decide, so many opportunities to hear. And then either the opportunity goes away or we die or maybe Jesus will return. Either way, when the grace period is over, the full penalty is due! Now is the time; today is the day of salvation. That should move us to fervently pray for the unsaved people in our lives and in the world. But if you're here today and you're a procrastinator, listen, this is your day of grace. You know about the sinfulness of your own life and you know that Jesus died for you and you need to take Him as your Savior, and if you pass it by and think, "I'll come to Jesus later", by the time your heart is touched again, it may be too late! Take a lesson from Felix and receive Him right now!

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The Faith Shared Before A King - Chs. 25-26

You will be brought before kings and governors... - Lk. 21:12-15

We're nearing the end of our trip through Acts; next week will be our last study. As we enter chapter 25, Paul has been sitting in a prison in Caesarea for two whole years, because Felix, the Roman governor at that time, was a corrupt man and would not give him justice. But, as I shared with you, Felix's day in court also came and a new Procurator named Porcius Festus was sent by the Emperor to settle all the problems Felix had left. He appears to have been an honest and fair man, one who was concerned to get all the facts, to rule well and to uphold Roman law.

I. Paul Is Tried Before Governor Festus - Ch. 25 Festus wasted no time; he went right to work to quell the unrest with the Jews, but in the process notice how:

1. God divinely protects Paul again (1-5) Can you believe those guys? Two years have gone by but their hatred of Paul is so strong that the first issue on their docket with the new governor is an urgent request to get Paul back to Jerusalem for trial. And here they are again with a plot to risk their own lives and commit suicide by attacking Roman soldiers in order to kill him before he gets there! Hate is a real tenacious thing and it dies hard. But look how God protected Paul through Festus, who doesn't even realize he's doing it! Instead of doing them a favor, moved by the Spirit, he unwittingly says, "Nope, I'm going to Caesarea in a few days and you go with me there!" And Paul is rescued once again! Solomon wrote, *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.* - Prov 21:1. God is in control; even of the hearts of despots and tyrants, and He can use that divine control to pro-

tect His people! What a comfort that is! But He can also use other things, even things like the legal system of society, as we see in the next section where:

2. Paul directly appeals to Caesar (6-12) Now let's go back to verse 11 and think about two things that are evident here. First, notice:

a. his willingness to accept just punishment "If I am guilty, if I've done anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die." You know, that's not how our flesh works, is it? If I'm guilty, I have a good excuse. If I'm guilty I deserve a break. If I'm guilty I want to use the legal system to get me off anyway or at least to shield me from as many of the consequences as possible. Our flesh would be speeding, get a ticket for it and then go to court hoping the cop wouldn't show up and we'd get out of it, rather than pay the fine and take the points. But when the Spirit of God is in control of your life, he convicts you of sin in such a way that you're willing to admit it and you're willing to accept the just consequences. That's something to think about even in our relationships at home, isn't it! Taking responsibility for our actions. But the other thing to notice here about Paul is:

b. his valid use of the legal system In the Roman system every citizen had the right of appeal if he did not feel he had a fair trial. He could appeal directly to the Emperor for his final decision on the case. In this case, it was Paul's only option. Festus was trying to press him to go back to Jerusalem because he wanted to do something to quiet the Jews, but Paul knew too well what that meant. His only out was to appeal to Caesar and he used that right. And there's nothing wrong with that. When you have a legitimate complaint, when you're falsely accused, and you have rights under the legal system of your country, there's nothing wrong with using them. In fact, through this appeal God was at work doing two things. First, He protected Paul again from the Jews and their plot, but more importantly God had already promised Paul that he was going to Rome and through this appeal he got there (and didn't even have to pay for the trip!). The churches of Kyrgyzstan are working hard to become registered legal entities in their country so that they can have legal rights and protections. There is a society of Christian lawyers that is forming all across Central Asia from Turkey to China whose goal is that very thing, to obtain for the emerging churches the rights and protections of their society under law. Now, Festus has no choice but to send Paul to Rome, yet he is faced with a genuine dilemma; there are no clearly definable violations of Roman law to charge him with! So

3. Festus deliberately appeals to King Agrippa (13-27) Now let me explain the family tree a little bit. This is King Herod Agrippa II. His dad was Herod Agrippa I, you know, the really proud guy we met back in chapter 12 who was eaten by worms and died! And his grandfather was King Herod who tried to snooker the wise men and ended up killing all the infants in Bethlehem. Great heritage! He ruled the area northeast of Palestine for Rome, though he was a practicing Jew and, because he had a friendship with the Imperial court, he had obtained the privilege of appointing the actual High Priest in Jerusalem. So, when Festus arrived as the new procurator on the block, King Agrippa came to visit him along with his sister Bernice, with whom he was living incestuously. And Festus decided to ask his advice about this Paul problem. There are two lessons in this part of the story. The first is:

a. a lesson about seeking counsel (13-22) Festus was a Roman; he knew nothing about the Jews and even less of Christians. He could see no crime, just a petty religious quarrel, yet the Jews are demanding the death penalty and Paul is appealing to the Emperor and he has no charge to write. So, to his credit, he was willing to admit his own ignorance, to say "I am at a loss...", to admit "I don't understand, I don't know what to do". And then to ask somebody for counsel and advice. That's such a healthy thing, but sometimes so hard for us. We'll keep on driving for hours before we'll stop and ask for directions just to prove to the wife we're not lost. We'll struggle for an hour over the math problem rather than call someone and admit we can't get it and ask for help. Or more seriously, we'll press boldly on with our life falling down in shambles all around us, insisting, "I'm fine, I know what I'm doing." Rather than admit that we're at a loss and need help and invite someone with wisdom and experience into our lives to help us. Now, I wouldn't have picked Herod for an advisor, but that's not the point of this story. He did turn out to give Festus good advice in the end and Festus actually had a whole group of advisors to help him. But as we continue there is:

b. a lesson about true greatness (23-27) Agrippa and Bernice entered with great pomp and circumstance. They were famous, well-known. They had a position of greatness in their day. He was called King. Men bowed down and called him, "Your highness, your excellency, your majesty..." But 2000 years later who remembers them? Who were they? What did they do? It seems ironic to me that today, their prisoner in chains, the Apostle Paul, is known, respected and read by more than 2 billion people in the world, while they are only known as two insignificant people who happened to cross his path for an hour on this particular day and through that coincidence got their names recorded in Scripture. Didn't Jesus say that many who are first shall be last and the last first? There are lots of people who aspire to be somebody, who want the applause, the spotlight, the clothes, the fame, the power. But it's all fleeting. Even in the church there are those like Diotrefes in 3 John who love to be first, who love to have the preeminence, who love to be seen and heard and to have power and control. But Jesus said, *... You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to*

give his life as a ransom for many." - Mark 10:42-45. In almost every one of his letters, Paul called himself a slave, a servant and many times a prisoner. Yet his spiritual legacy touched the world. So will ours if we follow his example.

Now, as we move into chapter 26, the prediction of Jesus comes true, probably for the first time but not the last, *But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.* - Luke 21:12-15. In this chapter:

II. Paul Shares His Faith With King Agrippa - Ch. 26 Instead of defending himself, he witnesses to a king and it's evident that the Spirit of God gave him the words to say. But before we look at them, let's extract from Paul's testimony:

1. the purpose for which we are sent (16-18) These are key words. They are Paul's commission from Jesus and they are also our commission, as they are another reflection of the Great Commission. And Don Richardson points out that they contain an important progression that goes something like this: *eye-opener → darkness to light → power of Satan to God → forgiveness and faith*. In order to be saved, people first need to have their eyes opened. They need to see and understand the reality of their separation from God. Only then will they have a desire to change their behavior from deeds of darkness to light. When they do, they'll discover they need to be set free from the power of Satan and belong to God. And eventually they will come to experience forgiveness and the holiness that comes only by trusting in Christ. So many times, we come to people to get them to change their behavior when what they need first is light; they need to see the difference; they need an eye-opener. And in most cases that eye-opener is YOU, your life, your words, your presence in their lives. YOU are what opens their eyes as you share your faith with them! That's our calling! And that's what Paul is doing with King Agrippa as he stands before him. And since we've seen his testimony twice before in Acts, this time let's examine it as:

2. an outline for sharing our faith: Everybody always wants to know, "What would I say?" Start where Paul did. Talk about:

SELF - what I have experienced (4-21) The most natural way to talk to anyone about anything important is to tell the story of what happened to you. Paul didn't launch into a discussion of theology or a treatise on the nature of God and who Jesus was. He simply told what happened to him and so can you. Think of it in three categories:

BC - life before Christ came in Tell what your life was like without Jesus. If you were saved very young, you don't have much to say about this part; you pretty much start with the next one. Anyway, you can:

- **share the positive (4-8)** "I was a Pharisee, an extremely religious man. I believed in the resurrection of the dead." Maybe you were a nice person, a churchgoer, a religious person but without Jesus. You can share that. You can also:

- **share the negative (9-11)** "I was wicked; I persecuted and imprisoned people; I voted for their deaths." Maybe you were not so nice. Maybe you were a drug-dealer, a thief, an adulterer and Jesus changed you. You can share that. But after BC comes:

DC - how I discovered Christ (12-15) Now, it's not real likely that the story of how you discovered Christ is quite as dramatic as Paul's story. Nevertheless, do:

- **include the details: they make it real** Paul tells what road he was on, what time, the circumstances, and so on. These are the things that make it real to the person. I was in a class, in church, this is what was said, what I prayed, etc. But in sharing the details:

- **remember the point: emphasize Christ** It is not the details that the person really needs to know. Some are saved in a church service, others at home watching a crusade on TV, others on the street. What's important is that I came to see that I'm a sinner, lost before the presence of a holy God, that I came to understand how Jesus died for my sins and that He is alive right now. And I placed my complete trust in Him and invited Him into my life. You may not get to share beyond this, so it's important to share the Gospel in the process of telling your story. But then move from BC and DC to:

AC - life after Christ came in (19-22a) Tell what life is like or has been like now that you have Christ and:

- **emphasize the difference** There is one. Almost every Kyrgyz I've heard share their testimony says the same thing. "Before I knew Jesus I was scared; I had no peace in my heart. But since I know Jesus, I am not afraid; I have peace." Tell what's different about your life and:

- **share what He means to you now** Tell how you walk with Jesus, how He comforts you, how He encourages you. Here's where you who were saved as children can really shine. Tell how He answers prayer, how He has brought you through this crisis or that problem.

But when you're done telling about your SELF, do what Paul did and move to:

SCRIPTURE - what God's Word says (22-23) This is important. It is the Word of God that is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword and pierces the heart. It speaks with the authority of God and He honors His Word. Share from it about the death of Christ, how all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God but how God showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Share how Christ rose from the dead and that He is alive right now and willing to save those who will come to Him. Now, you might get interrupted, but if the person is still with you after you share about SELF and share the SCRIPTURE, then do what Paul did and make a:

SUGGESTION - what the hearer needs to do (24-32) What did Paul do? He was bold. He shared the message and then:

- **extended the invitation** "Do you believe the prophets?" For us it is, "Would you like to receive Christ even now? Most people come to Christ because somebody invites them to, somebody asks them the question, somebody encourages them to take the step. But whether they say "yes" or they respond sarcastically like Agrippa did, that's not your problem. In the end you:

- **leave the results with God** It is He who draws people to faith, He who works in the heart and it might be now or next week or next year or never. We are simply called to be witnesses, those who've experienced Christ and share what we've seen and heard.

Paul was sent this day to be the eye-opener for a King. You and I have been sent to be eye-openers for people we meet in life every day. And you never know how God will use what we share. *One author tells this story: "In 1967 while taking a class in photography at the University of Cincinnati, I became acquainted with a young man named Charles Murray who also was a student at the school and training for the summer Olympics of 1968 as a high diver. Charles was very patient with me as I would speak to him for hours about Jesus Christ and how He had saved me. Charles was not raised in a home that attended any kind of church, so all that I had to tell him was a fascination to him. He even began to ask questions about forgiveness of sin. Finally, the day came that I put a question to him. I asked if he realized his own need of a Redeemer and if he was ready to trust Christ as his own Savior. I saw his countenance fall and the guilt in his face. But his reply was a strong "no." In the days that followed he was quiet and often I felt that he was avoiding me, until I got a phone call and it was Charles. He wanted to know where to look in the New Testament for some verses that I had given him about salvation. I gave him the reference to several passages and asked if I could meet with him. He declined my offer and thanked me for the scripture. I could tell that he was greatly troubled, but I did not know where he was or how to help him. Because he was training for the Olympic games, Charles had special privileges at the University pool facilities. Sometime between 10:30 and 11:00 that evening he decided to go swim and practice a few dives. It was a clear night in October and the moon was big and bright. The University pool was housed under a ceiling of glass panes so the moon shone bright across the top of the wall in the pool area. Charles climbed to the highest platform to take his first dive. At that moment the Spirit of God began to convict him of his sins. All the scripture he had read, all the occasions of witnessing to him about Christ flooded his mind. He stood on the platform backwards to make his dive, spread his arms to gather his balance, looked up to the wall and saw his own shadow caused by the light of the moon. It was the shape of a cross. He could bear the burden of his sin no longer. His heart broke and he sat down on the platform and asked God to forgive him and save him. He trusted Jesus Christ twenty some feet in the air. Suddenly, the lights in the pool area came on. The attendant had come in to check the pool. As Charles looked down from his platform, he saw an empty pool which had been drained for repairs. He had almost plummeted to his death, but the cross had stopped him from disaster."* You never know how God will use what you share. I know it feels scary and awkward. You may be worried that you don't know what to say. This little outline may help, but at the bottom line remember Jesus' promise, *Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* All we need to do is share what we're given.

"I Will Build My Church" - The Book Of Acts

The Gospel Goes To Rome - Chs. 27-28

With this message we come to the close of this first chapter in the story of how Jesus is building His church in the world that we call the Book of Acts. It has been an exciting story. We've seen the church grow from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, to Caesarea and Antioch, spread throughout Asia Minor then over into Macedonia and Greece. We've followed Paul through three wearying missionary journeys and then through his arrest and imprisonment for two years at Caesarea. And now the story closes with an exciting ending as the Gospel, in the person of Paul, goes all the way to Rome, the capital of the world. We pick up the story in Acts 27 where we have the account of:

I. The Hazardous Journey - Ch. 27 Here was:

- 1. the plan (1-12)** There were no transport companies, so Julius, the Centurion who was in charge of Paul, had to find passage on trading ships. He caught a ship in the harbor sailing north along the coast to Asia Minor. In those days nobody sailed across the open Mediterranean directly; ships hugged the shoreline. They stopped at **Sidon** overnight,

then were forced by the wind around the lee side of **Cyprus** because they were sailing against the prevailing winds and having trouble making headway. They landed at **Myra** where they switched to an Egyptian grain ship bound for Italy. They were forced by the winds over to the large island of **Crete** and started around the south side, but they were really having trouble sailing against the wind and finally made it to a place called **Fair Havens**. Sailing in those days in this region was seasonal; it was not done in winter because the prevailing winds and storms were wrong. So, ships would spend the winter safe in harbors and wait until spring to move on and that's what Paul wanted to do, but the majority wanted to go on further to **Phoenix** and winter there. That was the plan, but they didn't know about:

2. the storm (13-26) Now, before we continue, let's not pass over a worthwhile:

a. a lesson about trusting appearances (13) They *thought* they got what they wanted, but as the cliché says, appearances can be deceiving! And they often are! There are a lot of things that look fair and sunny with a gentle wind blowing in the right direction to give you what you want and you can be greatly tempted to ignore that warning voice of God that says, "Don't sail that way!" God's "Fair Haven" isn't good enough for us; it doesn't suit us because we want more. Our flesh wants to bask under the "palm trees" of Phoenix down the coast. God's "don't sail there" warnings include a lot of things like not dating or marrying a person who doesn't know Christ, like not having sexual relations with someone you're not married to, like not leaving your spouse to go seek another one, like not using drugs or alcohol to get high, and a thousand other things that have to do with honesty and integrity and morality. God says, "Don't sail there; it's dangerous water!" But the devil arranges the appearances to be so appealing and inviting that you do like the centurion and give more credence to the voices urging you on than to the voice of God warning you. And before you know it, the storm hits and you're in a pile of trouble bigger than you can get out of and you wish you'd listened. Just remember not to trust in appearances! eLT's read on. Now there's:

b. a lesson about trusting God's presence (16-23) They were in a terrible position. Everyone else had lost hope that they would be saved. They were so far out to sea and there were no rescue planes or vessels. It seemed so certain that everyone would be lost. However, in that night of despair in a place that seemed so far away from everything, God was right there with Paul. He sent an angel to appear to him to comfort him. When he was in jail back in Jerusalem after the riot, at his lowest, thinking he was going to die, Jesus appeared to him; He was there. No matter how low your circumstances, how dark the night of your soul, how alone and forsaken you feel, how hopeless everything seems, Jesus is right there with you. He has promised, *I will never leave you nor forsake you!* You can trust that His presence is with you. Now here's another:

c. a lesson about trusting God's promises (24-25) Paul says, "I believe it will happen just as God told me! I have faith that God keeps His promises!" Way back in Jerusalem two years earlier, Jesus had told Paul (23:11) "You will testify in Rome!" Now the circumstances were shouting loudly, "You'll never get to Rome; you'll die in this ocean!" But God's promise still stood and Paul believed it, and when you read the end, you see he was right! Some of us may be in the middle of one of those storms of life, one of those hurricanes that has blown you far away from all security and safety and into a place of hopelessness and despair. Your marriage has fallen apart, your spouse has deserted you, your son or daughter has broken your heart, you're a single mom with a handful of kids gasping to keep your head above the surface, you're in financial ruin and about to lose it all, you've lost your job, you are in that life and death battle with cancer. And wherever you are, the storm is shouting, "You're not going to survive this; you're going to die right here." But you have a decision to make. You can give in to the voice of the circumstances, or like Paul you can stubbornly believe that God's word is true, that He is with you, that He is in control, that every promise He has made will come true, that He will never leave you nor forsake you, that He will give you His strength, that He will work even this thing together for good and if He chooses to take you home through it, you will be seated with Him and reign with Him in His kingdom! Wherever you can find a promise of God in His Word that is meant for you, count on it! Rest in it! Let God be true and every storm a liar! Well, getting back to the story, now comes:

3. the shipwreck (27-44) Now there is:

a. a lesson about facing adversity (33-36) Everybody else had been in a constant state of fear, stress and anxiety for two solid weeks. They hadn't eaten hardly anything; they hadn't slept much. They were consumed with their situation. That's how a lot of people face difficult circumstances. They worry; they fret; they fume; they whine. They can't eat or sleep; they're a nervous wreck, living in fear and anxiety. But in those same circumstances Paul was calm and confident. His faith overcame the fear. He took bread and ate it to keep up his strength. He even stopped to give thanks first, to have an attitude of thanksgiving in the midst of adversity. What a testimony he was to these others and what a testimony you can be for Jesus to the people around you, if you will cast all your anxieties and care upon Jesus and face the adversity in your life with that calm confidence, that peace of God that passes all understanding. But back to the story. Read 39-44. Wow, what:

b. a lesson about God's sovereign power (44) 276 people on board. The ocean so violent that it breaks the ship apart. Many couldn't swim. But every last one of them reached land in safety as God had declared they would. Not

one of them was injured! God is well able to do what He promises! What a mighty God we serve! And now we come to the story of:

II. The Maltese Winter - 28:1-10 Here's what had happened to them. That strong wind out of the northeast drove them west 600 miles across open ocean, but also swirled them back slightly to the north. If it hadn't, they would likely have run aground in North Africa, however, in God's providence they ran into an island called Malta, the last speck of land off the tip of Sicily and the Italian peninsula where they were headed. There they *will* spend the winter. Two noteworthy events are recorded for us by Luke. First:

1. the miraculous snakebite (1-6) These people are dyed-in-the-wool idolaters. They're steeped in it. Paul gets bit by a snake and they think the god *justice* has marked him for death. The next minute when he doesn't die, they think he is himself a god. Luke doesn't give Paul's reply, but you can bet they got a sermon about turning away from worthless gods to the true and living God who can deliver from the power of the ocean and also from the power of the poison! Then over the next 3 months Luke records:

2. the ministry of healing (7-10) The leading man of the island took them in and Paul prayed and healed his father of fever and dysentery in the name of Jesus. Soon, all the sick on the island are coming to find healing. It was just like Jesus had predicted in **Mark 16:18** *...they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.*" and in verse 20 Mark comments, *Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.* That's exactly what He was doing here, confirming the truth of what Paul had to say to these superstitious idolatrous minds by demonstrations of undeniable power. And He's still doing it today. *Recently in Mahdya Pradesh in India there was a widow who worshipped her idols faithfully. One night she had a dream in which one of the idols spoke to her and said, "In a few days a man with a book will come and turn your faith away. It would be better for you to move somewhere else, so we can remain together forever." But she didn't and as predicted, the visitor came--a Christian evangelist and when she heard the good news of God's love and salvation in Jesus Christ, she turned her back on her idols. In a remote village in southwest China a middle-aged woman had suffered from demonic oppression for years. Various cures and solutions had been tried and all had failed. But when a group of Christians from a nearby village visited, they offered to pray for the woman. As they gathered around her and called out to God for healing, her countenance and behavior changed dramatically and she was set free. Now one year later 70 believers are worshipping God and sharing the good news in that area!* [Advance - 12/01] In the "Malts" of the earth, in those places where the spiritual darkness is the deepest, in the remotest and most idolatrous places, God is powerfully at work confirming His word and the church is being built in wonderful new ways and we have the privilege of being alive in these days to be part of it!

Anyway, by March or so, the long Maltese winter was over and the story moves on to tell about:

III. The Ministry At Rome - 28:11-30 First, there's a description of the last lap of:

1. Paul's final journey to Rome (11-16) Now note how good God was to Paul in this. First note:

a. his spiritual encouragement (15) I'm sure Paul was wondering how he would fare in this pagan city filled with vice, greed, corruption and idolatry. His destiny would be in the hands of a ruler who was growing more mad each year. But some 40 miles out, there was a welcoming committee of believers who came out to meet him and escort him in, men he'd never met but had only written to, yet men who loved him and hailed him as a spiritual father and conqueror. He was led into Rome in sort of a little victory parade, the way returning generals were greeted. And it greatly encouraged his heart. Isn't God good? And then we read of:

b. his special treatment (16) How unusual is that. Everyone else went to prison but Paul was allowed to rent a house and live there under guard, making his own living sewing tents and free to have people in, to preach, teach, and write. What gracious treatment God arranged for him, no doubt born out of four months of relationship with the centurion who had guarded him on the journey! And it is here in this house that we read of:

2. Paul's final encounter with the Jews (17-29) The first thing Paul does is what he did everywhere. He couldn't go to the synagogue, so he called the leaders of the Jews together, so that he might speak to the Jew first. But this session seems to be more than just an incident; in its position in the Book of Acts, it's almost like God's last offer to the Jewish nation. God has sent Paul to them everywhere from Jerusalem through Asia Minor and Macedonia and everywhere their response has been to reject him. Now here it is one last time, all the way over in Rome, the capital of the world. And look at:

a. their opportunity to hear (17-22) These Jews were a clean slate. They hadn't been tainted against Paul by letters or visitors. They were curious. They had every opportunity to hear without hindrance and so comes:

b. their offer of grace (23) For a whole day Paul reasoned and explained and pleaded with them from the Scriptures to believe. Here is the last remaining major group of Jewish leaders in the world, the Jews of Rome. It's like God was reaching down one last time to give the Jews the opportunity to receive their Messiah before their nation was destroyed. But look at:

c. their obstinacy that continues to this day (24-29) Isaiah was told in his day that Israel would hear and hear but not understand, because they didn't want to, because they had deliberately closed their eyes and their hearts. It was true then, it was true in Paul's day and it continues to be true today. A couple of the churches in Abington had a joint Thanksgiving time in a local synagogue and the leaders were offended that the name of Jesus was simply mentioned four times during the service, by Christians! In Romans 11 Paul writes that there is a blindness, a hardening that has happened to Israel and it will continue all through this age until the full number the Gentiles has come in, that is, until some from every tribe, tongue and nation have heard and believed. And even though a small remnant of Jews are being saved, the primary work of God in this age is reaching the nations. How sad their refusal, but as we conclude the book we read of:

3. Paul's fruitful incarceration at Rome (30-31) For two years Paul continued:

a. his personal ministry and it was fruitful! He wrote, *Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.* - Phil. 1:12-13. His own guards came to Christ and he mentions that some of Caesar's household were won to the faith in 4:22. From there he directed the ministry of others like Luke, Mark, Timothy, Aristarchus, and one of his converts was a runaway slave named Onesimus whom we read about. From there he labored in prayer daily for all the churches. It was a fruitful time and not only that, but from there Paul wrote:

b. his prison epistles, some of the greatest and deepest letters in the New Testament. Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon all came to us out of this time. Oh friends, God doesn't waste anything. When you're laid aside or facing adversity and frustrated that you can't do the things of ministry you'd like, just look up! God has a work for you in that prison, in that hospital, in that bed, in that room at home. It may be the work of prayer, of encouragement, of witness, of writing, but there is a work even from where you are that He has for you, if your heart is open.

As for Paul, tradition says (and Scripture seems to support it) that he was released after his first trial and traveled in ministry once again for at least a year through Macedonia, Achaia and Asia, and maybe even on to Spain as he originally hoped. He wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. But eventually he was arrested again, and this time imprisoned for real at Rome, just as Nero began his famous hatred and persecution of Christians. From his cell he wrote 2 Timothy, where he indicates that the time of his departure was at hand. At length, tradition says, he was beheaded and died a martyr for the cause of Christ. But Luke ends his story without telling any of this, because that isn't his purpose. He has chronicled the story of the building of the church of Jesus Christ from Day 1 with a handful of believers in Jerusalem until a brief 30 years later when it had filled the Roman world and there was virtually nowhere in the Roman Empire that had not had a church planted or heard the Gospel or at least heard of it! But the story did not stop there. Through 2000 years Christ has continued to build His church through faithful men and women like these we've read about. By 1974 half of the population of the earth was at least within reach of the church and had the opportunity to hear the Gospel. And now at the end of the second millennium after Christ (even though the world has mushroomed to 7 billion people) ONLY 1/3 of the earth still has no opportunity to hear and the gap is closing fast. There are thousands of Apostle Pauls out there in the farthest reaches of the earth and their adventures are no less exciting and dangerous. Several hundred thousand people every day hear the Gospel, and more than a hundred thousand of them are being saved. Hundreds of churches are being planted weekly. The final chapters of the story of Acts are being written in our lifetime and through our praying and our giving and our sending out workers and our going, we are a vital part of finishing the task. And one day soon when every people, tribe, tongue and nation has finally heard the Good News, the story of the Acts of God will be finished and Jesus Christ will return to take His church home and set up His Kingdom. And then those from the first century will come to us and say, "Is it true? Is it true that you lived during the time when God was doing His greatest work? Tell us, what was it like?" And we'll all sit down together at the table and tell our stories of His great work forever.

ACTS: BIBLE SCHOOL COURSE

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

I. The Importance of the book of Acts to us

1. It is the only accurate historical record of the early church It is like having the missing link in a story; without it we'd know about the death and resurrection of Christ and His ascension, but then skip to seeing a full-blown church all over the world with no idea how it got there!

2. It is a historical background for the Epistles They are loaded with references to people coming and going and doing things. Without Acts, many of those verses and even the dating or occasion of Epistles would be unintelligible. So, it's important to read the Epistles in light of Acts; it is a foundational study to them like Kings and Chronicles are to the Old Testament prophetic books.

3. It is the account of the transition from Israel to the Church Think dispensationally for a moment; ever since the time of Abraham, God had been dealing with one people, Israel! In the Epistles it is clear that Israel is now set aside; her law and sacrificial system are now declared to be obsolete, not binding on Christians. Instead, God is dealing with Gentiles all over the world. What a change! Now that transition was not instantaneous, as we might like to think, but took many years and Acts tells us how God brought it about. And that brings up an important fact: **Acts is the story of a transitional period.** God did some special things then that were given to make the transition but were not necessarily intended to be normal for the church in all ages! Here are practical applications:

- **we don't have to interpret Acts in light of today** For example, God no longer gives the Spirit by laying on of hands like He did in Acts 8. That was special, part of a special transition for a purpose. We don't have to sit and figure out why God doesn't do that now!

- **we don't have to "get back to the way things were in the early church"** So many folks want to be "New Testament Churches", by which they mean various things from having miracle healings in every service, to the way they set up their church officers with no single pastor but a plurality of elders. We don't have to imitate everything we see in Acts; God is always busy developing new methods and means. However:

4. It provides for us a tremendous example and challenge The most challenging verse is 17:6. Even pagans recognized the fact. God took a small group of committed Christians and in 30 years planted churches all over the Roman world. It contains the great example of sacrifice, courage, obedience, and faith found in early believers. We do well to imitate them!

II. Facts Concerning the Writing of the Book

1. Author: Luke Compare 1:1-2 with Lk. 1:1-4; they are addressed to the same person, Theophilus (which means God-lover), a Christian friend, but by its meaning, to us!

2. Purpose for writing - Lk. 1:1-4 His purpose was to write an accurate, orderly, historical account as a permanent record. Many accounts were being shared orally, but Luke wanted to provide a sure and certain record of the things so important to the faith. Compare Acts 1:1-2. Luke is the record of what Jesus *began* to do and teach on earth until His ascension. Acts is the sequel to Luke and is the story of how the Holy Spirit continued the work of Christ in building the church.

3. Method of writing - Lk. 1:2 Luke used sources. That sounds anti-scriptural but inspiration has to do with the recording of Scripture, not the source of the material. The final written document was the direct product of the Holy Spirit, but He gave Scripture writers information by sources such as:

a. personal experience Luke was personally involved in some of the things he reports. He uses the pronoun *we*.

b. Paul, who was his traveling companion

c. other eye-witnesses like James and Peter whom he met in Acts 21

d. personal research Luke was evidently in Palestine during Paul's two year imprisonment, so he had ample opportunity to meet many of first Christians and gather information.

4. Date of writing: circa 60-62 AD There is no mention of Nero's persecution which began in AD 64 in Rome, nor of Paul's death. The Temple is still standing, so it is before AD 70.

III. Outlines of the Book

Biographic:

- Chs. 1-12 Peter's ministry
- Chs. 13-28 Paul's ministry

Geographic: based on 1:8

- Chs. 1-7 Jerusalem
- Chs. 8-12 Judea/Samaria
- Chs. 13-28 Uttermost parts of the earth

Dispensational:

- Ch. 1 Introduction
- Chs. 2-7 Rejection - by the Jews
- Chs. 8-12 Transition - from Jews to Gentiles
- Chs. 13-28 Expansion - to the Gentiles

CHAPTER ONE

Chapter Outline:

- I. Post-resurrection Ministry 1-8
- II. The Ascension 9-11
- III. A Decision 12-26

I. Christ's Post-Resurrection Ministry - 1-8 It lasted 40 days. Only Luke lays it out for us in any detailed fashion.

1. Christ had chosen apostles (2) Compare Mark 3:14. He had two purposes, that they would be with Him and that He would send them forth. He prepared them during His ministry on earth and then they continued His work when He left, but He still had a few things to do with them by way of preparation for their role.

2. He convinced them of His resurrection (3) During those 40 days He showed them infallible proofs; they had to be absolutely convinced. This became basis for their message, "*This Jesus hath God raised up!*" Compare 1 Jn. 1:1-2.

3. He taught them about the Kingdom (3) Compare Lk. 24:44-47. He gave them a concentrated Bible course on the Old Testament with two emphases. First, He showed them the prophecies concerning Himself and how they were fulfilled. That explains how the apostles in all their speeches quoted specific Old Testament passages and applied them authoritatively to Christ. Second, He explained the prophecies concerning the Kingdom (by which He meant the Millennium and His return to establish it, not the Rapture). Thus, verses 6-7, their last question, is a natural outgrowth.

4. He gave instructions (4) For the short term He said, "Stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit." For the long term He commanded them to carry out the preaching of His message to the whole world, similar to the commands in Mt. 28:18-20 and Mk. 16:15.

5. He clarified the timing of the coming of the Spirit (5) The promise had been given earlier, particularly in the Upper Room in Jn. 13-16. But He refers back to Mt. 3:11 where John gives the promise and says it is about to come true. The word *baptize* means *to identify with* here. That is, the sign of being a follower of John was water baptism; the sign of being a follower of Christ is the personal presence of the Holy Spirit. Compare 1 Cor. 12:13. The disciples associated the Spirit with the coming of the Kingdom because of Old Testament prophecies like Joel 2. Jesus clarifies that the Spirit is going to come now, but the Kingdom will come later and gives a basic principle in verses 7-8. It is not given to the church to know either the duration of the age or the date of its ending; that was reserved to Father's authority. They would get power (*dunamis*) to be witnesses to the world. Note, the Great Commission is both a command and a compulsion; it is commanded in Matthew and Mark; here it is a compulsion of the Holy Spirit.

II. The Ascension - 9-11

1. it certified His leaving He didn't just disappear as on earlier occasions. He made clear to the disciples that He was gone for good. They might expect Him to reappear otherwise. Now see the meaning of verse 1: He began, He left, we continue! The church is His physical replacement in the world, His body!

2. it clarified His return It demonstrated that it would be the same Jesus in the same literal resurrection body literally coming down from clouds, just as He went up, so no one would try to change the meaning of His words.

3. it gives us a slow-motion picture of the Rapture - 1 Thes. 4:17

III. A Decision - 15-26 They followed His instructions and remained in Jerusalem, using the Upper Room as meeting place and prayer chamber, praying for the Holy Spirit to come for 10 days. During this time, it dawned on them that there are only 11 apostles now and they decided to elect a successor for Judas.

1. what happened to him (18-19) This seems to contradict Mt. 27:5 which says, *he hanged himself*. Evidently, in hanging himself, either the rope broke or after a few days of hanging there his body burst open. The site was the very field purchased by the priests with the blood money Judas had returned and it came to be known as "*the field of blood*" for both reasons.

2. their reasoning

- **David prophesied that Judas should be replaced (16)**, that his position should be taken by another

- **He was numbered with them (17)** Compare Mt. 19:28. This is a literal promise that the Apostles would sit on 12 thrones during the Millennial Kingdom and judge the 12 tribes of Israel. But now that promise of 12 can't be fulfilled with him gone.

- **it is necessary to appoint one to replace him (22)**

3. their method (26)

- **they located by themselves the two best-qualified men and then left it up to the Lord by casting lots** They probably put their names on two stones in a jar and dumped them out. Note:

- **these are Jewish people; this had always been God's method for them** They even had Scripture on it - Prov. 16:33

- **it was done after the best human efforts, between two equal choices, and with much prayer** The Holy Spirit hadn't come yet; after He does, they don't use this method anymore. Rather they let the Holy Spirit guide them. Compare 13:1-2 where He selects qualified men for them. There are no more fleeces or lots.

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH - Chapter 2

Chapter Outline

I. The New Dispensation	1-13
II. The Great Sermon	14-40
III. The First Church	41-47

I. The New Dispensation - 1-13

1. the events that happened

a. the day: Pentecost (1) It was the day of the Old Testament Feast of Weeks which occurred 50 days after Passover. This indicates that the coming of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise just like Christ's death and resurrection were foreshadowed in the Feasts of Passover and Firstfruits. Also, this was the very day that God gave Israel the Law. So, the day of Law is over; God has given a new law, the law of Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, a law written on the fleshy tablets of the heart.

b. the sound of wind (2) It was not an actual wind but a sound, loud and overpowering like that of a tornado or hurricane, yet they felt nothing. Why?

- **Jesus symbolized Spirit by wind - Jn. 3:8** The reason is that in Hebrew *ruach* can mean *wind* or *breath* or *Spirit*; the same is true of the Greek word *pnoe*. The Lord used a symbol they would recognize to convey the meaning of what was happening.

- **at creation God breathed into man the ruach of life - Gen. 2:7** and man became living soul. The same Greek word (*enphuseo* which is used in the Septuagint and means *to infuse*) is used in:

- **Jesus breathed on them and linked it with coming of the Holy Spirit - Jn. 20:22** Jesus is symbolically preparing them to understand that He would breathe on them the Holy Spirit and they would have spiritual life. At Pentecost Jesus was breathing the Holy Spirit of life into His church. Note: The Spirit did not actually come in Jn. 20:22. Acts 1:4 says, *wait for the promise*, 1:5 says the baptizing with the Holy Spirit would still be a few days in the future, and 1:8 uses the phrase, *after the Holy Spirit is come upon you*" indicating that it hadn't happened yet. This was a prophetic symbolic act, much like Ezekiel digging through the wall (Ez. 12:1-12) or Jere-

miah hiding his belt at Euphrates. The thing was counted as settled and done because it was imminent and certain; thus, Jesus' strong language, *Receive the Holy Spirit....*

c. the sight of fire (3) It was not actual fire, but the appearance of it. God often appeared in the Old Testament in fire (the burning bush, the pillar of fire). Fire would symbolize for these Jews the presence of God. From the language, it seems that it was a great mass of fire and then divided (was cloven) into individual small units called tongues. This is the Greek word for the actual tongue; human-tongue-shaped units then came to rest on each person, probably on their mouths! The symbols say this is the fulfillment of 1:8; God the Holy Spirit is now going to indwell each believer and be with their mouth so they can be His witnesses.

c. the baptism/filling of the Holy Spirit (4) The term *baptism of the Holy Spirit* is found only twice. It is used by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:11) and by Jesus (Acts 1:5). Both times it is a reference to a specific time event that is still future. Jesus equated the *coming* of the Spirit (verse 4) with the *baptism* (verse 5). This happened once for Jews here, once for the Samaritans (8:14-17) and once for the Gentiles (10:44-46). We now have a new promise, that we individually receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when we believe (2:38). There is no scriptural foundation for the modern use of the phrase *baptized in the Holy Spirit*, unless it refers to 1 Cor. 12:13 which says that to be baptized by the Holy Spirit is to be placed by Spirit into the body of Christ through His indwelling presence. That's what happened at the end of 2:3; in 2:4 they were literally *filled of the Spirit*. The best translation is not *with* but *by*. The Holy Spirit is a person like Christ, not a vapor that comes in quantities. In verse 3 He came into them; in verse 4 He controlled them, that is, He took over control of them. This is a statement repeated throughout Acts, sometimes of the same disciples. Therefore, it was not a once and done thing. The Holy Spirit baptized them once, but He filled them often, and I would say daily, not just on the occasions mentioned!!

d. the speaking in tongues (4-6) The result of the Spirit's control was speaking in other recognizable languages. The word in verses 6 and 8 is *dialect*; they spoke properly! Obviously, this was to provide a testimony to all those Jews who were gathered for the feast. Their subject was praise (11) but the term *wonderful works* may easily refer to the death and resurrection of Christ. The purpose of tongues is mentioned in Mk. 16:17; it was a sign, a mark of the power and authority of God. Compare:

- **Heb. 2:3-4 - God used signs to confirm the words of the Apostles**, that is, to convince the Jews that their message was true.

- **1 Cor. 1:22 - The Jews require a sign** Gentiles you can convince with logic, but Jews have a history of God doing signs and miracles to prove Himself. They asked Jesus for a sign to prove Himself! There are only three occasions of speaking in tongues in Acts and all were for Jews. Never in Acts do you find tongues as a personal gift to be sought; even Paul in 1 Cor. 14 said that tongues are for a sign to unbelievers!

2. the significance of the events: the church was instituted The Holy Spirit created a new organism, the body of Christ, the Church (compare 1 Cor. 12:13 which says it is the Holy Spirit who knits believers into the One body, with Col. 1:18, 24, which says that His body is the Church). So, the Church did not exist before Pentecost. It was a mystery (a sacred secret) that was hidden from previous ages and generations (Col. 1:24-27). Jesus announced and predicted it in Mt. 16:18, and now He brought it into being, a single body made up of Jew and Gentile alike who believe on Him. It is totally distinct from Israel (1 Cor. 10:32) and in it, there are no Jew-Gentile distinctions (Eph. 2:11-16).

II. The Great Sermon (14-40) Peter stands up at this God-given opportunity and preaches the first recorded sermon in church history! Here is the outline of it:

1. Explanation (14-21) Peter explains what had happened. The Holy Spirit had come as predicted in Joel 2:28-32. Note that this whole passage is not fulfilled; the rest of it waits for the Tribulation Period. But it becomes his sermon text; he begins with an explanation of the pouring out of the Spirit and ends with an evangelistic appeal.

2. Exposition (22-36) Now he tells how it was that the Holy Spirit had come. Christ was authenticated by signs as God's Messiah (22). He was crucified and slain, though not by accident, but by plan (23). He was raised from the dead (24). And now as Messiah He had sent forth the Holy Spirit and the signs they observed (32-33). He uses several Old Testament passages to prove that these things were prophesied beforehand and shows that they could not be applied to David. His main point is verse 36. All Jews must know that Jesus is their Messiah!

3. Exhortation (37-40) Now he tells them what to do about it. Note that this generation of Jews stands condemned for rejecting Messiah, but they could individually escape that condemnation (39-40). The same promise is for Jew and Gentile alike. The method is to repent, that is, to change their mind concerning Him and then to be baptized as the sign that they were followers of Him.

4. Extension (41) 3,000 of his hearers were saved and bound together into the very first local church. Note the normal order: conversion, baptism, addition to a local church.

III. The First Church (41-47) Note the regular activities of the first church. They occurred naturally and still should today:

1. teaching (42) by apostles

2. fellowship This is defined as the breaking of bread and prayers (these are an appositive in verse 42. They ate together, shared the Lord's Supper and prayed together.

3. sharing (45) with fellow believers in need

4. outreach (47) by their positive testimony

THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM 3:1-5:16

Section Outline:

I. A Healing And A Sermon Ch. 3

II. An Arrest And A Release 4:1-31

III. Sharing And Discipline 4:32-5:16

I. A Healing and A Sermon - Ch.3

1. the healing of the lame man - 1-11 Peter and John go up to the Temple to pray at the regular Jewish hour of prayer, 3:00 PM. They meet a lame man and heal him in the name of Christ and it creates quite a stir; a large crowd gathers. This brings up the question of miracle healing or the gift of healing. In the New Testament church there was a distinct gift of healing, mentioned in 1 Cor. 12, which was not simply praying for the sick, but healing by touch or command on the spot.

a. its purpose

- **Mk. 16:17-20** It was a sign like tongues, given for the purpose of confirming the message of the apostles.

Mark's summary of the early days of the church is that God was working with them giving signs like healings to confirm their word. This was illustrated directly on this occasion as a sermon to crowd follows. There is never a command given to church to go and heal all the sick!

- **Heb. 2:3-4** Here we find the same thing, except it indicates that signs primarily occurred among apostles and those who had seen the Lord; there is a sense that they are not continuing to occur so frequently.

- **Acts 2:43** says that many signs and wonders were done by the apostles initially. You can watch through Acts as the frequency decreases. The New Testament epistles seem to know little of miraculous healings apart from the reference in 1 Corinthians and the mention in Hebrews. Instead, we find the frequent mention of sickness, as in 2 Cor 12. Church history records no miracles for a century or two after the apostles died, but then begins to record reports of outlandish and unbelievable miracles unlike the Bible, obviously connected with relics, sacraments, and priestly doings in writings that would obviously be regarded as spurious.

b. does the gift exist today? God certainly heals miraculously at times and even tells us to pray over the sick but the gift of miraculous healing is rare; I know of no one who has it, though some certainly claim it. Many cases of fraud have been exposed. And maybe some even do get healed in healing services, but if so, not because of the man, but because of God's sovereign will. It is not that God can't or even doesn't do these sign gifts today; His ability is the same and He can do anything He wants.

2. Peter's sermon - 12-26

Note it is to Jews and has two main points:

a. an explanation - 12-16 Peter explains that the man was healed in the Name of Jesus (16) and identifies who Jesus was and what the Jewish leaders had done to Him. Really, he charges them with a heinous crime (13-15), where note a three-fold contradiction in their actions.

b. an exhortation - 17-26 Peter tells them what they must do. This is very significant. Peter is offering the Jews the Kingdom one last time. He says:

- **17 their crime was done in ignorance** (*agnoia* means *not knowing*) Compare 1 Cor. 2:7. But it was also in God's sovereign will (18).

- **19 their duty was to repent**, to turn and as a people receive Christ.

- **20 if they repented God would send Christ** who was literally *appointed for you*, that is, as Messiah and:

- **21 the times of restitution will come** (literally, *restoration to a former state*) The promised millennial kingdom spoken of by all the prophets will come. Here is Israel's last chance (26) before God turns to the Gentiles and al-

lows judgment to fall on that generation of Jews. God literally offered them the Kingdom, just as He was doing in the person of Christ in Gospels. Leave the question, "What if they had accepted the offer?" to God!

- **4:1 the result is rejection by the leaders** and so Israel is nationally set aside until the Tribulation Period, when she will repent and the Kingdom will come. Meanwhile, all must come to Christ as individuals and many did (4:4).

II. An Arrest and A Release - 4:1-31

1. the growth of the church (4) The Greek uses *ginomai* which means *become*, so it means 2,000 were added and the total grew to 5,000 as the NIV puts it. Note the cycles in the growth of church. In 2:41, 3,000 were saved; then there was an unknown interval during which they grew through some new believers being added daily (2:42-47). Then 2,000 more were added at once (chapter 3) and they grow slowly once again (chapters 4-5). We ought to expect cycles in church growth and recognize the importance of growing new converts!

2. the first opposition (1-3) Peter's sermon was interrupted by the Temple authorities who arrest Peter and John. The reason is that most of the priests belonged to the party of the Sadducees. There are three reasons they were upset (verse 2):

a. they were teaching Look at verse 13; they were *agrammatotai kai idiotai* which means *ungrammared idiots*! They had never been to rabbinic schools and were laymen who had no right to the realm of religious teaching.

b. they were influencing the people They had an obvious effect on the crowd; 2,000 of them believed. They were worried about their own following.

c. their doctrine The Sadducees denied the resurrection (23:8) and afterlife. Peter and John were preaching the resurrection through the person of Christ.

3. their trial and release They were let go with a warning after speaking boldly to the council. Note in verse 8 we have the first fulfillment of Jesus' promise in Mt. 10:19-20. The result was the oft-quoted principle of Spirit-given wisdom (19-20) Notice that they were filled with the Spirit; they couldn't help but be witnesses!

4. the prayer meeting - 23-31 When they get back to the brethren, they have a prayer meeting. There are three principles they express here (what maturity)!

a. God is sovereign and in control (24)

b. God's plan includes believers facing opposition (25-28)

c. the important thing is a bold testimony, not deliverance (29) There is no room here for the gospel of health, wealth, and prosperity which is fed to so many Americans and others around the world, the concept that God wants Christians to always have health, prosperity, and enjoyment of life. That is never found in the New Testament.

III. Sharing and Discipline - 4:32-5:16 Here is a glimpse of life in the Jerusalem church.

1. the caring in the community (32-35) This is sometimes viewed as though they set up some sort of commune, but note:

a. 2:46 says they met from house to house right after they sold their possessions Obviously, they did not sell everything; they lived in individual houses. 12:12 says Mark's mother's house was a place of prayer.

b. the change was in attitude not ownership (32) They still owned things but now they saw all their possessions as gifts of God to be used for the good of all. So, they began to sell off things in order to help others, rather than selfishly hoarding them. Their hearts were touched by the need of others.

c. their actions were voluntary; they were moved by the Holy Spirit No rule or law was laid down by the apostles. This is different from communism. Spurgeon put it like this: "Communism says, 'What's yours is mine'; Christianity says, 'What's mine is yours!'" Nothing here is any different from what ought to happen today, except that it doesn't very much anymore! We give our extras; they sacrificed. The reason this is noted is that it is so strikingly different from the Jews of the day!

2. Barnabas (36-37) Luke introduces him as an example of that kind of giving. He sold some land (evidently back home in Cyprus) and gave the money. His name means *son of encouragement*; we'll meet him again later.

3. Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11) They are introduced in direct contrast to Barnabas. He did it right; they did it wrong. Their sin was two-fold: 1) lying both to men and to the Holy Spirit, and 2) hypocrisy, falsely imitating the sincere believers. Here we get the first inkling that there is sin in the church and God punishes it by death. Why?

a. personally Ananias and Sapphira were believers but they had committed the *sin unto death* spoken of in 1 Jn. 5:16. Evidently, they had a testimony for Christ and were part of visible church, but instead of being filled by the Holy Spirit, they had opened themselves to be filled by Satan (3). What a warning to us! It's like 1 Cor. 11:28-32.

b. to guard His Name (5) God didn't want the world to have occasion to say, "see the hypocrites". He taught the whole community that He is a holy God (13).

c. to teach the church the seriousness of sin (11) This lesson is like that of Achan in the book of Joshua. The church is to be a holy people!

4. more miracles (12-16) This is like a final flurry, a last testimony of the power of God before real persecution began. Note here the fulfillment of Mk. 16:17-18 about the casting out of demons (16) and also the dangers of the attraction of healing. Jesus had the same problem; people came for the physical benefit instead of the spiritual. See their superstition that Peter's shadow could heal!

REAL PERSECUTION BEGINS 5:17-7:60

Section Outline:

- I. The Arrest of the Apostles 5:17-42
- II. The Appointment of the Seven 6:1-8
- III. The Address of Stephen 6:9-7:60

I. The Arrest of the Apostles - 5:17-42

1. the Twelve arrested (17-18) The reason for the hatred of the Jewish leaders was disobedience to their previous order (4:18), but also the success they had in 5:13-14 with the people. The church had grown by now to 7, 8, or perhaps even 10 thousand. Their strategy is to arrest all the leaders at once. You can see Satan trying to destroy the fledgling church.

2. the Twelve miraculously released (19-25) by an angel like Peter in chapter 12.

3. the Twelve found and tried (26-33) Note what bothers them in verse 28; the apostles are bringing accusation against them for crucifying Jesus, which is exactly what they say in verse 30. See how God is still pleading with Israel on a national basis! And notice the effect it had on them in verse 33; it cut them to the heart. That can be a positive thing as in 2:37 where it brings conviction, but it can also be a negative thing as it is here, where it is enraging. They made up their minds to kill them.

4. God's intervention (34-40) Gamaliel, Paul's teacher, advises restraint. His line of reasoning is that false works come to nothing but works of God continue on, so let us wait and see, lest we end up fighting God. It sounds pious but he's really saying that this thing will die out by itself, so let's not dirty our hands. Still, what he said is true and is one of the basic proofs of the reality of Jesus Christ. If the church was a mere human movement, it would have died centuries ago! But the fact that it has survived centuries of persecution and grown all the way says God is in it!

5. the principle of civil disobedience (41-42) A Christian is normally to obey the government and its laws in every way, but (29) when the government tells you to do the opposite of what God says, you choose to obey God. They did not cease their preaching, but they were also prepared to accept the consequences of suffering! See what maturity had come.

II. The Appointment of the Seven - 6:1-8

1. the problem The church at Jerusalem had two elements, Greeks and Hebrews, that is, Greek speaking Jews from other lands who remained in Jerusalem after their conversion at Pentecost and Aramaic speaking Jews from Jerusalem who were converted in the weeks that followed. There was a sizable element of each. In such a large number there were many widows whose care fell to the church and evidently this task was being handled by the Jerusalem faction with some general oversight by the Apostles (note that the Greeks were mad at the Hebrews, not the Apostles!) and the Greek speaking widows were getting neglected in process. This problem elevated into a general dissension and division between the two groups. See Satan at work again; if he can't kill the apostles, he'll divide the church!

2. the answer Appoint seven men to handle this ministry. Note that all seven chosen have Greek names and would undoubtedly see to the problem. Were they deacons? Not in the later sense of occupying the office of deacon or even elder. That had not yet developed. They were simply seven godly men who were appointed to handle a specific ministry. Note how qualified you have to be to handle finances (3); it is a spiritual job! They do, however, set a good precedent for us: our church leaders and those involved in our church ministries should be like these!

3. the principle (2-3) Here is the beginning of the concept that in the church there should be those gifted ones who devote themselves to study and teaching and prayer, while others with different gifts minister in other capacities. It is the beginning of the concepts of bishops and deacons, pastors and lay leaders.

III. The Address of Stephen - 6:9-7:60

1. Stephen targeted - 6:9-15 Note in verse 8 that Stephen was really used of God, maybe more obviously than the apostles at that moment. He was evidently trying to preach in a certain synagogue and really got the Jews very angry. So, they hired witnesses and dragged him before the Sanhedrin.

2. Stephen's sermon - 7:1-53 This is the longest recorded message in Acts. See the two accusations against him in 6:14, blasphemy against the Law and against the Temple. He probably did say these things, only they twisted them to use them against him. He addresses both of these. Here's a brief outline of his message:

- **He affirms the Law (1-43)** He identifies himself with what God did through Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, in essence saying, "I believe the Law" but:

- **Moses prophesied of a greater One to come (37)**

- **Israel would not listen to him and obey (39)**

- **He affirms the Temple (44-50)** He says that both the Tabernacle and later the Temple were from God but:

- **even God does not limit Himself to the Temple (49-50)** according to the Old Testament prophets

- **He accuses them of denying the very things they claim to believe in (51-53)** Their fathers did not obey Moses or God's law and now they had crucified the Son and were resisting the Holy Spirit.

3. Stephen's martyrdom (54-60) He died very much like Jesus, on the charge of blasphemy out of his own lips and with forgiveness for his executioners on his lips. Note that this is the last straw for Israel. With the death of Stephen God begins to turn to Samaria and to the Gentiles from chapter 8 on. Israel has now officially sealed their own destruction as a nation and their being set aside in God's plan as a national entity until the Tribulation Period. The destruction of Jerusalem and the nation in AD 70 was the result. Now Jesus will build His church primarily of Gentiles.

TO SAMARIA Chs. 8-9

Section Outline:

I. Philip and the Samaritans	8:1-25
II. Philip and the Eunuch	8:26-40
III. Saul and the Lord Jesus	9:1-31
IV. Peter and the wider ministry	9:32-43

I. Philip and the Samaritans 8:1-25

1. wholesale persecution at Jerusalem - 1-4 Stephen's death began a great persecution at Jerusalem, a door to door manhunt, Nazi-style, so a large majority of the church had to flee to other areas. Verse 1 says *all* but the church at Jerusalem did continue on, so the persecution was probably directed mostly against Greek speaking Jewish Christians (like Stephen and Philip). Why did God allow this destruction of such a great work?

- **the word *scattered* in verses 2 and 4 is literally to sow seed** (from the Greek *speiro*.) While the Jews think they are breaking up the church, God is busy sowing, planting the seeds of the church in other areas (4)!

- **note the words *Judea and Samaria* in verse 2** This is the first mention of those terms since 1:8. God is carrying out His plan for the spread of the Gospel. It is now moving into stage two. It is also possibly God's way of getting a reluctant church to move outward.

2. Philip reaches Samaritans - 5-8 Philip was the number two deacon at Jerusalem and he went to Samaria. This was a real breakthrough, because the Samaritans were considered dogs by the Jews! Note that this occasion was just like what happened at Jerusalem. God confirmed His Word by signs and miracles so that many believed and were baptized (12), but God withheld the giving of the Holy Spirit to them immediately upon belief (14-17), unlike what was going on currently at Jerusalem. He waited until Peter and John came from Jerusalem and laid hands on them. Here is a unique situation which occurs again in 19:6 and also in Paul's conversion, but it is not intended to be the norm. The Holy Spirit came much more often without it; it is not a pattern to be followed today, to lay on hands and pray for the Holy Spirit. Why did God do it this way? For two primary reasons:

- **it proved validity of this new work to the Jewish apostles** It is preparation for chapter 10 and the Gospel going to the Gentiles. When it happened, I'm sure they recalled 1:8!

- **it prevented a possible schism** The Jews naturally hated the Samaritans. This event tied the two together and prevented the developing of two churches, Jewish and Samaritan.

3. Philip and Simon - 9:11 Simon was a sorcerer, one who used black magic (the occult) to achieve power over the city. Philip's arrival with miraculous signs was a clear challenge to him as people saw the real power of God, so he followed them in believing Philip's message (13). However, later (18-24) he tried to buy the power to impart the Holy Spirit like apostles had done. He was not really saved. To summarize:

- **in verses 12-13 note, *when they..then he*** He wanted to keep those people.

- **in verse 13 he was impressed by power**, not by Jesus.

- **in verse 23 it never says he received the Holy Spirit** Peter says he is still captive to sin. Later history tells us he became the founder of a heretical sect.

In verse 25 the apostles now adopted the pattern of reaching Samaritans.

II. Philip and the Eunuch - 8:26-40 This is a familiar story so just two quick points:

1. God's direction The Eunuch was from Ethiopia (modern southern Egypt and Sudan, ancient Nubia). He was a worshipper of Jehovah and desirous of being a proselyte to Judaism. He was traveling southwest from Jerusalem down to Gaza in a chariot; God has Philip walk to where he is from Samaria which is north of Jerusalem. It is clear that Philip had to leave long before the Eunuch did; God arranged this opportunity!

2. in 36-39 we have the first clear hint of the mode of baptism used by the church They came to a body of water, that is, probably a stream or pond by the road. They *went in* and *came out* which indicates immersion, which is what the very word *baptize* means.

Philip then preached in Azotus (Ashdod in the Old Testament) and northward through villages until he reached Caesarea, where he settled and is still found there 20 years later in 21:8.

III. Saul and the Lord Jesus - 9:1-31 You know story well, so let's look primarily at overall thoughts:

1. the order of events There is some missing data here which we have supplied from the book of Galatians.

- **Saul's conversion enroute to Damascus** The New Scofield Reference Bible says AD 31-33, Unger says AD 36.

- **a brief period of ministry in Damascus - 18-22**

- **three years in Arabia mentioned in Gal. 1:17** These are the *many days* mentioned in verse 23.

- **further ministry in Damascus - 23-25** Compare Gal. 1:17 where it says he *returned*.

- **going up to Jerusalem - 26-29** Compare Gal. 1:18-20.

- **going to Caesarea - 30**

- **ministry in Tarsus - 30** Compare Gal. 1:21-24. This was either 4 or 7 years until AD 43, so it is a total of 7-10 years before Paul begins his prominent ministry in Acts.

2. what God was doing - 15 God chose Paul as a tool to take the Gospel to the Gentiles; God is gearing the church up to move in a new direction, both to the Gentiles of the Roman world and to Jews living abroad. So, God adds another apostle to spearhead this new movement and has him in training.

3. why God chose Saul He was thoroughly Jewish, raised in Jerusalem; he spoke the language and knew the culture but:

- **he was born in Tarsus** and therefore familiar with Greek culture and language.

- **he was a Roman citizen** and therefore had privileges which enabled him to have a wide ministry.

- **he was theologically trained** and therefore had credentials to deal with the Jews in synagogues.

- **he was able to support himself in a secular trade as necessary.**

III. Peter and the Wider Ministry - 9:32-43 Evidently Peter became involved in ministry to the villages of Judea and Samaria, beginning with 8:25 on his return trip to Jerusalem. He must have kept it up, according to verse 32. On this particular trip he healed Aeneas in Lydda and raised Dorcas from the dead at Joppa (this is notable because the last one to do that was Jesus Himself; it was definitely a sign of His power). God is preparing Peter during these years (number unknown) for what will happen in chapter 10, the acceptance of the Gentiles into the church.

- **he is in an area that is partially Gentile and God works the same way!**

- **he stayed in Joppa with Simon, a tanner** This was considered a ceremonially unclean occupation by the Jews because of contact with dead animals. God is preparing him to see that the Law has been set aside.

THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES Chs. 10-12

Section Outline:

I. Peter and Cornelius Ch. 10

II. Peter and the Jerusalem church Ch. 11

III. Peter and Herod Ch. 12

I. Peter and Cornelius - Ch. 10

1. the vision of Cornelius - 1-8 Cornelius was a Roman soldier, a full-fledged Gentile, serving in Caesarea, the Roman port city for Palestine. He was evidently a worshipper of Jehovah, but not a full proselyte because he was not circumcised (11:3). He had thrown away Roman idols! Now an angel appears to him and has him send for Peter at Joppa, which is 33 miles south, so the trip took four days there and back. Note:

a. God rewards seeking with light If a person wants it, He will send it.

b. God hears the prayers of nonbelievers (4) who sincerely seek Him.

c. God says seeking is not enough or He wouldn't have sent Peter!

2. the vision of Peter - 9-22 Peter is praying before lunch and sees this vision of a great sheet full of animals and is told to kill and eat. Peter, being a good Jew, knows the dietary laws and refuses to kill and eat unclean animals, but a voice says that they are declared cleansed by God. The first thought is that God is declaring the end of the law! But Peter recognizes (28) that God is declaring all men clean, that he can associate with and reach out to Gentiles. God taught it this way: the vision happened three times and instantly there were three Gentiles at his door! Peter readily agrees to go back with them.

3. the vindication by the Spirit - 23-48 Peter goes with them to Cornelius and preaches to those gathered. He took 6 men with him for witnesses, just in case (11:12). He tells them how to be saved and as they believe in their hearts (44), the Spirit falls on them and the sign of tongues is given (46), so Peter and the others will know this is a work of God. This is very significant:

a. the Holy Spirit is confirming that Gentiles can be saved This is the same manifestation as what occurred at Jerusalem and at Samaria, a Gentile Pentecost! The Holy Spirit is demonstrating that He will come upon all men alike.

b. the Holy Spirit is also showing how He will come from now on He will come instantly and without means on every believer alike.

c. God is revealing the mystery of the church to Peter, that Jew and Gentile will be welded into one body with no distinction.

d. the church has now entered phase 3 of its missionary program (1:8) The salvation of a Roman opens the door of ministry to whole of the Roman Empire, which was most of the known world! So, they are baptized and Peter stays to teach and instruct them.

II. Peter and the Jerusalem Church - Ch. 11

1. Peter's accounting to the Jerusalem church - 1-19 Some of the Jerusalem believers were pretty upset at Peter, not so much for preaching to Gentiles, but for eating with them which indicated fellowship and acceptance. Peter explained to the church all that had happened in chapter 10. His point was, "This is not my idea; it is God's doing (8,16-17)". At this, they were changed in their attitude. Verses 18-19 are very significant for two reasons:

a. it changed their doctrine The church has now discovered the truth that there will no longer be a distinction between Jew and Gentile, that the church will be one body in Christ composed of both. Compare Eph. 3:1-6. This was a hidden mystery, a sacred secret for ages but it is now made plain to the whole church.

b. it changed their practice They had been scattered and preached, but only to Jews wherever they went! Now the way is open for direct ministry to Gentiles and that follows immediately in 19-26.

c. it changed their image The church had been in favor with the common people (2:47; 5:13, 26). But now Law-loving Jews will hate Christians (12:2-3). Christianity will no longer be seen as a branch of Judaism.

2. the church at Antioch established - 20-30 This is important because Antioch became the mother church for the Gentile churches. They sent out the first missionaries. Antioch was a key city, the third largest in the Roman empire, some 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It was a very wicked place. When Jerusalem heard of the work there, it sent Barnabas to check it out and provide proper instruction, but the work soon grew so large that he went to Tarsus and got Saul, who had already been working with Gentiles, to help. The Antioch church was even able to send some famine relief money to Jerusalem and Barnabas and Saul took it there. Note:

- **for the first time the church actively went after Gentiles**

- **the name Christian evolved (26)** It was derogatory, not positive. The ending *ian* means *of the party of*. They were recognized as a party distinct from Judaism.

III. Peter and Herod - Ch. 12

1. Herod's attack on the church - 1-19 This Herod is the grandson of Herod the Great who tried to kill Christ at His birth and is just like him! He kills James (the disciple, John's brother; the James of verse 17 is Jesus' brother) and sees that the people like it so much that he's going to kill Peter after Passover. He locks him up with 16 soldiers to guard him, but through the prayers of the church, God delivers him and he goes into hiding out of the province.

2. God's attack on Herod - 20-23 God only tolerates such blasphemers so long. God smote him and he died of a horrible disease.

3. the point - 24-26 You can't oppose God!

- **God will accomplish His task in spite of opposition**

- **opposition ultimately serves God's purpose** This whole incident brought glory to God and strengthened the faith of the church.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY 13:1-15:35

Section Outline:

I. The Maturation of a Church	13:1-3
II. The Itinerary of the Journey	13:4-14:28
III. The Conference at Jerusalem	15:1-35

Introductory Remarks: 13:1 is a key turning point in Acts. Up to this point the church has not spread over 300 miles from Jerusalem. From here to the end of the book it spreads to the whole of Roman Empire. Note four transitions in the life of the church here:

(1) **from Jewish to Gentile ministry** Phase 3 of its 1:8 commission.

(2) **from Jerusalem to Antioch as its center**

(3) **from Peter's ministry to Paul's**

(4) **from natural missions to deliberate missions**, the deliberate sending out of missionaries and church planting

I. The Maturation of a Church - 13:1-3 The church at Antioch began back in 11:20-21 with raw converts. It grew in 11:25-26 under the ministry, first of Barnabas, and then of Barnabas and Saul. By 13:1, it has reached full maturity as a church. Note its characteristics:

1. it had developed mature leaders (1) Not just the two external leaders, but leaders from within itself, at least five altogether.

2. it had a consistent ministry of the Word by those leaders. It has leaders that can lead it on to maturity without outside preaching and leadership.

3. it was seeking the will of God (2) They wanted to know God's mind, to do more, to know the next step. A maturing church is looking to God, not to imitate other churches.

4. it was burdened to plant other churches (3) It wanted to reach out beyond itself and plant the Gospel in other areas. Just as a mature Christian reproduces himself in converts, so a mature church seeks to reproduce itself in daughter churches. Note that this is the missionary program for Acts: plant churches in key places which can mature and reproduce themselves in their own areas.

II. The Itinerary of the Journey - 13:4-14:28

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Place</u>	
13:4	Seleucia	- Antioch's port 16 miles away, then by boat to Cyprus, an island in the northeast Mediterranean and Barnabas' home
13:5	Salamis	- the largest city in eastern Cyprus, then traveling on foot 100 miles southwest to:
13:6	Paphos	- the provincial capital. The Roman proconsul is converted through a conflict with a sorcerer named Bar-Jesus. Then by boat back to the mainland.
13:13	Pamphylia	- a province in Asia Minor. The first stop is the city of Perga where Mark leaves them. Then they go on foot 100 miles north.
13:14	Antioch	(of Pisidia, not Syria), the capital of southern Galatia, the center of a system of military roads, a Roman colony. They stayed over a week but were driven out by persecution.
13:50-51	Iconium	- There is a response but a plot is formed to stone them so they fled to:
14:6	Lystra	- A city of Lycaonia, a thoroughly pagan city with a shrine to Jupiter (Zeus). Here the apostles were almost worshipped as gods but ultimately Paul was stoned and left for dead.
14:20	Derbe	- A neighboring city where they preached and then returned to:
14:21-23	Lystra, then Iconium, then Antioch	- now confirming converts and appointing elders and returning through:
14:24	Pisidia and Pamphylia	to Perga and then to:
14:25	Attalia	- the neighboring port city and then by boat home to:
14:26	Antioch	(of Syria) where they started.

Total Distance: Approximately 1200 miles Elapsed time: Possibly 3 years

Some special things to note from this journey:

1. Paul's methods in church planting process The process he used is typical of his whole missionary career.

a. he picked a key place (13:14) He always picked important centers.

b. he went to the most prepared people (15-16a) He went to the Jews of the dispersion, but in their synagogues were a host of Gentile God-fearers.

c. he used an acceptable method (16) He didn't start a protest at the local idol shrine! He taught in the synagogue.

d. he gathered a small group of converts (42-3) Some Jews but mostly Gentile God-fearers.

e. he used them to reach unprepared Gentiles (44)

f. he stayed and taught until they were established (14:22)

g. he trained leaders to take over and moved on (23)

2. Paul's relationship to the church at Antioch

a. he was sent out by the church (13:2-4) The Holy Spirit worked through the church to call the workers to service and send them out.

b. he reported back to the church (14:26-28) He returned, reviewed the work and stayed with them, perhaps a whole year. During this time Peter came to visit and the events of Gal. 2:11 and following occurred. Also, during this time the book of Galatians was written (the churches established on this trip into Asia Minor ARE the Galatians). The general description of this time is in 14:35.

III. The Conference at Jerusalem - 15:1-35 Date: AD 49, perhaps 10 years after the first real going to the Gentiles in the Cornelius incident.

1. the problem (1, 5) Men came from Jerusalem asserting that Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law in order to be saved. That is, Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be Christians because salvation is of the Jews. We

refer to these people as Judaizers. The same group either went to or evolved on its own in Galatia itself (thus the letter to the Galatians). Paul and Barnabas withstood them strongly and the church decided to send a delegation to the apostles in Jerusalem about the matter.

2. the conference It is really three sets of testimonies:

a. Peter testified about how God began this by his experience with Cornelius (6-11) He argues from experience, saying that God gave them the Holy Spirit just like He gave Him to us.

b. Paul and Barnabas testified how God used them on their journey and confirmed their words with miraculous signs (12)

c. James (Jesus' brother and evidently now the head of the Jerusalem church) **testifies that the Scriptures teach Gentiles will be saved but will still be Gentiles, not Jews in the Kingdom (13-18)**

3. the decision (19-21) This was sent by a letter (23-29) and accompanied by Judas and Silas. They were to abstain from three things;

- things offered to idols
- sexual immorality
- meat eaten with blood in it

Not only would these things keep them from offending the Jews, but they are particular moral sins to which Gentiles were prone. It is saying they must cut themselves off completely from their idolatrous past, from the immoral sexual patterns of heathen worship and culture, and that they are still under the Genesis 9 prohibition given to Noah about blood being a sacred symbol of life.

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY 15:36-18:22

Section Outline:

I. Churches Revisited in Asia	15:36-16:8
II. Churches Planted in Macedonia	16:9-17:14
III. Churches Planted in Achaia	17:15-18:17
IV. The Return to Antioch	18:18-22

I. Introductory Notes

1. the reason for the trip (15:36) It was to visit the churches established on the first trip and see how they were faring, particularly after the Galatian problem and letter. Paul took the Jerusalem conference decrees with him to deliver (16:4).

2. the apostolic argument (15:36-41) Barnabas wanted to take Mark again and give him a second chance (he deserted them on the first trip -13:13). Paul was so opposed to this that they separated and Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul took Silas and went overland through Cilicia to Galatia.

II. The Itinerary of the Trip.

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Place</u>	
15:41	Syria then Cilicia	- where the Antioch church worked locally and where Paul had labored years in waiting
16:1	Galatian churches	- Derbe, Lystra, Iconium. Here he meets and recruits Timothy.
16:6-8	thru Asia Minor	- preaching in Galatia and Phrygia but heading west. Every attempt is stifled and they wind up at Troas where Paul sees a vision.
16:9	entry of Macedonia	- they sail to Neapolis and go overland to:
16:12	Philippi	- Lydia is converted and then the jailer is converted
17:1	Thessalonica	- a riot occurs
17:10	Berea	- there is another disturbance and Paul sails south
17:14-15	Achaia	- southern Greece to the city of Athens and the scene on Mars Hill
18:1	Corinth	- Paul stays over a year and a half. There is another riot. He goes to:
18:18	Cenchrae	- and sets sail for home. On the way he stops at:
18:19	Ephesus	- preaches a little there and lands at:
18:22	Caesarea	- goes up to Jerusalem for the feast (Passover?) and then home to Antioch.

Total Distance: about 2200 miles

Time Elapsed: about 2 years

III. Some Important Things to Consider

1. the circumcision of Timothy (16:3) Why would Paul do this after the chapter 15 controversy and while carrying letter saying that circumcision is not necessary for Gentiles? It seems like a reversal of thinking, but that is not so. Here it is not a matter of justification before God, but of ability to witness to the Jews in that area who knew his mother was Jewish and he should therefore be circumcised. Paul's principle is to "become all things to all men to win some".

2. the presence of Luke (16:10, 40) The pronoun we shows Luke joined Paul at Troas and went along to Philippi, where he evidently remained to build up the church, while Paul went on to Thessalonica.

3. God's preparation of the Mediterranean world This makes possible all that Paul is able to do on this journey and particularly as he entered Europe. Almost all the known world was united under the jurisdiction of Rome. This brought:

- **Roman travel** A series of good military roads connected all major cities and shipping and the roads were protected. The Via Ignatia that led to Rome begins at Philippi.

- **Roman peace** Rome enforced peace and allowed free travel between areas of its jurisdiction.

- **Roman law** Now the world had a common higher law. Roman citizenship guaranteed some measure of justice everywhere. Paul used this at Philippi which was a Roman colony (all residents had citizenship).

4. the importance of women Lydia is the first convert in Europe (16:13-14). There is also a woman convert at Athens. And note the importance of Priscilla at Corinth and later at Ephesus. It seems that often the first converts were women and many are mentioned in Paul's letters. Women were raised to a new level of importance in the church and to equal status before the Lord. This was contrary to paganism which treated them as objects or Judaism which practically made them come to God through the husband.

5. the two households saved and baptized Lydia's (16:15) and the jailer's (16:30-34). Please note that a household included all the servants as well as children and it is clear that all heard the message, all believed and then all were baptized. It was not "family salvation" through one member or infant baptism.

6. the resistance of Thessalonica (17:5) Hard core Jews there attempted a public assault and even pursued Paul to Berea to cause trouble in that city, yet God planted a church. Paul wrote two letters back to Thessalonica from Corinth during his two year stay there.

7. the intellectualism of Athens (17:16-18,21) They were the cultural and philosophical center of the world, given to every conceivable idea from pleasure-seeking to self-denial. But verse 16 says it was all idolatry! Paul calls them very "religious", but the Greek word has the term for *demon* in it. They were great worshippers of demons! See what a difficult time Paul had here; it is his only major stay where no church was actually planted.

8. the corruption of Corinth Corinth was a thriving center of trade and shipping and with it came all kinds of vice. Just look at the problems in the Corinthian church! Its temple of Apollo had 1,000 prostitutes; the city was given to immorality and greed. The term "to Corinthianize" made it into the Greek language as a derogatory saying! Yet note 18:10; God had many people there and a thriving church was planted.

9. caring for the new believers It may seem like on this trip Paul stayed briefly and left new converts to fend for selves, but notice that Luke stayed at Philippi, probably for 4 years until Paul made it back there on his third journey. Silas and Timothy were left at Berea to establish the church there while Paul went alone to Athens and waited for them. 1 Thess. 3:1-2 implies that they, or at least Timothy, came and Paul sent them back to Thessalonica to strengthen the church and Paul himself stayed in Corinth a long time. So, all the churches were cared for at length!

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY 18:23-21:14

Section Outline:

- I. To Ephesus 18:23-28
- II. In Ephesus 19
- III. To Jerusalem 20:1-21:14

I. The Itinerary of the Trip

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Place</u>	
18:23	overland to Galatia and Phrygia	- confirming the work of the second journey
19:1	through interior to Ephesus	- to keep Paul's promise. He stayed 3 years and left after a riot about

		the goddess Diana
20:1	to Macedonia	
20:2	to Achaia (Greece)	- stayed 3 months at Corinth until a plot formed
20:3	back to Macedonia	- the city of Philippi
20:6	sailed to Troas	- stayed one week; Eutychus falls out a window
20:13-15	Assos-Mitylene-Kios-Samos-Miletus	- a series of quick stops. Paul calls the Ephesian elders for a farewell.
21:1-3	Cos-Rhodes-Patara-Tyre	- where he stayed seven days with the brethren
21:7-8	Ptoemais-Caesarea	- where he stayed with Philip
21:15	Jerusalem at last	

Total Distance: about 3100 miles Time elapsed: 3-4 years

Major Accomplishments:

- 1. the building of the church at Ephesus** This was a three year project.
- 2. the writing of Scriptures** Three New Testament letters were written this trip:
 - a. 1 Corinthians while at Ephesus**
 - b. 2 Corinthians while in Macedonia**
 - c. Romans while at Corinth**

II. The Ephesian Years

- 1. Apollos 18:24-28** Priscilla and Aquila had evidently begun a fledgling work there already; Apollos came to town teaching accurately about Jesus from the Old Testament, having only had the message and baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila were able to fill in the missing points and he became a mighty defender of the Gospel. He then went to Corinth (thus the Apollos faction in 1 Corinthians).
- 2. the disciples of John 19:1-7** They weren't even as informed as Apollos; they didn't even know John's teaching about Jesus. Paul led them to Christ and they were now baptized in His Name. This is the only case of "rebaptism" in the New Testament; evidently Paul's belief was that only baptism of a believer in Christ was valid baptism. Note that the Holy Spirit came upon them.
- 3. triumph over the occult 19:11-19** Note the widespread occult practices of the day. It is not new! Note the power of Jesus and His disciples over demons and also the utter abandoning of occult practices and materials by believers. Believers have no place messing with astrology, palm readings, seances, and so on.
- 4. the riot 19:23-41** Business for the silversmiths began to decline; the Gospel had a social effect! What a tremendous change it can make in a town. Note also verse 31. The Gospel had reached some important people; they warned Paul not to go into the assembly and were on his side. The term *officials* in the Greek is *Asiarchs*, those entrusted with maintaining proper emperor-worship at festivals! Don't think God saves only the lowly or common people; Acts clearly shows He can reach even government officials!

III. The Tour of Macedonia and Greece - 19:21-22 It had two primary purposes:

- 1. strengthening of the churches**
- 2. gathering of a relief offering for believers at Jerusalem** Compare 2 Cor. 8:1-7, 9:1-5; Rom. 15:23-29. That's why Paul was accompanied by representatives of the churches (20:4). Note that Luke rejoined the party at Philippi (20:6) and stayed with Paul for the rest of the book.

IV. The Voyage to Jerusalem Remember that sailing in that day was in small ships which did not usually venture out on the open sea but stayed near land and put in to shore often. So, there were many brief stops. Note three things:

- 1. Troas - 20:6-12** Here we have a picture of the daily life of the Gentile church:
 - **they met on Sunday, the first day of the week** They had a regular pattern of worship.
 - **they met in evening** after a hard day's work.
 - **they followed the Jerusalem pattern** They had teaching, the Lord's supper, a fellowship meal, and fellowship with each other.
 - **they worshipped as long as needed but were still human** Eutychus fell asleep!

2. the farewell to the Ephesian elders - 20:17-38 It shows the extent of organization in the Ephesian church, but more than that, it is a key passage for any pastor or local church leader, elder or deacon. It is a real glimpse into the heart of Paul.

3. the gift of prophecy - 20:22-23 Paul felt the Holy Spirit was compelling him to go to Jerusalem, yet was constantly warning him at every stop that bonds and afflictions awaited him there, for example at Tyre (21:4) and at Caesarea (21:10-12). The New Testament often speaks of the gift of prophecy, the direct revelation of a message by God to a gifted person. This was used by God to establish the church, especially before they had the New Testament Scriptures. Note that Paul wasn't being disobedient in going to Jerusalem; the Holy Spirit told him to go. Human feelings impacted others when the Holy Spirit told them what would happen in Jerusalem and they said, "Don't go!". He went anyway. What an example for us!

PAUL ARRESTED AT JERUSALEM 21:15-23:35

Section Outline:

I. Paul's Arrest	21:15-40
II. Paul's Defense to the Mob	22
III. Paul's Defense to the Sanhedrin	23

I. Paul's Arrest - 21:15-40

1. Paul's arrival - AD 56 Things have changed much in Jerusalem while Paul has been gone. It is a time of turmoil, unrest, and violence with the threat of insurrection. Two years earlier (38) there was a serious revolt involving 4,000 people. Jewish patriotism is building towards the final revolt that caused Rome to destroy Jerusalem 14 years later in AD 70. It has even affected the church (20-21) and Paul is not in good favor with many Jewish believers.

2. the attempt at placation The Apostles suggest that Paul show his respect for the customs of Judaism by paying the expenses for the sacrifices of four men who were just finishing a Nazirite vow. This placed Paul in the Temple.

3. the mob (27) Some Jews from Asia (where Paul had ministered on his third journey) were there for the feast and recognized Paul. They roused a mob scene on grounds that he had taken Gentiles into the Temple (28-29), which he hadn't.

4. the arrest (31-32) Attached to one corner of the Temple proper was the Fortress of Antonia where a garrison of the Roman 10th legion was quartered. The Roman commander heard of the mob and immediately took officers (centurions) and their men (at least 200 soldiers) down the steps into the Temple and seized Paul.

II. Paul's Defense to the Mob - Ch. 22 As Paul is being carried up the stairs, he talks the commander into letting him speak to the mob. His defense is in three parts:

1. his conduct before conversion (1-5) He stresses that he was a zealous Jew and persecutor of Christians.

2. his conversion (6-16) He tells of his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, of his blinding and the restoration of sight by Ananias. Note that verse 16 is in the past tense, *having called*. His baptism was the symbol to show that his sins had been washed away by having called on Christ.

3. his commission (17-21) He stresses that God told him to leave Jerusalem and go to the Gentiles. At that, the crowd became violent and the commander ordered Paul scourged to extract a confession of his crime. Paul averts it by mentioning his Roman citizenship, so the commander orders a hearing before the Sanhedrin to find out exactly what they have against Paul.

An Important Note: The Jews' response indicates that they had irrevocably refused Jesus Christ (as we saw in the early chapters repeatedly, especially with Stephen) and sealed their own fate. Only 14 years later God destroyed the city and brought utter destruction upon "this generation".

III. Paul's Defense to the Sanhedrin - Ch. 23

1. Paul's mistake The High Priest has him smacked on the mouth and he gets hot and tells the man he's a hypocrite! Paul was human! But when he was told of the man's position, he bowed to the Scriptures and admitted his mistake (5).

2. Paul's wisdom (6) He perceived the two parties in the Sanhedrin and chose a way of speaking about his case that he knew would divide them! He identified himself as a Pharisee and said his only crime was preaching resurrection. He actually had Pharisees coming to his defense! The dispute became violent and the commander took Paul back to jail for safety.

3. the conspiracy (12-13) 40 men bound themselves under a curse to kill Paul. But Paul has a nephew (16), his sister's son living in Jerusalem, who warns Paul. Paul sends him to explain to the commander, who determines to send Paul to Caesarea to Felix the Roman Governor of the province. He sends him by night with an armed guard of 400 soldiers, along with a letter explaining the case (25-30). His thought is that at Caesarea there will be less danger of violence by the Jews.

PAUL HELD AT CAESAREA 24-26

Section Outline:

I. Paul Before Felix	24
II. Paul Before Festus	25
III. Paul Before Agrippa	26

Paul is now tried by Felix and left bound at Caesarea for two years (AD 56-58). Then he is tried again and sent on to Rome.

I. Paul Before Felix - Ch. 24

1. Felix is a Roman Procurator (One who "procured" funds for the Emperor!) He was a former slave who gained freedom. Tacitus wrote, "He reveled in cruelty and lust and wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave." Drusilla was his third wife and he had enticed her away from her husband. He often employed "daggersmen" for his purposes. This is the kind of man to dispense justice?!

2. the accusations against Paul (5-6) The Jews hired an orator to state their case; they were careful to state it in a political way that would concern a Roman governor. They said Paul was:

- **a troublemaker**, one who breeds disturbances across the Empire (which very much wanted peace in every province)

- **a heretic**, the leader of an illicit religion or cult separate from Judaism and not recognized as a legal religion by Rome

- **a desecrator** who tried to desecrate the Temple by bringing in Gentiles. The Romans allowed the Jews the right of execution in this case, even of Roman citizens!

3. Paul's defense He says there was:

- **no time (11)** He had been in Jerusalem only 5-6 days after a three year absence; there was no time for him to stage an insurrection.

- **no trouble (12)** He was not found talking to crowds but worshipping.

- **no heresy (13-14)** He simply claimed that the promises made to the fathers were fulfilled in Christ, that Christ-followers were not really a sect.

- **no animosity (17)** He had even brought an offering to help the poor in Jerusalem.

- **no witnesses (18-19)** The Jews from Asia who accused him were not here to testify.

- **no crime (20)** Even the Sanhedrin didn't convict him in Jerusalem.

4. the disposition Felix thought of a pretext to postpone the case and kept Paul in jail. He even let Paul witness to him a number of times, but hoped for a bribe! Finally, he lost his office through his cruel handling of a problem in Caesarea two years later!

II. Paul Before Festus - Ch. 25

1. Festus, the new procurator was an honest, fair man who appears to be concerned to get the facts, to rule well and to uphold Roman law. He goes right to Jerusalem and the Jews mention Paul to him. They want him brought back to Jerusalem because their case is too weak and they want to ambush him on the way. But he won't do it and makes them come again to Caesarea.

2. the trial It is reported summarily in verses 7-8. Festus realized that the crime was a religious matter and wanted to be in favor with the Jews, so he asked if Paul would go to Jerusalem for yet another trial.

3. Paul's appeal (10-12) Paul's point is: "I am being accused of a crime against Rome, therefore I am standing now before Rome's appointed authority, so if you will not decide the case, then I appeal to Caesar". Roman citizens had the right of direct appeal to the Emperor. This is another turning point in the book. God uses this appeal to see that Paul gets to Rome as He promised him (23:11).

4. Festus' problem (20, 26-27) He doesn't understand the religious accusations of the Jews and must have a charge to send to the Emperor against Paul that is of some consequence. So, he turns to seek advice from Agrippa who comes to visit him.

III. Paul Before Agrippa - Ch. 26

1. King Agrippa is Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I of 12:1, and the grandson of Herod the Great. He ruled the area northeast of Palestine, but he was a practicing Jew and, because of his friendship with the Imperial Court, he got the right to appoint the Jewish High Priest in Jerusalem. As a practicing Jew he was well acquainted with Christianity. He was also corrupt; he was involved in an incestuous relationship with his own sister, Bernice.

2. Paul's defense He turns this hearing into an opportunity to witness! This is now the third time we have Paul's testimony recorded in Acts. See in it an effective plan to share the Gospel and use it for yourself!

SELF First Paul shares his own testimony.

B.C. - what he was *before* Christ (1-11)

- the positive (4-5) He was good, moral and religious.

- the negative (9-11) He was a zealous persecutor of Christians.

D.C.- how he *discovered* Christ (12-15)

A.C.- what he was like *after* he met Christ (19-21)

SCRIPTURE (22-23) He then shares the scriptural basis for his faith.

SUGGESTION (24-27) He suggests that the hearer also receive Christ.

3. Agrippa's response (28-32) The NIV translation, *Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?* is better than the KJV's, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*. He was actually being haughty about Paul's appeal to him; however, he concurred that Paul was innocent of any Roman charges. Still, Paul had appealed to Caesar and so he had to be sent to Rome.

THE JOURNEY TO ROME Chs. 27-28

Section Outline:

- I. The Hazardous Journey 27
- II. The Maltese Winter 28:1-10
- III. Paul at Rome 28:11-30

I. The Journey Luke gives a whole chapter and a half to it. Why? Probably for two reasons: 1) when Luke wrote only two years later it was still very fresh and important in his mind because it had brought Paul to the wonderful Roman ministry and he was along on the journey, and 2) to show God's sovereign direction and protection in Paul's ministry. God wanted him to minister in Rome!

1. Outline of the Trip

Verse Place

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------|--|
| 27:1 | Departure from Caesarea | |
| 27:3 | Sidon | - it is above Crete and sheltered from the prevailing west winds |
| 27:5 | Myra | - a port on the southern coast of Asia Minor. Here they change ships onto a grain ship going from Egypt to Rome. Egypt was Rome's breadbasket; such ships were considered to be in imperial service, therefore the centurion was able to use it. |
| 27:8 | Fair Havens, Crete | - It was difficult sailing (9) because it was Sept.-Oct. and sailing normally ceased for the Winter by that time. The captain attempted to make Phoenix but a hurricane-like storm from the northeast drove them out to sea and they drifted helplessly for 2 weeks. |
| 28:1 | Shipwreck on Malta | - They spent the remainder of winter there. |

28:11-12 Syracuse, Sicily - They caught a ride on another grain ship.
 28:13 Rhegium - on the toe of Italy
 28:13 Puteoli - They walked the famous Appian Way to Rome, approximately 100 miles north.
 28:16 Rome at last!

Total Distance: approximately 1400 miles Total Time: approximately 6 months Date: 58-59 AD

2. Some lessons from the trip:

a. about appearances (12-13) Appearances said the south wind would blow them north to Phoenix. Be careful; appearances can be deceiving!

b. about God's presence (23) He'll never forsake you, not even in your darkest hours.

c. about God's promises (24) Compare 23:11. He never breaks even one of them.

d. about God's protection (44) 276 men were on board, some of whom couldn't even swim, and fell into surf so rough that it tore the ship apart, yet all arrived safely on land!

e. about expectations Compare Paul's expectation in Rom. 15:23-24. God doesn't always do things the way you expect!

II. The Winter on Malta - 28:1-10 This fulfills Mk. 16:18 on two counts and is wonderful evidence from God of the truth of His word in the life of Paul.

1. the snakebite (3,5) Don't try this at home like some snake-handling churches in Kentucky do! God granted a miraculous intervention in this case. Also, see how the culture was; they so easily deified the creation and not the Creator!

2. the healings (8-9) These furnished an open door for Gospel ministry there.

III. The Ministry at Rome - 28:11-30 It lasted two years while Paul was imprisoned there. The church had already been established in Rome, possibly by converts returning home after Pentecost.

1. ministry to the Jews He first calls the Jewish leaders together, as always, and tries to convince them of the Gospel, but, like always, the majority reject Christ. It was sort of a final opportunity offered to the Jewish community in the capitol of the world and they rejected it, sealing the decisions made by Jews in other places and particularly in Jerusalem which began with rejecting Christ in the flesh. Paul's proclamation in verses 27-28 is significant. Jews, because of their obstinacy, will be blinded and God will deal with the Gentiles during this age.

2. personal ministry (30-31) Paul had special treatment as a prisoner. He was allowed to rent a house and be guarded by a soldier. This had a tremendous effect, compare Phil. 1:12-14. He was able to win many soldiers who guarded him (4:22) and probably some of Caesar's own household were won by him. He also directed the ministry of others like Epaphras, Luke, Mark, Timothy, and Aristarchus while there. One of his converts while imprisoned is a runaway slave named Onesimus who became like a son to him! What an encouragement to minister in whatever circumstances you find yourself!

3. written ministry During these two years Paul wrote his "Prison Epistles," Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon, some of the most wonderful and deepest books of the New Testament.

IV. Postlude Luke leaves off story here. Tradition says (and it seems so from Scripture) that Paul was released. He probably never made it to trial seeing there were no real charges against him and the Jews at Rome did not press his case. During the following year or longer of freedom that followed, Paul probably traveled in ministry again through Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia and then perhaps on to Spain as he originally planned. He also wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Eventually though, he was arrested again, this time just as Nero began his famous hatred against Christians. In prison again in Rome, he wrote 2 Timothy where he indicates that he knows his time has come to die. Tradition says that he was beheaded, a martyr for Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 1:1-15 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

1:1-7 Welcome To Romans

There are longer books in the New Testament, but there is certainly no book that explains and delineates the core of the Christian message better than it does. Romans is a letter written by Paul near the end of his third missionary journey to the Christians in Rome, a place he had never been and people he had never seen. Compare **1:13, 15:23-29**. He intended to go and visit them after he returned to Jerusalem. His intention was fulfilled, but he ended up there as a prisoner in chains, rather than a traveler to Spain. But anyway, a friend, Phoebe (16:1-2) was evidently going to Rome and Paul wrote this letter and sent it by her hand to prepare the way for his coming and to give to them the core of his message. Now, I want you to notice three things about this church at Rome:

(1) 1:8 - it was important Its good reputation was spreading to the whole Roman Empire. It was in a strategic location to have an effect on the world. It was said that "all roads lead to Rome". Rome was center of commerce, business, and government. A witness here could change the world; thus, it was important that this church be well grounded and firm. Friends, we are in a strategic area, here in Philadelphia. There are something like 4 million people here of every background, color, and nationality imaginable. It is an area that draws and attracts the business community, which affects the entire state and the eastern seaboard. We are in a place where our stand for Christ can make a difference in the world much better than if we were in a little town in the hills of Potter County. So, Paul's message here is especially important to us!

(2) 15:14-15 - it was mature This is not a letter written to new converts, to babes in Christ, but to a church that had knowledge and competence. We are a mature church, have had years of solid Bible teaching, but we need Romans to remind us again of the important points of our faith and practice, of the bedrock from which we are hewn.

(3) 16:19 - it was obedient to the Lord. Check the context. It had not fallen into any of Satan's snares, been deceived into false doctrine or even fallen into divisions among themselves. This letter was designed to help keep it that way! Folks, we've been true to the Lord; we haven't wavered, but Romans will help keep us on guard, keep us on right track. This book is just meant for us!

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

I. Introduction	1:1-17
II. God's Grace (doctrinal)	Chs. 1-8
III. God's Government (dispensational)	Chs. 9-11
IV. God's Guidance (developmental)	Chs. 12-15
V. Conclusion	15:24-16:27

Now, let's go back to the opening seven verses of the letter and find in Paul's greeting some very important facts that establish the viewpoint that Paul has about himself and about the church at Rome, and therefore the viewpoint from which we should approach not only this Book, but the Christian Life:

I. Our Vocation (1) Paul describes to them who he is and what his life is all about in three phrases. We are not what he was in the strictest sense; we are not apostles placed into a special office among the churches as he was. But everything he says about his vocation is also true of us:

1. we are servants The word is *doulos* which means bonds slave. The picture is that of **Ex. 21:2, 5-6**. Here's a master who set his servant free, but the servant didn't want to be free; he loved the master and became his devoted willing servant for life. Friend, that's us! In Christ you were set free from slavery to sin but you acknowledged Christ as your Lord, that is, Master. In love you submitted yourself to be His servant for life. You are not your own! Your existence here is not to please yourself, to do what you please, to follow plans you like. Your life belongs to Him, to do what He pleases, to follow His plans. We'd better get that through our heads! We exist only to please Him.

2. we are sent The word *apostle* means "one sent out". Note he was a called apostle; the Master called him and sent him out. Much like you would call your employee and send him to do a job. We are in this world as servants with a job to do. Christ called us to Himself and sent us into the world for a purpose. We are a people with a purpose; God saved us to accomplish something.

3. we are separated, limited to a specific, single purpose and that purpose is the Gospel of God, the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. We are sent to proclaim it in the world. That is the mission of our lives. That is

what each of us is to be about. We may accomplish it in different ways, such as preaching, teaching, witnessing, tracts, or practical ministries. But the goal is that in all we do the end result is that the Gospel is proclaimed and people come to Jesus Christ.

II. Our Message (2-5) Now, Paul takes a brief look at the message we are to take into the world. We have:

1. a message that was promised It was given ahead of time in the Old Testament. It was looked for and waited for for hundreds of years. We have a precious message to bear, the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption! Because of this, Paul quotes the Old Testament time and again in this letter. It is not a newly dreamed up message of man, but the very fulfillment of the Word of God.

2. a message that is about a Person The Good news we have is really summed up in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul mentions His Humanity as the Seed of David and His Deity as the Son of God, which was proved by the resurrection. God became man in Jesus Christ and He remains now the eternal God-Man. Fully God and fully man. We are not here to tell men how to make a better world or how to solve the world's ills. We are here to tell them about Jesus Christ, the God-Man who died for their sins and rose again.

3. a message that must be published It is for His Name's sake that we have our assignment: to publish the message, to proclaim it high and low to Jew and Gentile, to the ends of the earth, so that others might come to faith. Folks, that's what we're here for. We are people who have a message to proclaim to a needy world. That is the purpose of our life on earth! But note that in that purpose there is a great privilege:

III. Our Position (6-7) We as believers have a wonderful position, a beautiful standing in Christ:

1. we are selected We are called too. We are those who have heard the message and responded to God's call. We belong to Jesus Christ. We are a select group of people; from among all the people on earth, all 7 billion, we are called His people.

2. we are special We are the beloved of God. Now, God loves the world, but we are His beloved because we are in Jesus Christ. We are a special set-apart people, the pearl of great price that cost God all he had to purchase! He loves us in a way that is unique in the universe.

3. we are saints We are not "called to become saints" or merely "called saints", holy ones. We are not people who have been declared saints by men but people that have in Jesus Christ been declared holy and pure and righteous. That is our position before God, selected from among all people, beloved by Him in a unique way, and declared of all men to be holy right now. And it is in light of our privilege that our purpose comes. Seeing the position that God has put us in, should we not willingly get on with devoting our lives to their God-given purpose, to bearing the Message of His Son to all men?!

What are you living for today? What is the goal and purpose of your life? Is it to gather things, to be happy, or is it to serve Jesus Christ? *During the closing months of World War II, a group of American soldiers set about to rebuild a partially destroyed cathedral in one of the bombed-out towns of southern Europe. They were able to reconstruct the walls and roof, restore the windows and pews. One GI had been assigned to repair the life-sized white marble statue of Christ that stood by the door. Not being able to find the hands of the figure in the rubble, he was about to admit failure and throw the statue on the rubbish heap. Then he was struck by an idea. He found a white rectangle of cardboard, tied a length of string to its two corners, and hung it around the neck of the statue. On the cardboard he wrote these words: "I have no hands but yours!"* You are the hands of Jesus Christ to accomplish His purpose in this world. Is that what you are doing?

ROMANS 1:1-15 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

1:8-15 A Shepherd's Heart

As Paul opens his letter, he gives us a glimpse of his heart and we find that it is the heart of a shepherd; it is always on the sheep. Compare **2 Cor. 11:23-28**. What do you think bothered him most, those persecutions and hardships or his concern for the churches? Most of us, in facing the things Paul faced, would become totally self-centered, wrapped up in our own problems and deliverance from them. Not Paul; he had a shepherd's heart; he loved the sheep more than anything! This is exactly the kind of heart every pastor ought to have (the Greek for *pastor* is literally *shepherd*). It is the kind of heart every Christian leader should have as an elder, deacon, teacher, or youth worker; this is the heart you ought to have. It is the kind of heart every Christian ought to have, leader or not, a heart that loves the flock. Now, let's see how Paul's love revealed itself:

I. A Leader Lifts Up His People in Prayer (8-10) Paul prayed for those Roman believers even though he had never seen them! These verses reveal the prayer life of Paul as it relates to this church and probably to every other church. The real sign of his love for these folks is that they fill his prayer life! A Christian leader needs to have a prayer life, one that is filled with the concerns of his people. First, do you have a prayer life? Do you spend serious daily quantities of time in prayer?

Then, what is your prayer life filled with? With personal concerns or needs of others? That reveals you who you love most! Now, see the elements of his praying that he brings out here:

1. he praises God for them sincerely (8) Paul starts seven other New Testament letters this way too. Let me just read **1 Cor. 1:4, Phil. 1:3-4**. *I thank my God* is not just a trite phrase like "Thank God for your help". Paul meant that when he prayed for these folks, he literally thanked God in prayer for them. Now, note which ones:

a. for all of them He prayed, not "thanks God, for the believers at Rome" but he thanked God for each and every one that he knew as individuals and families and groups. Compare Ch. 16 and try applying it beg. w. verse 3! Now note what he gave thanks for:

b. for their testimony for Christ He gave thanks for their standing firm, their witness to the life-transforming power of Christ, given in different ways in their various lives. But it gained for the entire church a reputation that was spreading throughout the whole Roman Empire and having an influence everywhere because of it. He did not give thanks that they did well in business or that they were physically well, but that they were fulfilling their purpose on this earth, being witnesses. Now, I don't know about you but this verse puts me to shame. Thanksgiving is the thing I do least of in prayer and if I do, it is usually for personal things. I need to learn in praying to thank God for the people in my life! Is your heart filled w. thanksgiving?

2. he prays for them constantly (9) Thanksgiving is only part of his prayer life; he also prays for their needs, but the emphasis in this verse is how often he does it, constantly! Daily and through the day he prayed for them; they filled his prayer life (along with other churches). But note also:

3. he prays for them specifically (10) He did not pray "God bless the church at Rome, at Philippi, and at Colossae, Amen". He prayed specifically about a trip he planned to go there. I firmly believe Paul had prayer lists, he had to! They may have been memorized or written but he had them. I think the greetings of Rom. 16 probably were an elaboration of his prayer list for Rome! He prayed for them as individuals and for their needs. What fills your prayer life? Leaders, what fills yours? Teachers, youth workers, how about yours?

II. A Leader Longs For His People (11-13) Paul longed to be with them and see them. The Greek word is a strong word meaning to really long, to deeply desire. His heart yearned to be with them. A leader loves to be with his people; it is the fondest desire of his heart, but here's why:

1. he longs to feed them (11) He means "I long to help you grow spiritually, strengthen, encourage, teach, minister to you." Paul longed to use the gifts God had given him to benefit them. Every Christian ought to have a ministry based on the gifts God has given him. It may be public or private, big or small, but the desire of your heart ought to be to do that thing for others, to benefit others by it! Moreover:

2. he longs to fellowship with them (12) He doesn't mean to sit down and enjoy food and have a good time or tell Christian jokes and laugh. There's nothing wrong with those things, but what he really longs to be with them for is mutual spiritual encouragement, to share together the concerns of their hearts, to comfort and encourage each other in Christ, to pray with each other. That is fellowship! Note his desire was not one of a superior to bless the inferior; it was a mutual thing. He needed their strengthening and support and they his! Thirdly:

3. he longs to have fruit among them (13) Paul wants a harvest there; I believe he wants to be able to work with them there in Rome to win others to Christ. That fits the context of the next verses. His desire was not to go and be part of a tight little clique of saved people and enjoy them forever, but with them to win still others and grow the church there. What's the desire of your heart? Do you love the ministry God's given you? Do you love doing it? Do you love being together? Do you just enjoy each other's company or do you really long to minister and share with each other and work together serving the Master?

III. A Leader Loves All People (14-15) Paul's heart was big; it went beyond the Church at Rome to all those in Rome and to the rest of the world. Paul's heart came to be like God's heart, which is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. See:

1. he feels an obligation to all (14) He owes something to them because God saved him; He reached down by grace and saved a blaspheming, Christ-hating Pharisee. He feels a debt to every man, whether a Greek or a barbarian (non-Greek-speaker), whether wise or foolish. Paul's heart was burdened for the lost; it longed that they might hear and so:

2. he is always ready to fulfill it (15) He is eager, ready, anxious; he can't wait to get there and bring the message along with them to the Romans. Now that's a leader's heart; it's open, not closed; it encompasses the world, all the lost, the unsaved. Does your heart go beyond this church, your Christian friends and brothers? Are the people of Glen-side and Ardsley and North Hills on your heart? Do you stand ready to reach them?

Oh folks, if your heart really belongs to God, is wrapped up with Him, it will become like His. It will lift up your brethren in prayer; it will long for them; it will love all men and want to see them saved. I want to leave you with an Old Testament

verse from the KJV, 2 Kings 10:15, *And when (Jehu) was departed from there he came upon Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, coming to meet him; and he greeted him and said to him "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" And Jehonadab answered, "It is." (Jehu says) "If it be, give me thy hand!" And he gave him his hand and he took him up with him into the chariot".* And off they went to serve God together. Is your heart right tonight? Is it like God's, like Paul's? Does is have the same longings and desires as his? If so, then give me your hand and let's serve God together!

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Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

The Gospel: God's Good News To Us - 1:1-17

On Easter and Good Friday as we focused on Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, what we were really celebrating was the fact that God provided salvation for us through Jesus. But what does that really mean? In Eph. 3:18 Paul says he prayed that all believers would to have power, *...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ*. To say, "Jesus loves me" is simple enough and is true, but evidently God wants us to go much deeper and to grasp all the dimensions of how great that love really is and what it means to us. Likewise, to say that, "I am saved" or that, "Jesus saved me" is a simple concept that can be simply understood, but maturity requires us to grasp how wide and long and high and deep that salvation really is, to understand the utter greatness of the thing that God has provided for us. So today we're going to embark together on a study of the first 8 chapters of the book of Romans. In these chapters Paul gives us what is probably the longest and most systematic explanation in all the Bible of what our salvation really means. By way of:

Introduction Let's read verses (7-15). There is lots of good stuff in those verses that we could study, but for our purposes, two things are really obvious. First:

1. Paul had never been to Rome but knew and loved the Roman church We have no idea how the church got planted in Rome but it obviously happened very early on and by the time Paul wrote, the Roman church had a reputation throughout the whole of the Empire. Paul wrote this letter near the end of his third missionary journey about 57 AD to believers he had never seen in a place he had never been, even though he prayed for them continually. Actually, he was planning to go and visit them after he returned to Jerusalem, but we know it didn't exactly work out as he planned and he ended up there a few years later as a prisoner in chains instead. However, at this point, he wrote them this letter to prepare the way for his planned visit. Why?

2. Paul wrote to make sure the Romans clearly understood the Good News or the Gospel that he preached. That is, he wanted to make clear to them the very core of the message that he proclaimed everywhere he went, the Good News of God's salvation for mankind. And we are blessed because God has preserved this wonderful letter for us to learn from today.

So, let's start at the beginning and look at:

I. The Message Of Good News God Has Entrusted To Us (1) God Himself has a message of Good News to declare to the human race. It is a message of the greatest importance, first because it is from God Himself, the most important being in the universe, and when God speaks, everyone should listen! Then, it's important because it is a message about the most important subject there is, our eternal salvation, how we can be rescued forever and ever. It is a great message, a glorious message, and in verse 2, Paul points out that:

1. it is a message that was promised beforehand (2) This message of God is not something that came onto the scene with Paul or even with Jesus. This Good News was promised ahead of time in the Old Testament. It was declared by the prophets, it was pictured in the entire sacrificial system of the Tabernacle and the Temple, it was sung in the Psalms. Moses looked forward to it, Abraham rejoiced to see the day of its fulfillment and David was caught up in its glory in his prayers. Century after century, the faithful waited for the promises to be fulfilled. The message that we proclaim, the Gospel, is nothing less than the fulfillment of what God has promised for ages; it is God declaring, "I have kept My Word!" About what? Verse 3 tells us:

2. it is a message about a Person, about His Son Jesus (3-4) The Good news we proclaim is summed up in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. What about Him? Paul says He was one of us, a genuine human being with a royal genealogy that can be traced back to King David. But at the same time, He was also the very Son of God and God proved it by raising Him from the dead. The Good News is that God became a man in Jesus Christ to provide salvation for the world and now remains the eternal God-Man, fully God and fully man. We are not here to tell people how to make the world a better place or how to have a nice happy life. We are here to tell them about a Person, about Jesus Christ, God who became man, died for their sins and rose again. That's the message and because it is so great, so marvelous:

3. it is a message that must be proclaimed to all the peoples (5-6) This message, the Gospel, is such momentous Good News that it must be taken to all the nations, to all the peoples, all the ethnic groups of the earth, and they must all be called to obey it and follow Jesus. What He did is so glorious, so awesome, that for the sake of the reputation of

the name of Jesus, it must be published to the whole world and they are responsible to believe it and obey it. Yet right here in Kensington in the last few weeks, a team who were serving there met Cantonese speaking people who know virtually nothing about the name of Jesus and had no idea who He was and what He did, even though Easter bells were ringing in churches all around the city! And they are not alone; around the globe Joshua Project says that today there remain some 2.9 billion people in more than 4,000 ethnic groups who are unreached, that is, who have had still never had the realistic opportunity where they live to hear the Good News of Jesus. My point is NOT simply that they deserve the opportunity to hear for the first time what we've known all our lives, which they do. My point is that what Jesus did to save human beings is such an unspeakable gift that it absolutely MUST be told to every one of them for HIS sake! And we, like Paul, have been given both the power (the *grace*) and the commission (the *apostleship*) to do it. Or, to put it another way:

a. we have been set apart for this very purpose Back to verse (1). Paul says God set him apart for the Gospel, that is, God made the sharing of this Good News the very purpose of Paul's life on earth and he was to dedicate his life to proclaiming it. Now before you say, "Wait a minute; I'm not an apostle; I'm not called like he was", in 2 Cor. 5:19-20 Paul says this, *...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we [all of us!] are ambassadors for Christ...* God has this incredible message, this great good news of how Jesus provided salvation for the whole world and He has entrusted that message to US to deliver to them all as His ambassadors. This IS our core purpose in life, to share God's News with the world! It's why we live; it's why we're still here and not in heaven. As believers, God has set us apart, entrusted us with His message and commanded us to declare it to the whole world. But why should we do that? Why should we not be free to give ourselves to the pursuit of our own interests, of the things that make us happy? Why? Because:

b. we owe a debt to all people without distinction (14) Paul said, "I am a debtor! I owe a tremendous amount because Jesus reached down from heaven by His grace and saved me, a blaspheming, murdering, Christ-hating Pharisee! I owe Him my very soul, but He has commanded me to "pay it forward", as it were, to all the peoples of the world. My salvation puts me under obligation to tell the News to every human being. And that obligation applies whether the person is a Greek or a Roman like me or a barbarian, one of those 'other' Turkish or Persian or Chinese or Germanic or African peoples. It applies whether they are wise and educated and civilized or foolish and ignorant or even savage." Friends, we owe God a debt that we pay with our very lives as we devote them to proclaiming the Good News of His Son and, like Paul:

c. we should always be eager to fulfill it (15) He is eager, ready, anxious. He can't wait to get there and bring the message, along with these dear brothers, to the people of Rome. Our debt is not a burden that we laboriously pay back like a slave grudgingly earning his freedom. Our debt is one that we pay eagerly, with gladness, because of the immensity of what God has done for us!

I read about a man who once laid a piece of chocolate candy on a table. Then, picking up an ant, he put it near the delicious bon-bon to see what it would do. He expected it would immediately gorge itself on this huge delicacy but he was surprised to see it take only a single bite and then scurry off down the table and out of the room. However, very soon the little creature returned, followed by a long train of other ants who enjoyed the treat with him. Now why did he do that? Because built into his core instincts was an obligation, not to hide what he'd found, to keep it for himself and satisfy his own hunger with it for weeks, but an obligation to inform the rest of the colony so that the whole of his kind might survive with him. Folks, the message of the Gospel is so great, so huge, that it is too big and too wonderful to be kept to ourselves and enjoyed by us. In saving us, God has built into us the obligation to proclaim the Good News to our entire global colony because we have found it, so that they might be rescued along with us! Let's do it eagerly! And also, confidently! Why? Because:

4. it is a message that contains the very power of God (16) Think about that for a second. Paul has just written that he can't wait to get to Rome to preach the Gospel there. That is no light statement. Rome is the eternal city, the capital of the world, home of the mightiest power and force on the face of the earth, the Roman army, home of the most powerful man on earth, the Emperor, a city where allegiance and worship are demanded of everyone. It is a very dangerous place to preach the Gospel, not a place like Athens where men sit and endlessly debate religions and philosophies, but a place where power and might and strength are the understood language of the day. Telling Romans the story of how Jesus was put to death on a cross by Roman soldiers could well cause them to think that Jesus lost and Rome won! And yet Paul says he is eager to preach there and he is not ashamed of the Gospel. Why? Because it is not a human message. It is a message that contains the very power of Almighty God. That message itself, not anything that we do,

a. it saves human beings from the wrath of God The Roman legions were the most vicious means of death and destruction the world had ever known. But God declares that His Gospel has power to save, to deliver from something that even the mightiest soldier could not stand against. Look at verse 18. A sword may deliver from the wrath of man but nothing can deliver from the wrath of God! Even the Romans in their paganism would admit that men can't fight gods; their wrath must be appeased because it can't be resisted. Yet Paul brought a message that has the ultimate power of delivering a man from the very wrath of God, from the punishment of God which is far worse

than any earthly destruction because it is eternal and infinite! Paul is not ashamed because the weapon he carries is a powerful force, something that transforms lives and changes eternity. You can see it work! Look at the Book of Acts: Saul himself, the furious persecutor of Christians is gloriously transformed and now preaches everywhere the faith he once tried to destroy. Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, is now a humble servant of Christ. Sergius Paulus, a Roman proconsul on the island of Cyprus, now believes in Jesus Christ, not the Roman gods. A rough and tumble jailer at Philippi is now rejoicing with his whole family in Christ. Century after century down through history, this Gospel has impacted the lives of countless people who were living under the wrath of God and transformed them into fervent followers of Jesus who dedicate their very lives to His service. Warring Yanomami people and headhunting Sawi tribesmen, as well as civilized suburbanites like you and I, have been changed forever by the power of the message that we heard. And that message:

b. it is needed by every human being without distinction It doesn't matter whether that person is a Jew who zealously tries to keep the law of Moses or a pagan Roman who lives by the sword or an ardent Muslim who bows with his forehead on the ground toward Mecca five times a day or a Hindu who places rice and flowers before a stone statue or an educated American who lays his life on the altar of scientific evidence or materialism. EVERY single human being needs to hear this message in order to be rescued! Not one can be saved any other way, but the good news is that this message:

c. it saves every human being who believes There are no limits on who God can save. The Gospel will save a Roman soldier or a slave, a rich man or poor beggar, a drunken wretch or a gentle princess. We need never be ashamed to tell anyone, no matter who they are, where they live or what language they speak, because if they believe, they will be saved! No one is too good or too bad or too difficult. God's power is so vast that it saves absolutely everyone who believes! Sometimes we get intimidated because those around us seem to have it all; they have intelligence, education, money, success, or maybe great power and authority, or they may be hostile toward Christianity. But we have been entrusted with the mighty power of God Himself. If anyone, even one of those who seems farthest from it, will believe, God will save that person from eternal wrath and transform his life!

Listen to this: *George Thomas of CBN News wrote recently: In a region once hostile to the gospel, tens of thousands of Muslims are now following Jesus. Muslims across Northern Africa are converting to faith in Jesus Christ in record numbers. Filmmaker Tino Qahosh said, "What God is doing in North Africa, all the way from Mauritania to Libya is unprecedented in the history of missions." He has spent years traveling the region to document the transformation. He said, "I have the privilege of recording testimonies and listening to firsthand stories of men and women, of all ages... Pastor Salah leads one of the largest churches in Algeria. Some 1,200 believers attend the church, and they have baptized an average of between 150 to 160 believers per year. He said, "God has given to us many opportunities to witness at the police stations, at the courts, and in fact one time I went to the police station and they gave me 45 minutes to speak about Jesus! Just imagine yourself, they are all Muslims sitting and telling me, 'Tell us about Jesus!'" Emboldened by God's power, Thomas says Algerian Christians are now on a mission to take the gospel to the four corners of the globe. "God has put in our heart to be able to send 1,000 missionaries by the year 2025."* Dear friends, the Gospel is powerful! Its power is breaking forth today in some of the most resistant places on the earth! Now in verse 17 we have:

II. The Content Of This Message (17) We usually think of the Gospel the way that Paul spells it out in 1 Cor. 15, Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose on the third day. That's the story of what Jesus did, but it is not enough simply to tell a person the story. Paul focuses on the *meaning* of the story. The Gospel:

1. it reveals that there is a righteousness that comes from God Human beings almost universally think that they can attain a right standing before God by their behavior. They believe that they must be good or be religious or keep certain laws or act in certain patterns to find favor with God, depending on the culture. It is universally hidden from us that there is another kind of righteousness, God's kind of righteousness, a perfect righteousness where a human being can stand before God with absolutely no record of any wrong-doing, perfectly accepted by God with all his sins totally removed. The Gospel reveals that that God-kind of righteousness is not only something that only God Himself has, but He is willing to GIVE it to us! We cannot generate it or attain it by our own efforts, no matter how hard we try. Rather, the Gospel:

2. it reveals that this righteousness can only be obtained by faith It is literally *out of faith unto believing*, that is, it comes by means of faith to those who believe it. In other words, this right standing is bestowed on men by God as a free gift when they place their complete trust in what Christ did for them by dying on the cross and rising again. That's the Gospel! That's God's Good News for us! And in the first eight chapters of this letter Paul goes on to spell that message out in detail:

3. the four sections of God's message (1:18-8:39) which we'll be studying together in the rest of this series:

- a. Condemnation:** we all lack righteousness (1:18-3:20)
- b. Justification:** God provides His righteousness to us (3:21-5:21)
- c. Sanctification:** God's righteousness transforms our lives (6:1-8:17)
- d. Glorification:** we are ultimately made completely righteous (8:18-39)

Now, in verse 17 Paul confirms what he's saying by quoting what the Prophet Habakkuk wrote in 2:4 when he was pondering the impending invasion of the land by the Babylonians and said, *the righteous one will live (that is, will save himself from the impending wrath of God on the nation) by faith (that is, because of his faith, not his strength, his might, his skill, but only and simply because of faith)!* This is the concept that transformed the life of Martin Luther, a Catholic monk who was possessed with the idea of being right before God to the point where he was driven into every kind of pious deed, into a monastery, into extremely severe self-deprivation. Yet he had absolutely no assurance of being right with God. In the preface to his works, he writes: *I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they call it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God.... Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scripture from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus, that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.* God's Good News in that one verse transformed Martin Luther's life and put him in the forefront of a wave of salvation that shook the world and resulted in you and I sitting here today, a movement that we know as the Protestant Reformation. Let's be eager to share it with others!

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

The History Of The Human Race 1:18-32

From 1:18 to 3:20 Paul sets forth in detail the first point of the Gospel message, which is: **CONDEMNATION (1:18 - 3:20)**. If we are to fully understand what our salvation means, we first have to thoroughly understand what we have been saved FROM. So, his design in these chapters is simply to show that without Christ, the whole human race stands condemned before God, without exception. He will go on to show us that even "good" people are lost, that "religious" people are lost, that every single person starts out lost. But in this first section, he's going to show us how we got that way; he's going to show us a picture of the history of the human race from God's perspective and he starts in verse 18 by telling us that:

I. All Human Beings Stand Under God's Wrath (18) That word *wrath* is a term we seldom use. What it means is that:

1. God has an abiding, rightful anger The most basic truth we must realize is that God is God! He is the Maker, Owner, and Rightful Master of everything in the universe. He made it, He owns it and He has the right to control everything about it. Furthermore, He is holy. So, everything He created, He made to be holy and pure like Himself and when it is not, He is rightfully angry because of the evil. His very nature demands that He must eradicate and destroy sin and evil from His creation. Nevertheless, notice in the verse that His anger is directed toward *ungodliness*, that is:

a. against all who rebel against Him, against those who fail to acknowledge that He is God and has the right to control their lives and behavior and deliberately choose to ignore Him and do what they please. That *ungodliness*, dear friends, is a part of every one of us. It is in the nature we're born with to ignore God, to think and act as if we have the right to do whatever we want and thumb our nose at Him and His standards. And His anger is directed toward *unrighteousness*, that is:

b. against all who treat their fellow humans unjustly, who lie and cheat and steal and hurt others for their own advantage. Which of us does that not include? Listen, it makes God rightfully angry when we human beings sin both against Him and against one another. Fortunately for us, His mercy and patience is also involved in this process, so that He does not immediately destroy us. **He pours out His wrath**, sometimes in the events of our personal lives in this world, as He did when proud Herod was eaten by worms and died in Acts 12, or in the events of human history as He did in sending Israel captive to Babylon. But ultimately that pouring out of His wrath occurs after death in a lake of fire where the individual suffers the consequences of rebelling against God forever. This is the truth that God has revealed from the time He spoke to the first man, "If you sin, you will die!" Yet, verse 18 says that:

2. in our wickedness, we human beings suppress the truth about God We don't want to hear it and we don't want it to be known. So, we hold it down, we repress it, we bury it. We cover it up with lies and myths. We doubt it. We do everything in our power NOT to acknowledge the truth that God exists, that He has the right to control us and, especially, that because we rebel against Him, we stand under His wrath toward us.

Miroslav Volf, a Christian theologian from Croatia, like many today, used to reject the concept of God's wrath. He thought that the idea of an angry God was barbaric, completely unworthy of a God of love. But then his country experienced a brutal war. He writes: "My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love." [Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge* (Zondervan, 2006), pp. 138-139] We think, "Yeah, that makes sense. God should be angry at people who commit such atrocities!" But what we fail to realize is that it is also atrocious for a created being to refuse to worship and serve his Creator, for a person for whom Christ died the cruel death of the cross to reject Him or for a subject to deliberately break the righteous commandment of his rightful King. Before we come to Christ, God's wrath abides on every single one of us and we genuinely deserve it. But so does His love or He wouldn't have made a way to save us! Now Paul goes on to declare that we humans have absolutely no excuse for not believing the truth about God. For one thing:

II. We Have No Excuse Because God Reveals Himself In Creation (19-20) In other words, Paul is saying that:

1. the complexity and magnitude of the universe plainly reveals a Creator You don't find a watch or a camera lying on the ground and think, "I wonder how that evolved?" You KNOW somebody made it. It is too complex, too intricate, too detailed to have happened by chance. Everything about it screams, "Somebody made me!" Yet you watch nature program after nature program on TV graphically detailing the wondrous intricacies of the many plants and animals on earth, their instincts and capabilities to survive, the cycles of the natural world that never vary and the amazing complexity and capabilities within the human body and the punchline is always simply, "It's amazing how that evolved!" Listen, the odds of even one of the most common natural phenomena, like say birth, happening by evolutionary chance are trillions to one! **Ps. 19:1-4** challenges us to look upward, *The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world.* [NLT] Mankind has been looking at the stars for millennia and tracking their movements but instead of saying, "Somebody made all of those and put them exactly where they are!", people worshipped them and tried to use them to predict the future. It is no accident that there is only one place, only one planet, in our solar system or anywhere else in the universe that we have discovered so far that has the conditions necessary to sustain living beings. GOD made the earth to put life on! And if Somebody made all this:

2. He must transcend His creation and be unlimited in power If He made it, He can't be part of it. He's got to be above and beyond it, greater than it, so there's no use worshipping what He made. The God who made it must have a nature unlike any other being, a Divine nature. Plus, if He made all this, the stars, the sun, the earth, the mountains, the seas, the complexity of living things, then He must have infinite power. He must be more powerful than any force He has created. Indeed, He must be omnipotent. Any human being anywhere on earth, living in any era of time, can simply look at the world around them and know that there is a God who created it and them and if there is, then HE ought to be known and worshipped! Now let me be clear:

3. this general revelation (as we call it) can't save us. This realization that there is a God can't bring us forgiveness for our sins; it can't remove His wrath against our wicked behavior. Rather, **it makes us responsible to seek God** and try to find Him and know Him. It makes us responsible not to worship any created thing or any human being, to worship only the God who made it all. Yet that is not what human beings do! And this witness, this evidence:

4. it has been present from the time of the creation of the world No human being that has ever lived or will ever live has an excuse to say, "I did not know that there is a God!" Regardless of whether or not anyone ever tells them, or any missionary brings them word, every human being ever born is responsible to know that there is a God and to seek Him.

I like the song *There Is A God* that you hear on Christian radio by the group 33 Miles. Its chorus goes, *There is a God, this is the proof, That all around the evidence is speaking the truth. From the center of my soul, to the edge of the universe, Creation is crying out, believe it or not, there is a God!* That's the choice man faces. The evidence is all around us and we must choose to believe it or deny it, but we cannot ignore it. Then Paul goes on to declare that we humans have absolutely no excuse for not believing the truth about God for a second reason:

III. We Have No Excuse Because God Revealed Himself In Our History (21-23) Now don't read over those verses too quickly because in them is God's description of the entire history of mankind. Not only has every person always had the evidence of creation:

1. from the beginning the human race had direct knowledge of God (21a) ...*they knew God*. Adam and Eve knew God directly, personally. They walked with Him. Their sons Cain and Abel knew God and talked with Him. The human race began with the direct personal knowledge of the one true God. But within just a few generations Cain's descendants had forgotten or ignored Him and so did almost all of Seth's descendants. They threw away the knowledge of God, so much so that by the time of Noah the earth was filled with violence and the Scripture says that the thoughts of man's heart were only evil all the time. So, God in His righteous wrath against evil wiped the earth clean and started all over again with one man. Noah knew God and walked with God and talked with Him. His sons and their wives all knew God and saw what He did in the great flood. When they got off the ark literally every member of the human race had full knowledge of and relationship with God. But within only a few generations they threw it away for the second time and built the tower of Babel for their pagan worship in rebellion against Him and God confounded their languages, scattered them abroad and created the root stock for all the ethnic peoples of the earth. Skeptics always ask, "What about the people who have never had opportunity to hear?" The answer is, "That's not God's fault! Their ancestors had it and threw it away!" As Paul puts it:

2. they consistently refused to worship or thank God (21b) Man consistently said, "I know God but I don't want to worship God. I want to do things my way!" Pride got in the way, just like it did for Adam and Eve in the garden. And:

3. their pride led to foolish ways of thinking (21c-22) They got impressed with their own wisdom and in doing so became fools. And remember, a fool, according to the Psalms, is one who says in his heart, "There is no God!" Mankind proudly and consistently chose not to worship the God they knew. Instead, Paul says:

4. they exchanged the worship of the True God for idols (23) They wanted gods that they could control and manipulate. So, they made their own. They exchanged the worship of the glorious immortal God for the worship of gods made with their own hands, idols, images of created things, people, birds, animals, reptiles, you name it. Go to India today and you can see it everywhere, people bowing to statues of elephants and monkeys and grotesque demonic looking figures of gods and goddesses. Mankind did it from the very beginning in every culture on earth. Our ancestors were all idolatrous pagans. Of course, we think we've become more sophisticated than that. It is true that our idols aren't made of wood and stone and gold and silver, but we have made false gods of concepts and ideas and worship at their shrines just the same. "The universe was NOT created; it evolved." "Human beings are essentially good in their very nature." We believe, "Each person has the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of their own happiness", yet we deny that those very privileges are gifts we are endowed with by our Creator! We call evil good and good evil because as a culture we have exchanged the True God for proud, foolish, idolatrous thinking. All human beings do that, one way or another. And in the end, Paul says:

5. they devoted their lives to worshipping and serving created things (25) The entire human race exchanged the truth of the Eternal God for *THE* lie, that universal lie that someone or something can be venerated in His place. So, apart from Christ, all of us lay ourselves at the feet of some manmade god or idolatrous man-invented idea and spend our lives serving it. That is the history of mankind; that is MY history. No wonder every human being stands under the wrath of God who created all things for HIS glory.

Now we ought to consider momentarily why they did that? Why did the race turn from the knowledge of God? Why do humans refuse the light all around them? The answer is that every human being is born with a sin nature that we inherited from our first parents Adam and Eve. It is more than a tendency; it is a bent, a driving force inside us toward sin. Human beings universally choose to follow their own inner nature which hates God and wants nothing to do with God rather than retain the knowledge of Him. Therefore, Paul says:

IV. God Gave The Human Race Over To Pursue Their Own Evil Desires (24) In His wrath, God removed the restraining influence of His grace and allowed them to follow their own evil nature to where it naturally leads. You can see where it has led in cultures down through history and all over the world. First of all:

1. it resulted in rampant sexual immorality Right away Lamech took two wives, then there were multiple wives and concubines. As idolatrous religions developed, sexual rites became a part of man's self-invented worship with both male and female sacred prostitutes at the shrines. As Paul wrote this letter, he was in Corinth which was known for its unbridled sexual practices and where the Temple of Aphrodite, the fertility goddess, had more than 1,000 priestesses serving male worshippers all day long! The practice still exists in India where young low caste girls are devoted to the goddess or see it as their only choice to survive in life. To be fair, don't blame the women; the whole system is driven by the evil lusts of men! Remember the Browns telling us about a 15 year old Yanomami girl who was causing jealousy in their village by sleeping with one man over another. So, he threw an arrow at her and it killed her. That's their culture without Christ! But honestly are we any better? Since we've eliminated God from our thinking, sex is everywhere right here. Down in the city our teachers deal with 15 year old girls who are pregnant. In their culture they believe they have to be sexually active in dating. It's expected and normal. And much of America is right there with them, even though

God has said that sex belongs ONLY inside the boundaries of marriage. We don't care! We follow our lusts and reap the consequences! Second, Paul says:

2. it resulted in the practice of homosexuality (26-27) David Guzik says: *Paul wrote to a culture where homosexuality was accepted as a part of life for both men and women. For some 200 years, men who openly practiced homosexuality, often with young boys, ruled the Roman Empire. At times, the Roman Empire specifically taxed approved homosexual prostitution and gave boy prostitutes a legal holiday. Legal marriage between same gender couples was recognized, and even some of the emperors married other men. At the very time Paul was writing, Nero was emperor. He [later] took a boy named Sporus and had him castrated, then married him (with a full ceremony), brought him to the palace with a great procession, and made the boy his "wife." Later, Nero lived with another man, and Nero was the "wife."* Think how dangerous it was for Paul to write this! He says clearly that homosexuality is against nature. Our culture has almost universally believed a lie, "People are BORN that way; they can't help it any more than they can help the color of their skin or hair!" No, they are not! Scientists have never found a "gay gene" and they never will because there isn't one. It is a practice that they are led and introduced to by their life experiences, fueled by their inner passions, just like any other variety of sexual immorality. So, it can be stopped and changed, as many former practicing homosexuals would testify. Then note that Paul says it is, *shameful in character*. It is not something to be "brought out of the closet" and paraded openly. It is dishonorable, beneath human dignity. Eph. 5:12 says of behavior like this, *...it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret*. We shouldn't be talking about it openly, much less passing laws legalizing gay marriage! Then Paul says, *it carries its own penalty*. Sometimes it is the visible penalty of venereal disease or HIV, but even deeper is the emotional damage that universally occurs in the hearts of people who practice sexual sin. Now, let me be clear: does God hate homosexuals? NO! God LOVES people that practice homosexuality, just like He loves adulterers and murderers and liars and thieves and the rest of us; Jesus died for every one of them! He just hates what they DO. In fact, Paul says thirdly that God's giving us over to our own desires:

3. it resulted in every form of wicked behavior (28-32) Mankind practices an overwhelming array of evil. Primitive societies like the Yanomami or the Sougb we know, tribes that have been isolated completely from any godly influence, don't end up "peaceful savages" living idyllic lives; their societies are filled with cruelty, violence, murder and revenge, even headhunting and cannibalism. Africa is a perfect model of where the human race goes. In South Sudan in recent months the Nuer tribe rebelled against the Dinka government and thousands were killed and driven from their homes. Just a week ago Dinka forces including a mob of 300 youth stormed the refugee camp where 5,000 Nuer people were sheltered, killing 58 and wounding 100. UN troops couldn't stop it and the cycle of vengeance continues. It's happened in Uganda, Rwanda, Liberia and it's still going on today in the Central African Republic. Women raped, children killed, houses burned, that's where the nature of man leads him. Are other parts of the world better? Watch World News tonight and see ethnic Russians in Ukraine smashing windows and trying to take over buildings while Putin has his troops poised on the border to make sure Russian control is not lost. We inherently KNOW all of this is wrong, that all these things evil, yet we do them anyway!

No wonder Paul warns in Col. 3:6, *Because of these things the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience*. And Jude wrote: *Look! The Lord is coming with thousands and thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, and to convict every person of all their thoroughly ungodly deeds that they have committed, and of all the harsh words that ungodly sinners have spoken against him*. - 14-15. We have taken God's perfect world and turned it into giant version of the Black Hole of Calcutta. On June 20, 1756 the Bengali commander of Fort William, took 146 British prisoners and locked them in the Fort's guardhouse overnight. All of them were crammed into a space 14x18 feet with but little ventilation and the door barred shut. By nine o'clock several had died, and many more were delirious. A frantic cry for water now became general, and one of the guards, more compassionate than his fellows, caused some to be brought to the bars, where several received it in their hats, and passed it on to the men behind. In their impatience to secure it, nearly all was spilt, and the little they drank seemed only to increase their thirst. Self-control was soon lost; those in remote parts of the room struggled to reach the window, and a fearful tumult ensued, in which the weakest were trampled or pressed to death. They raved, fought, prayed, blasphemed, and many then fell exhausted on the floor, where suffocation put an end to their torments. At 6 in the morning the door was opened and of the 146 only 23 crawled out alive. A monument remains in a nearby church yard today. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Hole_of_Calcutta]. God left us to our own devices in His world and we've made it a black hole of clawing, struggling, blaspheming people trampling one another to survive. And the only ones who will get out of it alive are not the strongest, but those who trust in Jesus Christ to save them.

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

The Lostness Of "Good" People - 2:1-16

In these first 2 ½ chapters of Romans, Paul is explaining in depth the first aspect of the Gospel: the fact that all human beings are lost and rightfully deserve God's wrath. At the end of chapter 1 he outlined the history of the human race and how we end up in all kinds of sexual sin, envy, murder, strife, deceit and all other types of wicked behavior that plainly deserves God's wrath. But Paul is a mind reader. He knows that somebody reading his letter is thinking, "But wait a minute! I'm not like that. I don't do all those bad things. People like that *obviously* deserve punishment, but do I? I'm a GOOD per-

son!" And this hits home for us, even as believers, because we know people like this and even love some of them dearly! They are "good" people; they are moral and kind and generous. They are helpful and regularly do good and admirable things. In fact, some of them put Christians we know to shame by their principles and behavior! It grieves our hearts to realize that they are lost and separated from God. This also bears upon the case of those who have never had the opportunity to hear the Gospel. Surely among the billions of them in other lands who have no contact with the Gospel there are some who do not live licentiously and strive to do good! Are they really lost too? Would it not be enough to strive to be good if you have no opportunity to know Christ? So, Paul pretends he's talking to this "you", this imaginary questioning person and explains in verses 1-4 that:

I. "Good" People Sin Just Like "Bad" People (1-5) [Read 1-2] *Such things...* What things? The evil stuff I just mentioned at the end of chapter 1. There's no question that:

1. we know that people who do "bad things" deserve punishment It comes naturally to us to realize that murderers and rapists and kidnappers and traffickers and drug lords deserve punishment. We're angry about what they do, so surely God must be angry about it. It's easy to compare ourselves to other people and what they do and categorize them as "bad" and ourselves as "good", or at least "better than them". But Paul points out that:

a. we fail to see that we actually sin against God just as they do Oh sure, I've never committed murder or kidnapped anybody or done most of the other awful things on Paul's list. But you see, to put it in language that is easily understood today, God has a zero-tolerance policy about sin! You know, just like a school may have a zero-tolerance policy about drugs: get caught once and you're out, no exceptions. Or against fighting: get involved in one fight and you're expelled. It is not that God can tolerate a little bit of sin or a few sins but do something major and you're gone. It takes only one sin to make me a sinner. All Adam did was eat a piece of fruit that God told him not to eat; that hardly rates as what we'd call a "serious sin" and yet through that one sin death came upon him and all his descendants! Why? Because God is an unfair, intolerant being who won't cut us any slack? No, because God is HOLY, absolutely pure, and NOTHING impure or unclean can be in His presence or, ultimately, in His creation! It's not simply His policy, something He decided to make up and put in place; it's His very NATURE! As Habakkuk put it [1:13], *Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong....* If He could, He would cease to be absolutely good! He wouldn't be the God we know and love. So, OUR sins are just as evil in nature, just as much diametrically opposed to the heart and character of God as those of the people we think of as being "really evil"! Therefore:

b. when we judge others, we are really judging ourselves! When we say, "Sin like that deserves to be punished!", we're really saying, "I deserve to be punished!", because our sin is sin too! In fact, Paul goes on to say:

2. it is arrogant to assume we will escape God's judgment by being "good" [Read 3-4] It is the height of arrogance to say that "God won't condemn ME; I'm too good to deserve that!" I'm reminded of a certain Pharisee Jesus mentioned who was in the Temple one day praying, *God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get...* - Lk. 18:11. That guy didn't get very far with God, did he? His prayer bounced right off the ceiling. We're appalled at how arrogant he is when we read the story, but "that guy" is every person who thinks that they are good enough that their good deeds make God obligated to save them! "That guy" is the huge majority of all the people we know who live all around us! "That guy" is everybody who says, "Well, of course I'll go to heaven, I've always been a good person!" If you were truly good, Jesus didn't have to die for you; God went through the agony of sending His own Son to a cross to save a person who didn't need saving in the first place! Basically, to say "I'm good enough to go to heaven" is to say "I am as good as God!" *The story is told of an attorney who sued a large corporation, asking for a huge sum of money as a settlement. The amount seemed utterly ridiculous to everyone in attendance, including the judge, who asked the attorney why he was demanding such an exorbitant compensation. The lawyer responded, "I'm doing this for one reason," and with head held high he announced, "I am, you understand, the best attorney in the whole world." When the trial was over, a good friend asked him, "Why did you brag about yourself the way you did?" Without batting an eye, the attorney responded, "There was nothing else I could do. After all, I was speaking under oath. I had to tell the truth!"* We laugh at this kind of arrogance, but when we think, "I am good", that is exactly what we're doing, sincerely believing a delusion of grandeur about ourselves that is not merely far from true, but it is a rank offense to God. You see, according to verse 4:

3. God's kindness is intended to reveal our sin and lead to a change of heart We think God is kind to us and blesses us with so many things because we deserve it, that He is patient with us and overlooks our faults and failures because our goodness merits it. But the exact opposite is the case. The more we see of Him, the more we should see of how we can never measure up. His goodness toward us is intended to open our eyes, to help us to see how good and kind and loving He is and how we rebel against Him over and over and over again. It is supposed to lead us to a change of mind about ourselves, to take the proud Pharisee in us and change our prayer into, *God have mercy on me, a sinner!* It's supposed to make us wake up and see ourselves as we truly are, to shake us out of this grand delusion about our own goodness and give us an attitude that says with Paul, *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst.* - 1 Tim. 1:15. So:

4. when we presume others deserve judgment but we don't, this is what happens **(5)**. This attitude:

a. it reveals a hardened, unchanged heart toward Him His kindness and goodness toward us is not having its intended effect. Instead of making us humble, it's making us proud, hardening us in our arrogance toward Him and therefore:

b. we are storing up wrath for ourselves on the day of judgment The more we insist how good we are, the more wrath is waiting for us on that great day when we stand before Him and see at last how truly wrong and deceived we were! We're just throwing more fuel on the fire!

Now, in verses 6-11, Paul goes on to explain that:

II. God Judges Each Of Us According To Our Actual Deeds (6-11) [Read (6)]

1. God judges what we actually DO, our works, and that includes not only our actual deeds or actions, but also our words, what we say, and even our thoughts and attitudes that He alone can see. His judgment of us is not based on some overall opinion or generic evaluation, but on the actual rightness or wrongness of every word, thought and deed of our lives. They're all there; every one of them is recorded and Rev. 20 tells us that at the Great White Throne the books are opened and the dead are judged by what is written in the books! Now read verses 7-10. Look at the two contrasting persons here. Paul says that:

a. one who steadfastly, constantly, perpetually, does good shows that he seeks God (7, 10). He does not seek the things mentioned in verse 7 in a selfish fashion, to obtain glory and honor and immortality for himself as a reward for his deeds. Rather, it means that:

(1) he desires God's glory, honor and eternal existence with Him He is all about God, not about himself. He wants God to get the glory and honor He deserves as God and longs to be with God forever, so he unflinchingly does what God wants every moment of his life. And as a result:

(2) he receives eternal life, glory, honor and peace with God He gets the object of his heart's desire, God and all that comes with Him.

On the other hand, Paul says:

b. one who does evil shows that he is self-seeking (8, 9) He is acting in his own interests, not God's. In fact, at that moment:

(1) he disbelieves God's truth and follows injustice An act of evil is an act of unbelief; it is saying, "I don't believe God is right about this" or "I don't care whether He is, I'm going to do what I want; I'm going to be my own god and live my own way. I'm going to choose to do what I know is not right, to follow injustice". And that person, Paul says:

(2) he receives God's passionate wrath at the judgment, plus **trouble and calamity** from Him here in this life.

Now here's the rub. Do you know anyone who fits into category number one, who perpetually, always seeks God and not self? Solomon put it like this, *Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.* - Ecc. 7:20. Nobody qualifies! Everybody, every human being, every man, woman, boy and girl sins! We all choose to serve ourselves and disbelieve God! Look with me at Jesus' discussion with an expert in Jewish law in **Lk. 10:25-28**. He had the right answers, the very ones Jesus Himself gave on another occasion. "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus says, "Great! You know the right answer; you see it more clearly than most people! So, go DO it and you will live forever!" But look at his response **(29)**. He knew he couldn't DO it; no human being can DO it! So, he immediately looked for a way to excuse himself from having to be perfect! That's what we all do. The best we can say is, "I'm not so bad, not as bad as...." None of us loves God with every fiber of our being and always does what pleases Him the way Jesus did. We can't get life that way. And here's the kicker:

2. God is completely impartial (11) He plays no favorites. He grants no exceptions. As far as the matter of salvation is concerned, He cannot say, "Oh well, you tried really hard; I'll let you in because of your good effort! Good is good, evil is evil and all evil must be punished and eradicated! So, every one of us, even the best of us, stands condemned before Him.

But wait a minute. What about people who don't know anything about God, who have no idea what right and wrong, good and evil truly is. Well, in verses 12-16, Paul goes on to explain that:

III. God's Judgment Does Not Depend On How Much We Know (12-16) What is evil and what is good can be known clearly because:

1. God spelled out the nature of righteousness in the Law given to Israel about 1400 BC. *You shall not worship any other god...you shall not murder... you shall not steal... you shall not covet*, and so on. He gave Israel a written code of His law, of what is good and what is evil, and they were blessed to have such a precious revelation from Him. However, no one can use the excuse, "Well, I never knew about that..." because:

2. God has placed in each person an internal awareness of right and wrong We know by nature, by that remnant of the image of God that is still within us when we're born, by instinct if you will, the difference between right and wrong. Look at almost any society on earth, even the most primitive, and you will find that universally people regard it as wrong to kill someone who is not an enemy, to steal what belongs to another, to take the wife of another, to lie to those who trust you, to ill-treat parents and so on. All the basic commandments God gave in the decalogue about our relationship to other people are recognized in nearly every society all over the world. Why? Because we KNOW inside ourselves that certain deeds are just wrong. God, in that sense, has written the essence of His law directly on every human heart. And what's more:

3. God has also given each person a conscience to apply it Conscience is something hard to define, but every person has one. It's that part of us that takes what we know and uses it to evaluate what we do. It's what makes a little kid feel guilty for taking cookies he was told not to take. Your conscience takes what your nature knows is right and wrong and either accuses you to yourself or excuses you, that is, defends your behavior as being right. Now, to use scriptural terms, a conscience can become corrupted, weakened, or seared. That is, evidently you can ignore it; you can deaden it and desensitize it so that after while it will not function very much, but it was there to start with. Every human being has enough light to know basic right and wrong and a conscience to convict him when he does evil, whether he ever hears God's written statement of it during his life or not. Every human being knows enough NOT to sin, but not one of us DOES it. But, Paul says:

4. one day Jesus Christ will pronounce judgment on all acts, secret or overt God has appointed Him the Judge and when we stand before Him ALL the things we have done will be revealed, especially the ones that other people can't see and don't know about, down to the last and most minute acts and words and thoughts, and what will be clear is just how many of them were evil. And the punch line is back in verse 12:

5. ALL who have sinned will perish with or without external knowledge (12) If we didn't know about the Law, we'll perish because we violated the inner law God planted in us. If we did know the Law, we'll perish because we failed to keep the Law He revealed to us. Either way, we perish!

The point of this whole section is clear: **Without Christ**, those we deem to be **"GOOD" people ARE actually lost!** As I've mentioned before, Martin Luther tried as hard as anybody ever had to be good, to be righteous, to live up to God's holy standards and the more he tried, the more miserable he became because the more he tried, the more aware he became of just how short he fell. But that's exactly how God intended it to work! When we become proud of how good we are, we miss the point in our arrogance. We do not see in truth at all. But when we see how far short we fall, no matter how hard we try, then we can see just what Jesus did for us. Until then, we can't. After he came to see, Martin Luther wrote this poem, which I hope expresses what all our hearts realize today:

*I do not come because my soul is free from sin and pure and whole and worthy of Thy grace;
I do not speak to Thee because I've ever justly kept Thy laws and dare to meet Thy face.*

*I know that sin and guilt combine to reign o'er every thought of mine and turn from good to ill;
I know that when I try to be upright and just and true to Thee, I am a sinner still.*

*I know that often when I strive to keep a spark of love alive for Thee, the powers within
Leap up in unsubmissive might and oft benumb my sense of right and pull me back to sin.*

*I know that though in doing good I spend my life, I never could atone for all I've done;
but though my sins are black as night, I dare to come before Thy sight because I trust Thy Son.*

*In Him alone my trust I place, come boldly to Thy throne of grace, and there commune with Thee.
Salvation sure, O Lord, is mine, and, all unworthy, I am Thine, for Jesus died for me.*

If you happen to still be trusting in your goodness today or if you're hanging on to hope that someone you care about might "squeak through" because they're good enough, give it up once and for all. You don't have any goodness. Neither do I. Neither does that person you care about, so pray for them and share with them the good news. The only hope any of us have, the only basis on which we can ever stand before our Holy God is by humbly clinging to this simple truth, "Jesus died for me!"

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation **The Lostness Of "Religious" People - 2:17-3:8**

Remember that in these first 3 1/2 chapters, Paul is spelling out in great depth the first fact of the Gospel message: our **CONDEMNATION**. In the end of chapter 1, he showed us that the pagan peoples of the earth who traded the knowledge

of the true God for idols and ended up practicing every variety of evil stand under God's wrath. In the first half of chapter 2 he showed us that even "GOOD" people who try their best to be moral are lost, because in reality they still sin. Now another thought comes to his mind. Paul, even though he is an apostle of Christ, is still every ounce a Jew, both in ethnicity and in his religious background. Thousands of the early believers were also Jewish like him and came out of a zealously religious background like he had. So:

1. Paul wrote this next section mainly to his own Jewish people (17) The big question is, "What about Israel?"

God had created them and chosen them to be His very own people from the time of Abraham nearly 2,000 years earlier. God had taken them out of Egypt and given them His Law. The whole of the Scripture written at that time centered upon them. What about the Jewish people, many of whom, Paul admitted in 10:2, had a genuine zeal for God? Well, here is the Jewish mindset:

a. Jews divided the world into two categories: Jew and Gentile The Jews were God's people; everybody else was not. To fully worship the true God, one needed to convert and become a Jew and keep God's laws as the Jews did. And the sign of entering into that special relationship, for males, was circumcision. Therefore, the Jews used the term **circumcised** to refer to themselves as belonging to God and the term **uncircumcised** as a term of derision to refer to Romans, Greeks, Syrians and everybody else. So, Paul wrote specifically to his own people, the Jews, to address this "I am a Jew; I keep God's laws!" attitude, but:

b. we can apply its truths to other "religious" people In our day there are millions of people who take the generic name of being Christian, who fill church buildings all across our land and throughout the world, who give assent to the Bible, who pray, who attend worship services, who observe religious rituals like baptism and communion, who try to do good things and follow the teachings of Jesus. They call themselves Christian and do Christian things, but they are relying upon their good deeds and religious participation to make them right with God. They do not really understand the meaning of the Gospel nor have a genuine personal relationship with Christ. There are "Christian" religious people like this living all around us; many of them identify with the Roman Catholic church or with other mainline Protestant churches. Now hear me clearly: there are some TRUE, GENUINE believers who get it in all of those churches, but there are thousands upon thousands who are relying upon their religiousness rather than Jesus, *having* (as Paul said to Timothy) *the appearance of godliness but denying its power* - 2 Tim. 3:5. They are just like the Jews Paul is talking to. We might also apply some of this to people who are zealous about a different religion, Islam, for instance. There are a billion Muslims in our world today, hundreds of thousands of them here in the US, 50,000 in Philadelphia, and many are zealously religious, doing the things that their book commands, bowing in prayer toward Mecca 5 times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadan, going to the mosque on Friday, keeping dietary rules and so on, counting on their performance of these duties to gain merit before Allah. A few blocks from where we sit this morning is a Buddhist Temple that sees lots of activity. At the bottom line, Buddhists hold that their proper behavior in this life will get them a better one in their next incarnation and ultimately release them into Nirvana. People who rely upon being religious are everywhere all around us! Well, in verses 17-20 Paul explains:

I. The Thinking Of People Who Rely Upon Being Religious (2:17-20) He begins in verse 17 by saying:

2. they rely on performance of duties and are confident that God accepts them because of it (17) The word *rely* in Greek means *to lean upon*; it's what you're doing to your pew right now, putting your weight on it! The Jew relied upon the fact that he was born a descendant of Israel and that he was privileged to have God's Law, confident that it gave him a special relationship to God. The religious person relies on the fact that he was "born Catholic" or "born Muslim" or whatever and trusts in the fact that he is doing the religious duties that God wants and expects of him and that God is pleased by that. Then, in verse 18 Paul points out that religious people like this:

3. they know and even approve of many of the right things God expects (18) They know immorality and adultery are wrong. They participate in worshipping God as they understand it and in giving and helping the unfortunate. They abhor lying and deception and are concerned for things like justice and peace and the rights of the downtrodden. The religious person knows right from wrong, approves of and even does many of the right things. Furthermore:

4. they are often confident that they are right and a guide to others (19-20) The pious Jews Paul knew tended to look at themselves as having arrived, as being a guide for the blind who don't understand, a light to help others out of darkness, instructors of those who are less wise, teachers of those who are "babes". In other words, the religious person is convinced that by his religious knowledge and practice of rituals that he is pleasing God and, very often, that he is superior to others. The best example, and I'm sure the one that Paul is thinking of because he was one, is the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They loved the law and reveled in it; they even kissed the scrolls! They were zealously concerned to keep it in every minute point. But their zeal for religion produced in them the attitude that they had arrived, that they were pleasing to God and totally acceptable to Him, the epitome of what God wanted, and everybody else was beneath them. Yet their hearts were so far from Him! You see, Paul says, here is:

II. The Problem That Jews And, indeed, All Religious People Have:

1. they break the very Law they rely on (21-22) The point is that we who have the most knowledge of God and what He demands, don't actually DO it! Paul raises the example of three particular areas where this is often the case and what comes to mind for me is the examples that Jesus experienced in the intensely religious culture of His day. For example, practically everybody knows, agrees with, and even teaches the command, *You shall not steal*. Yet the very people that say it do it! In Mk. 12:40, Jesus castigated the scribes, the men whose lives were given to meticulously copying the scrolls of the Law, because while they would zealously defend the command not to steal:

a. they devoured widows' houses and for a pretense made long prayers Here were women whose husbands had died and left them without anyone to protect them, who were scraping to find some way to make a living and feed their children and these pious, religious men had found ways to take advantage of them and swindle them out of the little they had. I have always pictured it as foreclosing on the poor widow when she could no longer pay the debt on her house, but doing it with great empathy and even praying over the family as they were put out into the street. Now that's an extreme case of hypocrisy, but people who loudly espouse "not stealing" seem to always find creative ways to steal, whether it's taking money under the table without reporting it or cheating on taxes or downloading copyrighted songs you didn't pay for. There is NO ONE who hasn't stolen something somehow. Then there were the Pharisees, careful keepers of the Law, who certainly stood firmly behind the command, *you shall not commit adultery*. And yet

b. they lightly divorced their wives for others They found a legalized way to do what they wanted, to have another woman. That's why they came to Jesus in Mt. 19:7-9 and strongly asserted that Moses had told them to give a wife a writing of divorce and send her away. Jesus had to explain to them that God's intent was for the husband and wife to be one forever and that it was their own hard hearts that created the problem. I don't have to tell you that even the very religious people in our society while clearly holding that it's wrong to cheat on your spouse, have no problem legally divorcing a spouse because they met someone else they'd rather be with. Jesus said clearly, "If you divorce your spouse to marry someone else, that's adultery!" Then, in Paul's time, all Jews vehemently abhorred idolatry. No Jew would ever think of worshipping one of the idols of the Greek and Roman people around them. So, what does Paul mean when he says, *Do you rob temples?* Nobody knows exactly, but here's at least something similar. You remember how on at least two occasions Jesus cleansed the Temple, how he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and drove out the vendors selling animals for sacrifice. And what did He shout?

c. the leaders had made God's Temple a den of thieves - Mt. 21:13 They had managed to take the very worship of God Himself and through their greed turn it into a business opportunity, right in the very courts that were built for the nations to come and pray in! Religious thieves were robbing God by selling sincere worshippers overpriced sacrifices while claiming they were advancing worship! They would never worship a statue but they'd embezzle money for themselves that would have gone straight into the Temple treasury! How many religious charlatans through the years have had the audacity to literally steal from God by turning their ministry into a cash generating machine for themselves! And, of course, it's easy to say, "Well I'm not like those guys! No wonder Jesus chewed them out! They deserved it. They were all total religious hypocrites!" But go with me to the Sermon on the Mount for a moment.

d. Jesus explained that we break God's commands, not merely in outward acts, but in our hearts Look at Mt. 5:21-22. God didn't simply mean not to commit the outward act of murder; you can commit murder in your heart and with your words. God wants us not even to have ill feelings toward others! Or look at 5:27-28. God didn't simply mean not to commit the outward act of sexual sin; you can sin sexually with someone in your mind. That's why pornography is such a serious thing! God wants us to have pure thoughts toward other men and women who we're not married to, not to lust after them!

You see, God's standard is perfection! He commanded us to be perfect as He is perfect; that's the true aim of the Law. But every one of us who espouses it breaks it! We all do the very things we tell people not to do! *We're all like the old mountain man who claimed to be the best shot around. All over the valley where he lived, he had targets that were painted on trees and fenceposts with the bullet hole dead in the middle. One day an observer hid out and watched him for a while and the truth was that the old man would shoot at a tree, then go find the bullet hole, paint the target around it and carve his initials next to it!* Instead of shooting at God's target, which is perfection, that we know we'll miss, we find a way to create our own target to show we're good enough, when we're really not! We, especially the religious people among us, tend to justify our behavior to make it appear right instead of falling on our faces and admitting how far short of holy we really are. That's why Paul says of the Jews that:

2. their behavior dishonors the God they claim to worship by causing Him to be disrespected (23-24) People tend to recognize and spot hypocrisy quickly. When they see us do something that is the opposite of what we proclaim, people say, "If he's a... (Jew, Christian, Muslim or whatever), I don't want anything to do with it." That applies to us sincere believers as well as "merely religious" people. We all dishonor our God by our behavior.

Now in the next section, Paul tells us:

III. The Truth About Being Religious (2:25-29)

1. religious identity and ritual have value only if God's law is kept (25-27) All that circumcision does is to reaffirm that you are committed to keep the law. But it is deeds that God looks at. If a non-Jew kept the whole law that's written on his heart perfectly, he would be much better than a Jew who knows the law but has broken it. However, it is what we actually DO that counts. Keeping commanded rituals, such as circumcision for the Jew, is only one small part of overall right behavior. However, no one keeps the Law or follows their conscience perfectly. That's why:

2. external identity and rituals do not produce relationship with God (28) A person is never accepted because he is born Jewish or born Catholic or born Muslim or whatever! Outward rituals like circumcision or baptism or bowing toward Mecca cannot remove our sins and bring us into God's presence. In fact:

3. circumcision is to reflect the work done by the Spirit in our hearts (29) A person who is truly accepted by God is accepted because God has done a work in his heart, not in his flesh! Circumcision was meant to be a picture of the fact that when you come to Jesus and His Spirit comes into your heart, He kills that old, dead spirit inside and creates a brand new one that is pure and holy. Just like baptism, it's a reminder that the "old me" died with Christ and I'm a new person. Rituals are never meant to be ends in themselves, means of saving us, not even the sacrifices of the Old Testament; God always intends that these things are merely signs and symbols to point us to His true work in saving us. Simply being religious can't save you!

But, of course, when you tell this to a religious but lost friend, they are not going to buy it. They will begin to raise objections. In the beginning of chapter 3 Paul anticipated four different:

IV. Objections That Religious People May Raise (3:1-8) The first is that:

1. Israel has no advantage as God's chosen people (1-2) The Jew says "Well then, what's the use of being a Jew and doing all these things?" The "Christian" says, then what's the use of church-going and praying and being baptized and taking communion? Paul's answer is: you have been entrusted with the very words of God! You have the opportunity to know in a clear and concrete way what God requires, that much of the world doesn't have. You can read what God says and know your state before Him! The second objection is that:

2. God would appear unfaithful to Israel if they are lost (3-4) "If there are religious people without true faith, doesn't that make God look unfaithful? Doesn't that make Him look like he doesn't regard what people do, like He doesn't care whether we try to worship and obey Him or not?" Paul says, "Not at all; God is always right. You can't malign the character of God; He's perfect! If there is any unfaithfulness, it is not on God's part but on ours! God will always be proved right!" The third objection is that:

3. God is wrong to punish us since our sinfulness shows His righteousness (5-6) The religious person says, "If human beings can't do any better than this, if it's impossible for us to keep God's standards, then it's not fair for us to be held accountable. After all, we wouldn't expect a child to do something he could not do, would we? So, God would be unjust to judge us! Our failures serve to point out how perfect and holy He is!" Paul says: "God is never unjust; if that were so, how could God be the judge of all the earth; how could he judge men; He would be disqualified. He is a just judge!" And the final objection is that:

4. this teaching encourages people to do evil (7-8) So, a religious person could say, "Well, since my sinfulness only serves to point out how holy and righteous God is, then let's disregard the Law altogether. It isn't doing us any good to try to keep it and God is only being proved more and more righteous by our sinful behavior, so let's go ahead and sin!" Paul comments, "People who think like that are condemned and deserve it!" It's a thought so utterly ridiculous that it needs no rebuttal!

God's **CONCLUSION** is this (9b), *...we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin...* That is, **All people, Jew and Gentile alike, religious and nonreligious and pagan, all stand condemned for sin!** Listen to Gerry Seltzer's testimony: *When I think about my religious or spiritual experience during the first 45 years of my life, it would be most accurately described by words such as rituals, rules and regulations. From the time that I was baptized as an infant, I virtually never missed mass. It was part of every weekend's ritual. I took "holy communion" at most services and carefully avoided all "mortal" sins. Any "venial sins" I committed, I would dutifully confess to a priest once every month or so. Along with my three brothers, I attended Catholic school from kindergarten through the tenth grade. Throughout my childhood and into my teen years, I tried to be a "good Catholic." ...I went through all the right motions, and almost never considered becoming inactive or dropping out. I essentially never questioned or doubted what I was being taught, but faithfully followed the teachings of the Catholic church. But God changed all that when He caused one of His servants, named Jim, to intersect my path and initiate a friendship. I met Jim at work, where he and I were both employed as accountants. We began walking together during our lunch breaks to get some much-needed exercise and our walks included many talks. I noticed that Jim often brought Scripture into our conversations and was able to quote many verses from the Bible. ...Jim's talking to me about spiritual things really got my attention. When Jim invited me to visit his church, I readily went with him and very much enjoyed the preaching. Soon after that, I did a Bible study with Jim to learn more about how to be saved. At the conclusion of the Bible study, I prayed a prayer to be saved. However, I was so trained to follow rituals and do what*

was expected of me, that I did not realize that I had simply gone through the motions of a false profession, without truly repenting of my sin and trusting in Jesus Christ alone as my Savior. ...it was not long before I realized that my life had not changed and that I was still unsaved. I felt the same old way, trapped in mechanical rituals without a changed heart. In September of 2003, while driving to church, I was thinking about my lost condition before God and certain eternity in hell. I was scared and had come to the end of myself. I cried out to God, "What do I need to do to be saved"? I had nowhere else to turn, but to Jesus. As I continued to pray to God, I let go of any dependence I had upon my religion or self-righteousness for my salvation; I repented of my sins and put my faith totally and completely in what Jesus Christ had done for me on the cross of Calvary as my only means of salvation. At that moment of surrender and commitment, I sensed Christ's presence and the peace that only He can give in my heart. I knew I was now saved!

[<http://www.lvbaptist.org/gseltzer/>] Dear friend, THAT'S the Gospel, that's what God wants of each one of us. Being religious saves no one. Only Jesus can do that. You can be in a church all your life, even this church, and still be completely lost, if in your heart you're relying on your religious identity or keeping religious rituals to save you. If that's you, do what Gerry did, trust Jesus alone.

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

The Lostness Of ALL People - 3:9-20

There is a doctrine that pervades our land society today called humanism. It has been around for a long time in various forms but in our day, it saturates our entire society, our schools and universities, our media and many of our mainline churches. Indeed, it is the way that most people in our culture think. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines humanism as *a system of values and beliefs that is based on the idea that people are basically good and that problems can be solved using reason instead of religion*. That is, man is good and he doesn't need God. Somewhere down deep at the core of every human being is an inherent goodness. It tends to get corrupted by his environment as he grows up, so if we can just improve the environment in which people live, improve family structure, social structure and educational structure, then people will do good and be good and the whole world will become a better place! If that were true, you'd think that in 5,000 years of recorded human history we ought to be able to see hard evidence of it by now, yet the world is just as violent and dangerous a place as it has ever been, and probably more so. Well, God has always had a radically different view of the human race. Paul has been explaining it to us beginning at Rom. 1:18. Here is:

I. God's Conclusion About The Human Race (9) God says, **ALL Human Beings Are Under Sin**. It doesn't matter whether we are Jews or one of the thousands of other peoples of the world, every last one of us sins and stands under God's condemnation and wrath because of it, without exception. "But wait a minute, isn't there somebody, somewhere among the 7.2 billion people of the world that is worth saving? Certainly, there must be at least a few who seek after God and live nearly perfectly. Surely there must be someone whom God will let into heaven without knowing Jesus Christ because they are good!" God's answer is a clear, "NO." Paul has already shown us that people don't live up to the light of creation; they worship it! People don't live up to the light of conscience; they deaden it. And they don't live up to the light of God's direct commandment; they break it! In our text is:

II. God's Scriptural Statement About The Human Race (10-12) Period! That is God's final statement on the matter. Really, what Paul has done through verse 18 is to pull together a collection of Old Testament Scripture references and these three verses are a rather direct quoting of **Ps. 14:1b-3**, *...there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one*. God actually looks down at the entire human race, all 7.2 billion individuals and not only sees each one of us, but knows us! And here are six things that He sees:

1. no human being is righteous - not even one! That is, there is no human being without sin, not one single person who never does an evil act, says an evil word or thinks an evil thought. Not one. And you don't have to be God or even a rocket scientist to see that. Of the hundreds of people you've met in your life, you can't name one! Am I right? We all sin because it is in our very nature to do it. Second, God sees that:

2. no human being understands what God wants We just don't get it. On our own, none of us comprehends just how holy God is and how sinful we are and that we can never earn our way into His favor. We always think we can find a way, that we can measure up somehow or that He will somehow overlook our sin. None of us could ever comprehend that the only way for God to save us and still be holy and just is for Him to take the penalty for us upon Himself! Even when someone comes and tells us that, we can't grasp it! Think how many times the Gospel goes out and people hear it and walk away without responding. Why? **1 Cor. 2:14** says, *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned*. Unless God's Holy Spirit does a work in our hearts and turns on the light of understanding, not one of us gets it! But even if we did, God sees that:

3. no human being genuinely seeks God Left to ourselves, we don't search for God and try to find Him. The word means *to crave, to desire*. We don't want Him; we don't thirst for Him; we don't desire Him above all else even though

He created us. Why not? **Jn. 6:44** says, *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...* It's not in our nature to seek Him; it's in our nature to serve ourselves! We're spiritually dead, absolutely unresponsive, completely flat-lined. Unless God Himself plants a desire in us by His Spirit, not one of us would ever want Him. That's how far gone we are! Then, as God looks down on us, He sees that:

4. every human being has turned aside from God's path God started us down the right path, the right way to live, but every single one of us turns off the path and goes the way we want to go. Of all the dogs I've had in my life, only one of them ever obediently and quietly walked by my side and went whatever way I wanted to go. The rest of them all pulled on the leash as hard as they could wanting to go to that tree, to this fire hydrant, to chase this squirrel or to run after that other dog. Walking them was a continual tug of war. Do you know what I mean? God says that's us! We all, like sheep, go astray, instead of going where the shepherd leads; every one of us turns to our own way! Even little Lucky who walked so good got to where he snuck and went to the bathroom in the house because he didn't want to make the effort to go outside anymore! So, he's gone, but you get my point! We are all self-willed creatures and that's not how God created us! That's why God says:

5. every human being has become useless for God's purpose We've become spoiled like a rotten banana or soured milk that you can't use for the purpose you got it for. God made us to serve His purpose and carry out His will and because of our sin, we're worthless; He can't use us to accomplish His purpose in the world. We keep going our own way and doing our own thing, acting in our own self-interest all the time. And finally, God sees that:

6. no human being continually practices goodness - not even one of us! The Greek word *good* here means *kindness, unselfishness*, and the verb is present tense which carries the sense is of continuation. Sure, a person may do things that are good and kind and unselfish once in a while, but apart from God changing us, we are basically self-centered. We cannot be continually good all the time; not one of us can! And that's God's point:

We are all alike; there are no exceptions! This quote begins and ends with *not even one!* From our human perspective we may see great differences in people in terms of their character, but God looks inside us and He says we're all the same. We're all *under sin*, regardless of our culture, race, religion, or location! *When Harry Truman was thrust into the presidency by the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a friend took him aside and said, "From here on out, you're going to have lots of people around you. They'll try to put up a wall around you and cut you off from any ideas but theirs. They'll tell you what a great man you are, Harry. But you and I both know you ain't."* If we're honest, we all know deep inside that we sin, that we do evil, that we do wrong. Not one of us, not even me, is righteous. But then Paul goes on to compile a string of quotations from the Old Testament in which we have:

III. God's Graphic Portrayal Of The Human Race He paints a picture for us of what we humans look like using the image of a person in **(13-18)**. First of all, God says that:

1. our mouths spew out vile things (13-14) Imagine opening a tomb that has decaying bodies in it and getting hit in the face with the stench and the flies swarming out. The point of the image is that inside are vile, detestable things and these come out through our mouths. Jesus Himself said that what comes out of the mouth defiles a man because what's in his heart pours out through his mouth and He mentions all manner of evil things. Here it says:

a. we use them to deceive others Verse 13 actually quotes **Ps. 5:9**, *For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.* We lie. We flatter others. We deceive them by telling them things that are not true. We all do it. Then, quoting **Ps. 140:3**, it says:

b. we use them to harm others, like a poisonous snake which keeps its deadly venom in a sac under its lips. It uses its mouth to kill and destroy people and so do we. We use our mouths to do great harm to others! Every one of us does it! Then, in verse 14 it says:

c. we use them to curse God and man quoting **Ps. 10:7**. I think of how James put it in the New Testament; look with me at **James 3:8-10**. Our very mouth that God created to praise Him we use to curse and condemn and criticize both God and our fellow human beings! We all do it! But our mouths are not our only problem; God says that:

2. our feet run quickly to sinful behavior (15-17) Here Paul quotes **Is. 59:7-8**, pointing out how quick we are to sin, how easily it comes to us, so easily that it is impossible for us to avoid. When God looks down, He sees that:

a. we easily kill one another without cause In just one recent conflict, the war in Syria alone, some 114,000 people have died, 11,500 of them children! Thousands have perished in South Sudan and the Central African Republic in the last year or two. Unbelievable atrocities occur regularly because a person simply happens to be from another tribe! But we're no better here. 92 people were murdered in Philadelphia last year and we're already up to 88 this year! But that pales in comparison to the fact that we take the lives of 1.2 million unborn children every year with hardly a thought! God sees that wherever we go:

b. we leave a trail of destruction and misery Everywhere human beings live there is a trail of violence and injustice and crime. Human beings kidnap and sell one another for forced sex, for forced labor, even for organ removal

and sales! Human trafficking generates 9.6 billion dollars a year in OUR country and the Attorney General says that the Superbowl is the single largest human trafficking event in the US! All over the world we see example after example of the suffering that human beings inflict upon one another and, God sees that:

c. we are completely unable to live in peace. He's not talking about inner peace but about the fact that we can sing songs about peace and making the world a better place all we want; we simply can't do it. While Russian President Putin was demurely observing the Olympic Games and welcoming the world and celebrating harmony between nations, he managed to slip away and finalize plans to invade Ukraine and take Crimea! Ethnic tensions exist on every continent and in every nation; there are literally dozens of armed conflicts currently in progress on all over the world! The only way peace will ever come to this world is when Jesus comes! Our mouths spew out filth, our feet run quickly to sin, and, God says:

3. our eyes do not perceive reality (18) This is a quote from **Ps. 36:1-2**, *Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.* We human beings don't fear God because:

a. we are convinced that our sin can be hidden, that nobody can see it or nobody knows about it, that we can put one over on God and the world, that we can get away with our sin. And even if we sin boldly:

b. we have no fear of God's judgment We tell ourselves that God IS however we want to imagine him, that if He exists, He will never judge us, that we are invincible. We just can't see the reality of how things are. We are blind to the impending doom awaiting us and we run swiftly toward it without thought. Scripture says, *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* - Heb. 10:31.

The point is that humanity is totally corrupt in every aspect, our speech, our deeds, our thoughts and our perceptions. We are totally depraved and there is not a thing we can do to save ourselves. Like it or not, that is the human race as God sees us and that is you and I before we were transformed by Jesus Christ. *Yehiel Dinur survived the holocaust of World War II. Many years later, he was called upon to testify at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of Hitler's architects who orchestrated the holocaust. A film clip from Eichmann's 1961 trial showed Dinur walking into the courtroom, stopping short, seeing Eichmann for the first time since the Nazi had sent him to Auschwitz eighteen years earlier. Dinur began to sob uncontrollably, then fainted, collapsing in a heap on the floor as the presiding judicial officer pounded his gavel for order in the crowded courtroom. People wondered, was Dinur overcome by hatred? Fear? Horrid memories? No, as Dinur explained in an interview with Mike Wallace of CBS News, all at once he realized Eichmann was not the godlike army officer who had sent so many to their deaths. This Eichmann was an ordinary man. "I was afraid about myself," said Dinur. "...I saw that I am capable to do this. I am ...exactly like he. Eichmann is in all of us".* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yehiel_De-Nur]. What a vivid way to say what Paul said, *all [human beings], both Jews and Greeks, are under sin*, controlled by sin, driven by sin. It is not just some; it is ALL of us. So then why did God give His law to Israel and through them to the world? Why did He bother to spell out all those things that are evil for human beings to do, if trying to keep them does no good? Well, before he moves on, Paul explains:

IV. Why God Gave His Law To The Human Race (19-20) First of all, the Law:

1. it was intended to produce humility by giving us the knowledge of sin He gave it to silence our mouths. Did you ever get caught doing wrong, let's say speeding or something like that where you were deliberately guilty and you knew it and when the officer asked why you broke the law, all you can say is, "I have no excuse". If you can imagine that, that's what Paul means. God wants us to come to that place where we humbly admit that we are sinful and lost and that we have no excuse for it. The written law was designed to define sin in concrete terms with the intent that it would bring that kind of consciousness of sin in order that the whole race could stand humbly before God without excuse, knowing that we have broken His commands. Secondly:

2. it was intended to show us that we stand under the judgment of God, that every human being is accountable to God for his sins, that there is a day of condemnation and punishment coming where the Righteous God of the universe will give us what we truly deserve. The Law was given to show that the entire human race has a universal need for righteousness because not one of us is righteous! We have to find a way to escape our condemnation by the Law or we are doomed! Yet, Paul says:

3. no human being will be made righteous before God by trying to keep it Not one single person will ever stand before God and be declared righteous by his deeds. Why? Because not one of us is without sin, no not one. No matter how hard we may try, not one of us can become holy. God never gave the Law as a way to make us righteous; He gave it to show us that we are all unrighteous!

So, how then can anyone be saved if there is nothing we can do? The answer is obvious: only by the grace of God, only if God steps in and does something to save us from our fate! And that's the message Paul begins to declare from verse 21 on. God has done something to rescue us from our plight; He sent His Son. Now, I know that this has not been a pleasant message to listen to and the last three have not been either. But please remember that it is only when we fully compre-

hend the situation, we were in that we can fully appreciate what God did for us when He saved us. Our condemnation before God is the first basic truth that a person must understand in order to be saved, so that he gives up trying to find ways to save himself. *Once a man was bent over on the sidewalk looking for something. Soon a policeman came by and asked what was wrong. He said, "I've dropped my keys and can't seem to find them." So the policemen helped him look and after a few minutes the policeman asked, "Are you sure you lost them here?" He replied, "Oh no, I lost them over there in the grass, but it's much easier to look here on the pavement."* We have to understand that we've all been looking in the wrong place for salvation, trying to get to heaven on the wrong basis, before we can ever find it. We have to see ourselves as lost sinners, condemned and undone, and recognize that there is nothing in us or about us that can save us, before we can experience God's wonderful grace.

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Justification: God's Provision Of Righteousness - 3:21-5:21

How God Makes Us Righteous - 3:21-31

At 3:21 we move into a whole new section of Paul's letter to the Romans. Up to this point He has been focusing on CONDEMNATION, proving that the whole human race is lost and desperately in need of salvation. From here he moves on through end of chapter 4 to explain the process of JUSTIFICATION, the way that God makes us righteous. If all human beings, even the best and most religious of them, stand under God's wrath because of their sin and can't do anything to earn salvation, then there must be an entirely different way for them to be saved, if any are to be saved at all. And that way of salvation has to originate with and be provided by God Himself, since we can't save ourselves. Of course, that's exactly what God did. Paul says:

I. God Has Revealed A Different Kind Of Righteousness (21-24) Human beings (and especially the Jews whom Paul has in mind) always think that righteousness comes by doing deeds, by keeping the law, that righteousness is the sum total of a life of perfect actions. But there is a different kind of righteousness. God is not righteous because He does right actions; He does right actions because He is righteous. Righteousness is at the core of the character of God. It's a purity and holiness of being, without one speck of sin. So, there is this God-kind-of-righteousness that is totally different from the way we understand it that God wants us to have.

1. it is a righteousness that comes from God; as the NIV puts it, *a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...* It is a righteousness that originates from God Himself so that:

a. it has nothing to do with human performance We don't get it as a result of anything we do such as trying to keep the Law or trying to be good. We receive it totally apart from any work, any good deed, any effort that we make. It is totally separate from the principle of keeping rules. But, wait a minute, where did this idea come from? Didn't God for centuries demand that His people keep the Law in order to be accepted by Him? Did God just radically change His method? No, as Paul will prove in the next chapter:

b. the Old Testament attests to it. The idea of God *giving* righteousness is mentioned concerning Abraham and also by David. It was known in the Old Testament, although it was somewhat obscured there, **but it is now fully revealed** since Jesus has come. It is not that God *changed* His method of saving people; rather in the coming of Jesus, God *revealed* what His method of saving people has really been all along and it's the same method that He uses ever since Jesus came. Verse 22 says:

2. God gives His righteousness to all who believe in Jesus Christ! Now pause a moment and let that sink in. It's a tremendous statement: God gives His righteousness to all those who believe in Jesus Christ. Let's think carefully about what that means. No human being is righteous, so God turns around and gives His own righteousness to some of us. Which ones? Not to those who try to earn it, but only to those human beings who believe in His Son Jesus. First, notice that this:

a. it is His universal and only means of saving people As God sees the human race there is no distinction between people; it doesn't matter whether they are part of Israel or any one of the other thousands of peoples of the earth, whether some are better behaved than others. ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of the holy, righteous, pure God of the universe. The only way for Him to save any of us is for Him to give us HIS righteousness. It's the only way for everyone without exception. Then notice the word *gift*. That means:

b. He gives it freely, simply and only because He wants to. He didn't have to; He was under no obligation because **we contribute nothing** that causes Him to give it. He doesn't give it because we've tried so hard and done so much; He gives it simply and only because He loves us and chooses to save us. And hand in hand with that is the concept that:

c. He gives it out of grace That means He gives it even though **we deserve nothing**. We deserve the very opposite! We deserve wrath, punishment, an eternity of fire! But God chooses to freely give us what we do not deserve, His righteousness. Yet it is not as easy as simply making the choice to give it:

d. He gives it because of the liberation procured by Jesus Redemption means to set free. God is a just God, a just Judge. He cannot simply let us off the hook, pardon our sins and ignore the punishment due us. He can't let the murderer walk and release the terrorist to return home as our officials may do. He can only give us His righteousness because of what Jesus did on the cross to set us free from the penalty of our sins. Without that, God couldn't spare us. Therefore, the decision to give us salvation WAS the decision to send His own Son; there was no other way for Him to do it. So how do we get this righteousness?

e. He gives it when we place our faith in Jesus and what He did for us He doesn't just randomly pick people to save. He saves those who choose to believe that Jesus provided that gift of salvation for them. Now let me be clear about what faith is. It is not an intellectual thing. It is not believing facts about who Jesus was or what He did. Faith is reliance; it is trust. Tim Hansel writes: *One day, while my son Zac and I were out in the country, climbing around in some cliffs, I heard a voice from above me yell, "Hey Dad! Catch me!" I turned around to see Zac joyfully jumping off a rock straight at me. He had jumped and then yelled "Hey Dad!" I became an instant circus act, catching him. We both fell to the ground. For a moment after I caught him, I could hardly talk. When I found my voice again, I gasped in exasperation: "Zac! Can you give me one good reason why you did that???" He responded with remarkable calmness: "Sure...because you're my Dad."* [Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat*, 1987, Word Books Publisher, pp. 46-47.] Zac had absolute complete trust that his dad would save him by catching him as he jumped off that rock. He wasn't thinking, "Well, if he misses, I can roll when I hit the ground and I won't get hurt too badly." or "I'm such a good jumper that I will land on Dad just right so he can't miss me." He was thinking, "Dad will save me!" His trust was all in Dad and none in himself and that's what faith in Jesus is, being absolutely convinced that He alone can save me and crying out, "Jesus save me!", trusting that He will.

And when we do that, when we place our faith, our complete trust, in Jesus:

3. God declares us righteous, or to use the word in verse 24, He **justifies** us. That's a fancy theological word which means that God declares me, who was a sinner, to be just or righteous. It is a legal term that comes to us from the courtroom. The picture is that the person stands before the judge and the judge pronounces him to be free and cleared of all the charges against him. As a young person I learned a simple way to remember its meaning: justified means that I stand before God just-as-if-I'd never sinned! It means that I stand before God with a clean slate, with not one single sin on my record.

But how can that be? My slate is black! My rap sheet is pages and pages of wrongs and evils that I have done! How can God declare me or any of us righteous? Well, Paul says that:

II. God Himself Provided This Righteousness For Us (25-26) God Himself sent Christ to earth to be a sacrifice of atonement (some translations use the word *propitiation*) for our sins. That's another way of saying that:

1. Christ's blood made atonement for our sins; the offering up of His life satisfied the wrath of God against the evil that we had done. Look with me at **1 Pet. 3:18**. Christ brought us to God, from whom we were separated, because:

a. in His death Christ received the full penalty for all our sins Look back to **1 Pet. 2:24**. On the cross God made a great transfer. In the Old Testament a person who sinned would place his hands upon the head of a lamb or a goat to be sacrificed and confess his sins over it, symbolizing that his sins were transferred to the animal, then the animal was slain in his place. That was to picture what God would do at the cross; He would place all our sins upon Jesus on the tree and pour out the fullness of His wrath against our sins upon Jesus in our place as our substitute. But that's only half the story:

b. through His death God gave to us Christ's righteousness Look with me at **2 Cor. 5:21**. God laid our sins upon Him for our sake, so that He could give to us the very righteousness of Christ. There was a great exchange: He became what we were; we became what He was through the cross. Now, God actually gave us His righteousness in two senses. First of all, He didn't simply SAY we are righteous, even though we aren't. He actually did MAKE us righteous by placing His own Holy Spirit inside us and causing us to be born all over again, so that now at the core of our being we have a nature, a spirit, that is holy, righteous and pure, just like Christ. But that's a subject Paul takes up in chapter 6 and in his other epistles. In our text here, he means that God assigned Christ's righteousness to us and declared us to be righteous. He gave us Christ's righteousness as a free gift through Christ dying in our place.

But wait a minute, that doesn't seem quite fair! Can God really not punish us for our sins and still be just? Paul asserts twice that:

2. God Himself was absolutely righteous in doing this He is not an unjust judge who deliberately punishes the wrong man and lets the true criminal go free. Well, what about those who lived before Christ? How could He make them righteous? Paul says:

a. God patiently withheld judgment on those who believed until Christ came There were millions like Abraham and Jacob and David and Elijah and Isaiah who had genuine trust in the true God alone. They believed God and God counted their faith as righteousness until Christ came to take their penalty. To put it in plain language, they

were "saved on credit". Knowing that He would send Christ, God held off collecting on the sin debt that they owed until Christ came and paid the bill! OK, but to be just, didn't God actually have to punish US, the ones who actually committed the sin? No, Paul says:

b. God was perfectly holy since our sin was fully punished in Christ Think about it another way. The Bible says that God placed me IN Christ, that He joined me to Him, in such a way that what happened to Him happened to me. He didn't merely take my place as a stand-in. I've been joined to Him so that when He died, I died! He didn't just represent me; He was joined to me and it was fully right that my penalty should fall on Him. When it fell on Him it was, in essence, falling on me. God's wrath, His justice, was completely satisfied and justice was meted out fully to me in Him. Therefore:

c. God's tremendous love was free to justify us who believe Because my sin was paid for completely, there was no condemnation left and God, because He loved me so much, could declare me righteous and even make me righteous, because I am joined to Christ. At the cross, God's love and His justice met in perfect harmony. He was absolutely just and could still justify me! Hallelujah!

Martin Luther wrote: "All the prophets did foresee in Spirit that Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, blasphemer, and so on, that ever was or could be in all the world. For he, being made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world is not now an innocent person and without sins...but a sinner. Our most merciful Father...sent his only Son into the world and laid upon him...the sins of all men saying: Be thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner which did eat the apple in Paradise; that thief which hanged upon the cross; and briefly, be thou the person which hath committed the sins of all men; see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them. Here now comes the law and saith: I find him a sinner...therefore let him die upon the cross. And so, he setteth upon him and killeth him. By this means the whole world is purged and cleansed from all sins." Luther once wrote to a friend: "Learn to know Christ and him crucified. Learn to sing to him, and say, 'Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness... You have taken upon yourself what is mine and given me what is yours. You became what you were not, so that I might become what I was not.'" [Your Father Loves You by James Packer, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986] What an amazing concept this is! We stand in awe of it. What human being would ever have thought of this plan? It is clear that:

III. God Showed Great Wisdom In Justifying Us This Way and Paul finishes the chapter by mentioning three things that God accomplished through doing this. First:

1. all human boasting before God is eliminated (27-28) If all we must do to receive this gift is to believe it is ours, to accept what God has done for us and depend upon it, then there is nothing that we can try to take credit for. No one can say, "I did this" or "I am this" or "God saved me because I..." God gets all the glory because our salvation is all of Him and not of us. All we can do is thank Him for providing it and praise Him for His great love for us. Through this plan God insured that no one can steal His glory. Secondly, He insured that:

2. all human beings must come to God in the same way, through faith (29-30) God leveled the playing field; He put all human beings on the same plane. Jew or Gentile, Uzbek or Kyrgyz or Yenadi, rich or poor, religious or atheist, Mother Theresa or Hitler types, ALL have only one and the same way to be saved and made righteous. I can't find who first said it, but it's true, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." We're all on an equal footing. No one has any advantage over another. We can bring God nothing; all we can do is believe and trust in what He has done. And finally, through this plan:

3. God's Law is upheld (31) Are we saying that God's law doesn't matter, that it doesn't matter if you sin, that you can do evil and get away with it? Not at all. The law has been completely upheld. God's sentence, *The soul who sins shall die!* [Ez. 18:4], still stands. Our sin has been dealt with and its penalty of eternal death has been fully carried out upon the Lord Jesus. The sentence of the Law has been satisfied with no injustice done; nothing has been gotten by with. God is still just and He has justified us!

The story is told of two brothers who once lived completely opposite lives. The older was a God-fearing man, good to everyone. The younger was rebellious, even violent. The older brother tried to influence him, but in vain. One evening, while the older sat quietly in his home, the younger brother stormed in with blood on his clothes, shouting, "Save me if you can! I have killed a man, and the police are after me!" The older replied, "Quick! Let's change clothes." They did so. The murderer donned the white garment, and the innocent put on the blood-stained one. Scarcely had they finished when the police arrived. Seeing the older brother in bloody clothes, they knew they had found their man and dragged him from his home. They had no doubt he was the one they sought. Brought to court, the accused admitted his guilt. The judge bowed to what seemed clear evidence and sentenced him to death. He had one last wish: "At the moment of my execution, please give my brother this letter." His wish was granted. Later, when the brother opened the letter, he read: "I died in your place, in your bloody garment, for your guilt. I was happy to make this sacrifice for you and ask only one thing, that you live a life of love and goodness." The innocent man was dead. Nothing could change that fact. But as often as former comrades asked the younger brother to participate in an act of violence, he replied, "I cannot do it in the white garment I received from the brother who died for me." [Jesus, Friend to Terrorists by Radu Valentin. Living Sacrifice Book Company,

1995. Pages 91- 92]. Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus changed places with us and died, the righteous for the unrighteous so that He might save us from that eternal penalty. He was happy to do it; He endured the cross for the joy that was set before him and that joy was the joy of having YOU! But the point is that, having given you His righteousness, now we should from the bottom of our hearts desire to live the way He wants, even if we fail at it. And when we are tempted to live the old way, this thought should reverberate through our minds, *I cannot do it in the white garment I received from the Savior who died for me.*

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Justification: God's Provision Of Righteousness - 3:21-5:21

The Example Of Abraham - 4:1-25

Paul expressed the theme of this 2 1/2 chapter long section of his letter clearly in 3:28, *...we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law*, or as the NLT puts it, *...we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law*. God gives us His righteousness when we simply trust with all our hearts in Jesus Christ; it is not based on anything that we do. And Paul devotes all of chapter 4 to sharing with us how we can see this principle in the life of one man, Abraham. **(1-2)** To you and I that might not seem to matter very much; to us Abraham is just another obscure Old Testament Bible character. But:

I. The Way That Abraham Was Justified Before God Is Important Abraham was the forefather, the first father, the progenitor of the entire Jewish race. The Jews held him in extremely high esteem. When the Pharisees argued with Jesus in John 8, twice they said, "Abraham is our father!" In their minds, it was their relationship to Abraham that made them Jews, part of God's chosen people. So, if Paul can demonstrate that Abraham was made right with God by faith and not by his deeds, then they have no leg to stand on when they insist that keeping the law makes a person right with God. The other reason Paul chose to give this much attention to Abraham is that in the record of Abraham's life he found the most direct statement of God's method of saving people that is found anywhere in the Scriptures, **Gen. 15:6**, which clearly says that:

1. God counted Abraham righteous because of his faith (3-5) When Abraham was 75 and childless, God had made Him the promise that he would become the father of a great nation of people and a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. He waited patiently, but in Gen. 15, one day some eight or nine years later, God gave Abraham a vision and, in that vision, he was questioning God in prayer about His promise. He was complaining that he was now old and God had given him no son and one of his servants was going to end up being his heir. So, in his vision it must have been nighttime and God told him to go outside his tent and look up at the stars. Have you ever been out on a bright moonlit night in the country somewhere or in the mountains where there's no light pollution from a town or city to obscure the heavens? You gaze upward and there are stars, thousands of them, little distinct points of light, each shining clearly in every sector of the heavens. It's beautiful; have you ever seen that? So, God says, "Now count those, if you can. I'm not only going to give you a son, I'm going to give you as many descendants as those stars up there!" What an amazing, awe-inspiring moment that must have been. And the record says in that powerful moment:

a. he believed God's promise that he would have innumerable descendants. God made sure that Moses wrote down there in Genesis that *Abraham believed God* as though at that moment there was a full commitment, a complete trust like never before and because he trusted God to do what He said, God counted him righteous! God put down on his account sheet in heaven, "Abraham is righteous; he trusts in Me". Now, Paul goes on to point out that:

b. God counted that faith as righteousness to him apart from any deed God did not call Abraham righteous because he obeyed God's call and left his home in Ur of the Chaldeans. He did not call him righteous because he threw away the idols of his ancestors or because of the uprightness of his personal behavior. God counted him as being righteous for only one reason, simply because he trusted in Him! And Paul says in verse 5 that:

c. He does the same for us when we trust Him to justify us When we stop trusting in our deeds as the way to be made right with God, when we admit that we are *ungodly*, wicked, irreverent sinners who cannot save ourselves, and simply trust God to save us because Jesus died for us, He counts our simple trust as righteousness! He declares us righteous because of Jesus and all our sins are washed away, so that we stand before God just-as-if-we'd never sinned. We don't do a thing to cause it to happen except believe! Isn't that marvelous? But Paul wants to prove it even more clearly, so now he turns to the life of another Old Testament figure, King David. The name of David was just as honored and revered by the Jews as that of Abraham. He was their best and greatest King, the one to whom God promised that his descendants would reign forever! He was called a man after God's own heart, the sweet singer of Israel who wrote so many of the Psalms. Yet there was a period in his life when David fell into great sin, sin worthy of death. As you recall, his armies were engaged in a great battle against the Ammonites but he stayed home. And as he was walking on his rooftop in the cool one evening, he saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing on a neighboring roof. It turned out she was the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah, but he gave in to lust and sent for her and committed adultery with her. Of course, she became pregnant, but to hide his responsibility in the matter, he gave secret orders to have Uriah killed in battle and took her as his wife. A whole year he kept up this charade until God sent the prophet Nathan to point his finger at David and say, "YOU have done this!" As

the floodgates of guilt and remorse and mourning broke upon him, he realized the tremendous depth of his own sinfulness and repented. He expressed the depth of his feelings in several of the Psalms and Paul points out that:

d. David affirmed this same truth of being counted righteous by God **after his great sin**, knowing there was nothing he could do to earn forgiveness (6-8) You know that he's talking about himself here. Look back with me to the passage from which this comes, **Ps. 32:1-5**. You can almost hear his sigh of relief! Now go back to the first two verses and notice the verbs. This is Hebrew poetry written in a specific style. There are three parallel clauses that say same thing, each one becoming more intense than the last. It's like coming out of Dairy Queen saying, "That ice cream was good; it was absolutely delicious; it was the best ice cream I've ever tasted!" So, David is saying, "It's blessed to know that my sins are forgiven (that is, sent away from me), but it's even better to know that they are covered (hidden from God's sight), yet the best of all is to realize that they are not counted against me anymore, that God counts me righteous, as if I'd never committed this awful sin!" Now, how did that happen? In verses 3-5 you see that it was not by doing good deeds to erase the sin, but by simple confession and trusting in God to forgive! Thus, David was rescued from his iniquity by faith; he was declared righteous by believing God, just like Abraham was and just like we are!

Listen, the most wonderful thing in the world is to know that your sins are all forgiven, that not one of them is counted against you, that God declares you righteous simply and only because you believe in Jesus! OK, but does that only work for people who are Jewish, who are physically descended from Abraham to start with? What about the rest of us? That's where Paul goes next. Now, you have to understand that the thing that from Abraham on set the Jews apart from Gentiles, the rest of the world, was circumcision. In the Jewish mind, circumcision is what made a person a Jew and included them among God's people. Jews derogatorily referred to Gentiles as "the uncircumcised"; even young David with his sling and stones scoffed at mighty Goliath saying, *Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the Living God?* So, Jews easily came to think that circumcision is what made you belong to God, just as within Christendom there are millions who think that baptism is what makes you belong to God. But Paul makes an interesting point here:

2. Abraham was circumcised AFTER he was justified (9-12) Abraham was counted righteous in Gen. 15 when he was in his early eighties. Circumcision was not given until just before the birth of Isaac at age 99 over a decade later! So, Abraham was counted righteous long before he ever heard of circumcision, and when God did command him to do it:

a. circumcision was the sign of his faith in God Let's look at the story in **Gen. 17:1-5**. Notice how God extended his promise to Abraham here. God said *You will be the father of a MULTITUDE of nations*, not just one! He even renamed him from Abram to Abraham, "father of a multitude". Then God gave him a sign, a symbol: **10-11, 23-24**. As Paul notes, Abraham's circumcision was the sign, the symbol, the outward token, that said that he believed the promise of God and that he belonged to God. So, Abraham is not the father of all who are circumcised except in a very limited physical sense, rather:

b. he is the spiritual father of ALL who believe, whether they are circumcised or not! He is the spiritual ancestor, the progenitor, of all those who believe even though they're "uncircumcised" to the Jews. You realize that's us! Almost none of us are Jewish; we're not descended from Abraham in our flesh and yet God says that he is our spiritual father because we believe God, even though we're not part of the nation of Israel! We're part of that *multitude of peoples* that he is the father of! But he is also the father of those Jews who believe like he did. Down through history there was always a true Israel within Israel, a remnant like Moses and Joshua and David and millions of others who placed their trust in God like Abraham did. Then after Jesus came, there was a remnant of Israel who believed in Christ and there still is today. Not all Israelites were God's people then or now; only those who believe God like Abraham did are counted righteous.

So hey, we can actually claim Abraham as our father! Remember the little kid's song, *Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham. And I am one of them, and so are you. So let's just praise the Lord!* I used to think, "Why are on earth are we teaching kids to sing about that?" But it really is true! By our faith we are grafted into the line of God's people so that Abraham and the rest are not just some Jewish guys from long ago; we can claim them as our very ancestors and we ought to praise the Lord! Hallelujah! But the other big thing in the Jewish mind is the Law given to Moses and the keeping of it. That's what set them apart from the rest of the world. So next Paul points out that:

3. Abraham received God's promise by faith, not law (13-17) That promise that he would become the father of a multitude of nations, heir of the world, didn't come through his keeping the law. In the first place, the Law was only given by God at Sinai 430 years later (Gal. 3:17). But even if God gave him and his descendants that promise through his keeping A law, a set of rules, Paul says:

a. if the promise came by law, it would be worthless because the promise would be lost through transgression. Inevitably where there is law, people break the law and commit sin and that would render the promise null and void. If receiving what God promised depended on our performance, we'd never get it. But:

b. since the promise came through grace, it is guaranteed Grace means it comes solely from God and our receiving of it depends on God's character, not on our human performance. And because God never changes, it is guaranteed and cannot fail; it is as sure as God is! But most importantly:

c. since the promise is by faith, it is open to all who believe, not just Jews Because it does not depend on physical birth, it now applies to all who believe through Christ; we are Abraham's promised descendants. In God's sight we who believe in Jesus are Abraham's children; we share his faith. He believed in a God who called things that did not exist into existence, that is, a God who promised a child when there was no human hope of one and counted it as though it were already done. We believe in a God who raised the Lord Jesus to life again when there was no human hope! We are just like our father! Now Paul explores that a little further. Here's:

II. Why Abraham's Faith Was Counted As Righteousness (18-22) Abraham:

1. he believed God's word, even though it appeared impossible He was not an unrealistic dreamer; he faced the facts squarely. He knew his own body was not capable of having children and he realized that not only had Sarah been barren all their married life, but she was now physically past having the capacity to bear a child. He knew all of that was true and there was no hope, humanly speaking. Yet:

2. he never wavered in his trust, but instead gave glory to God He didn't look at his circumstances and give up. He didn't despair and say, "Not even God can give us a child!" Rather, he was strengthened in his faith; he trusted God more and gave Him glory for what He promised, trusting that it would be so. But how could he do this in such an apparently hopeless situation? Verse 21 says that:

3. he was completely convinced that God was able to do what He promised He believed something about the nature of God. He was convinced that He is an omnipotent, almighty God, one who has the power to do what He promises regardless of human circumstances. That's the kind of faith God credited to him as righteousness, a faith that cast its whole weight on God and His ability to keep His promise. Likewise, when we cast our whole weight on God to save us through Jesus, realizing that in our sinful human selves we cannot possibly be saved, that there is no human hope for us, and we trust in God, believing that He has power to do what He said He would do, it is then that He counts us righteous! You see:

III. Abraham Was Meant As An Example For Us Who Believe In Jesus (23-25) You have to realize something here. The words, *Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness*, were words that Abraham never saw. They were a comment written by Moses centuries later under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Abraham perhaps never fully understood the process of what was happening; he simply believed God. So why did God place that Divine comment in the text?

1. God had those words specifically written for us, not simply to explain to us what happened to him, but so they would instruct us in the way that we can be made right with God. God wrote them specifically to tell us that:

2. like Abraham, we must trust in Jesus and be counted righteous We must do like Abraham did, trust in the God who did the impossible, who raised up Jesus from the dead. We must trust that Jesus died for our sins and that He was raised the third day "on account of" our justification, that is, to prove that His blood had paid the price and that we now have a right standing before God because of our faith.

Paul sums up what he has said in this whole chapter nicely in another place. Look with me at **Gal. 3:6-9**. Amen. We who believe are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith! *Two children were playing together on a hillside one afternoon. When they noticed that the hour was nearing sunset, and one of them looked up at the sky and said wonderingly, "See how far down the sun has gone! A little while ago it was right over that tree, and now it is so low down in the sky." His brother answered, "Only remember it isn't the sun that moves; it's the earth that turns. You know, Father told us." The first one shook his head, "The sun did move! I've been standing here all the time in the same spot." And with great confidence, he declared, "I know what I see!" To which his brother calmly replied, "And I believe Father."* Those two boys are representative of the whole human race. All human beings stand in one position or the other. The vast majority confidently trust in what their senses reveal to them or in what seems obvious to them because of the culture they were raised in. The rest of us simply believe Father; we believe what His Word tells us is true. We are confident that He has power to do what He says He will do and that by our faith we are not only made righteous before Him, but have become His very children.

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Justification: God's Provision Of Righteousness - 3:21-5:21

The Joy Of Being Justified - 5:1-11

Ever since 3:21 Paul has been talking about the fact that we are justified by faith. When we believe in Jesus Christ, God counts us righteous or just. Paul spent all of chapter 4 proving his case through the example of the life of Abraham, but

now in chapter 5, he begins to talk about what a blessing it is to be justified and its effect can be summed up in one word: *joy*. For some reason we here seem to have a hard time either experiencing or expressing joy. But I've seen it. I've seen poor, illiterate people in tiny little churches with thatched roofs in the south of India sing and dance and shout to God with all their strength. I've stood in a converted airplane hangar near Lake Issyk Kul in Kyrgyzstan and watched people who didn't have much in this world clap and dance and reach up and touch the banners that young people were waving across their heads as they passed down the aisles. I've seen people who suffer more than I've ever dreamed of, who live and survive with less than I think that I could ever live with, be filled with a kind of joy that it's tough for me to come close to. And this joy is simply and fully because of their relationship with Jesus Christ. *About 250 years after Christ, Cyprian was the Bishop of Carthage (in modern Tunisia) during a time of persecution by two Roman Emperors. In writing to a friend, Donatus, he penned these words: "It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians--and I am one of them."* Paul reveals to us here the secret of that joy. It is that:

I. We Have A Permanent Standing With God (1-2) Most of the people in the world, if they have any belief in God, are perpetually unsure of their status with Him. They are always concerned whether they have done enough to be accepted by Him, never sure whether if they die, they will belong to Him. But we have a complete assurance that, because of Jesus, we have a permanent relationship of union with God that cannot ever change because:

1. it is based upon the past transaction of our justification *Since we HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED by faith...* The tense of the Greek verb here is one that indicates an action that was begun in the past and is continuing in the present. Our justification is a past transaction that continues in place through this moment and forever. It occurred by faith the minute I placed my trust in Jesus Christ to save me; at that very instant God counted me righteous and He continues to do so. Let me compare it to the paying off of a mortgage or a car loan. Do you know that feeling you have when you write that last check and pay off the balance? Well, some of you do, anyway! The sense is that this debt is settled; the account is now closed and cannot be reopened anymore; it's over and the house or the car is completely yours. That's the sense of relief Paul is trying to convey. For us, the sin question has been settled before God once, for all, forever and that has brought us into:

2. it is a state of peaceful union with Him *...we have PEACE with God.* The Greek word for *peace* comes from a root that means "to bind together that which has been separated". When we placed our faith in Jesus Christ and were justified, that was our access, it was our entrée to a new relationship with God, one where we who were the very enemies of God because of our sin, are now bound together with Him. And the tenses of all the verbs in these verses are the same; they indicate something begun in the past that continues through the present, that is, something that is permanent. The moment we were justified, we came into this relationship, but we still have it and always will. Paul further emphasizes that fact by using the word *stand*. It means *to place*; we've been placed into this relationship with God forever, permanently. Do you realize what a wonderful thing that is? You never have to worry that you will wake up tomorrow and be lost! Your standing with God is based on the death of Christ and can never change, so let come what may! And the reason it can't change is that:

3. our standing is an act of grace given to us through Jesus by means of faith *...this grace in which we stand* means that this relationship we have, this union with God that is ours, was a gift given to us by God's grace. We didn't earn it or strive to achieve it; He, out of His own love, simply gave it to us once and for all the moment we believed that Jesus was our Savior. It was a gift given by God, not dependent in any degree on our behavior. To illustrate, a few weeks ago LuAnn and I were at Dan's graduation at Arcadia and, as at many university graduations, the first thing they did was to award an honorary doctorate degree to the speaker, the woman who produced "Reading Rainbow" years ago. Anyway, that degree was a pure gift that the university decided to grant. She didn't do any of the coursework required to earn it; she accumulated no credits, wrote no thesis, did no homework, received no grades, yet out of the grace of the university she was given a permanent standing as a Doctor of Letters, with all of the full rights and privileges that appertain to it. She stands a doctor forever. That's what's been done to us! God has given us this permanent standing of union with Him forever as a free gift and therefore, Paul says:

4. we rejoice in the future certainty of experiencing God's glory That phrase, *in hope of the glory of God*, we usually read over without thinking about it. But in the Bible, *hope* means an absolute certainty of what is yet future, so because of our permanent standing we are certain, not that God is glorious, but that we shall experience God's glory, we shall see Him face to face and share in His glory! It's what He prayed in **Jn. 17:24**; Jesus asked, *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.* Jesus asked that we, all of us, would be with Him in heaven to see and experience and share in His glory, the glory He had with the Father before the world began. And the Father answered that prayer! Our guaranteed future is to be with Christ and experience all the fullness of His glory! That's the source of our joy. That's what makes us rejoice! We rejoice because:

II. We Have A Complete Certainty About Our Relationship With God, an absolute assurance, a complete confidence that other folks don't know anything about. Paul moves on to point out four things that give us that blessed assurance and the first one is actually something we would not expect:

1. we are assured of it by our circumstances (3-4) There is a process that God has put into effect in our day to day lives that causes us to know by experience with greater and greater certainty. And of all places it begins with the trials, sufferings, and problems we inevitably experience in life. It works like this:

a. our suffering produces endurance Trials come into our lives. A loved one gets sick, we lose our job, we're in an accident. And what happens to us as result? We develop endurance or perseverance in the NIV. What's that? It is **trusting God through difficulty**. We learn to trust Him to carry us through hard times as we continue to follow Him. This happens a first time, a second time, a third time and it keeps on happening as life throws its curves at us and each time we endure by trusting God, so:

b. our endurance produces character What's that? It's **the habit of trusting** that's been developed by doing it over and over again until it has become a part of who we are. It becomes part of our character. Look with me at **James 1:2-4**. Enduring suffering produces a maturity, a completeness, a realization that, "God has caused me to stand every test I've faced". And when we go through enough troubles to be able to look back and see that history of how God has brought us through every test in life, and we have that character habit of trusting God, of being a man or woman of faith like Abraham:

c. our character produces hope. What's that? It's a complete **confidence in God's future for us**, the certainty that if God has done all of that, then He certainly will not only be with us in future circumstances, but He will deliver us all the way to our arrival in glory!

So, trials and problems actually do us a wonderful service; they build into us a confidence in God that cannot be shaken and therefore as we mature spiritually, we learn to rejoice in them, rather than complaining about them and wishing them gone all the time! In 2 Cor. 12:9-10 Paul wrote of his own experience with suffering and said, *I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* That's the kind of maturity that God desires to develop in us, the kind that ends up experiencing joy even in trials because they become a means of assuring us of our relationship with God! Then Paul goes on to say that:

2. we are assured of it by the Holy Spirit God has given us (5) That confidence, that hope, will never be disappointed; we'll never be ashamed of having held it, because it is not just some human conclusion that might be proved false. While circumstances are confirming our hope on the outside, something else is happening inside. God has placed His Holy Spirit within us and:

a. He has overwhelmed our hearts with God's love for us He is pouring out the experience of the love of God for us inside us until we are full and overflowing. Twice, Paul wrote that when the Spirit of God comes to live in us, our very hearts cry out *Abba, Father!* We joyously exclaim, "Daddy!", like a little child who sees his father walk in the front door. Because of the Holy Spirit, we are absolutely convinced internally that we have become God's children and that He loves us! Of course, at the same time:

b. He has produced in our hearts an overwhelming love for God in return. Our hearts overflow with love for our Father who has given us this amazing privilege! We truly LOVE God with all our hearts because of the permanent relationship He has given us. Now thirdly, Paul moves to the realm of our minds and says:

3. we are assured of it by the death of Christ (6-8) Paul points out something that we already realize:

a. human beings will scarcely die for those they deem worth dying for Human beings are seldom willing to die for another. A few might die for a relative or friend. Only rarely might someone give his life to save someone they don't know, but it would have to be someone who seems worth it. Nobody gives up his life to rescue people who appear to be getting what they deserve! He says Christ died for us who were weak (we who couldn't save ourselves), but what really causes us to stand in awe of God is that:

b. Christ died for us while we were still ungodly sinners God has proven once for all time, beyond all doubt, His love for us, in that while we were still wicked, sinful, unrighteous, ungodly enemies, Christ died for us! Christ looked down from the cross upon the cruel soldiers who had hung Him there and were gambling for His clothes, upon the mocking, jeering crowd who had called for His death, and cried, *Father, forgive them!* Then He died to make it possible! The Holy Spirit helps us to realize that *them* means US, that all humanity by our sin hung Christ on that cross and that His love for us was so great that He died for us anyway! How do I know that my future with God is secure? Because Jesus died for me! Because God so loved me that He gave His only Son, so that since I believe in Him, I will not perish but have everlasting life! People use the term *extreme* sports to describe people doing the most crazy, illogical, dangerous things that almost nobody is willing to do, but this is the most *extreme* act imaginable, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!

Father Maximilian Kolbe was a prisoner at Auschwitz in August 1941. Another prisoner had escaped from the camp, and in reprisal, the Nazis ordered that ten prisoners had to die by starvation. Father Kolbe offered to take the place of one of the condemned men. The Nazis kept him in the starvation bunker for two weeks and then put him to death by lethal injection on August 14, 1941. Thirty years later a survivor of Auschwitz described the effect of Kolbe's action: "It was an enormous shock to the whole camp. We became aware that someone among us in this spiritual dark night of the soul was raising the standard of love on high. Someone unknown, like everyone else, tortured and bereft of name and social standing, went to a horrible death for the sake of someone not even related to him... To say that Father Kolbe died for us or for that person's family is too great a simplification. His death was the salvation of thousands. ...We were stunned by his act, which became for us a mighty explosion of light in the dark camp." [A Book of Saints, Anne Gordon - BILL Norman Markham, Ontario] That's what the act of Jesus in dying for us does! It stuns us! It shocks us! It is an explosion of light that proves once and for all that God loves us and that makes us absolutely confident and certain of our standing with Him! And finally, Paul says:

4. we are assured of it by the life of Christ (9-10) There is another great fact we are convinced of: that Jesus rose from the dead and He is alive now and forever! So, it makes the utmost sense that:

a. He who gave His blood for us so long ago **will surely save us from God's wrath** in the future, from an eternity in hell when we die! If He did such an extreme thing to save us then, it should assure our hearts greatly that He is alive to protect us forever and ever. As Heb. 7:25 says, *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.* He is always there on our behalf. But Paul's thought goes even one step deeper:

b. the Son who died for us as enemies, lives to save us as reconciled ones If He died for us when we were enemies who had nothing to do with God, how much more will He do for us now that we have been justified and brought into relationship with Him as His children, because He is alive forevermore and wants us to be with Him! His life is our ultimate confidence that He will guarantee our future forever and ever.

Oh, what a wonderful guarantee we have of our own future because we've been justified. It's not merely a reasonable certainty, but a perfect, complete certainty, and it is because of that that:

III. We Are Continually Rejoicing In God (11) The Greek word for *rejoice* actually means "to boast or to glory in something." We might say, "to sing and shout about something." And what do we sing and shout about? God!

1. the gift of reconciliation through Jesus is cause for great celebration Every day of our lives should be filled with, *O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy Name in all the earth!* We should be shouting with the angels and the saints who are around the throne, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing!* This great gift, this unspeakable gift, should fill us with thanksgiving. Peter wrote, *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory!* - 1:8. But remember that:

2. this gift is also cause for bold declaration That word *rejoice* carries the sense of doing it before others, declaring your joy to them and the reason for it. People that are full of joy about something just can't keep quiet about it; they just can't keep from bubbling over with it and sharing it with others. If your joy is real, you'll talk about it.

Oh, how different this is from the people all around you who have no sense of a permanent standing with God, who worry about it from day to day and have an uncertain future with no sense of confidence as to what eternity holds for them! Imagine facing life like that! Imagine facing death like that! In the beginning I shared with a quote from Cyprian about the joy that he had found in Jesus. I thought you might like to hear the story of the end of his life. *At the end of the year 256 a new persecution of the Christians under Emperor Valerian I broke out, and two of the Bishops of Rome, Stephen I and Sixtus II, suffered martyrdom there. In North Africa Cyprian courageously prepared his people for the expected edict of persecution... and himself set an example for them. When he was brought before the Roman proconsul he refused to sacrifice to the pagan deities and firmly professed Christ. The proconsul banished him to Curubis, modern Korba, where he comforted to the best of his ability his flock and his banished clergy. In a vision he saw his own approaching fate. When a year had passed, he was recalled and kept practically a prisoner in his own villa, in expectation of severe measures after a new and more stringent imperial edict arrived, demanding the execution of all Christian clerics. On September 13, 258, Cyprian was imprisoned by the new proconsul, Galerius Maximus. The day following, he was examined for the last time and sentenced to die by the sword. His only answer was, "Thanks be to God!" The execution was carried out at once in an open place near the city. A vast multitude followed Cyprian on his last journey. He removed his garments without assistance, knelt down, and prayed. After he blindfolded himself, he was beheaded by the sword.*

[<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprian>] His joy was not extinguished by danger, by banishment, by imprisonment or even by being sentenced to death; even then it bubbled out of him. He had found a joy a thousand times better than any pleasure this life could offer. He had found Jesus. Paul said it best when he exhorted the Philippians, *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!*

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Justification: God's Provision Of Righteousness - 3:21-5:21

Understanding Death AND Life - 5:12-21

The second half of Romans 5 is one of the more difficult portions of Scripture. In fact, D. M. Stearns, the well-known Bible teacher and missionary statesman from Germantown, once said that if you want to know whether a man is a real theologian, see if his Greek Testament falls open to Romans 5 and whether the pages are brown and worn! Greater men than I have wrestled with the meaning of this passage, so I just want us to look carefully at what it says and try to be as simple as possible. Let me explain why I think Paul wrote this passage. He has been talking since 3:21 about justification, about the fact that a person is counted righteous before God when he believes in Jesus Christ. He has explained the fact that it happens, he has given the proof that it happens from Abraham's life in chapter 4, and he has extolled the great joy that it brings us in the first half of chapter 5. So, now he is going to picture for us *how* it happens, how it is that God counts us righteous, but in order to do that, he first has to explain why God counts us as sinners and that brings him to expound one simple, central fact, which is that:

I. Adam's Sin Brought Death Upon Us All (12) The first reading textbook for the American colonies, the New England Primer, expressed it this way, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all!" This is called the doctrine of imputed sin: the concept that somehow Adam's first, original sin was attributed to the entire race descended from him and it affects each and every human being born into the world. Verse 12 spells it out nicely for us:

1. sin entered the world through Adam Adam was the doorman who opened the door and let it in. Prior to this, sin was external to both the world that God created and also to the people He had made. It existed only among Satan and the angels who fell with him. But when Adam sinned by disobeying God, he brought it in and when he did:

2. death entered as a consequence of sin God had told Adam clearly that the penalty of sin would be death, and please keep in mind that physical death is what Paul has in mind in this whole section. So, death entered the world as the penalty of sin. Death was not part of the original creation; human beings were designed and created to be immortal, to live forever. But when Adam opened the door:

3. death spread to the entire race Abel was the first to die, but soon Adam died, Eve died, their children died and their grandchildren and great grandchildren after them all died. It was like Adam opened the floodgate on a dam and in gushed death and wiped out every member of the entire human race. Every human being that has ever lived (save two that we know of in the Bible) has died and we see all around us living proof of that fact. The human mortality rate is perfect; one out of one people die, always and everywhere. The question is, why do we all die? And verse 12 answers:

4. we die because all of us sinned "in Adam" The Greek tense here is very important; it indicates an action that is completely done and over with in the past. Paul is not saying that *all DO sin* but that *all DID sin* in that one act of sin Adam committed long ago. Commonly, we think that we die because we have committed sins, yet infants die before they knowingly sin, sometimes even in the womb before they do anything! Mentally handicapped people die, who may never have understood moral responsibility. In fact, if your individual sins cause death, as a believer in Jesus, you would not have to die, because your sins are gone! You have the very righteousness of Christ. So, why are you and I going to die physically? The answer is not because of our personal sins, but because of that one primary act of sin; we die because of our connection with Adam. As **1 Cor. 15:22** puts it, *...in Adam all die*. Now the first thing that comes to mind is something like, "That's not fair; how can someone else sin and I suffer the penalty!" But that's not actually what is happening. There are two ways to explain our connection to Adam. One is to say that:

a. he acted on our behalf Some theologian would say with a deep academic voice, "He was our federal head". That is, Adam, as the first human being, was the representative of the whole race of people who would descend from him and he acted on their behalf. We acknowledge this concept in many areas of life where a leader acts on our behalf and in doing so, we act. For example, if our President or Congress declares war, then I, as a citizen of the United States, am at war, even though I was not personally there to declare it. The head of a tribe may sign a peace treaty and so each member of the tribe is in effect bound to that treaty, as though he signed it himself. So, Adam's action was my action; he acted for me and the consequences of his action fall on me, just as surely as if I was the one who acted there. The good news is that this helps us to comprehend how Christ died in our place on the cross; He acted as my representative, so that the penalty for my sins was actually poured out upon me *in Him*, just as surely as if I had physically hung there. He received it on my behalf! Do you get what I'm saying? But our connection to Adam goes even deeper than the concept that he acted *for* us. In God's eyes:

b. we acted in his act Look with me at **Heb. 7:9-10**. You can review the story in Gen. 14 for yourself, but the Holy Spirit says here that Levi, Abraham's great grandson, who was not born until many years later, actually paid tithes to the priest Melchizedek in the person of his great grandfather Abraham. Abraham's act was his own act, it says, because he was "in the loins" of his ancestor. Abraham was the head or the progenitor of a race of people, the Hebrew race, so God counts the whole race which would physically descend from him as being already present in

him. Obviously, they are not physically present, but God counts them that way. That's why the promises God made to Abraham hold good to his children; when God made those promises to him, He made them to each and every descendant who was "in him" as well. And that's how I am physically connected to Adam; I was "in Adam" and so was in the garden in him. The case is not that he sinned and I now pay for it. Rather it is that when he sinned; I sinned. The guilt of that act was my guilt and the penalty for it, that is, death, my penalty. I know that's heavy and hard to understand, but hey, God is pretty deep, you know! Anyway, the next point that Paul makes is that:

5. all humans die whether they sin knowingly as Adam did or not (13-14a) Paul is proving his argument that *all sinned* in Adam. Those people who lived during the time from Adam to Moses had no law to break, no direct command of God follow. They could not sin against the direct revelation of God, as Adam did, and have it counted against them. Yet every one of them was a sinner and the proof of it is that they all died. Why did they die? Because they sinned *in Adam* and so did we!

So, the bad news is that Adam's sin is imputed to us; that's why we die! However, the good news is that that explains to us how our justification, being made righteous before God, occurs. It works exactly the same way! For the rest of the chapter Paul shows over and over how:

II. Adam Is A Contrasting Picture Of Christ (14b) That word *type* [or maybe *pattern* or *figure* in your translation] means the impression left by a stamp or seal pressed into clay. How many have ever used a typewriter? Not many anymore! Each key on a typewriter causes a letter to strike the ribbon against the paper and leave an impression. The impression is a shadow of the real thing that made it. In the Bible, a type is an Old Testament person or thing that foreshadows or pre-figures a New Testament thing. It is something in the Old Testament that is like something in the New Testament and is intended by God to be an illustration of it. For example, Heb. 8:5 says the Tabernacle in the Old Testament was a *copy and a shadow* of things in heaven. It was built carefully to illustrate things about God's dwelling in heaven. The sacrifices of the Old Testament are types of Christ; they illustrate and spell out the various aspects of His death on the cross and its meaning for us. Jesus said that Noah spending three days in the belly of the fish before being spit out alive was a picture foreshadowing His own burial and resurrection. So, Paul says Adam is also a type of Christ and by studying his act, we can learn more about what Christ did for us by His act on the cross. Now, most types are comparative, that is, both things are *like* each other. But Adam and Christ are contrasting types; they and their actions are similar in position, but with totally opposite results. In other words, we look at Adam and see what he did for us in a negative sense and it helps us see how Christ did the exact opposite for us in a positive sense! *Kapeesh?* [By the way, Urban Dictionary says *kapeesh* is a word commonly used by Italian gangsters and mobsters of which I am *not* one!] Now Paul goes on to point out seven successive contrasts between Adam and Christ, beginning in verse (15):

1. as Adam's sin affected many, Christ's grace-gift affects many Both Adam and Christ were heads of a race; both were representative persons acting in behalf an entire body of people. Because the whole race was in Adam, his act was the act of *many*, that is, the entire human race and it brought the effect of death to us all. Just so, Christ's act of dying can give life to the *many* millions of us who believe! But Paul's point is not about the quantity; it is about certainty. If one man can sin and ruin a whole race like Adam did, then how much more can a God of grace by a free act of grace redeem a whole race. Just as surely as in Adam all die, in Christ all get life! Every person who believes gets life from Christ, his Head, just as certainly, and in fact, even more certainly, than he got death from Adam! Hallelujah! Next, we read verse (16). Paul says:

2. condemnation followed one sin but justification followed many sins Each act (both Christ's and Adam's) had a relationship to sin. One sin was all it took to ruin the whole race. Think about it. The simple act of disobeying a command not to eat a piece of fruit was enough to condemn an entire race to death. That's how awful and destructive a thing sin is! But in contrast, think how great a thing Christ did in giving us righteousness. Think of all the millions and millions of sins committed by all those from Adam on, even down to all the many in your own life. Christ's one act of dying was sufficient to justify us from every one of those. Hallelujah and hallelujah again! Now comes verse (17). Paul says:

3. as Adam made death reign over many, Christ made many reign in life The contrast here is in the word *reign*. Each person established a reign, a kingship, a controlling force. Adam's act gave death full reign, full control over every human being. Death reigned as king over the race, as verse 14 said, and not only for that time, but for all generations to come until it is finally abolished. On the contrary, Christ's act defeated death and disarmed it and claimed the keys to it, so that the race of people who are in Him, even though they were once ruled by death, now reign with Christ in life that is eternal. We will reign over all things with Him forever and ever. Adam created a reign of death; Christ created a reign of life that will never be extinguished! Is it fair to say TRIPLE Hallelujah?! On to verse (18). Paul points out a similarity this time:

4. as one trespass brought condemnation to all, one righteous act brings life for all The emphasis here is on the result of the two actions. Adam's action was a trespass, a wrong action, a breaking of the command of God and that wrong action brought condemnation to the whole race that was in him. The word *condemnation* in Greek technically refers to the passing of a sentence of punishment. Adam's entire race came under the pronouncement of the sentence

of death. But Christ's act was a just one, a righteous one. It was the satisfying of all the demands of God's nature and of the Law and the end result of that one act was that it brought a new judgment, a new sentence, a verdict of life for all who believe! Now four Hallelujahs is something even a Pentecostal church might have trouble with, but this is worth it! However, back to contrasts in verse **(19)**. Here's another similarity:

5. as Adam's disobedience made many sinners, Christ's obedience made many righteous Now Paul focuses more closely on the nature of the two actions. They were similar yet opposite. Adam's act was disobedience. The word *disobedience* literally means *failure to hear* in Greek. Adam failed to hear God in the right way and therefore failed to heed what God told him. How many times did the prophets say, "Hear, O Israel!" It means to hear with the intent to act, to carry out what you hear. And his act of not hearing caused God to declare or constitute many as sinners. But Christ's act was an act of obedience and the Greek word for *obedience* means *to hear under*, that is, to hear with submission to the authority of the speaker, the way a private listens to the command of a general. Christ listened; Adam didn't! And as a result of His listening, God declared or constituted all who believe as righteous, as freed from sin! That should lead us to ask ourselves, "How's my hearing?" Do I hear the way Adam did or the way Christ did? Well, now the question comes up in Paul's mind, "What about the law then; if all men were made sinners through Adam's transgression, what use was the giving of the law and what did breaking the law matter?" Look at verse **(20)**. Paul says:

6. law caused sin to increase but grace increased much more Literally he says the law *entered alongside*. Mankind was already sinful, but the law augmented that, so that sin increased. Sin took on the new character of transgression, of the breaking of God's commands on a personal basis. Personal sin, individual sin, was added on top of the original sin and man became even more deeply guilty of sin before God. However, this became an opportunity to show the even greater grace of God. God's grace literally, *superabounded!* The word has the sense of filling something up and then piling some more on top of that! When we were at the shore last week, my brother-in-law always gets a plastic container of Fisher's Carmel corn. He saves the container from year to year to refill. Well, this year the lip of the lid was cracked and it was unusable, so he handed the man the container without it and the guy not only filled it to the level line of the lid but he filled it in a mound about six inches above the top until it was running off the sides! That's the word *superabound*; it means all you could have and then some more on top of that! No matter how bad sin got nor how much it increased nor how evil it became, it was just that much more opportunity for God to show that His grace is greater still and some more on top of that! Praise God that no matter how far we fall, no matter how low we become, it only becomes more of an opportunity to show how much greater His grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ is! I don't even know what to call six Hallelujahs!! And now we come to the conclusion in verse **(21)**. Here is Paul's conclusion:

7. as sin reigned through death, grace reigns through righteousness bringing eternal life There are two forces which have reigned as king universally. Through Adam, sin was made king of the human race. Sin ruled humanity and the result of its reign was universal death to every one of its subjects. But now through Christ, grace was made king and grace now reigns over all those who are in Him, and the result of its reign is to bring eternal life to every last one of them. It was all done through Jesus Christ our Lord! Oh, aren't you glad we are ruled by grace and not by sin any longer!

Can you see how much Christ has done for us? If we were left to ourselves in Adam, what a terrible state we would be in! But now in Christ all of that has not only been cancelled out, it has been superabundantly changed for us so that we are fully justified, made righteous, freed from the powerful reign of death and of sin and are ruled by the mighty grace of God which knows no limit! Let me tell you this story. *Major John Andre was a British officer and intelligence agent who was involved in planning with the American General Benedict Arnold, the infamous traitor, to have the British army take the fort at West Point NY during the Revolutionary War. While traveling out of uniform he was discovered, arrested and sentenced to be hanged as a spy, while Benedict Arnold successfully fled. Even though he was an enemy officer, he impressed a great many of the Americans as a brave and honorable gentleman in the way he conducted himself throughout the whole affair. He was hanged on Oct. 2, 1780 and buried on the spot, but his remains were later brought to Britain and buried in Westminster Abbey as a recognition of the miscarriage of justice. However, after his hanging, in his pocket were found several verses of a religious poem that was first published in 1776 in The Gospel Magazine, a British evangelical magazine that is still published to this day. These verses he had written down from memory as a testimony to his faith and because of him this poem went on to be set to music and to appear in American hymnals for the next hundred years. For us this morning it forms a fitting conclusion to all Paul has taught us in Romans 5 and it goes like this:*

*Hail, sovereign love, which first began
The scheme to rescue fallen man!
Hail, matchless, free, eternal grace,
That gave my soul a Hiding Place!*

*Against the God who built the sky
I fought with hands uplifted high,*

*Despised the mention of His grace,
Too proud to seek a Hiding Place.*

*Enwrapt in thick Egyptian night,
And fond of darkness more than light,
Madly I ran the sinful race,
Secure without a Hiding Place.*

*But thus the eternal counsel ran:
"Almighty love, arrest that man!"
I felt the arrows of distress,
And found I had no hiding place.*

*Indignant justice stood in view.
To Sinai's fiery mount I flew;
But justice cried, with frowning face:
"This mountain is no hiding place".*

*Ere long a heavenly voice I heard,
And Mercy's angel soon appeared;
He led me with a placid pace
To Jesus, as a Hiding Place.*

*On Him almighty vengeance fell,
Which must have sunk a world to hell.
He bore it for a sinful race,
And thus became their Hiding Place.*

*Should sevenfold storms of thunder roll,
And shake this globe from pole to pole,
No thunderbolt shall daunt my face,
For Jesus is my Hiding Place.*

*A few more setting suns at most,
Shall land me on fair Canaan's coast,
Where I shall sing the song of grace,
And see my glorious Hiding Place.*

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Sanctification: Our Appropriation Of Righteousness - 6:1-8:17

Our Great Transformation - 6:1-11

Paul has now completed his deep explanation of two of the aspects of our salvation. For the first 2 ½ chapters he explained our *condemnation*, how all of us are under sin. Then for the next 2 ½ chapters he explained our *justification*, how God declares us righteous when we simply believe in Jesus Christ. Now, beginning at 6:1, he is going to spend 2 ½ chapters explaining our *sanctification*, that is how God actually makes us to BE righteous and holy, how we become during our lives on earth what God says we already are. *Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, long-time pastor and Bible teacher from Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, described sanctification through this story. Several centuries ago, the emperor of Japan commissioned an artist to paint a magnificent portrait of an exotic bird. After many months of waiting, he went to the man's studio to see how he was progressing. Upon his arrival, he found that the final touches had just been put on the canvas and the work was a masterpiece in every minute detail. When the Emperor asked what had taken so long, the painter went from cabinet to cabinet, producing armloads of separate sketches which featured outlines of the bird's feathers, tendons, wings, claws, eyes, and feet. He had been making preliminary drawings all along, but only when the emperor appeared was the lengthy task perfected. Barnhouse commented: Just as it took much painstaking effort before the picture could be true to its subject, so the Holy Spirit must constantly work in the believer's life to conform him to the image of God's Son. Though the Christian has been justified and even potentially sanctified in God's sight through the new birth, a long process of spiritual development must still be accomplished. His state must catch up with his standing. When the King of kings comes to claim His own, then the blessed work will finally be completed.* That's what sanctification is and now Paul begins to discuss this subject of how God changes our lives by revealing to us the nature of the great transformation that God has caused to happen within us. And he starts with a question that is actually a very startling statement (1-2). Paul is saying that:

I. It Is Impossible For A Genuine Believer To Continually Practice Sin He is not saying that a believer never commits a sin, period; He is declaring that the change that has happened to us is of such a magnitude that it is impossible for us to go on in the habit of sinning as before we believed. His question points out:

1. the serious danger of abusing God's gift of grace There have been those who have concluded that if God forgives us simply for believing, then we are free to live any way we want. In fact, the more we sin, the more opportunity there is for God to display His grace in forgiving us! *Grigori Rasputin was a monk who became a powerful influence with the Tsar of Russia in the early 1900's. He believed that sinning and repentance were a necessary part of salvation and that those deliberately committing fornication and then repenting bitterly, would be closer to God. One person commented, "Rasputin was a dual character who could go straight from praying for the royal family to the brothel down the street."* [Wikipedia] Paul says that's a travesty! A person who can sin with such impunity has never had a real encounter with Jesus Christ, because if he did, it would be impossible for him to do that! Why? Paul's answer is, because *we have died to sin!* Now, that is a powerful statement and I want to unpack it for a moment. When Paul uses the word *sin* here and throughout these chapters, he is not referring to individual deeds or acts of that are sinful, that is, sins. Rather:

2. sin is the evil force or power that indwells people and drives them to commit sinful actions. It's a force just like gravity in the physical realm. Gravity is a powerful unseen force, a strong pull, that is constantly drawing all objects on the planet toward the center of the earth. In the spiritual realm, sin is a similar unseen force that is continually at work inside of human beings relentlessly and powerfully drawing them toward evil. We are born with it; it dwells inside every one of us from the moment of our conception. But Paul says something amazing happened when we came to Jesus Christ. He says:

a. we have died with respect to it Now, that's significant. He doesn't merely say that it has less pull upon us now. He says we are *dead* to it. Something that is dead is totally insensitive to its surroundings. A road-killed squirrel doesn't jump up and flee when the next car comes speeding up. It doesn't squeal in terror. It doesn't scurry about and try to get away like it did when it was alive. In fact, it doesn't respond at all. It just lies there uninfluenced by any of the forces that once moved it. So, Paul says, we are dead with respect to that force called sin. It has no power over us any longer; it exerts no pull on us. When an astronaut goes up in a spacecraft far enough, he gets beyond the gravitational pull of the earth and becomes weightless. There is nothing pulling him (or anything else) down to the floor any more. He floats about; everything floats about, free from gravity. We might say that for the moment, he is *dead* with respect to gravity. It has no power over him any longer. And the fact that we are dead to sin means that it does not control us anymore the way that it did. It's power over us is broken. The other reason I think Paul uses the word *dead* is because it indicates permanence. When something is dead, it's dead. It isn't coming back. Paul is telling us that the power of sin over us is broken forever. That's why he says that:

b. it is impossible for us to live controlled by it any longer Once the astronaut is in space, he can't be controlled by gravity, even if he wants to be! Just so, John explains, *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed [that is, God's very nature now] abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.* - 1 Jn. 3:9. It is impossible for us to live a lifestyle of sinning, to keep on perpetually being drawn to do evil all the time. The transformation God has made inside us makes it absolutely impossible. Rasputin was evidently never born of God, monk or not!

Now Paul goes on to tell us:

II. How God Transformed Us When We Believed (3-5) There are two very important truths summarized in verse 4. The first is that:

1. we died and were buried with Christ At the moment we believed; God placed us IN Christ. Our life was joined to His in such a way that what happened to Him happened to us. When He died, we died; when He was buried, we were buried. It's not just that we were made different. Something about us actually died, perished, is no more, is gone forever. Hey, did you ever think about how we use the idiom *dead and buried* in English? If we say, "that issue is dead", we mean it's not worth talking about, but if we say, "that issue is dead and buried," we mean it's over with for good! Burial is the proof that death is real, the guarantee that the buried object is no longer alive and isn't coming back! Hold that thought for a moment and look at Paul's second important truth at the end of verse 4:

2. we were resurrected with Christ to live a new order of life like His What happened to Him, happened to us. He rose from the grave to a new manner of life. He still had His body, but it was different. It was no longer impacted by all of the forces of earth the way the old one was. And when He rose, we rose with Him, not yet to the new bodies like His that we will get one day, but to a new manner of life, a new way of living that is driven by the new nature that He created within us. We are totally different people, living a totally different life because we died with Christ and rose with Him. Now Paul explains that:

3. baptism symbolizes this tremendous transformation that has occurred The act of being buried in the water pictures the fact that my old self has died and been buried with Christ and I have been raised with Him to a new self; I'm a new man who lives a new way. Now, please understand that baptism:

a. it does not cause the transformation to occur It does not cause the dying and the rising to occur. It merely pictures what already happened to us when we believed. Yet even though the act of baptism doesn't save us:

b. it is important. It is not something to be neglected, to be nonchalant about. It is a command of Christ Himself and He commanded that every one of His disciples from every nation should be baptized in His name. To ignore that command is disobedience! But why is it so important? Because **it declares our union with Christ and our transformation by Him.** It says, "I am in Christ and Christ is in me and He has changed me! The old me is dead and gone. There's a new me living now. My life has been changed by Jesus Christ!" However, the point of what Paul is saying is really in verse 5:

4. since our death is undeniable, our living a new life with Him is inevitable Those words *united with Christ* are literally *grown together with* in the Greek. Perhaps *fused together* would be a good translation. Think of Siamese twins. They are not just tied or held together; they are vitally connected. Each one of them is a living part of the other. They share a common life. We are fused together with Christ in both His death and resurrection; we share a common life. So, since we were fused together with Him when He died and we died with Him, it is inevitable that we also share together in a new life. He's not talking about the future resurrection of our bodies some day; he's talking about walking in newness of life, as he said in verse 5. We cannot help living a new life, a life not dominated by the power of sin, a life that is growing in holiness like His, IF we are truly in Him. Of course, if we're not living the life, the Bible says we ought to examine ourselves as to whether we are really in the faith or not. We could be fooling ourselves and that would be deadly!

At any rate, Paul does not stop there. He goes on to give us:

III. The Explanation Of Our Transformation (6-7) Here's how it works:

1. our old self was crucified with Christ and is dead Now, just what part of us is that exactly? Well, in my understanding, we are three part beings. We have a *spirit*, the very core of our being. It is our life, the essence of who we are, our nature, if you will. Then, technically, we have a *soul*, or what we might call a personality. It is composed of our mind (thoughts), our emotions (feelings) and our will (ability to choose). Or as Bill Gillham likes to say, "We have a thinker, a feeler and a chooser." It's more or less the mental part of who we are. And then, of course, we have a *body*, the physical part of us that we leave behind when we die physically. So, when Paul says our *old self* was crucified, he means that:

a. the old sinful nature at the core of our being is gone *Crucified* means *killed*. The core essence of the person we used to be is dead and gone forever; it is removed from us by an act of spiritual circumcision as Colossians describes it, cut away and thrown out! However:

b. the force called sin still remains present in our bodies and our minds It is not sin that was killed in us. It was our own old nature that was executed. From birth, the power of sin lived in our spirit, in our mind and in our body. We were thoroughly controlled by it, through and through. But now it only lives in our mind and body. We still have sinful thoughts and feelings and make sinful choices and do some sinful deeds with our body, but at the core of who we are, we are new people. And:

c. through this process the power of sin to rule over us was broken You see, sin controlled us by using our nature. It is the nature of a cow to eat grass. It is the nature of a lion to eat the cow. If you change the core being, the inner nature of the lion into that of a cow, he'll eat grass and he'll want to eat grass. Now, you might be able to get him to eat meat now and then by outside influence, but by nature he wants to do what he is inside. The power of carnivorousness, or whatever we'd call it, is broken and he is freed from eating cows forever. He doesn't have to do it. That's what God will do with lions in the millennium, by the way! But it has already happened for us now:

d. we have been permanently freed from the power of sin. It can no longer control us because our old nature is gone. Now, it might manage to attract us to sin now and again, but it can no longer force us to do it; we are no longer sin's slaves. The point being this: **we don't have to sin.** We can choose to, but there is no longer a nature in us making us do it. Rather, in place of the old self:

2. Christ created in us a new self exactly like His Paul doesn't go into detail with this right here, but look with me at **Col. 3:9-10.** We have put off, been completely stripped of, the old self, the old nature and we have been clothed with a new nature, a new spirit, a new self, one that Christ created in us in His own image. What is it like? Back up to **Eph. 4:23.** At the core of our being, we are actually righteous and holy like Christ Himself. He birthed in us a new nature like His own that is totally free from sin and at that same moment:

a. He also joined Himself to our new spirit - 1 Cor. 6:17 says, *he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.* His Holy Spirit enters us and fuses Himself to our human spirit, uniting us as one and giving us His holi-

ness! So, we are not split personalities; we don't have two natures at the same time, a little angel on one shoulder and a little devil on the other like in the cartoons! We ARE righteous and holy like Christ, even though sin still lives in our body and mind and tries to give us trouble whenever it can. We'll talk about that war in the next chapter, but Paul's real point is in verse (8). He's not talking about living with Christ in heaven in the future some day. He is saying that since such a change of literal death to sin has occurred in us:

b. it is absolutely sure that we will live life with Christ, that is, we'll live an entirely new style of life. Our newness of life guarantees it. Paul put it like this in **Gal. 2:20**, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Christ's life is what animates me. It's not me living anymore; I died! Jesus put His life in me and He is doing the living. I live my life in this body by simply trusting Him to live out His life through me! This new way of life is a sure thing, a certainty, because the old self is dead and gone.

But can that ever change? Can it ever be reversed? Can I ever go back to being what I was before? Paul answers that:

3. this transformation in us is permanent (9-11) Christ cannot go back and die again. His death settled the issue of sin once and for all and death has no claim or hold on Him anymore because He went through it once and conquered it. And what Paul is saying is that:

a. just as Christ's death to sin was permanent, so is ours Our old self is literally dead and buried. It can't be resurrected and brought back, any more than Jesus can have His earthly body back and die again! Moreover:

b. just as the life Christ lives, He lives to God, so do we This new nature created in us can't go away. Christ can't unjoin Himself from our spirit and resurrect our old self and put it back so that we live the old way. This change in us is a permanent change that lasts forever!

But here is the thing that is really important. Having been transformed on the inside, we play a key role in the outworking of that in our lives (11):

IV. We Must Grasp The Reality Of This Transformation And Apply It We must adopt a new way of considering ourselves. We must count or reckon ourselves to be what we really are as the first step in our new life. If you do not grasp what we've just learned, you'll always see yourself as trying desperately to become something you are not, that is, holy. But if you comprehend it, you'll see yourself as simply learning to become what you already are. And that makes a world of difference.

In his book, The Normal Christian Life, the well-known Chinese leader Watchman Nee shared his personal experience: "For years after my conversion I had been taught to reckon. I reckoned from 1920 until 1927. The more I reckoned that I was dead to sin, the more alive I clearly was. I simply could not believe myself dead and I could not produce that death. Whenever I sought help from others, I was told to read Romans 6:11, and the more I read Romans 6:11, and tried to reckon, the further away death was: I could not get at it. For months I was seeking and at times I fasted, but nothing came through. I remember one morning, one I can never forget. I was upstairs sitting at my desk reading the Word and praying and I said, "Lord, open my eyes!" And then in a flash I saw it. I saw my oneness with Christ. I saw that I was in Him and that when He died, I died. I saw that the question of my death was a matter of the past and not of the future, and that I was just as truly dead as He was because I was in Him when He died. The whole thing had dawned upon me. I was carried away with such joy at this great discovery that I jumped from my chair and cried, "Praise the Lord, I am dead!" I ran downstairs and met one of the brothers helping in the kitchen and I laid hold of him. 'Brother', I said, 'do you know that I have died?' I must admit he looked puzzled. 'What do you mean?' he said, so I went on: 'Do you not know that Christ has died? Do you not know that I died with Him? Do you not know that my death is no less truly a fact than His?' Oh, it was so real to me! I longed to go through the streets of Shanghai shouting the news of my discovery. From that day to this I have never for one moment doubted the finality of that word: "I have been crucified with Christ". I do not mean to say that we need not work that out. Yes, there is an outworking of the death which we are going to see presently, but this, first of all, is the basis of it. I have been crucified: it has been done." Hallelujah!

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Sanctification: Our Appropriation Of Righteousness - 6:1-8:17

Living Like Who We Are - 6:11-23

In this section, Paul is explaining the aspect of our salvation that we call *sanctification*, the process of how God causes us to become progressively more and more holy in the way that we live. He began in the first half of chapter 6 by spelling out the nature of the great transformation that God works within each one of us when we believe in Jesus Christ. Now he's going to tell us how God wants us to actually use that understanding in a practical way to change the way we live. Last time we ended with verse 11; today we'll begin there (**11**). Here's a principle to remember: we always act out of or based on what we believe to be true. Let's take, for example, a girl who was told she was fat or teased about her weight a lot when she was young. She learned to believe that she was fat. So, today she is 30 or 40 years old and weighs 110 lbs. And what does she do? She starves herself continually. She diets perpetually, maybe even to the point of eating and throwing up. Every time she looks in a mirror, she thinks, "I'm fat!", even though everyone else tells her it's not true. She keeps on acting on what she believes. Now, the rest of us may confidently smirk at a person like that, thinking we would never be so foolish, but for all our supposed "knowledge", we all act on exactly the same principle. We all act out of what we believe to be true, whether it is or not. That's why Paul is telling us here that:

I. We Must Believe The Truth With Our Mind We must believe ourselves to be what God says we really are. We must consider or reckon or count ourselves as being the way we are in truth; if we don't, we'll never act that way. He says:

1. we must realize that:

a. we are dead with respect to sin which indwells our minds and bodies Sin does still live in us, but its chains of control over us have been cut; its forceful power over us is severed. We are dead to it! We do not have to respond at all when it tries to influence us. And further we must realize that:

b. we are alive because our brand-new nature is joined to Christ Sin doesn't live in our spirit or our nature.

Christ put in us a brand-new nature that is holy and pure like His, a nature that loves Him and wants to serve Him. The problem, of course, is that neither of these two things is visible. You can't do an MRI on your body and see that your old nature has died and been removed. Nor can you see the new nature that Christ birthed in you there. This transformation inside us is invisible, so just like all the other major truths we hold, we have to count them as being true because God says so! Our mind has to reason, to consider, to say, "God says this is true, therefore I believe this is true; THIS IS REALLY TRUE!" But it is not an academic kind of knowledge, some fact to be filed away collecting dust and cobwebs in the back of our minds:

2. we must stand firmly on these truths in the moment that sin tempts us When we feel the drawing power of sin pulling us toward something we know is wrong, in our minds we have to be ready and able to say, *"No, I died to that with Christ! That's not who I am, I really am like Christ; I really don't WANT to that. So I WILL NOT do that!"*. The difference is that I'm not kicking myself and feeling guilty for that evil thought entering my mind. I'm not saying, "Oh what a wretch I am; what a sinful worm I must be. How could I even have such a thought!" So, I repent and confess over and over again and all the time I feel that I must be the worst sinner on the planet. If I believe what God says, that I really am a *saint*, a holy one, then I recognize that sin is still IN me, but IT IS NOT me. There is a foreign power, if you will, trying to take over control of me and I won't have it!

Can you see what a difference it makes to know who you are? *After General Jonathan Wainwright was forced to surrender to the Japanese during World War II, he was held prisoner in a Manchurian concentration camp nearly 4 years. Cruelly treated, he became "a broken, crushed, hopeless, starving man." Finally, the Japanese surrendered and the war ended. A United States army colonel was sent to the camp to announce personally to the general that Japan had been defeated, that he was free and in command. After Wainwright heard the news, he returned to his quarters and was confronted by some guards who began to mistreat him as they had done in the past. Wainwright, however, with the news of the allied victory still fresh in his mind, declared with authority, "No, I am in command here! These are my orders." From that moment on, General Wainwright was in control. [Forever Triumphant, F. J. Huegel]* Why? Because knowing what was really true about himself changed the way he acted and that's exactly what it does for us. That's what Paul goes on to show us in verses (**12-14**) He is saying that, now believing the truth with our minds:

II. We Must Choose With Our Will You see:

1. sin can only control us if we allow it to It has no power over us except the power we give it. Before we knew Jesus, sin used to reign as king in us and when a king says jump, you jump. Why? Because he has the power to make you do it. But wouldn't it be neat to be able to say to a wicked king, like old Nebuchadnezzar who commanded the people to bow down to his statue, "No, I won't bow and there's not a thing you can do to make me!" That's what we have to do to sin. It still exists in our mind and body and it will still try to give us orders, but it has no power to make us do them. Its demand is all hot air! So:

a. when sin tempts us to pursue its evil desires, we must refuse to hear; we must refuse to obey its orders. In our mind we have to say "No, I will not do that! How could I do that when Jesus saved me and made me brand

new!". As an example, let's pretend you are Joseph and you find yourself alone in the house going about your duties. And here comes Potiphar's wife, dressed to seduce you. She talks to you and begs you to sleep with her; she grabs at your garment. Sin, living in you, sees the opportunity to gain control over you. It floods your mind with lustful thoughts, sets your hormones to raging, and begins to tempt you sorely. If that process goes on very long it will result in sinful actions. What can stop it? Truth! Joseph says, *[My master] is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*" In steps Joseph's mind and says, "Wait a minute, I know this is wrong. It is evil, unjust to my master and it is rebellion against God, whom I love! I'm not going to listen to this. I don't want to do this and I WILL not do this. Legs, get going! RUN!" That's what Paul means when he says, *Let not sin rule over you...* In fact:

b. we must refuse to allow sin to use any part of us for unrighteousness That word *present* or *offer* means literally *to hand over to*, to place something at someone else's disposal, to place it beside them for their convenient use. For example, if I hand you my car keys, I place my car at your disposal to use as you wish. (*Just don't wreck it; I love my SUV!*) Paul says, "Don't give sin the keys! Don't let it use your body for its evil purposes! In fact, don't let it use any of your members, any part of you, your body, your thoughts, or your emotions. Refuse to place yourself at its disposal! Why not? Paul says in verse 14:

c. sin must no longer rule us since we now live by God's grace, not by keeping the law If it was up to us to keep God's commands perfectly in order to be accepted by Him, then sin would rule us. It would tempt us to break the commands and then fill us with guilt that we did and condemn us before God. But we are free from all of that; all of our sins have been forgiven once, for all, forever by the marvelous grace of our loving God. We live on a new plane; Christ has made us alive together with Himself and He lives in and through us. Why would we want to, why would we dare to, allow sin to rule over us and tell us what to do in even the smallest degree! Rather, going back to verse 13:

2. we must choose instead to offer ourselves to God We hand Him the keys to our life. We say, "Here, Lord, I am Yours!"

a. we do this because we know we have been brought from death to life We do it because we know that this is who we are and this is the right thing to do. And again, Paul uses the concept of our members, meaning:

b. we must invite Him to use all parts of us as His tools to work righteousness We come in our minds to God and say, "God, here is my body; here are my hands; here are my feet; here are my eyes; here are my thoughts...use them to glorify You! I choose to be Your tool, not sin's tool! Do your righteous will through me!" Paul comes back to the same concept later in *Rom. 12:1*, *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* We must commit our body to God and put it at His disposal. By the way, you know what the problem is with a living sacrifice, don't you? It keeps trying to crawl off the altar! I think Paul is implying that we must keep that offering, that presenting of ourselves new and fresh and reaffirm it daily in every situation where we are tempted. So, let's go back to Joseph in his moment of temptation and add in this step. As his hormones rise, he says in his mind, "Wait a minute, I know this is wrong. It is evil, unjust to my master and it is rebellion against God, whom I love! I'm not going to listen to this. I don't want to do this and I WILL not do this. GOD, HERE IS MY BODY; use it for Your glory. Take control of me. What should I do? Run, Lord? OK legs, do what God says! Get going! RUN!" I'm saying that we should take Paul literally, that when we're tempted, we should actually stop and pray and ask God's Spirit to take control of us so that we have His power, as we proceed to think and act under His control, not sin's.

So, to reiterate again, when sin tempts you there is a simple three step process. First, you count the facts of who you are as true. Second, you say "no" to sin mentally; you say, "I will NOT do this!" Then you pray; you give your body, your thoughts, and so on to God and ask Him to do with your body the thing that He wants to do. Then you do it. That's how you live like what you really are! Now Paul gives us another way of looking at this process in verses 15-23, but he transitions to it by raising the question in verse (15). Of course, the fact that we're completely forgiven and living under grace doesn't mean that we are free to live any way we want and sin whenever we feel like it! Rather, because of the grace God has extended to us:

III. We Choose To Become Slaves Of Righteousness (15-23) Now, slavery is not something we like to talk about; because of our cultural history we tend to view it as this evil thing, but slavery was such a common part of Paul's world. Many of the early believers were slaves who belonged to the households of wealthier masters and accepted that as their lot in life. So, Paul uses it as an analogy to help us understand the process of our sanctification (16-18). Paul says:

1. we are slaves to whichever force we ultimately end up obeying A slave has no real will of his own; his lot is to always carry out somebody else's will. So, when you carry out the will of somebody or something else, you are, in essence, a slave to that person or thing. Before we were saved:

a. we used to obey sin as its slaves Sin, the powerful force, dwelt in our very nature at the core of our being. We used to do its will routinely. It would compel us to do wrong and even if we were able to resist, so often we found

we just couldn't. We were enslaved to its power, which, Paul says, led to death. Death is the end and the result of that kind of life. But when we came to Jesus:

b. we were set free from the power and control of sin Because our old self died and Christ put a brand-new nature in us, sin was knocked off its throne. Without the old nature, it couldn't control us as slaves any longer. With the new nature Christ gave us comes the freedom to choose other paths, so:

c. now we obey God's teaching from our hearts Because our hearts, our natures, were made like His, we WANT to do what He tells us! It's a good thing, one that we continually choose more and more. And so, Paul says:

d. we have become slaves to righteousness We're always going about doing the will of God, which is righteous, holy behavior. You have to understand, there is no middle ground. There is no "doing our OWN will" as a third option. We are either doing the will of sin or doing the will of God, which is righteousness. All things we do are either one or the other. So, every choice to obey sin or to obey God is, "Whose slave do you want to be?" Now, in verse (19) Paul admits that:

2. this is an imperfect analogy Like all analogies it fails at some point. But we use analogies since humans are frail and don't think so clearly. We need something concrete that we can see in order to understand truths about things that we can't see. **Paul is only using it to make a point.** The place at which the analogy of slavery breaks down is the idea of choice. In the Roman world a slave had no choice, no will of his own. But in Christ we do; we are now free to choose our master, to choose whose will we will obey. Paul simply wants us to understand that:

a. the way we obeyed sin led us ever deeper into impurity and lawlessness The more we did what sin wanted us to, the deeper we fell into doing things that were impure and unholy, the more we chose to act as if God's law didn't exist and didn't apply to us. But by contrast:

b. choosing to obey God leads us ever deeper into righteousness and holiness The more we say "Yes" to God and obey Him, situation by situation, the more righteous and holy our lives become, the more we live like Jesus and become what we really are! So, we should do it with the same vigor and intensity that we once served sin! And the other point at which the analogy breaks down is this. A slave was never rewarded for doing what he was born to do. He simply did what he was told without any expectation of pay or reward, except that his master kept him alive. But God is such a gracious Master that He rewards His slaves! Paul says:

3. there is a genuine reward for our slavery (20-23) We quote verse 23 all the time, but what it really means is that:

a. the poor wages of that shameful slavery to sin is death The word *wages* is a military term. The Roman soldier got some of his pay in currency, but part of it was given to him in his rations, the daily food that he got by on. Obeying sin doesn't pay any huge dividends; it pays scanty wages, subsistence pay, like that which a slave gets, and the sum of it all adds up to death, both physical and spiritual. To perpetually serve sin is a life of death; it is being dead while we yet live, doing things we're ashamed of, and then dying forever in eternity. But:

b. the fruit of serving God is holiness and His free gift is eternal life You see, God doesn't pay wages; He graciously gives to his servants who serve Him a marvelous gift which is two-fold. In this world God produces in us holiness of life and behavior on a daily basis, a life that is really living the way it was meant to be with nothing to ever be ashamed of, and its culmination is life forever, life that begins the moment we are saved and goes right on through death for all eternity. We can never die! So, our lifetime of serving Him, long or short, is worth it all!

Let me share with you two imperfect analogies of my own in closing. Did you know that in the world there are nearly 100 species of slave-making ants, living anywhere from the jungles of South America to the US and Europe? Slave-making ants can't really take care of themselves and do the work needed to sustain their colony, so they periodically swarm out of their nest to raid the colonies of other breeds of ants, kill off the defenders and then bring back cocoons full of larvae to their own nest. When these new little ants hatch, they assume that they are part of the "host" colony and launch into the tasks they were born to do. They spend their entire lives never realizing that they are actually forced-labor victims, living as slaves of an enemy. And that's how we are. From birth we enter the world and proceed through life as slaves to sin, never realizing that we are enslaved and doing the work of an enemy. But Jesus Himself became an ant like us and walked into our colony, not merely declaring the message of the truth that we are slaves, but actually dying in our place to set us free. So, now we know that we are free; we don't have to serve our former slave master anymore! Then, do you remember that in the Old Testament, there was a law that said when it came time for a servant to go out free from his service, that if he loved his master and wanted to keep on serving him, *then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.* - Ex. 21:6? A free man could choose to become a voluntary slave for life, if he really loved his master. That's what Paul is urging us to do. Now that we are free, now that our debt and obligation has been paid in full by Jesus, let us bring ourselves to God who freed us from our sins and let Him mark us permanently as His servants who are committed to carrying out His will forever. That is how we live like who we really are!

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Sanctification: Our Appropriation Of Righteousness - 6:1-8:17

The Role Of The Law - 7:1-13

Paul has been teaching us about sanctification, the process by which God produces holy lives in us, since the beginning of chapter 6. He began by explaining to us exactly who we are, those who have died with Christ and risen with Him to a brand-new life. Then, he showed us the process of how to live like what we are by grasping who we are, refusing to give control of ourselves to sin and offering ourselves to God in every situation we face. But there's another issue we have to face here. In 7:1, Paul says, *I am speaking to those who know the law...* Of course, that would include Jewish people who became believers, like Paul himself, but though there were some, I doubt there were tons of those at Rome. What we often forget is that the only Scripture that the early believers had was the Old Testament. The teaching of Jesus was passed on orally and the apostles were slowly writing letters like this one, however, growing in their knowledge of God's Word meant getting to know the Hebrew Scriptures. These were filled with statutes and laws which God commanded Israel to keep in order to be accepted by Him and the question, "Which of these must we obey as followers of Christ?" was something the early church wrestled with for many years. In fact, we still struggle to answer it today. But it leads us to the deeper issue of the principle of law-keeping itself, or what we would call obedience. What role does obeying what God tells us play in our acceptance with Him? Well, in the first six verses Paul explains:

I. Our Relationship To The Law As Believers (1-6) Let's read (1-3). Here's another one of those analogies that Paul uses to help us understand. He says:

1. the law was like a husband, whom we were bound to obey This is not a sermon on marriage and we don't have time to discuss the dynamics of headship right now and that's not the point. For purposes of the analogy, before we came to Jesus, we were bound to obey the law, to do what it said, because God said it, just like Peter says that Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. That was our obligation, to obey, to do what we were told. But, Paul says:

2. death permanently severed our relationship to our old husband, the law The analogy is that:

a. the law binds husband and wife to one another until death We say it in our wedding vows, *until death us do part...* A husband who leaves his wife to live with another woman while she is still alive or a wife who leaves her husband to live with another man while he is still alive is committing adultery, breaking the command of God. But:

b. death releases a married person to belong to a new spouse When death of a spouse has occurred, the relationship has ended, so that the survivor is free to marry another person. A widow or widower who remarries is not committing adultery against their original spouse because death has broken that bond of law between them. The person remains, but the relationship of wife or husband has been severed by death. I have two retired missionary friends, Matt and Mary Lou Bristol. previously Matt was married to Betty, whom he loved and we loved, but Betty died of cancer and death severed that relationship to the law of marriage. He is no longer married to Betty because she's dead and with the Lord. That relationship is ended. That's why Matt was free to marry a new spouse, Mary Lou, and devote his life to her. So, Paul's analogy is that that's what happened to us. We were married to the law, bound to obey it, but a death occurred which severed that relationship. Only it was not our husband, the Law, that died; it was US!

3. we died to the law because we were in Christ when He died (4) As we learned in chapter 6, when we believed, God placed us *in Christ*; He joined our life to His so completely that what happened to Him happened to us. Therefore, when He died, we died and:

a. our death released us to be united to a new husband, Christ Any relationship, any obligation that we had to the law was broken, cut off, severed completely. We are no longer bound to obey the Law and no longer stand condemned by the Law. That whole matter of us breaking God's law was nailed to the cross once and for all when we died with Him. However, because we also rose with Christ to a new life, we have a new husband, Christ Himself! When a man and a woman are joined in marriage, they become one flesh; when we are joined to the Lord, we literally become one spirit with Him. We join our spirit with the Spirit of God. We are made one with our new husband, Christ! We are no longer bound to the law; we are now bound to Christ Himself and:

b. our union with Him is designed to bear Him fruit in our lives Malachi says that God makes a husband and wife one because He desires godly offspring. That union is designed to produce fruit and our union with Christ is for the purpose of producing fruit also. And that fruit is a life of holiness and purity and good works that pleases God, the very life that the law was pointing toward by trying to get us to mechanically obey commands!

So, we're dead to our old husband, the Law, with his telling us what we HAVE to do and condemning us when we don't and we're married to a new husband, Christ, doing the very things God approves of because we WANT to! Can you see the difference? Paul goes on to explain it more thoroughly. He says that:

4. before salvation we were living in the flesh (5) Let's think about that phrase *living in the flesh* for a second. The NIV uses the term *sinful nature* and that's really a poor choice of translation that its translators chose consistently throughout the New Testament. The Greek literally says *flesh* and here's what it means:

a. flesh is our mind and body indwelt by sin and the patterns of thought and behavior we developed because of its control Remember, sin is that force of evil we're born with, that lives in us, even after our spirit is made new in Christ. Because of sin's powerful control in our lives, it developed in us patterns of thinking and acting that were wrong and we lived in those patterns. Those patterns are what Paul means by our *flesh*. I received Christ when I was 15, but long before that sin had developed evil patterns in me. I'm like Paul; I coveted. I wanted things I didn't have that belonged to others and so I stole things on several occasions, things that I wanted for myself. I lied, not only about the stealing but about other things to keep myself from being in trouble. I learned to think lustfully about girls. Nobody taught me any of those things. I didn't get them from other kids. I lived and thought and acted in the patterns that I did because sin was in me! And, Paul says:

b. sin used the law to arouse sinful passions inside us St. Augustine, the early theologian who lived around 400 AD, wrote this in his *Confessions*: "*There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it. We took off a huge load of pears--not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of the forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply to become a thief. The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing.*" It was the same for me. I knew it was wrong to steal, but the more I saw the things I wanted, the greater the desire I had to take them. I knew it was wrong to think about girls like that, but the more I knew I shouldn't do it, the more I wanted to do think wrongly and to do wrongly if I had the opportunity. Sin uses God's prohibitions which are meant for our safety and our good, and causes us to desire to break them. And that's how I lived, even though I was what you would have called "one of the good kids"! Now, according to verse 5:

c. following these passions bore fruit unto death Not only would sin have killed me for all eternity if I had died physically, but it gave me a life that was a "living death". I was dead while I still lived because I lived for pleasure. If God had left me continue down the path I was on, I might be in jail today instead of behind a pulpit, who knows! And there would have been a trail of hurt and wrong and evil left behind me, the way there is for all who live apart from Christ. However, Paul says:

4. now we have died to the law and are free from serving it (6) Not only have we died to sin and its power of control over us, but through that same death, we have died to the law:

a. the obligation to obey the law no longer holds us captive We are accepted by God, received by God freely on the basis of grace, apart from anything we do. And so:

b. we serve God in a whole new way, through the inner desire of the Spirit, not by outwardly obeying a written code We end up doing the very things God wants us to do. We end up, not merely *not* stealing, but giving to those who are in need. We end up, not just *not* lying, but always committed to telling the truth. We end up, not simply *not* lusting, but treasuring and valuing the opposite sex. Why? Not because we're obeying some code imposed upon us against our will, but because Jesus has changed our very natures and we WANT to live godly lives. It's who we are! Are you following? Now Paul goes on to further explain:

II. Our Problem With The Law As Believers in (7-11) and the first thing he has to point out is that:

1. there is nothing inherently wrong with the law (7-8) The law is God's creation; it is holy and good, just like He is. It is righteous and just and fair. Those characteristics of it have not changed. In fact:

a. God uses the law to reveal to us what sin is He gave it to clarify the nature of sin. We would not definitely know that coveting is wrong if we didn't have God's own word on it. We wouldn't know that stealing or lying or adultery are wrong. Our conscience might bother us while doing wrong things, but we would have no authoritative word to know it. The law made sin definite and clear and it gave to sin the character of transgression, that is, choosing to do what God has said NOT to do. So, there's nothing wrong with the law; as we saw a moment ago:

b. sin, still dwelling in us, uses the law to arouse evil desires Sin sees an opportunity to regain control in me and so it grabs the law and uses it as a base of operations against me. It tries to make me want to do the very things which the Law forbids. Sin uses God's righteous law to intensify its own evil desires like forbidden fruit to tempt me all the more strongly. It's just like when you tell a small child, "You can't have any candy until after supper." The child may not have even wanted any candy, but now that you brought it up and prohibited it, the want is there and the more you insist on prohibiting it, the stronger it grows. That's how sin works in all of us, even after we come to Christ; without the prohibition, sin lies dead, dormant, waiting for opportunity. So:

2. the problem occurs when believers try to live by keeping the law (9-11) Please note that *alive* is a verb not an adjective. Paul says, *I was once living apart from law...* When was that? Certainly, he does not mean before he came

to Christ because he was constantly taught the law from little on up and always strove to keep it. He testifies that as far as legalistic righteousness goes, he was blameless. So, in my opinion, he is referring to the time after he was first converted to Christ, when he finally understood that it is by trusting Jesus and not by law-keeping that he was righteous before God. He started to live this new way, not by keeping rules, but by following the new desire of his heart to live God's way. Just so, when we first come to Christ, we are thrilled that we are no longer in bondage to trying to please God by keeping rules. But then:

a. sin tries to re-exert control over us by using the law *The commandment comes to us in a new and fresh way.* Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, we now understand the spirit of the commandment. Now we see what Jesus explained, that not killing is not merely the act itself, but having bad feelings in the heart is the same thing. Not committing adultery in the body may be simple, but God's intent was for the thoughts of our mind to be pure. So, all these things that once seemed fairly easy to do now become virtually impossible once we truly understand them. It finally dawns on us what God really expects, perfection! The commandments come to us in a whole new way! So:

b. sin deceives us into thinking we must obey the commandment, that even though salvation may be given freely by grace, that the Christian life is the keeping of a set of rules for God. I remember being like that! I remember preaching like that! "You must do this; you must do that! Try harder; do more! Live the Christian life in your own strength; it's all up to you!" And when we strive to live that way, thinking that God being pleased with us depends on how well we perform:

c. we feel condemned and under the sentence of death, though we are not Paul says, *I died!* How? Certainly not in the body. And not in the spirit either, because our dying with Christ is already accomplished. So how then? In his conscience! He ended up feeling as he expressed himself in verse 24! Here's what sin does: I want so badly to keep the law and I try and try and I can't keep it and every time I fail, I feel so guilty before God, condemned because I can't please Him. I become more and more conscious of how rotten I am and I try harder and harder and I live in misery! That's what sin wants to use the law to create in me; it wants me to become so frustrated with trying that I give up and quit and go ahead and sin. It wants me to think, "What's the use anyway? I'm no better than I was!"

When I was in seminary we lived in rural southwest Ohio. Our next door neighbor was the epitome of what you'd call a "redneck". Jerry was the son of a Pentecostal preacher. He knew all the do's and don'ts, but he had a real temper and was always drinking and fighting. His wife and two small kids suffered for it. He resisted coming to Jesus because he was convinced he couldn't live the Christian life. But he liked me and we got to be friends and one day Jerry invited Jesus into his life. For a time, he seemed to be genuinely different. All of us were rejoicing. But Jerry worked in a steel plant and the guys were really on his back now about becoming a "holy-roller". He courageously resisted and held his temper in check, but one day he was in the bathroom and some supervisor must have really lit into him. And he couldn't help himself; he grabbed that guy by the neck, stuck his face in a urinal and kept on flushing it until the man pulled away and fled in terror. Well, that was the beginning of the end for Jerry. He was crushed. It convinced him that his own fear was true, that he couldn't live the Christian life even as others could. It was not for him. He gradually went back to his old ways. Was he truly converted or not? I don't know; we moved away and he died young. But that frustration over trying to live a holy life in my own strength is real and it is something that every one of us experiences as we'll see next time. But:

III. This Process Reveals To Us How Truly Awful Sin Really Is (12-13) Sin is a dreadful thing, a terrible, horrible, evil force that would take God's holy, pure commands and pervert them to produce death in me instead of life. I don't have sufficient words to describe how appalling sin really is and I sure can't wait for the day that God will take it out of me forever when I'm with Him!

But don't miss the point of what Paul is teaching in this section: we are dead with respect to the Law. We are not serving God on the basis of trying in our own strength to better ourselves and be more like Him. If you try to live the Christian life that way, you will fail and maybe quit. We are to be serving God in the power of the Holy Spirit, not by keeping a list of rules God gave us. *Fred Brown was a Tennessee evangelist all his life; he died in 1992. In one of his sermons, he used three images to describe the purpose of the law. First, he said it was like a dentist's little mirror, which he sticks into the patient's mouth. With the mirror he can detect any cavities. But he doesn't drill with the mirror or use it to pull teeth. It can show him the decayed area or other abnormality, but it can't provide the solution. Then, he said that the law is also like a flashlight. If suddenly at night the lights go out, you use it to guide you down the darkened basement stairs to the electrical box. When you point it toward the fuses, it helps you see the one that is burned out. But after you've removed the bad fuse, you don't try to insert the flashlight in its place. You put a new fuse in place to restore the electricity. And finally, he said the law is like a plumb line. When a builder wants to check his work, he uses a weighted string to see if it's true to the vertical. But if he finds that he has made a mistake, he doesn't use the plumb line to correct it. He gets out his hammer and saw. The law is holy and good and God uses it to reveal the presence of sin, but don't try to use it to fix the problem. That only creates a bigger one.*

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Sanctification: Our Appropriation Of Righteousness - 6:1-8:17

The War Within Us - 7:13-25

I know these last messages have been difficult to understand. So, before we go to Romans, I want you to look with me for a moment at **2 Pet. 3:15-16**. My point is that Peter didn't understand Paul either! At least, he admitted that some of the things God gave Paul were *hard to understand*! So, why do we study them if they're confusing? Because, as Peter acknowledged, they are part of the Scriptures and to twist and misuse them leads to destruction! So, be patient as we wade through together, OK? Back to Romans.

Romans 7 is describing the "monkey wrench" that shows up as we try to live the Christian life. In chapter 6 we learned that God wants us to understand that we are dead to sin, even though it still lives in us, that we are no longer under its power and that we have a new nature that desires to serve God. He instructs us to count those things as being true and then act on them by refusing to yield control of ourselves to sin and offering ourselves to God instead. That's how we're to live the Christian life, however, two things get in the way of us doing that. Sin does not give up easily; it keeps trying to reestablish control over us. The first thing it uses is the law which we learned about last week in verses 1-13. Sin tries to get us frustrated through trying to keep the law, even though we are free from it. Then, hand in hand with trying to keep the law, is the second thing which we'll study today in verses 13-25: dependence on self. If sin can get us wrapped up in trying to please God out of our own strength, we will end up living a defeated, miserable Christian life and sin will regain much of its control over us. Now, it is very important to keep in mind that this section was written by Paul who has now learned the secret of living the Christian life, but is looking backward in these verses on the previous struggle he had experienced in his life when he was a new believer. This struggle is something that each of us experiences, however, what Paul describes as his experience here is not meant to be seen as a normal or expected part of the ongoing life of the believer. In fact, in chapter 8 he goes on to tell us how we can live free from this struggle! Here Paul is now graphically spelling out what he meant in verse 11 when he said, *sin killed me*. These verses show how sin completely demoralized and defeated him at that time. So, let's pick up our study in verses **(13-14)**. Again, it is extremely important to recognize that:

I. The Enemy Is Sin Dwelling In Us Paul says that sin used the law to produce death in him. Sin is a spiritual force, the evil power that lives IN me, but it is NOT me. Perhaps a good analogy would be to say that sin is like having a cancerous tumor. The cancer is IN me, but it's NOT me. It's a powerful alien force that began in one of my cells that is multiplying and growing and trying to take over control of my body, seeking to use all my bodily resources for its own growth and, in the end, trying to kill me! So typically, if I discover cancer is in my body, I devote every resource I can find to try to kill it and rid my body of it! That's a good picture of what sin is like in us. When we come to Christ, we experience a new birth; our spirit is made brand new in the image of Jesus. But sin still lives in us as a powerful alien force that continually tries to get us to voluntarily yield control of our body to it, so it can take over and rule our lives. And one of the ways that it tries to do that is to get us to think that IT IS US, that IT is who we are, that we are poor sinners who can never stop sinning, rather than saints of God destined to live a holy life. Verse 14 describes Paul's spiritual state at that time in his life. He says, *the law is spiritual*, that is, it can only be kept by the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells our spirit. But in contrast to that, he says, ***I am fleshly*** (the NIV says *unspiritual*, but the Greek is literally "fleshy"). *Fleshly* or *carnal* is Paul's word for the believer who is immature and is depending on himself rather than on the Holy Spirit. Look with me at **1 Cor. 3:1-4**. Paul chides the believers at Corinth because they were *fleshly*; they were acting as mere human beings in their own strength, separating from each other into selfish factions. What *fleshly* really means is that **my mind and body are frequently dominated by sin**. Sin tries to keep us living *fleshly*, to let it control our thinking and our acting. So then, according to verse 13, sin uses the law, it uses our new consciousness of what God expects of us, to point out to us our inability to keep God's standards and to bring us to a place of defeat and frustration so deep that we stop trying and give it control. You know, I'm sure, people that have had multiple rounds of chemotherapy. They fight the cancer once and it appears to be dead but then it comes back stronger and they fight it all over again, a second and then a third time. Cancer attacks again and again until it wears them down and they are too tired to continue. That's what sin does in us; it assaults us over and over again, and Satan is just hoping that we'll get tired and give up and let it and him have control! Well, good analogy or not, that's the process Paul describes as happening to himself in the verses that follow. Look at:

II. Paul's Explanation Of the Battle I Face and notice that he talks in the first person to make sure that we all apply it personally **(15)**. He says, here's:

1. what I find in my experience

a. I am unable to do what I truly want to do I have the right desires. I have a new nature and I genuinely want to please and obey God, but in situation after situation I can't bring myself to actually do it. I want to do right all the time, but I can't; I don't have the power to make it happen. I fail time after time. In fact:

b. I do the very things I hate I find myself doing things I don't have any desire to do at all, things that I actually hate. Haven't you found this at some time in your life? Have you ever caught yourself using language that you really hate hearing? Have you ever reacted in anger and done something rash or maybe even struck someone physically

in a way you never wanted to do and you're sick about it afterwards? Why do I do things like that? It's confusing. Paul says:

c. I don't understand this about myself Here I am, a believer with a new heart. I genuinely want to obey God, but time after time I can't and I don't. I do things that are totally the opposite of what I want, things I detest in other people. How can that possibly be? Well, it's happening because:

2. two opposing forces are clashing inside me I'd like you to turn with me to **Gal. 5:17** because there we have this conflict succinctly described in one verse. The first force that is at work in me is:

a. my spirit, that is, the new nature that Jesus created in me and joined to His Holy Spirit. My spirit is who I really am, the real me, my true nature, and it is made in the image of Jesus Himself. It is holy and pure and continually desires only to do good. But then in me there is also:

b. my flesh, the evil desires that are produced through sin dwelling in my mind and body. The works of the flesh are listed down further in Gal. 5:19-21: *sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things*. Sin continually creates in me the desire to do evil things such as these. Sin is a powerful force in me and:

c. these two forces continually oppose one another The New English Translation (NET) says, *the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other...* They oppose each other and they are adversaries of one another. Both are strong forces and they clash with each other; they war with each other inside me. That's why I end up not doing what I want, because:

d. sin struggles fiercely to keep me from doing what I (and God) want When my spirit wants to do something good and right, my flesh, controlled by sin, pushes powerfully to get me to obey it and do its will instead. This is the struggle that I experience inside myself.

Does anybody know what I'm talking about? Do you experience this? Good! Listen to what John Piper has to say about it: *A Christian is not a person who experiences no bad desires. A Christian is a person who is at war with those desires by the power of the Spirit. Conflict in your soul is not all bad. Even though we long for the day when our flesh will be utterly defunct and only pure and loving desires will fill our hearts, yet there is something worse than the war within between flesh and Spirit—namely, no war within, because the flesh controls the citadel and all the outposts. Praise God for the war within! Serenity in sin is death. The Spirit has landed to do battle with the flesh. So, take heart if your soul feels like a battlefield at times. The sign of whether you are indwelt by the Spirit is not that you have no bad desires, but that you are at war with them!* [www.desiringgod.org/sermons/the-war-within-flesh-vs-spirit] Did you hear that? Yes, it's confusing that there's a war inside us after we're saved, but the fact that we're fighting a war is the very proof that we're spiritually alive with Christ! So now, let's go back to Romans 7 where Paul spells out what He said in Galatians in more detail. Here's:

3. what I must understand First of all:

a. the real me (that is, my new nature) agrees with the law about what is good (16) I know what God commands is good and right and I want to obey it. It's not that the requirements are too hard. And the fact that I WANT to do it in the first place is the real evidence that I am truly born again. People without Christ WANT to sin, even though they may try hard to keep themselves from it for various reasons. I am new inside; I WANT to do good and live holy. Therefore:

b. when I do what I don't want, it is really sin controlling me (17) It's not ME, *per se*. I've simply given control to sin and let sin take over control of me to do what it wants. I've yielded to it and sin is carrying out its desires through me. Sin is using me! I am letting sin use my body to do what IT wants instead of what I want. Now, make no mistake, that doesn't make me any less responsible for the actions. *A man was filling out an accident report for his insurance company because he had carelessly dented the fender of a parked car. One question on the form was, "What could the operator of the other vehicle have done to avoid the accident?" So, trying to lay the blame on the owner of the other vehicle, the man wrote, "He could have parked somewhere else!"* We always like to shift the blame, but that's not what Paul means. I can't justify myself by saying, "Sin made me do it" or "the devil made me do it". I am dead to sin's control; I don't have to yield to it, yet I do sometimes. I am responsible for yielding, yet I realize that when I am doing evil, it is really not me, but sin doing it through me because I yielded to it. Do you understand what I mean? Now here's the bad news:

c. I have no innate ability to carry out the desires of my new nature (18) Yes, something good DOES dwell in me. My nature is good. But nothing good dwells in my flesh. I have the desire to do good, but not the power in and of myself. It's not in me. It's not in me to save myself. It's not in me to keep myself. And it's not in me to live the life God intends for me to live. I can't do it! That's why:

d. this is a continuing problem for me (19) I keep on struggling. I keep on failing over and over. I think that I get past it and it happens again. But Paul repeats it one more time:

e. I must remember that it is not really me doing it, but sin (20) I am a new creation in Christ Jesus. It is not me that wants to sin, but there is this enemy force called sin in my very body that is trying to make me do evil! I must never give up and think that this is just how I am, that I am sinful to the core and will never be able to do any better than this. Rather, I must agree with:

III. Paul's Conclusion: I Am At War (21-23) This is not just an incidental, occasional thing. There is a principle at work here, a law that is constantly functioning. In fact, there are two laws at war inside me, clashing like two titans engaged in an epic battle. The first law is that:

1. my new nature delights in obeying God I do delight in my very inner being in the law, in pleasing God, doing what God wants me to do. So, my mind is ruled by my new nature yet there is another law raging in me:

2. sin wages war against me to control me Sin is trying to control the members of my body by stirring up evil desires in my body and mind and it's a terrible fight! And what's worse yet, I am losing! Sin wins all the time! In incident after incident sin wins and I do what it wants rather than what I want. Now what does any intelligent person do when they're in a fight and they're losing badly and they're about to get creamed? They yell for help! Right? And that's exactly what Paul does in verse (24). He realizes:

3. I need help from another to win this war "I feel wretched, literally, I feel exhausted and worn out by labor. This struggle has tired me out and I don't know if I can keep fighting it any longer. Somebody help me! Deliver me!" At some point in Paul's life, he became so tired of trying to fight this struggle on his own and came to his senses and cried out for a deliverer, for someone else to help him in this struggle. And that, dear ones, is actually the real problem in this struggle. Look how many times the word "I" appears in this saga. Over and over, he says, "I", "I". He's fighting alone; he's taking on this powerful enemy called sin in his own strength and he can't do it. The Indians are burning down the fort and he needs the cavalry to show up! He needs someone to come to his rescue, some force that is stronger than he is to step in and do for him what he cannot do. So, finally in verse 25 he announces the glorious truth that he discovered at long last:

4. I have help from another; I have help from Jesus Christ Himself (25a) He bursts out in thanksgiving for what he knows now. God has provided a live-in power source through Jesus Christ and that power, we'll find in chapter 8, is the Holy Spirit whom He has placed in us to live out the life of Christ through us! Instead of me battling against sin, when I feel the struggle, I simply cry out to the Spirit of God and ask Him to take control of my mind and body and to empower me to do His will. And He does it! I learn to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and that's what gives me victory in the battle! It doesn't make the battle go away; but it makes victory available to me every moment of every day. I don't have to lose; I can win because Jesus will take over and do it for me! Oh, that's a hard lesson to learn, isn't it?

In 1964, Alan Redpath, well known former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, had become pastor of Charlotte Baptist Church in Edinburgh Scotland and was going great guns in the ministry, packing out the church, expanding meetings to other venues Saturday nights and Sunday nights. And in the midst of all of this seeming success, Alan suffered a near-fatal stroke which put him in a nursing home. In the ensuing months as he slowly recovered, he sank into the depths of despair. He wrote later that it was as if the devil had bombarded his soul with terribly wicked thoughts, the likes of which he'd not known in 20 years. He wrote, "Sinful thoughts, impurity, bad language were all the shattering experiences of those days." At one point, he prayed, "O Lord, deliver me from this attack of the devil. Take me right home!" It was then that he felt the Lord was saying to him, "You have this all wrong. The devil has nothing to do with it. It is I, your Savior, who has brought this experience into your life to show you two things. First, this is the kind of person--with all your sinful thoughts and temptations, which you thought were things of the past--that you always will be, but for My grace. I have never intended to make you a better man. In the second place, I want to replace you with Myself, if you will only allow Me to be God in you and admit that you are a complete failure, and that the only good thing about Alan Redpath is Jesus." [Our Daily Bread - 9/8/1984] Dear ones, God lets this war go on inside us because He wants every one of us to come to a Gethsemane, to a watershed moment that changes our life, a moment when we realize that only Jesus can live the Christian life and that the only good thing about us is Jesus. All this is designed so that we simply learn to cry out to Him, "Lord, live through me!"

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Sanctification: Our Appropriation Of Righteousness - 6:1-8:13

The Role Of The Holy Spirit- 8:1-13

We left the second half of Chapter 7 last week with a clear picture of the awful war that goes on inside us between our spirit, which is joined to the Holy Spirit, and our flesh, which is indwelt and controlled by sin. The struggle was so intense at one point in Paul's life that it caused him to cry out for a rescuer in verse 24, *Who will deliver me from this?* But then in verse 25 he declares that Jesus Christ IS our deliverer, and as we enter Chapter 8, he shows us how Jesus delivers us. Here we come to the real secret of how to live the Christian life; we learn to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the first nine verses Paul describes for us just how the power of the Spirit is provided and applied in our life. Look with me at verses (1-2).

I. Christ Has Removed All Condemnation From Us And Given Us His Spirit Let me say that again. There is not one iota of condemnation left for us who are in Christ. Not one! Sin, which dwells in us, tries to deceive us into feeling condemned because we fail to keep God's law. But those thoughts of condemnation are pure lies. There is NO condemnation for us, not even one little bit; it was removed at the cross. Our standing before God is not based on our performance but rather on our position. We are IN Christ Jesus and you cannot be in Him and have condemnation! *In 1857, Abraham Solomon created a now-famous painting entitled, "Waiting for the Verdict." You can google it on the internet. In great detail it depicts a family of that era in a small room waiting just outside the open door of a courtroom where a young man is on trial. A set of older parents sit with a look of intense pain etched on their faces. A forlorn looking younger woman, evidently the wife, tries to manage two small children with their help, while the young man's sister, frightened and tearful, stands peering through the half-opened door into the courtroom where her brother is on trial. As you look at that painting, you can almost feel the tension as they await the verdict.* That's the tension that sin tries to produce in us as believers. It points to our failures, to the times when we do the very things we hate, and fills us with the tension of waiting and wondering as to how God is going to regard us for this offense and that offense. Its goal is to keep us in that state of waiting and wondering whether we'll be accepted by God or not. *Well, later that year, Solomon created a second painting entitled "Not Guilty (The Acquittal)". In this work he shows the same family with the young man now in the room holding his wife and children in his arms, with the judge reassuring the father and a look of joy and relief on everyone's face. They are no longer waiting for the verdict; they are feeling the relief of knowing that there is no longer any condemnation for their loved one.* And that sense of peace and relief is what Paul is hoping we'll grasp from this wonderful affirmation. We are no longer waiting for a verdict; the verdict is in! We are released, freed, pardoned. Our Judge is now the One who reassures us that we have nothing to fear, that there is now NO condemnation for us! Why? Because, according to verse 2:

1. the Holy Spirit freed us from the law of sin leading to death To put it in common parlance, there's a new sheriff in town, people! There's a new law, a new principle at work in us! Jesus put His Holy Spirit in us and His Spirit became our very life. We get life through His Spirit and that sets us free from the old principle that the one who sins must die! You see:

a. the law was too weak to break sin's controlling power in us (3) Simply telling us the right thing to do was not enough. The power of sin was so strong in us that we did what we knew was wrong to do anyway. The force of sin pressuring us to do what it wanted was too strong; it was undeterred by simply trying to prohibit those actions. It's like the local school putting up signs that say, "Drug Free Zone". I rather doubt it; forbidding it doesn't make it so! The sign or the law saying, "Thou Shalt Not" has no power to make the person "Not"! It's too weak, but, Paul says:

b. God did what the law could not by sending His Son into the world to rescue us from that condemnation. He says that:

(1) Christ came in a body of flesh like ours, though without sin That made Him truly one of us; it joined Him to us so that He could take our place and bear our punishment. And then:

(2) God gave Him as a sin offering for the guilt of our sins He became the perfect sinless sacrifice offered in place of the guilty. He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree and died for our sins, once for all, that He might bring us to God. But in that process, not only were we completely released from all condemnation forever, but another very important thing happened:

(3) God carried out the sentence of death on the force of sin in our bodies at the cross It is not US who stands condemned now; it is the SIN which lives in us which is condemned. Did you hear that? The sentence of death has been passed upon sin which dwells in us. Its power has already been broken because it can't touch and control our spirit any more. It can't rule our hearts and do what it wants with us. It is dying and on the way out and one day when we're at the feet of Jesus, it will be removed altogether! One day sin will be no more! So now:

c. the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us by the Holy Spirit (4) Paul says that we believers:

(1) we do not walk according to (that means under the power of) the flesh. We don't live our lives letting the power of sin in our flesh control our thoughts and actions. We refuse to do that. Rather:

(2) we walk according to (and that means empowered by) the Holy Spirit We live out of a new source of power that God has placed within us. We ask the Holy Spirit to use His mighty power to do through us all that God wants us to do and by that power we DO it! We do the very things God said to do because the Spirit in us gives us the power to do them! Last week I used the analogy that sin is like cancer, an alien force living inside me that is NOT me, trying to take control over me and kill me. Now let me use another analogy. We are like Iron Man, if you've seen one of his superhero films. Iron man himself has no superpowers of his own. He's just an ordinary mortal, Tony Stark, who can be beat up or killed as easily as any other man. But he has this suit of armor that contains an almost unlimited power source and when he puts on that suit, he can fly, he can withstand explosions and impacts, he can send out repulsor rays to destroy his enemies, he can do almost anything and defeat anyone. Only it's not him doing it; it's the suit, with its inexhaustible power source, that he wears! Well, that's us! Only instead of a suit of powered armor on the outside of us, we have a source of limitless, infinite power on the inside, the very Spirit of Almighty God Himself, and His power will live our life, the very life God intended, for us!

But the Holy Spirit has done more for us than simply providing us power. Paul says:

2. the Holy Spirit took us completely out of the realm of the flesh (5-8) Now remember, the flesh is the set of desires, thoughts and actions that sin produces in us by controlling us. Paul says there are two kinds of people in the world, people who live in the realm of the flesh (that is, nonbelievers) and people who live in the realm of the Spirit (believers). Paul says:

a. those whose existence is in the flesh think about things of the flesh. They think about how to get their own wants and desires met. They **have minds hostile to God**; they think thoughts that are not only contrary to His, but that are against Him. They **cannot submit to His law, cannot please Him and are on a path that leads to death.** But:

b. those whose existence is in the Spirit think about things of the Spirit which lead to life and peace Spiritual people, people who have the Holy Spirit, think about the things of God. In fact, they think the very thoughts of God because the Spirit knows those thoughts and puts them in their minds. The path they are on is a path that is life and they live it in peace because through the Spirit they please God continually. There are only two ways to live and people are either living in the realm of the flesh or in the realm of the Spirit. But look what Paul says **(9)**:

c. we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit since He dwells in us Every person who truly and genuinely believes in Jesus has the Holy Spirit. Without exception! You can't be a Christian and NOT have the Holy Spirit, unless it is only a term or a name to you. If you actually belong to Christ, you have the Spirit and since you have the Spirit, you live in an entirely new realm, an entirely new way, the realm of the Spirit, not of the flesh!

For 16 years, John Joseph Kovacs was a "tenant of the tunnel." Along with a few other squatters who sometimes called themselves "the mole people," John lived underground in an abandoned railroad tunnel in New York City. When Amtrak bought the tunnel and prepared to reopen it in 1991, John was forced to look for a place to live above ground. According to The New York Times, Mr. Kovacs became the first person chosen for a new program designed to "transform the homeless into homesteaders." After spending a third of his life in a railroad tunnel, he left his underground existence to become an organic farmer in upstate New York. He was quoted as saying, "The air will be better up there. I'm not going to miss anything. I'm not coming back." Can you imagine the change in his life? To go from living in a realm of darkness and cold and concrete, to living in a realm of fresh air and warmth and light. That's a graphic picture of what happened to us. Col. 1:13, For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son! We now live in a whole new realm, the Kingdom of His dear Son, who through His Spirit has produced in us life and light and peace! We don't live in the flesh anymore because, Paul says:

II. The Holy Spirit Now Lives Through Us (10-11) Listen:

1. our bodies are "dead" (that is, they are dying and bound for death) because of sin Sin still lives in our bodies and is joined to them and the only thing that will release us from that is death. So, we're stuck in dying bodies, but:

2. the Holy Spirit is now our life through joining Himself with our new spirit Since He has come into us and become one with our spirit, He is the life force flowing through us. He is the power which causes us to live and the power by which we must live. And the point is in verse 11:

3. this new life in our dying bodies is as certain as Jesus' resurrection He's not talking about the future resurrection of our bodies one day. That subject is not even in view in this passage. J.B. Phillips translates it like this: *Nevertheless, once the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you, he will, by that same Spirit, bring to your whole being new strength and vitality.* The life of the Spirit of God who lives in you will flow through you and bring a new power, a new strength, a new kind of life to you, even though you still live in a dying body still indwelt by sin.

That same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at God's right hand is IN us and is available to us to live life through us. That fact is as sure as the fact that God raised Jesus; we can count on it! But there is one catch: our will. God will not violate our will. He will not make us into puppets who have no control over what He does with us. We must choose to allow His Spirit to have control of us. As Paul put it very simply in **Eph. 5:18, ...BE filled with the Spirit!** Let the Spirit of God take full control over you! Tony Stark has to put on the suit in order to be Iron Man and likewise I have to choose to "put on" or "be filled by" the Holy Spirit. That is what Paul is going to finish by saying here:

III. We Have A Solemn Obligation To Live Under The Holy Spirit's Control (12-13) Because of what God has done for us, we owe a tremendous debt. We have a solemn, sacred obligation to Him. You see:

1. we have no obligation to do what our sin-dominated flesh tells us to do We're dead to sin and its power over us. We have no earthly reason to let sin control our acts and thoughts, or as Paul puts it, to live according to the flesh. We don't have to do it and there's no reason we should do it.

2. that is the way nonbelievers live and it leads to death They live that way because they can't do otherwise. They're stuck. They're in bondage to it, controlled by it. Rather we have been set free, so we have a solemn obligation to choose to exercise that freedom.

3. by the Spirit's power we "kill" the deeds sin tries to do through our bodies Sin says, "Why don't you lie about that?" But you say, "Spirit, I don't want to lie! Take control of me and help me to tell the truth, no matter how painful it is!" In effect, I kill that evil deed; I put it to death before my body even has a chance to do it, but I do it through relying on the Spirit's power to do it through me and not on myself. In every circumstance, every time my flesh serves up a wrong thought or desire, I turn to the Holy Spirit who lives in me and rely on Him to take control of me and put that evil deed or thought to death. Paul says:

4. this is our normal way of living and it is truly life! It has to become a habit. Whenever sin serves up its evil suggestions in my mind, I reject them and call upon the Spirit for His power to do what is right and righteous and pure and holy. I do it every day, multiple times a day. It becomes the way I live and that is what causes me to live the holy, pure, sanctified life that God intends.

Tony Evans tells the story of a man who went to buy a refrigerator. He bought the most incredible refrigerator you could imagine. It had all the bells and whistles you would expect, and then some. It cost hundreds of dollars more than a normal refrigerator, but what could you expect for such a fine product? The store delivers the new refrigerator to the man's home; he fills it with all his food, and he's so excited to have this great new refrigerator. The next morning, he goes into the kitchen to make breakfast, only to find that the milk is spoiled, the ice cream is running out of the bottom of the freezer compartment, and the vegetables are changing color. It's obvious that the refrigerator is not working. So, the man calls the store to give them a piece of his mind. The man at the store says, "I don't understand what's wrong. Open the door and see if the light comes on." He opens the door; "No light." "Put your ear up close to the refrigerator and see if you can hear the hum of the motor." "No hum." Then the man says, "There's a cord at the back of your refrigerator. Check and see if it's plugged in." The man looks, and sure enough, it wasn't plugged in. So, he comes back to the phone and says, "You're right, the cord was not plugged in. But for the kind of money I paid for this refrigerator, that shouldn't matter. This thing should work anyway!" That's silly, isn't it? We would never expect an appliance to work without being connected to a power source which flows through it and produces cold or heat or whatever the appliance does. I have a battery powered drill and a battery powered computer and a battery powered phone. We know that all these things need a power source placed within in order to do what they are intended to do. Well, God expects us to have that kind of common sense about our own lives. He placed His Holy Spirit in each one of us as a kind of life-time warranted, unlimited, never wears down or runs out, power source for us to live by. But we must plug ourselves in; we must connect by simply asking, "Holy Spirit, please fill me! Holy Spirit, please control me! Holy Spirit, please empower me! Holy Spirit please love this person through me! Holy Spirit, please give me grace to forgive this person. Holy Spirit, keep me from these evil thoughts!" And on and on the conversation goes, every day, all day. And whenever we ask, He does what we ask and takes over and fills us and controls us and empowers us. That is truly living the Christian life, asking Christ to live it through me.

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Glorification: Our Ultimate Righteousness - 8:14-39

Our Future Glory - 8:14-27

In our study today we enter the final section of Paul's explanation of the depths of the great salvation God has provided for us through Christ. Let me take a moment to remind you of the four aspects of it that Paul addresses:

Condemnation: we all lack righteousness (1:18-3:20)

Justification: God provides His righteousness to us (3:21-5:21)

Sanctification: God's righteousness transforms our lives (6:1-8:13)

Glorification: we are ultimately made completely righteous (8:14-39)

Beginning at 8:14 we look to the future. We *have been* saved because God justified us when we believed on His Son. We *are being* saved as God transforms our lives more and more into His image by His Spirit. But one day we *will be* saved when sin is completely removed from us and we are made completely righteous like Him. When we think about our eternal future, we like to talk about where we'll be and what that place will be like, but Paul is more interested in what we ourselves will be like. In verse 17 he says we will be glorified with Him, that is, we will be made to share in the very glory of Christ Himself when we are in His Presence! Three of the disciples saw at least a glimpse of what it means to be glorified when they were up on the mountain with Jesus and *...he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light*. Years later Peter wrote, *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.* - 2 Pet. 1:16-18. They saw Jesus be glorified, brief as it was. And the apostle John, who was also there with Peter, said, *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* - 1 Jn. 3:2. Oh, we shall be glorified as He was, as He IS, shining, majestic, radiating the very glory of God Himself! That's what lies ahead for us. But how do we know that? Well, Paul says:

I. The Holy Spirit Assures Us Of Our Glorious Future (14-16) First of all, the Holy Spirit:

1. He assures us of our present relationship with God as His children He bears witness to and with our own renewed spirit. He convinces us internally, at the core of our being, that we are really God's children. It's more than a mere feeling; He gives us an unexplainable, supernatural certainty that we now belong to God as His sons and daughters. And the evidence of that assurance is that:

a. He creates a spirit of intimacy between us and God We no longer cringe in fear of God and His judgment and worry what He will do with us; we don't serve Him as slaves who do His will and fear His punishment. Rather we are drawn to God; we approach Him like a little child saying from our hearts, *Abba! Father! Daddy!* We're no longer afraid that God is going to "get us" the next time we do wrong, that condemnation awaits us; instead, we run to Him like a child and climb up on His lap to talk to Him and share all that is on our hearts! The Holy Spirit gives us this intimacy with God that is just incredible. And one of the glorious effects of that intimacy is that:

b. He leads us through life according to verse 14. Last time we talked about how we need to have a running conversation with the Holy Spirit, asking Him to fill us, that is, to take control of us in situation after situation, directing us what to do and empowering us to do it. I think that's what Paul means here. We whom the Spirit guides and empowers and works through, we are the children of God! God's Spirit has a living relationship with His children that takes them on through life. And that spirit of intimacy and that personal walk type of relationship He gives us naturally leads to something else:

2. He assures us of our future inheritance as joint heirs with Christ (17a) Listen to this: Jewish law said the oldest son gets a double portion of the inheritance, but Roman law said that all sons share an equal portion of the inheritance, even adopted ones! That's the concept that Paul has in mind. As God's children, we are His heirs. All that is His becomes ours! But we don't simply each get a little piece of it; we are equal heirs with Christ; everything Christ has from the Father will be ours too! Well, how much did He get? *Heb. 1:2* says, *...[God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things...* In fact, Jesus Himself said, *All that the Father has is mine...* - Jn. 16:15. Then simply look down to verse 32 of our chapter; God will give us all things together with Him! We ALL get it ALL! All of it is all of ours. Every privilege He enjoys, we will enjoy! Every pleasure that is His will be ours! Every created thing in heaven and earth will be ours with Him. We will shine with Him in His glory; we will reign with Him in His authority; we will participate with Him in all that He has planned for all eternity. No wonder the Scripture says, *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him!* - 1 Cor. 2:9.

I told you previously the heartwarming story of a father who had moved his family into a marvelous new home. The accommodations and luxuries were so much better than in the old house that it was almost impossible to believe it was true. His little boy ran from room to room, scanning everything with surprise and calling out repeatedly in childish delight at each new object that greeted his sight, *"Is this ours, Dad--is this really OURS?!"*...When the glories of Heaven burst upon our view, we will not stand at a distance like some stranger, saying, *"O God, all this is Yours?"* Rather, we will bound forward and examine every provision in those blessed mansions, exclaiming, *"Father, these are OURS?"* We will be absolutely overwhelmed by all the divine riches of glory that are ours in Christ Jesus! That's the good news, however Paul wants to make sure we understand that:

II. Our Glorification Is Linked To Our Present Sufferings In the very same breath as he mentions our glory as joint heirs, he adds verses (17b-18). God has this principle that sufferings come first and the glory follows. It is the pattern He laid down for His own Son, that He should endure the suffering of life in this world and the agony of the cross first, and that is what achieved the greatness of the glory that follows forever. And likewise, Paul says:

1. we will endure sufferings in this present time While we are alive on earth, we will suffer with Him. The New Testament never paints a picture that life for us as believers will be a bed of roses, that we will all be rich and prosperous and well and safe. Rather it warns us that in this world we will have tribulation, we will be hated, we will know hardship and even deliberate persecution for Jesus' sake. Don't sign up to follow Jesus expecting a cushy assignment! However, **our very endurance of suffering with Him assures us of our glorious future!** The fact that we are willing to endure all things for Him, to suffer and even to die without turning away from Him, is the very evidence that we truly belong to Him and because of that:

2. we will experience an incomparable future glory together with him! That little word *to* at the end of verse 18 is the Greek word *into* or *unto*. It's saying that glory:

a. it will be revealed both to us and in us We will SEE the very glory of God in all its fullness and marvel at it, but we will also BE His glory. He will transform us and glorify us in such a way that His glory will shine through us to the whole watching universe. And when we are there at last and experience all that glorification means:

b. it's greatness will cause our present sufferings to fade to insignificance There will be no comparison. That glory will be so great that the sufferings we endured in this life will seem like so much dust on the scales. Albert Barnes comments: *They are nothing in degree. For these are light compared with that "eternal weight of glory" which they shall "work out."* [2 Cor. 4:17]. *They are nothing in duration. For these sufferings are but for a moment; but the glory shall be eternal. These will soon pass away; but that glory shall never become dim or diminished; it will increase and expand forever and ever.* Our sufferings don't even rate a comparison with the immensity of that glory. Awful as they may be at this moment, they are merely a drop of evil in light of the ocean of eternal glory that awaits us.

And Paul tells us this to help us to think like he did, to *consider*, to *reckon*, to look at our sufferings in the right way. To us our sufferings are big; they are immense, huge, awful as we are enduring them. But the way to endure them is to realize and remember the immensity of the glory that lies ahead, to fix our eyes on the things above, not on things on the earth, on that eternal weight of glory that these sufferings are producing that will never fade away! And part of that is something that we never even think about. Paul says:

III. The Whole Of Creation Is Anxiously Awaiting Our Glorification (19-22) All of creation, the earth, the animal kingdom, the plant kingdom, the human race, all of it:

1. it was perverted from its original state at the fall of man Remember Adam's punishment when in **Gen. 3:17-19** God said, *...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread...* The very earth now requires difficult cultivation instead of producing natural abundance as God intended originally. As death entered the human race, evidently death entered the animal world too and with it, violence. All those nature shows where the hyena eats the gazelle alive or the cheetah chases the baby springbok and pulls it down, it was never meant to be that way! Beautiful as it is, nothing in all of creation is the way it was meant to be; it's corrupted; it's perverted, just as we have been perverted by the entrance of sin into us. But the good news is:

2. it will be set free from its bondage to corruption along with us On that day when Jesus comes and we are finally glorified with Him, the whole creation will be released too! Look with me at **Is. 11:6-9**. When's that ever going to happen? When Jesus comes! When He comes to earth and sets up His kingdom, it will all be set right once again! It'll all be the way it was meant to be. The whole earth will experience the glory of God and be transformed, but for now:

3. like us, it is currently groaning in pain, intensely longing for that day That word *groaning* in verse 22 means the creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth. It is experiencing violent, painful things like disasters and earthquakes and famines and wars and terrorism. These things are like labor pains, extremely intense, but the good thing about birth pains is that they look ahead to a wonderful event! What's the creation waiting for, longing for? For us! For the day when God reveals His children in all their full glory to the watching world! The world will be changed along with us, so it's waiting for what Jesus has planned to do with us! And likewise:

IV. We Ourselves Are Anxiously Awaiting Our Glorification (23-25) Just like the creation, WE are waiting for something:

1. we are awaiting our adoption Now wait a minute. I am already adopted, aren't I? I have already been made a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ and become a member of His family. Yes, that's true, but we think of the meaning of adoption in its modern context. Paul doesn't use it that way. In Roman society adoption meant being placed in full position as an adult son. When a young man reached a certain age, it was customary for his father to take him into the Forum. From a public platform he would say to the citizens of the city, "This is my son; he has now come of age; he inherits my name, my property, and my social position!" Then he would take off the boy's youthful *toga praetexta* and put on him the *toga virilis*, "the coat of a man". This act installed him as an adult son and invested him with all the full rights and privileges of sonship and was known as *adoption* and that is what Paul is referring to. In **Gal. 4:1-2** he explains, *I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is*

under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. There is coming a day when our sonship will no longer be an inward unknown thing to the world but an outward visible thing that all of creation will know, because we will take up our full right of ruling and reigning with Christ! And the crowning act of this moment set by our Father:

2. this will include the redemption of our very bodies by resurrection We will at last be made like Jesus Christ fully. We will get our brand-new resurrection bodies which have no sin nature and are not subject to decay and all the things that sin brought in! Right now, sin is an alien force residing in us, and still trying to control us, but one day it will be cast out. We will have glorious liberty and be free at last from the curse of sin, holy and pure in spirit, soul and body! And then the Lord will set us on the Forum of the universe and publicly bear witness to every created being, "These are my children, my sons and my daughters, made like Me in all my glory. They bear My Name. All that is Mine is theirs and they have My full authority over you!" Hallelujah! That's why Paul says that:

3. we are saved in hope That is, as believers in Christ we have a confident assurance that our glorification will occur and we are always looking toward it. Yes:

a. we groan inwardly at our present suffering Knowing what awaits us on that day and tasting even now the sweetness of the Holy Spirit's presence which is our guarantee of it, we groan inside ourselves. We can hardly wait to get there; we long for that day. We have this awful sense that the world is not right and, on one hand, we agonize over the misery of this present evil age, but on the other:

b. we wait patiently, eagerly, and confidently for our glorification We are filled with hope, with the confident expectation of our future! We know what is out there. We are convinced of it. How? Remember verses 16-17. The Holy Spirit convinces us that we are God's children and if children then we are heirs and will be glorified with Christ! We've read the end of the book first and we know how it's going to turn out so we are eager for it to happen. Like the creation, we are eagerly waiting, but also patiently waiting. We're like a person waiting for the bus that will take them home. We know the bus will come one day, so we sit at our bus stop and keep looking down the road for the bus, expecting it, but meanwhile we wait patiently, enduring the heat or the rain or the cold, determined to endure the difficulty and wait until it gets here, no matter how long it seems to take, actively doing whatever God has told us to do until the bus comes, yet always wishing that bus would come soon, because when it does, we will go home! We live, full of the Holy Spirit, His very presence assuring us that the bus is coming, living out the life of Christ day by day, yet always with one eye on the eastern sky watching for His appearing because we want that Day, that glorious day! Oh, we want it so bad! But remember, nobody ever said that waiting and hoping and looking ahead is an easy thing to do. Fortunately, Paul tells us:

V. The Holy Spirit Helps Us Endure Our Present Distress (26-27) As we wait here and endure suffering, we pray! It's just natural; we pour out our hearts to our Father as we endure the struggles of life. But we have a weakness, a limitation, even in that process:

1. we do not know what we should pray for because our perspective is limited We're often so confused by our circumstances, so blinded by our pain, so limited in our understanding of what's happening to us or in the world, that we don't know what God's will really is. And therefore, we don't know what to pray for as we ought. Sometimes in our suffering we have to pray, "Lord, I want to get well from this awful illness, but maybe not getting well means you can use me more and if so, your will be done!" Sometimes we are so overwhelmed that we don't know even what to pray at all. Yet in these very moments:

2. the Spirit translates the true longings of our hearts to the Father The Spirit is joined to our spirit, to our very heart, the core of us. He knows our thoughts and feelings. He endures our pain with us. And He, also being one with the Father, is God's window into our very soul. He conveys the longing of our hearts in the most accurate way possible to the Father, but in that process, He does second thing:

3. He intercedes with the Father for us according to God's will Nobody knows all that means, but at the least it means He helps us to pray the right things, the things that God wants us to ask for, even if we can't say them with our mouths. Another way to say it might be that just as He lives through us when we ask Him, He also prays through us as we rely upon Him. One commentator says, *this ...implies not only that...we are taught to pray what would otherwise be unutterable ...but that the Holy Ghost himself pleads in our prayers, raising us to higher and holier desires than we can express in words, which can only find utterance in sighings and aspirations...* [Lange's Commentary on Rom. 8:27] And whatever the Holy Spirit prays through us and on our behalf will always be exactly in accord with God's perfect will.

Dr. Wilbur Chapman was a Presbyterian evangelist who held crusades in the US and worldwide for many years around 1900. From April 20-28, 1911 he booked a music hall that held 800 in the town of Shrewsbury, England. Despite publicity, attendance the first night was sparse and Chapman and many others were gravely disappointed, sensing something was sorely lacking. But a guest was there that night, an American missionary by the name of John Hyde who was enroute home from 20 years on the field in India. And as he sat in the meeting that night a burden came upon him to pray for the rest of the crusade. The effect was immediate; the next night the hall was packed and some 50 received Christ. For more

than a week he prayed in a hotel room and hundreds were impacted. But on the first day after prayer so obviously turned things around, Dr. Chapman asked Hyde to come to his room and pray for him personally. He wrote to a friend: "He came to my room, turned the key in the door, dropped on his knees, and waited five minutes without a single syllable coming from his lips. I could hear my own heart thumping and beating. I felt the hot tears running down my face. I knew I was with God. Then with upturned face, down which the tears were streaming, he said, 'Oh, God!' Then for five minutes at least he was still again, and then when he knew he was talking with God his arm went around my shoulder. Then he said something like this, 'My Father, here is a minister who sorely needs Thy help, do bless him, I beseech Thee, may his life be precious in Thy sight. May he be girded anew with strength for service; may Jesus Christ become more real to him.' And then there came from his heart such petitions for men as I had never heard before. Then he was still again for a little while, and when the closing words of the prayer were said, we rose from our knees, and I had learned a never-to-be-forgotten lesson concerning intercession. Jesus Christ became a new ideal to me, and I had a glimpse of His prayer life, and I had a longing which has remained to this day to be a real praying man."

[\[http://shrewsburylocalhistory.org.uk/effective.htm\]](http://shrewsburylocalhistory.org.uk/effective.htm) I have a sense that prayer like that might just be a glimpse of what Paul means when he says, *Pray in the Spirit on all occasions...* - Eph. 6:18. Our occasions might be far different from that one, but if we ask Him to fill us in our suffering, the Holy Spirit will pray through us and intercede with the Father in ways we can hardly imagine now. We can have a taste of that future glory here and now to sustain us until then.

Romans 1-8: Understanding Our Great Salvation

Glorification: Our Ultimate Righteousness - 8:14-39

Our Absolute Security - 8:28-39

The ultimate result of everything that we have learned in these chapters about the great salvation God has provided for us is our absolute, unshakable, rock solid, impenetrable security. People today look frantically for security in every conceivable way, from amassing huge bank accounts, to survivalists storing up weapons and food to, marrying a person they think can meet all their needs. But truthfully, there is no person on earth that has any degree of security at all, except we who know Jesus Christ. If we understand justification, we realize that we are secure in our relationship to God because our righteousness is provided by Him. If we understand sanctification, we realize that we are secure in our Christian life because the Spirit's power lives the life God expects through us in holiness and purity. But if we understand glorification, we realize that we are absolutely secure in our circumstances, that no matter how awful the things that come our way become, we know our future is guaranteed! And the ground of our absolute security is God Himself; He is what guarantees our future. First of all, Paul tells us that:

I. We Have Absolute Security Through The Sovereignty Of God Our security rests in a God who is sovereign, who is in absolute control of all things, in a God who is omnipotent, all powerful, a God who is able to do anything He chooses to do and whom nothing can hinder from it. That's why:

1. we are completely secure amid our present circumstances, no matter what they may be. Look at verse (28). We quote this verse all the time, especially when something bad happens, to console ourselves or others with the idea that, "God will bring something good out of all this." But its real meaning goes so much deeper than that. Look at the end of the verse first:

a. God called us to Himself as part of His eternal purpose He has a plan and purpose that He has determined to work out in this world and we are part of that eternal plan and purpose. The whole of my life, indeed, the whole history of the human race, is to God only a blink in time. In and through this brief vapor of vanishing earthly life, God is creating a race of perfect sons and daughters who will be with Him and involved with Him in all of His plans and exploits forever! And therefore:

b. He causes every earthly circumstance to serve His good purpose for us Bad things like tragedies, loneliness, hunger, natural disasters, crime, sickness, death, all these things not only cannot thwart the purpose of God, but our God is so powerful and mighty and sovereign that they are actually made to serve His purpose! In the life of the child of God, He uses His sovereign power, not merely to control everything that happens to us, but to work all those things together to come out for what is to Him a good result, the doing of His will! Nothing stands in the way of God accomplishing what He has determined to do! That's why you can lose your job and say, "God is doing something else here; He will work this out for me." That's why your house can burn down and you can say, "God is at work in this and I know He will take care of me". None of these things touches us apart from His will and plan and permission. None of them are accidentally running loose on their own somehow, pure mishaps that have no rhyme or reason. But of course, He doesn't promise that we'll know what the reason is! We just have to rest in God's sovereignty and be content to know that He has one! *Romanian Pastor Richard Wurmbrand spent 14 years in prison for his faith, three of them in solitary confinement, and endured much torture. Few have suffered more than he did, but here is his testimony: "The communists believe that happiness comes from material satisfaction; but alone in my cell, cold, hungry and in rags, I danced for joy every night. Words alone have never been able to say what a man feels in the nearness of divinity... Sometimes I was so filled with joy that I felt I would burst if I did not give it expression. I remembered the words of Jesus, 'Blessed are you when men come to hate you... on account of the*

Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! I told myself, 'I've carried out only half the command. I've rejoiced, but that is not enough. Jesus clearly says that we must also leap.' When next the guard peered through the spy-hole, he saw me springing about my cell. His orders must have been to distract anyone who showed signs of breakdown, for he padded off and returned with some food from the staff room: a hunk of bread, some cheese and sugar. As I took them, I remembered how the verse in St. Luke went on: 'Rejoice in that day and leap for joy – for behold your reward is great.' It was a very large piece of bread: more than a week's ration. [In *God's Underground*, p. 54] God used 14 years of awful suffering to help Richard Wurmbrand grow into a closeness of relationship with Himself that he might never have otherwise attained! Suffering accomplished God's good purpose in him and so it always does in us, especially when we cooperate with the process as he did, instead of fighting it!

Well, now Paul takes this thinking that God always accomplishes what He sets out to do and expands it one step further by explaining that:

2. we are predestined to glorification (29-30) These verses have been a point of contention for centuries between different brands of theologians, and to no avail. So, it's really important that we all lay down our systems of theology and simply look at what the text plainly says. First of all, it says that God:

a. He foreknew us and long ago predestined us to be made like Jesus Way back when, in eternity past before the creation of the world, before we were ever formed, God knew us. He knew all about us and all about our life and all about the things that would happen in our life. And way back then, God did something, He decreed something about us individually. Strong Calvinists would say it was because He chose to elect us. I would say He knew we would respond and so chose us as being in Christ, but none of that is the point. Predestination in this text is not about why we come to Christ; it is about being glorified. What it says is that God decreed way back then that you and I would conformed to the image of His Son, that is, that we would be glorified, that we would have a resurrection body like Jesus and that we would reign forever together with Him as a joint heir! God decreed that about us eons ago and then when the time was right and He brought us into the world:

b. He carried this decree out by calling, justifying and glorifying us God lined out an entire progression of events for us way back then, an unbreakable chain of happenings. So, because He foreknew us and made that decree about our final state, He then called us to Himself, justified us by giving us Christ's righteousness and, notice this, glorified us. Therefore, if you know you are saved, if you know you have been called, if you know you have been justified, then you can also be absolutely certain that you will be glorified, because God made that determination about you long ago and He cannot fail to carry out the last part of the plan! In fact, what this verse really says is that to God it is already accomplished! That's how secure we are. It is, to use a common expression, a "done deal". God decreed it, and since He has the power to make sure His will and Word come to pass, it is already done! As I keep saying, our lives are joined to Christ, so what happened to Him happened to us. When He died, we died. When He rose, we rose. He ascended and now He is seated in the heavenly places, so guess what? We are already seated in the heavenly places with Him. It is not simply anticipation of what lies ahead for us; it is factually true to God because to Him time doesn't make any difference. To Him the future is as real as the present because He inhabits eternity! We are already glorified! Hallelujah! That's secure! And then Paul gives us the real reason that God decided to do all this:

c. His purpose is that Jesus might be first among many brothers (and sisters) who are like Him. Simply put, God wanted a whole bunch of kids! He wanted a big family! And He planned from the very beginning that He would have it. Hebrews 2:10 tells us that God's purpose was *to bring many sons to glory*! He didn't just want a bunch of things He had made. It was not enough for Him to have the galaxies and the stars and the planets. It was not enough for Him to have trillions of angelic beings to carry out His wishes. It was not enough for Him to have the world and all that it contains. He wanted sons and daughters, children who would be made in His very likeness, contain His very nature and be capable of sharing the glories and joys of all eternity in a oneness of being with Him! That's why God decreed all these things about you; that's the reason behind sending His Son to the cross and that's why He will bring every last thing He has decreed about you to pass! *The well-known Chinese Bible teacher Watchman Nee told about a new convert who came in deep distress to see him saying, "No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm losing my salvation." Nee said, "Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ's heir because it is for you that He died."* WE are the object of all that God has done, of His whole purpose in the world and He will not fail to complete it! Hallelujah! Don't you just want to love Him?

Well, moving on, it is not only God's sovereignty that gives us security. Paul says:

II. We Have Absolute Security Through The Love Of God in verses (31-39). Love is the motive behind all that God has decreed. Love is the reason for His determination to carry it out. Paul makes a powerful statement in verse 31:

1. God Himself is FOR us (31-34) God is FOR us. That is our security. Nothing can penetrate that. Paul reasons, "Look:

a. God will not condemn us Why would He? **He gave up His Son in order to give us all things!** He gave His only Son whom He loved to die on a cross for us, so if He condemned us, His own Son would have died in vain! And if He loved us so much as to give up His Son to get us, won't that same love carry itself out all the way and bring us safely to glory and give us all the things that belong to us as joint heirs with Christ? Sure, it will! No, the Father will never condemn us and:

b. Christ will not condemn us Why would He? **He died, rose, ascended**, all for us. In fact, He even **intercedes for us right now!** How could He condemn those He gave His very own life for? Not only that, how could He condemn those that He is representing at the right hand of the Father every single day? No, Jesus will never condemn us and, if neither the Father nor the Son will condemn us, then:

c. no one else can bring any charge against us since God has justified us! Sure, Satan would love to. In Revelation it says that he is the accuser of the brethren and that he accuses them before God day and night. We have a glimpse of that in the way he tried to accuse Job before God and impugn his motives for obeying as being selfish, even though Job wouldn't sin. I'm sure Satan tries in vain to point out our failures and our sins. But listen, since God is for us, since we are in right standing with Him, since we are free from any condemnation by Him and He is the Judge of all the earth, then if follows that nobody can condemn us. Nobody can take our glorious future away from us! God would never let it happen!

And now in the conclusion of this chapter, we come to such a beautiful section that we often read it for the majestic way in which it expresses the depths of God's love. But instead of admiring the diamond for its sheer beauty from a distance, I would like us look carefully at each facet that makes up the whole gem. The precious truth Paul is trying to drive home is simply that:

2. NOTHING can separate us from Christ's love (35a) The answer is "No one!" Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. It is too great, too vast, too deep, too strong. There are not sufficient words to describe it, so Paul begins to list all the things that, even though they are the most powerful forces we experience on earth, can't succeed in dividing us from Christ because of His immense love for us! First, Paul says that:

a. no experience of suffering in life can separate us from it (35b-37)

(1) our suffering or even dying is not evidence of a lack of God's love When trouble comes, Satan will always try to get us to think that God has stopped loving us. He will pop that question into our minds, "If God loves me, why is this happening to me? Why doesn't He stop it and rescue me from this? If I loved someone, I would never let them have to endure something like this!" It may be persecution like our brothers and sisters in Iran or Afghanistan face today; it may be even the threat of death. It may be famine, falling on hard times and not having enough to eat or to pay your bills. It may be the loss of a loved one, a debilitating accident or a dread disease. Suffering comes to us in a myriad of forms in this world. We may even find ourselves in a situation like the Psalmist in Ps. 44:22 that Paul quotes, where Israel hadn't been unfaithful to God, yet she was defeated before her enemies and faced death at their hand like so many helpless sheep to be butchered. Yet not even that can separate us from God's love. Rather:

(2) God's love causes us to win a glorious victory over all these things We are not the losers but the winners. We are not the vanquished; we are the conquerors. Why? Because all things, even these, still work together to accomplish God's plan and His good purpose. And in the end, they convey us to glory and result in His glory! And not one of them changes His love for us! Don't ever buy that lie of the enemy! Suffering does not come from a lack of God's love; it is in suffering that you will come to know His love in the deepest and greatest ways of all as you enter with Him into what the Scripture calls *the fellowship of His sufferings!* No experience of suffering can take away that love and further:

b. no facet of creation can separate us from it (38-39) What is there in all of the universe that could possibly break that love. What are the most powerful things we know that could part us from it? Paul says:

(1) neither dying nor living can do it. In chapter 14 he says, *For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.* If we live, His Spirit lives in us and we live out His life. If we die, we are with Him in glory. Either way, we win! But what about the spirit world? Paul says:

(2) neither angels nor demonic forces can break that love. All the demons the enemy can muster, not Satan himself, the most powerful of all, not all of them combined can lessen that love even one iota! But what about the things we fear on earth? Paul says:

(3) nor earthly rulers... No Kim Jong-Un can stop God from loving us. No dictator can terrorize us by threatening our lives! Psalm 2 says, *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed... He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.* For all their plotting and planning, not one of them can

stand against Him or break His great love for US! Then, we always get anxious about the unknown, but Paul says:

(4) neither present nor future circumstances can separate us. We worry and worry about so many things. What if this? What if that? Listen, there is not a single thing in the present and there will be not a single thing to come in the future that will ever keep God's love from being lavished upon us! Not one!

(5) nor any dimension of space No matter where we are, how high up on a mountain or how low down in a mine, whether we're on one side of the earth or the other, everywhere we are, God is, and where He is, so is His love for us! The punchline is in verse 39:

NOTHING in all creation can separate us from God's glorious love in Christ! Did you hear that? Nothing! That's how absolutely secure we are because He loves us! I don't think anyone knows that better in human experience than our dear sister and survivor of the holocaust, Corrie Ten Boom. If you have never read her story, [The Hiding Place](#), it's a classic and a must read if you want God to show you the greatness of His love in the midst of the greatest suffering. Corrie wrote this, *Often I have heard people say, "How good God is! We prayed that it would not rain for our church picnic, and look at the lovely weather!" Yes, God is good when He sends good weather. But God was also good when He allowed my sister, Betsie, to starve to death before my eyes in a German concentration camp. I remember one occasion when I was very discouraged there. Everything around us was dark, and there was darkness in my heart. I remember telling Betsie that I thought God had forgotten us. "No, Corrie," said Betsie, "He has not forgotten us. Remember His Word: 'For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.' Corrie concludes, "There is an ocean of God's love available - there is plenty for everyone. May God grant you never to doubt that victorious love - whatever the circumstances." Amen!*

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ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 9:1-5 Israel, O Israel!

Let me remind you of the general outline of Romans:

Doctrinal	Chs. 1-8	God's Grace
Dispensational	Chs. 9-11	God's Government
Developmental	Chs. 12-16	God's Guidance

At chapter 9 we begin a whole new section of Romans. In chapters 1-8 Paul has been dealing with our salvation from beginning to end, from condemnation through justification and sanctification to glorification! But now he leaves that and goes on to a subject that he had touched on back in chapters 2-3. Back there he had proved that Jews are lost people that need salvation just like Gentiles. However, Paul, with his tremendous Jewish heritage, couldn't leave it go at that.

I. Paul's Next Subject: God's relationship to Israel You see, one of the hardest questions the early church had to digest was, now that there was a Church of Jesus Christ, what about Israel? In the earliest church there was a movement to say that all converts had to be circumcised and keep the law. Paul fought this at every turn, but it simply took a long time for the church to understand God's new relationship to Israel. It took 10 chapters of the book of Acts before the church even began to think that Gentiles could be saved, and then God had to give Peter a supernatural vision to prove it! In Acts 15, a council was called at Jerusalem to settle the issue of whether Gentile converts had to keep the law, but still nowhere in the Scriptures was there any full explanation of Israel's place in God's plan, now that Christ had come and the church had been started. This is it. Alongside this, put the book of Hebrews, which is (I believe, Paul's) treatise showing how Old Testament things which were only shadows that are now fulfilled and can be left behind. Christians no longer need a Temple and animal sacrifices. It was his theological help to Jewish believers to let go of the things they still clung to. But Romans 9-11 spells out God's relationship to Israel as a nation in three phases:

Ch. 9	God's Past Dealings with Israel	Sovereignty
Ch. 10	God's Present Dealings with Israel	Responsibility
Ch. 11	God's Future Dealings with Israel	Prophecy

If I could summarize the message of these three chapters in a nutshell it would be this: In the past God sovereignly chose Israel to a place of privilege among all nations. Because of her unbelief and hardness, He has presently removed her from that place of privilege. Yet one day she will be reinstated to that place of privilege in the Kingdom. And, even though this question of Israel's place in not so much of a big deal to us, as we see how God dealt with national Israel, there are many valuable lessons we can learn for our own lives!

II. Paul's Present Anguish (1-4a) No one loved the Jewish nation more than Paul did. In Phil. 3:5 he calls himself a Hebrew (born) of Hebrews! His roots went deep. His life had been committed to Israel and her law. What he is going to say about her being set aside does not come easy for him. In fact, he wishes it could be some other way, but it isn't. He says if it were possible, he would trade his own salvation for theirs, that somehow they could be in his place of privilege in Christ and he be cut off from Christ as they are! Note how he emphasizes and re-emphasizes his sorrow at their condition, *I speak the truth...am not lying...my conscience...the Holy Spirit...GREAT sorrow...UNCEASING anguish!* Let me ask you, do you love lost people like that? Do you have that kind of anguish in your heart for people that are cut off from Christ and face eternal hell if they don't turn to Him? When was the last time you cried over the fact that someone was lost? Beloved, one of the chief reasons Paul won so many to Christ was that he cared about their spiritual state; one of the chief reasons we don't win more is that we don't. We are too often content to sit back and watch people travel the road to hell instead of feverishly building a road block to keep them from it! And there is a second point of application I'd like to make here too; we ought to be concerned specially for the lostness of Jewish people! In our era of world missions, wonderful as it is, we have often looked to the vast regions beyond and forgotten the Jew, by whose fall salvation came to us! It is only in the last few decades that missions to the Jews have come into being and the concept of a Hebrew Christian has been revived! We should be concerned for the salvation of Israel. It is not as though God has forgotten them and thrown them away so we can ignore them; on the contrary God has a plan whereby once the church is raptured out, they will become the center of His earthly activity once again and forever! In fact, Paul goes on to point out:

III. Israel's Perpetual Privileges (4b-5) There are some things that belong to Israel and always will, some very awesome things:

1. the adoption - Ex. 4:22 Nationally, Israel was placed in a special relationship to God as His son, His firstborn who would receive the inheritance. Compare Is. 66:22, Jer. 31:35-37. God put the nation of Israel into a special relationship with Himself that is perpetual. It is as unshakeable as the universe itself. She remains, though set aside from her privileges, God's chosen nation! The nations of earth would do well to remember that!

2. the Divine glory The Shekinah glory-cloud that led Israel in the wilderness and filled the Tabernacle and the Temple belongs uniquely to Israel. That special manifestation of His presence is uniquely hers and will return to her Temple in the Millennium (Ez. 43:5).

3. the covenants All the covenants God made from Abraham on, He made with the nation of Israel. They are hers and their promises are hers still. The promise of the land as an everlasting possession, of the perpetual establishing of David's throne, and so on. Even the New Covenant which Jeremiah talked about in 31:31 (the law written on the heart) and which Hebrews says we share in, is given to Israel if you go back and read it. He is yet going to keep it!

4. the Law The Law was never given to the Church; it was given to Israel and it remains hers. She will practice it again in the Millennium. But what a high and holy privilege she had in receiving the very Word of God!

5. the Temple worship with all its sacrifices and regulations It was never given to the church. It is Israel's and she will again have a Temple and serve God in the same way (Ez. 40-48). But what a privilege to be entrusted with the very outward things that explain and spell out for us the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross!

6. the Promises What promises? Hundreds of them! The Old Testament is filled with them! Promises of the land, protection, prosperity, blessing, longevity, a Messiah, a Kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital, and many more. God is not an Indian-giver! He does not promise and then retract it. Those things are still hers and the attempt to steal them away and make them apply to the church in some spiritual fashion is robbery!

7. the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and Joseph are all of Israel; they are not ours in any sense except a spiritual one, as we imitate their faith. That great heritage is Israel's alone. And finally:

8. the Christ! The Messiah when He came, came to His people. The flesh that Jesus took unto Himself was Jewish flesh! God forever bonded Himself to His Nation in a Person, the God-man, Jesus the Christ. The very word *Christ* means *Messiah*. He is first and foremost the Messiah of Israel besides being the Savior of the World!

These are perpetual privileges, irrevocable in the long run. God could not give all these things to Israel and then cast her aside forever. And indeed, these chapters will show us He hasn't. But the tragic shame is that in spite of all the privileges she had, Israel still rebelled against God! Listen, the privileges she had are wonderful! But the privileges we have in Jesus Christ are far superior, even to those. God bound Himself to a nation, but in Christ he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit. Almighty God binds His Spirit as one with ours. We have a heavenly kingdom and promised authority. We have better promises, a wonderful covenant through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, a superior law of love and so on, you name it! Yet how often we rebel against God in spite of all these! Oh beloved, never take your privileged position in Christ lightly like they did! Never think that since you are God's children you can do what you like and He will still love you. He will, but He

may have to remove you from the experience of your privileges and discipline you like He is doing with Israel, even today! I'm reminded of a story: *An old farmer had been plowing with an ox and a mule together and working them pretty hard. The ox said to the mule "Let's play sick today and rest." The mule said, "We need to get the work done and the season is short." But the ox played sick and the farmer brought him hay and corn and made him comfortable. When the mule came in, the ox asked, "How'd it go today?" "Alright I guess, but we didn't get as much done." The ox asked, "What'd the old man say about me?" "Nothing". The next day the ox thought he had a good thing going and played sick again. When the mule came in very tired, he asked, "How'd it go?" "Alright I guess, but we didn't get as much done". The ox asked, "What'd the old man say about me?" "Nothing to me, but on the way home he stopped and had a long talk with the butcher!"* Israel stands today as a warning to us never to presume upon the privileges God has given!

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 9:6-24 Israel's Rejection

In Romans 9-11 we are in some of the deepest Scripture in the Bible. It is really tough to understand. But it will help to keep in mind that Paul does not skip randomly from subject to subject. He has one thought in mind in these chapters, Israel's relationship to God. Remember in verses 1-5 how he outlined Israel's high and holy privileges as God's chosen people and lamented the fact that, generally speaking, Israel was now lost and set aside from her privileged position before God. Now, that whole thought raises:

I. The Problem: it seems God's Word has failed (6a) Remember those promises that God made to Abraham and his seed, wonderful promises, eternal promises? If God now sets her aside and being an Israelite no longer counts before God, then how can God keep His promises? Hasn't His Word failed? The answer, of course, is no, but the reason why is kind of tricky! So, Paul gives:

II. The Explanation (6b-13) He first lays out a principle and then applies it:

1. Not all physical Israelites are counted as Abraham's seed and heirs to the promises (6b) Just because a person is physically descended from Abraham does not mean that God counts him as an heir to the promises. Indeed, it never has meant that. God has never counted all physical descendants as true descendants. For example;

a. He chose to count Isaac's descendants, not Ishmael's (7-9) Abraham had other sons. He had Ishmael, the father of the Arabs, long before Isaac. Later he had sons by Keturah after Sarah died. But all those, though they were his offspring were not his "children". Indeed, when God tells him to sacrifice Isaac, He calls Isaac his *only* son whom he loved. It was the son who was born to inherit the promise that was his son. God chose to count it that way; He reckoned Abraham's seed through Isaac. Every good Jew would concede that! Further:

b. He chose to count Jacob's descendants, not Esau's (10-13) The same is true for Jacob and Esau. And Paul reminds us that before the two boys were ever born or had done anything good or bad, God had already chosen to count the descendants of Jacob, not Esau. His words, *The elder shall serve the younger*, were never fulfilled to the two individuals, but they are a prediction about the two NATIONS that would descend from these men. The statement about loving and hating comes from Malachi 1:2-3, and if you check it out, it is spoken about the two nations, Israel and Edom, not the two individuals. Paul's point is that God chose to count only Jacob's descendants as "children of Abraham," not Esau's. And every good Jew would be quick to say, "AMEN!" Now please note:

2. These were sovereign choices (11-12a) God did not wait to see how things would work out, nor did He simply look ahead with His omniscience to see how these two nations would turn out. He chose, according to His own plan and purpose, the line from which Messiah would come and the nation that would be His chosen people, to fulfill His purpose in the earth in bringing forth Messiah and being a light to the Gentiles. This is exactly what He told Israel. Compare Deut. 7:6-8. The reason for the choice lay with God, not with them. Folks, God is still making a lot of sovereign choices. Who is to say why you were born in America and someone else in China, into the family you were instead of another, looking like you do? Who is to say why the US is so great in the world today and what will be tomorrow? Listen, all of these things belong to a Sovereign God, not to us! But now, Paul gets onto a brief sidetrack of answering objections before concluding his main point, so we'll skip them and get right to the point:

3. He now chooses to count only believing Jews along with Gentiles as His people (22-24) If you sort carefully through the language, the point is that just as God has made it clear in the past that He has chosen to count some as His people and not others, so He is making it clear now that those Jews who believe in Jesus Christ (along with the Gentiles who believe) are His true people, not simply those who physically descend from Israel! Just as God chose to set aside Ishmael and Esau, so now, He has chosen to set aside for this present time the majority of national Israel from her place of privilege and blessing as His people. Now don't get me wrong; we'll see that He is going to preserve her as a people and is not finished with her yet, but in this current time, it is only those Israelites who become part of the church of Jesus Christ that are His people! God chooses it to be that way.

III. The Objections It seems to me that Paul either was a mind-reader or a good judge of character, because when you read his letters, he's always anticipating what's going through your mind ahead of time. So, here Paul anticipates two possible objections to God's sovereign choice to set Israel aside:

1. it looks like God is not fair (14-18) How can God just "arbitrarily" choose like that; how can He exercise that kind of control over the destiny of men and nations without any input on their part? The answer is that God will do what He wants. The Scripture says so; it says He will have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy. Paul cites the example of Pharaoh. The scripture says God raised him and his nation of Egypt up to the very height of glory in the earth in his day, just so that God could display His superiority to all false gods in bringing Israel out of bondage. If God wants to harden or soften a world leader or raise up or throw down a nation, He does it. That goes along with being God! If God wants to harden or soften someone's heart that you know, that too goes along with being God. You see, the problem of unfairness is based on a misconception, that God is under an obligation to treat everyone equally, to give everybody equal opportunity, to do for all what He does for one. That would be true if all were deserving of it, but the fact is that no one is deserving of God's mercy; all deserve His wrath! The entire human race is sinful and wicked to the core and deserves destruction. If God does anything for anyone, it is purely His mercy! But there is nothing in moral law to say that criminals deserve mercy. He can have mercy on whom He wills! God is not bound to equal treatment. But there's another objection:

2. it looks like I am not responsible (19-21) If God is sovereign and has that kind of control and we can't ultimately resist His will, then how can He hold me responsible for anything I do? I am simply carrying out what He has decreed anyway. Well, Paul has a good answer for that! Who are you, creature, to question God?! How can you, a mere man, question God! You see, you and God didn't happen to end up in the same world and meet. He made the human race and the world it inhabits. He made you. You and the world are His property, created by Him to serve His purposes. God has the right to carry out His purposes with His property! Then he turns to the example of the potter. The clay is his; he has the right to form it the way he wants. If he wants to make one lump a fancy vase, fine. If he wants to make another a cooking pot, fine. If he starts to shape the lump one way and then reshapes it another, fine! He's the potter; the clay has no room to object, because he took the water and the mud and made it! God can choose to do what He wills because He is God and it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves!

Listen, there is a good lesson in all this for us. There are times when we want to complain, to feel badly towards God for putting us in a particular situation, for letting us get sick or leading us into an unpleasant place where we'd rather not be. We're tempted to complain to God for the way He's handling things. But just wait a minute! In those times remember this: He is God! Think of Psalm 8, *What is man that thou art mindful of him?* You and I are nothing but hell-deserving sinners. The fact that Jesus Christ died for us and saved us should be enough. Even if the whole of my life is miserable torture according to God's plan, He has already given me much more than I deserve, a glorious eternity, and that should be enough! How can I complain?!

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 10 Opportunity Missed

Chapters 9 and 10 are like two sides of the same coin and the coin is God's dealing with the nation of Israel. Chapter 9 tells us of Israel's past and how God worked in it. Chapter 10 tells us of how He is dealing with Israel in this present age. Chapter 9 tells us very plainly about God's sovereignty in choosing Israel and then in setting her aside from a place of privilege before Him. Chapter 10 tells us just as plainly of Israel's responsibility before God. She rejected God's provision in Christ and so was set aside. The message of Chapter 10 boils down to this: Israel has missed and continues to miss the opportunity God has placed before her.

I. Israel's Mistake (1-4) Oh, do you see how much Paul loves Israel still? One would think that by now, after all the persecution they had brought him and how they nearly killed him, he would not feel this way, but he loves them with all his heart and prays for them to be saved! But, by his involvement with them and his own life as a Pharisee, he knows that they are have made one basic mistake:

1. they have zeal and plenty of it Josephus, the Jewish historian, reports how zealous they were under Roman rule. Many were crucified and tortured rather than break their Law. He comments that no pagan would do that! He reports that they made proselytes in practically every city of the empire and in Rome itself. Look at Paul himself in Phil. 3:4-6. Not only did he keep the law blamelessly but he was so zealous that he dragged men and women to prison and death for their daring to defect from what he believed! And many Jews still have a zeal for God, still keep the feasts and the law and endure hatred and bitterness for who they are. But:

2. it is misdirected What they are really trying to do by their zeal is this:

a. they try to become righteous by works They do not know the righteousness God waits to provide by faith. They think they have to manufacture their own. And they get so busy doing it that:

b. they fail to receive it by faith When the opportunity to receive Christ by faith comes along, they don't take it. You see, verse 4 says Christ is the end of the law, its goal or purpose, the thing to which the law was the means. The law was a schoolmaster, Paul says elsewhere, a tutor. It brings conviction of sin, convinces men that they have no righteousness and leads them to receive Christ and the righteousness He provides as a free gift. But they get so caught up in pursuing the means that they miss the end altogether! Listen, there are plenty of people around us making the same mistake. They have all kinds of zeal. They go to church and attend mass regularly, even daily. They repeat prayers and give money without question. They do an untold number of good deeds. But zeal doesn't make it with God. Muslims are fanatically zealous about religion but just as hell-bound as any atheist. Now secondly, see:

II. Israel's Opportunity (5-17) I want us to look at the bulk of this chapter from two perspectives. First, in its direct reference to Israel, then, in how we can apply what it says to us. First:

1. what God did for Israel

a. God provided a Savior (5-8) Paul quotes Deut. 30:12-14. This was the challenge Moses set before the second generation of Israelites, just before they entered the promised land. They had not been at Sinai like their fathers and seen God's glory, but Moses said that's alright. They didn't need another Moses to go up and get God's Word for them. They didn't need to send for someone from far away to teach it to them. They already had God's law in their hands; it was provided for them. Paul uses those familiar words (to Jews) and applies them to Christ. Nobody has to go up to heaven and bring Him down; nobody has to go down to Sheol and bring him up. He has already come down from heaven and come up out of the grave and it was this very message that Paul preached. God provided a Savior for Israel and then:

b. God presented to them a Savior (9-13) All that any Israelite has to do is to confess Jesus as Lord, as Master, Messiah, the Promised One, with all his heart and be saved. God presented Him to Israel both directly and, for those who came later or lived elsewhere:

c. God sent someone to tell them (14-15) God sent people with beautiful feet, the apostles and others, people bearing the good news to them in every city of the empire. Yet:

d. most Israelites rejected God's provision (16) He quotes Isaiah's prophetic cry in 53:1 which intimates that few would believe in the crucified and risen Christ. And few did! They missed their opportunity after all that God did for them and so were set aside that God might go after the Gentiles and call out of them a people for His name!

2. some lessons we can learn from it Now, you're getting tired of hearing about Israel, so let's look at three general principles found here:

a. faith eliminates all human effort (5-10) Works says, "Do and keep on doing and if you do perfectly, you will live". God says:

(1) there is nothing left to do (6-7) Christ has done it all! I once got a two page letter from someone to tell me that the Bible teaches we are saved by faith and works. Millions and millions of souls are blinded by that lie like the Jews were. They are all around us. But Jesus paid it all! All that is left for us:

(2) it is an act of trust in the heart (9-10) It is an act of the heart, believing that Christ died and rose again and calling out to God that Jesus is Lord. This does not seem to be talking about confession before men, but about calling to God (compare 12, 13). That is all that God requires of us to be saved!

b. faith is available to all (11-13) The emphasis in these verses is ALL; everyone is the same!

(1) God's requirement is the same for all There is not a separate way for the Jew (by keeping the law). In this age there is no difference. Jew and Gentile are alike sinners and are saved the same way and incorporated into the same body, and in that body, Ephesians tells us that God has knocked down the middle wall so we are no longer Jew or Gentile! I might add it is the same for the drunkard and the priest and the prostitute and the humanitarian. There is one way and only one. But:

(2) God stands ready to receive all Don't you get the sense from these verses that God is the Father just standing and waiting with open arms for the prodigal to come home? All who believe receive. There is none too bad, none who is beyond God's grace.

c. faith comes by hearing the message (14-17) Verse 17 makes it clear. People don't call on someone they don't believe in and they can't believe in one they've never heard of and they can't hear unless someone tells them and they'll never get told if no one is sent! Faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God as it is proclaimed. Hence, two things:

(1) the necessity of preaching Here is the cry missionaries have raised for years. People can't be saved unless we tell them. The Jews can't be saved unless they're told; the Gentiles can't; no one can. Who are you telling? What means are you using to tell others?

(2) the responsibility of responding Not all Israelites respond. Not all Gentiles respond. Not everyone we tell responds. But they have a responsibility to do it. Man is responsible before God from conscience and from general revelation, but how much more when he has been told directly! People are responsible for missed opportunities!

III. Israel's Objections (18-21) As Paul draws this section to a close, He raises two possible objections that a Jew might raise to what he has just said:

1. they did not hear (18-19) Not every Jew had an opportunity to hear. Paul says, "Of course they did". He quotes Ps. 19 which, if you'll recall, talks first about the general revelation of God in the creation. The very heavens declare His glory. But the second half goes on to talk about the special revelation God has given in His Word. Paul quotes a verse from the middle of it which says that God has made himself known everywhere. They had creation and conscience to drive them to God and they also had His law. All those things point to Christ and hold them responsible.

2. they did not understand (20-21) They heard the message but they did not understand it. Paul quotes Moses and Isaiah to show that Gentiles could understand, who knew nothing and were not even seeking after God. Israel's problem was not understanding, but disobedience and obstinacy!

Listen, people can hear if they want to hear. Even where Christ has not been preached, they can seek God through the revelation He has left them. But right here, how easy it is for a person to hear God's message. They have to avoid it to miss it. Man's problem is not understanding; it is obstinacy. Jesus put it this way, "Ye would not!" No one will stand before God and say, "You didn't give me an opportunity to be saved". God will say, "You had the opportunity, but your heart was hard and you didn't want it!"

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 11 Israel's Future

You may have seen people wearing buttons with the initials P.B.P.G.I.N.F.W.M.Y., standing for, *Please Be Patient God Is Not Finished With Me Yet!* That is true of us, but in a very real sense that statement sums up the message of this chapter concerning Israel's future. Romans 9 dealt with her past, Romans 10 with her present, but in Romans 11 God lays out the fact that He has a plan and a purpose for her still. In essence this chapter is prophecy, but it helps fill in some specific gaps for us about our relationship to the Jews today. The chapter divides into three sections:

I. Israel's Relationship to God (1-12) Paul begins with a question. Has God then totally cast away and forgotten about His people Israel? Don't they have any relationship to Him anymore? The answer is, "YES, they do!" He speaks of them in two groups:

1. the remnant who are saved (1-6) He offers himself as an example. Paul was a Jew, a Benjamite, and here he is in a relationship with God. Paul then cites the example of Elijah, who felt himself so alone in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, but God told him there was a remnant of 7000 left within Israel who still were His. God has always had a remnant within those nationally called Israel who were truly in relationship with Him. And it is true now. There are thousands of Jews who have come to Christ. They are today's remnant, the portion of Israel who today belong to God. Throughout the age it will continue to be so, by God's grace. He could have cut all of them off for rejecting His Son, but He didn't!

2. the rest who are hardened (7-10) The rest of Israel has experienced a hardening, a dullness of understanding, a blindness of seeing spiritual truth. It was brought on by their own rejection of God, but it is from God. In setting them aside, He also dulled their spiritual senses, which is why it is so very difficult for Jews to be won to Christ. Now, that may not seem fair to us but see:

3. the reason which is us! (11-12) God didn't do it simply to punish them; He did it to bring salvation to us Gentiles. What great riches we have inherited through Israel's fall! We have come to know Christ, millions of us all over the world! And still God wants to use us to eventually bring about the future turning of Israel to Him, which brings us to discuss:

II. Our Relationship to Israel (13-24) Paul turns now specifically to talk to Gentile believers for a while and spell out by illustration two very crucial things for us:

1. our role toward Israel (13-14) Our assignment is to arouse Jews to envy and save some, to let them see that we have accepted their Messiah and are sharing in the blessings of Abraham which should be theirs, while they're missing out. We are not to forget the Jew but to reach him for Christ!

2. our attitude toward Israel (19-20) Here's Paul's primary concern. History has borne out the fact that it is a great danger, because time after time Christianity has become haughty against the Jew and even persecuted Jews in the name of Christ. Paul says, "Oh no, you should love them and desire to see them saved, not become proud over what you have and they don't". He uses the illustration of the meal offering to prove his point (16). It is the first handful offered to God that sanctifies the whole batch. Abraham and Israel are the firstfruits; we are the batch. Our salvation came from God's working through them, through the promises to Abraham and the transmission of God's Word and the bringing forth of Christ according to the flesh. Salvation is indeed from the Jews! Then he uses the illustration of a cultivated olive tree which had some of its branches cut off and wild olive branches grafted in. The root and the trunk are Abraham and the fathers, Israel. The natural branches are Israel today. The wild branches are the Gentiles. So God set aside Israel nationally after the cross and grafted in the Gentiles, but remember the root and the trunk hold up the branches. We are Abraham's seed by faith! And we should not be haughty. God cut off Israel for disobedience but the same will happen to the Gentiles as a whole during the Tribulation Period and Israel as a whole will be grafted back in again. They will come to Christ. Things will be reversed. In the Tribulation, only a remnant of the numerous Gentiles will be saved, but a great majority of Israel will turn to Christ! So be careful about your attitude! Jews can be easy to dislike; they can be demanding and materialistic sometimes. But love them!

III. Israel's Relationship to Us (25-32) Now, Paul turns the subject around from how we should relate to them, to how they relate to us now. But first, he sums up by giving:

1. two truths to remember Paul clears up a mystery now; he fills in what God has not yet made fully clear.

a. partial present hardening (25) Israel's national hardening is partial and it is temporary. It affects only a majority, not all Jews. Some will come to Christ. And it will only last until God comes to the place in His plan where the full number of the Gentiles have come into the fold!

b. full future deliverance (26-27) Paul quotes Isaiah to show that when Christ the Messiah finally comes to reign, Israel as a nation will turn to Him and have His blessing in the Millennium. Now, having given these truths Paul shows us:

2. two paradoxes A paradox is something that seems backward, seems reversed. It is two parallel truths that can't seem to be true at the same time, but are:

a. the paradox of Israel's situation (28-29) On the one hand:

(1) they are enemies of the Gospel individually They are outside of Christ, antagonistic to the Gospel, enemies of the church. They are individually God's enemies, just as all unsaved people are but:

(2) they are beloved for the fathers As a people, they are specially loved for the sake of the patriarchs and they continue to have a special place in God's plan and program for the world. Why? Because God's gifts and calling are irrevocable. He does not change His mind nor renig on His promises. When He promised that Israel would be His people and would inherit the land forever, they will. This generation may be individually set aside, but nationally they are still very much on God's mind and heart!

b. the paradox of God's mercy (30-32) Here's another strange thing:

(1) we (being disobedient) received mercy through them We the Gentiles were apart from God and having no hope, Ephesians says. We were pagan idolaters. We were disobedient. They were in the place of grace and blessing. But through their disobedience in rejecting Christ, we got opportunity; we got mercy. But now:

(2) they (being disobedient) receive mercy through us Now, they are apart from God; they are in the place of disobedience and we Gentiles are largely in the place of grace and blessing. Now, we are the means of bringing God's mercy and grace to them! We've all been in the place of disobedience, Jew and Gentile alike, and God has had mercy on all! And finally, Paul can't contain himself any longer:

IV. A Benediction (33-36) He breaks out into song. Let it stand for itself. How wise God is, how great His knowledge and understanding. How wonderful the plan He has laid out for the history of mankind, Jew and Gentile alike. We would never have thought of it and cannot conceive it all yet. What a wonderful, magnificent, marvelous God we have!

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 12:1-8 Your Christian Service

At Romans 12 we come to the third major division of Romans:

1-8	God's Grace	Doctrinal
9-11	God's Government	Dispensational
12-16	God's Guidance	Developmental

These chapters are meant to develop you in the practical areas of your Christian walk:

12-13 Christian Relationships

- to the Lord 12:1-2
- to the church 12:3-16
- to the Enemy 12:17-21
- to the government 13:1-7
- to the neighbor 13:8-14

14 Christian Liberty

15-16 Paul's Closing Advice

We'll begin by considering the first half of the twelfth chapter concerning your relationship to the Lord and to other believers. If we could characterize both of those relationships with one word, it would be the word *service*. The relationship God wants you to have with both Him and others is that of *servant*. The activity God wants you to be involved in toward Him and others is *service*. Now first let's see:

I. The Means of Your Service (1-2) There are two things you need for genuine Christian service:

1. a body consecrated for the service of God (1) Here we have the picture of a living sacrifice. The language is that of the Old Testament. To *offer* means *to give as a sacrifice*. Now, with animals that meant to death, but dead sacrifices do God no good; they only picture Christ. God needs a living sacrifice, that is, YOU, to come to Him and say, "Lord, this body of mine is Yours and I am ready to use it in your service in any way You direct". Notice:

a. consecration is an act of the will Paul beseeches and urges; it is not mandatory. It is something you and I must do freely in light of all that God has done for us in saving us. It is also something that must continually be reaffirmed. I'm not telling you to go home tonight and pray one prayer and that's it. The presenting may start with telling Him, but it is acted out every day in the choices you make, either to help someone or pass them by, to go worship with other believers or stay home and watch TV, to lie or tell the truth. In every decision we make we must say, "Lord, my body is yours, I'll do what you want!"

b. service is a genuine act of worship The KJV says it is *reasonable* service; the NIV says *spiritual* service. The Greek says, *intelligent* or *logical* service. I would say *real* or *genuine*. The most genuine true worship is done daily by submitting to God and obeying, not like the Jew who might offer his sacrifice and go off and ignore God's law or like the Christian who might come to church and worship outwardly and then go home and live selfishly. Real worship is a moment by moment consecrating of your body to do His bidding!

2. a mind renewed by the Spirit of God (2) When I get saved, my spirit is joined to the Lord and is one with Him. But as we've just seen, to be fully serving God requires more than that. It requires you to voluntarily present your body to Him, but it also requires a changed mind as well. Our thought patterns have to change; we have to think God's thoughts, to think like He thinks. But the natural mind can't comprehend God's things, can't agree with them. Something has to be done and it has two parts:

a. resisting conformation to the world We must voluntarily resist the attempt by the world around us to shape our thinking. We must refuse to say, "Well, that's what so and so thinks, so that's right and I'll do it". The world system is a jello mold and it's trying to stuff you in and shape your thinking, to teach you to believe in humanism, to disbelieve things the Bible says are true. You have to make a conscious effort to say no!

b. assisting the transformation by the Spirit The construction here is interesting. *Be transformed* is a passive imperative; it is something you have to get done TO you but can't do it yourself. Somebody else has to do, it but you initiate the process by your wanting it! Who is the Somebody that renews your mind? Compare Titus 3:5; it's the Holy Spirit. He not only gives you a new nature at salvation (regeneration), but is the One who from His inside vantage point, uses His power to alter your thinking patterns. So, what am I saying? You have to consciously give the Holy Spirit moment by moment control over your mind, reject any thoughts that come from Satan, and ask Him to fill your thinking. You do it moment by moment, every time a sinful thought comes. Now look at the result:

3. a life transformed into the will of God Your life is gradually transformed, metamorphosized. Compare 2 Cor. 3:18. It's the same word used of Jesus at His transfiguration. We are changed to be like Him. and the final result is that we live out God's will, not that we figure out God's will, but we experience it and live in it daily. It's like this:

A *consecrated body* leads to a *renewed mind* which leads to a *transformed life* which is *living out GOD'S WILL!* Service is not a job we do; it is a way we live, a daily putting of our minds and bodies at God's disposal and so living out the will of God! That's how you serve God! Now here are the means you use:

II. The Manner of Your Service (3-8) If you want to talk about the nitty-gritty of the actions you do to serve God, there are two things you must do:

1. you must evaluate your performance (3-5) When you are serving God side by side with others in the church, it will be a natural thing to think, "How am I doing at this? Am I a good servant?" That's not bad, but we must leave the final evaluation up to God. However, we can take stock of ourselves from time to time. Here are four rules:

a. don't overestimate yourself It is always our tendency to think we're doing the best job we can, to think we're as committed as we can be, doing what we do as well as we can. Paul warns about overconfidence. Rather he says:

b. do it with sound judgment *Sober* means *sound minded, sensible*, according to what you know from the Word of God. Be careful to use the Word as your measuring stick and hold yourself against it.

c. do recognize it as a gift God proportions out to every believer a measure of faith, the ability to trust Him. If you've been able to trust Him and obey by serving in any way whatever, it is all a gift from God. That'll keep you humble. As you evaluate yourself and think it was neat that you led someone to Christ or helped someone out, remember it was God doing it through you!

d. don't compare yourself to others (4-5) Here is the big bug-a-boo of service. I serve in the midst of others so I tend to set them up as a yardstick and measure my performance by theirs. We the church are a body and a body has many different parts that do different things. So, we all have different functions, different places in the body. Some may serve with children, some with music, some in the office, some in the pulpit, but we're one body and are fitted together to complement each other. So don't compare yourself and feel that you have to do what someone else does! The question is, "Are you doing what God wants you to do? Are you fully submitted to Him?"

2. you must use your spiritual gift(s) (6-8) Every believer has a gift or ability that the Holy Spirit can use to serve. You don't need to complain that service is only for the talented. You already have a God-given means to serve. There are three things you are responsible to do with it:

a. you must IDENTIFY it You must figure out what it is. Perhaps that means experimenting a bit and trying some different things, taking some opportunities that come your way, or asking others what they perceive you to be fitted for. Maybe you have more than one gift but you have at least one!

b. you must EXERCISE it When you find out what God wants to use you to do in particular, then you are responsible to concentrate on it and do it. Look at the list. If it is prophecy (speaking for God or preaching), do it. If it is service (like giving material help or painting rooms), do it. If it is teaching, if it is encouraging (counseling), or giving, or leading (organizing), or showing mercy (visiting the sick, helping the needy), do it. Whatever it is that God has enabled you to do, do it, concentrate on it; exercise that gift and let everybody else exercise theirs. We complement each other!

c. you must MAXIMIZE it This shows up in the list. If you give, give generously. If you organize, do it diligently. If you help, do it cheerfully. Maximize that gift! Do it as much and as well as you can, to whatever extent God enables you.

You see, God didn't save you to be a nothing, to sit in the body and absorb from others, to have no purpose, no ministry. He might as well have taken you home. No, He saved you to serve Him, to take the ability He provides and trust Him and be used. So, start daily laying your mind and body on God's altar. Find that gift and get busy using it. Count for God! The only trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps trying to crawl off the altar! Stay there!

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 12:9-16 One Christian To Another

A Christian must not only concentrate on his God-given ministry, but he has to relate properly to other Christians while he is doing it. This little section consists of a series of brief commands and exhortations that spell out for us the things that should characterize our relationships with fellow believers. I have tried to group them into sections for clarity of understanding.

I. The Christian's Attributes (9) An attribute is an aspect of a person's nature and character. We most commonly use it to speak of the attributes of God like love, holiness, and so on. It is not simply that God acts in love; He IS love. It is not that He does holy acts; He IS holy. These things are part of His very nature and Paul gives us three things that should be part of our very nature:

1. loving sincerely Literally it says *without hypocrisy*, without play acting, without putting on a false appearance and acting differently from the way you really are. A Christian must love with his heart; his heart must care about others genuinely. I read somewhere that the English word *sincere* comes from the Latin *sina cera* which means *without wax*. Centuries ago, there developed the practice of hiding flaws in a certain kind of ceramic product with wax, so that ven-

dors with genuinely valuable products would label them "without wax" to declare that there was no nice exterior with a flawed interior. Are you like that?

2. hating evil God does not merely refrain from evil; His being detests it! So should we! It is not a matter of not sinning because God says so, but secretly wishing we could. We must grow to abhor and hate evil like God does. Note it does not say evil *persons*, but *evil*, the evil that the persons do and the evil that we do!

3. clinging to good The word used here means to *glue*, to *cement together*. We must be "super-glued" to good; we must learn to love it, to cling to it with all our strength, not simply doing it because God says to do it. Now if our very being, our heart, is characterized by these three things, love for others, hatred of evil, and love of good, then we should not have any problem getting along with each other in a proper way. Those things will underlie our behavior. We must be, before we can act!

II. The Christian's Axioms (10) An axiom is a basic principle by which you operate. As far as our relationship to other believers is concerned, there are two axioms that should sum up our behavior:

1. caring tenderly for the other There are two interesting Greek compound words in this phrase. The first one rendered *brotherly love* is familiar to you. It is *philadelphia*, the love of a brother. Now Paul is not telling us THAT we should love our brothers, but HOW we should go about it, and to tell us, he uses another *phileo* word, *philostorgos* (translated by the NIV as *devoted* and by the KJV as *kindly affectioned*). It means the tender kind of love between a parent and child. The kind of love we should have for each other is the kind a mother has for the baby on her knee, the kind that cares for it and worries over it and sacrifices for it and meets its every need. As you look around at each other, that feeling of tender affection should be in your heart for each one. Christian love is not some cold statement, some mechanical giving to others; it is loving them with the same depth of emotional commitment you would give to a child when you whisper, "Daddy loves you!"

2. seeking honor for the other This is the opposite of our nature and what we've been taught. We want to take credit, to be in the limelight, to get recognition, to be honored and esteemed by others. But God says the Christian's actions should be characterized by seeking the recognition and honor for others, deferring to them, letting them be in the limelight.

Now, if we'd learn at the root of all we do to practice these two things, relationship problems would all but disappear! Just think if your children did them!

III. The Christian's Attitudes (11-12) Here Paul gives four attitudes that should characterize all that we do, whether for God or others. We must:

1. be zealous Literally it says, *in zeal not sluggish but burning in spirit, serving the Lord*. The Kless translation reads, *not a lazeball but a fireball*. Your service for God should not be something you do as you get around to it or because "nobody else will" or begrudgingly. Rather it should be like a fire burning, always wanting more fuel, flames reaching higher. There is nothing worse than a lazy servant!

2. be joyful A Christian should be a joyful person. Why? Because he has hope. Hope in the Scripture always points to the return of Christ and the guaranteed future we have with Him. A Christian should not be a grumbler and complainer, a negative cynical person. He should be a person with a deep-seated joy that comes from knowing Jesus Christ and understanding his own future glory!

3. be patient A Christian should be patient under pressure when trouble comes. He should literally *remain* or *abide*, not throw in the towel and quit! Compare 5:3-5. This produces our hope!

4. be prayerful Need I comment on that? A Christian's life should be characterized by prayer, by regular prayer, habitual prayer, faithful prayer.

Just think if we all had the three attributes mentioned, practiced the two axioms as our way of living and had these four attitudes, the church would be heaven on earth! It should be! But then Paul goes on to spell out how these things work out in some concrete actions:

IV. The Christian's Actions (13-16) There are seven key things you should be doing:

1. help your brothers When a brother has a need, we are supposed to be there to help him meet it. Now, that hits you right in the pocketbook! But remember John's words in 1 Jn. 3:17-18. Love means material sacrifice. That's what the early church did!

2. love your strangers *Hospitality* is the compound Greek word *philoxenia* which means *love of strangers*. Now, of course that would include all strangers, but the context here is believers. Hospitality is not having all your Christian buddies over for coffee. That's fun. Hospitality is reaching out to believers that are new, unknown to you and loving them just like those you know well, doing for them what you'd do for close friends!

3. bless your adversaries Remember the context here. Outside enemies seem to come later in verse 17 forward. I think here we have believing adversaries, those who are down on you, who have differences with you, who give you a hard time. Bless them; don't curse them! They are still brothers in Christ. Their lack of love is no excuse for you to be the same way and besides, the Holy Spirit can use it to speak to their hearts!

4. empathize with others I chose *empathize* over *sympathize*. Don't just see them happy and say, "That's nice!" or sad and say, "Too bad". Feel what they feel. Stand in their shoes and rejoice when they rejoice. Share their joy. Go through their suffering with them; cry when they cry. This kind of support does an untold amount of good!

5. harmonize with others Be like-minded. Have a harmony of thinking with other believers. Of course, that's only possible if you concentrate on doing what Phil. 2:2-5 says, *Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus...* It doesn't mean we always have to agree on details, but we should have harmony of goal and purpose and attitude. Do your best to harmonize.

6. socialize with others, not just with people who are like yourself, but with people that are different, with people who dress poorly and color their hair green. Be with people whom you might regard as lowly, with people that may be less intelligent than you are. See Jas. 2:1-9. The NIV's *willing to associate* or the KJV's word *condescend* is literally *be carried away with*, that is, make a point of it; go out of your way to reach out to people like this. Don't be too proud for it!

7. epitomize others Literally it says, *Do not become wise concerning yourselves*. Don't set yourself up as the epitome of what a Christian should be. Epitomize others instead. Find a model out there who's ahead of you in spiritual maturity and epitomize somebody like that rather than yourself. Don't ever think you've "arrived" in spiritual things.

Now I know that's a pretty long list of expectations and a pretty tall order too! But I didn't write it; I just explained it! God wrote it! It's up to you and I to do it. But when we do, when we as a group of believers learn to act like this to each other, then Jn. 13:34-25 will start to come true. Outsiders will see the love we have for each other and recognize that it comes from Jesus Christ and accept Him.

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 12:17-21 "Dear Enemy..."

At verse 17 Paul moves from our relationship to others in the body of Christ to our treatment of enemies, those who do evil to us, those who hurt us or mistreat us or take advantage of us. My assumption is that this is basically dealing with unsaved folks, though from time to time you may have enemies even within the body of Christ, but there you have the Mt. 18 route to follow in getting help from the church. My guess is that few of us think we have any enemies. But we do. They are probably anonymous to us. It might be the business that takes advantage of you by selling you a defective product at an inflated price; it may be those who are standing against the cause of Christ in general and trying to hinder Christianity in its stand against moral evils or humanism like the ACLU or the porn industry. But sooner or later you'll meet one in person, at work, at school or in the neighborhood and then all we study now will hit home! First, Paul lists:

I. Your Perils in Dealing with Enemies (17-18) Dealing with enemies is very dangerous, not so much because of what they might do to you, but because of what they might cause you to do! There are three great dangers:

1. not realizing the character of your reaction The natural human reaction to anything is payback. We do unto others AS they do to us! So, when somebody steals from us, our human nature tells us that, given the opportunity, we should take from them and we feel it is FAIR. But in reality, stealing is not FAIR but EVIL! Two wrongs don't make a right. If you slander me and I know about it, my natural reaction is to slander you. But slander is wrong whether it is done to you or by you! The desire for vengeance tends to cloud our thinking, to lead us to sin and justify ourselves in doing what we would never do otherwise!

2. not thinking how your action will affect others The Greek word for *careful* is interesting; it means "to think ahead". Oftentimes when we are injured by an enemy, we react instead of thinking, thinking, for instance, that others are watching, that others see our life. Unsaved people see our life. If others see us do evil and take vengeance, what a blot it puts on the name of Christ that we bear! If we don't watch out, Satan can use an enemy to cause us to do lots of damage!

3. not seeking to live in peace God's goal for us is to be able to have a peaceful relationship with all men. The danger is that we may allow a hurt to fester and become a grudge and deliberately throw out the goal! Now, Paul recognizes:

a. it may not be possible It may be the enemy will not allow it, that they will always make trouble for you, however:

b. you are responsible for your part If any portion of the responsibility for creating a peaceful relationship falls to you, if there's anything you can do to make it happen, then you are responsible to do it! It may mean apologizing for something or doing an act of kindness, but the danger is in giving up and being party to the strife that separates you!

II. Your Premise in Dealing with Enemies (19) In everything you do, you operate from some basic premise and in this area, you have a very clear one:

1. justice is God's province The words *revenge* and *avenge* have a very bad meaning to us. But both words in Greek are compounds of the noun *dike* which means *justice*. God is not talking about a selfish kind of getting even; He is talking about the doing of justice, about a person getting the just punishment for the offense he has committed. And justice is God's realm; it belongs to Him and here's why:

a. He is the offended party David knew it and prayed so in Ps. 51, *Against thee, thee only have I sinned...* It is not simply that your enemy has done something to hurt you; he has broken the moral law of God, just as a criminal has not only injured the victim, but broken the law of the land. Therefore, the judge must mete out the penalty of the law. So, it is really God's place as the offended party, the upholder of the Law, to mete out punishment; it is not up to you to do it for yourself! Further:

b. He is the only qualified Judge The saddest part about personal revenge is that it is blind; it doesn't look at the facts. Besides, only God knows all the facts, all the intents of the heart, all the hidden circumstances. There may be things involved in that enemy's action toward you that would totally change your reaction if you knew them. God is the only one qualified to give out just punishment and believe me:

2. He will see that it is carried out He says, "I WILL repay!" Look where Paul quotes this from, Deut. 32:35. This is a prophecy looking ahead to the Tribulation and Millennium, about how God will repay those who hurt Israel. But the key thought is not carried over to Romans, *IN DUE TIME*. We want justice now; God says "in My time". It may not be until after death, but be sure of this: the Judge of all the earth WILL do right; He will repay! So:

3. you must not try to take it from Him Don't steal His place; leave Him the room to do it. Don't try to be what you cannot be by avenging yourself. David had his enemy Saul lying asleep at his feet; his man had a spear in his hand ready to kill him. But David said, *As surely as the Lord lives, the Lord Himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die or he will go into battle and perish...* David said, "As much as he's hurt me and is trying even now to kill me, justice belongs to God and God will take care of it in due time; I will not try to usurp His place!" So exactly what are you to do when you have an enemy? Simply avoid him as much as possible and try to coexist?

III. Your Position in Dealing with Enemies (20-21) Here God lines out for you your course of action!

1. your action: do good Don't just evade; do good to your enemies. Jesus taught that very thing, *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*. Here Paul spells it out. He says to meet your enemy's needs. If he's hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him drink. I might add, if he's stranded by the road, help him. If he's sick, take him a meal. If he has problems, try to help however you can. Find out what his needs are and love him by trying in positive ways to meet them! Don't sit back and figure he deserves it! Maybe he does, but that's God's realm; yours is to love him like God loved you when you were His enemy!

2. your reason: Now we have to cope with that famous passage about the coals of fire which is a quote from Solomon in Prov. 25:21-22. What does it mean?

a. not vengeance What it looks like is, "Keep doing good to him and it compounds his judgment; get your vengeance through doing good." But that is totally inconsistent with the context of both passages. Now, one obvious reason is:

b. to produce repentance Hopefully the enemy will be won over by love and become a friend, if not become a believer! Some commentaries note that the Egyptians centuries earlier had a ritual of repentance that involved carrying a pan of hot coals on the head as a symbol of sorrow over misdoing. Whether Solomon knew about that or not, I don't know, but the thought fits nicely. Christianity has always striven to convert its enemies; Paul himself was a converted enemy! But the bottom line reason is:

c. to show obedience The part Paul doesn't quote is, *the Lord will reward you!* For what? Obedience! For doing what He says to do whether you feel like it or not! Actually, the words *in doing this* are not in the Hebrew. The Greek translators added them and Paul retained them. Heaping coals of fire is probably a reference to the custom of starting a fire from borrowed coals (there were no matches) and Orientals often carry things on the head. If one would heap coals in the pan, then some would surely be alive by the time the person got home to start his fire. I think the meaning is, "If your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give drink; if he needs fire, HEAP coals in a pan and give them to him; don't be stingy!" That is obedience and the Lord will reward it!

3. your admonition: don't let evil conquer you Instead, you conquer it by continuing to do good! *Overcome* is the Greek word for *conquer*. There is a battle going on, but it is not the outward one between your enemy and you. It is a spiritual one. Don't let evil conquer you by causing you to sin and try to take personal vengeance. Instead, you conquer evil by continually going out of your way to do good to your enemies and then leave the results to God!

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 13:1-7 Taxation Without Hesitation

Paul now moves into another area of the Christian's relationships: the Christian and the government. Now remember first, that Paul is writing to believers in Rome, the capital city of the world, the seat from which world government was exercised. There was a constant intrigue and power struggle connected with the emperorship and plots against the government were common. In fact, the emperor of the day was none other than Nero, who in another five years or so would set up the first wholesale Roman persecution of Christians, trying to blame them for the burning of Rome and remove suspicion from himself. Nero started out pretty fairly in his reign but after a few years yielded to low passions and was engaged in immorality, homosexuality, and murders! How should a Christian relate to government and especially to one like this? Should we bring about the Kingdom of God with force of arms and join in rebellion against such wicked governments? This may well become a real issue for us some day. There is growing interference of government in religion today. Some day we may face the question in a real way, "Can I be subject to a government which is so unjust?" Paul lays down a rule:

I. The Rule of Subjection to Authority (1) We are to be subject to higher authorities, especially in this case, the government, but not limited to government alone. There is a family authority structure in the home. There is a spiritual authority structure in the church. There is a social authority structure in the nation. And wherever we fall in those authority structures, we are to be subject to the authority that is over us, whether it be parents or elders or policemen and government officials! And what it means is obeying their laws, the rules of the house, the teaching of the elders, or the laws of the land! Notice two specific things here:

1. everyone is under authority There is a tendency born in us to think that we are the exception. The rules apply to everyone but us! No, each of us is subject to the authorities that are over us and we have a duty to obey them.

2. subjection is a voluntary act We must submit ourselves. God does not say, "Disobey until you are caught or forced to obey." He says voluntarily obey! Compare 1 Jn. 3:4 which says, *sin is lawlessness*. The Greek word *anomia* means acting as if there were no law, no authority. The spirit of resisting established authority is at the root of all sin. That's why Satan fell and where Adam and Eve went wrong. It is now our nature to rebel against authority. But for the sake of God, we have to voluntarily place ourselves under our authorities by obeying. Now there are three things this does NOT mean. It doesn't mean that:

a. we should not use legal opportunities to improve our government and laws or protest injustice We're free to vote, to write letters, or to protest abortion or other injustices.

b. we should not remove ourselves from under an oppressive authority We are free to quit our job or flee a country.

c. we should disobey God We must always obey Him above any earthly authority. Compare Acts 4:19, 5:29.

II. The Reasons for Subjection to Authority (5) This verse gives us two reasons why we should obey authorities and summarizes verses 1-4. They are conscience and punishment. We need to have:

1. a holy conviction of the necessity We obey because we are convinced in our hearts that it is the right thing to do before God. Here is why:

a. all authority is of God (1b) The Greek word is *exousia* which means *authority*. God is a God of order; He established authority in the universe beginning with Himself and then among men. He invented the concept of rightful authority. God is in fact the author of human government, the basis of which was given to Noah and family when they got off the ark. God told them that mankind was to police his ranks and punish the shedding of blood. So, positions of authority like ruler, president, or parent, or elder, are God-established positions. Further:

b. those in authority are God-ordained it is not just the positions, but the people in those positions who are God's instruments. That applies to whoever is there! You may say, "What about evil rulers?" Well, take the case of cases. In the Tribulation a vile wicked man will very nearly rule the world and will persecute Jews and Christians mercilessly. Yet the fact that he will rule is part of God's ordained and predicted plan! I heard a Chinese believer say, "God closed China's door. Mao was God's instrument!" So, we are not only to obey good men, but to submit to the authority of all who hold it! So:

c. to resist authority is to resist God (2) If authority is God's and if God superintends who gets into authority, then to resist and disobey the authority is to disobey God and is sin, which the Christian is never to do deliberately and:

d. to resist authority is to bring judgment God chastens disobedient believers! Usually by that very authority which they disobey! Parents discipline disobedient kids. If you cheat on your taxes, sooner or later God is liable to see that the IRS audits you!

2. a healthy fear of the penalty Now, conscience should be the primary reason for obedience but fear of punishment doesn't hurt either! Here Paul examines:

a. the ministry of rulers (3-4) Twice he says that rulers are God's servants; they serve a special purpose in the plan of God and it is two-fold:

(1) to promote good To do good things for those who do good. To provide incentive for people to do right! And conversely:

(2) to punish evil, even to the extent of the sword, that is, death! Government is what God instituted to prevent the world from becoming as wicked as it was before the flood. Government and authority in general is what keeps man's sin nature from running rampant, resulting in total anarchy and degradation. Imagine if there were no laws and no police, what would happen! Even the worst of government is better than no government at all in the long run.

b. the message for you

(1) you will be rewarded for doing good, at least under any normal government. In most countries you will be praised and justified for doing what is right and good in most cases, for honesty, hard work, caring, and so on.

(2) you will be punished for doing evil If you do what is evil, the government will punish you. And that is only right. You should not be able to steal and get away with it or hurt someone and get by with it. So, be obedient and do good and you won't normally have to worry! Have a healthy fear of being disobedient!

III. The Range of Subjection to Authority (6-7) Now, just what areas does this cover? Paul says broadly, *To all their due!* You have debts and obligations that you owe in various realms; be sure to meet all of them. Then he spells out four specific examples:

1. tribute The word here means taxes levied on a subject nation, like those Rome levied on her conquered provinces. In this respect the Boston tea party to protest the tea tax was not exactly a biblical idea! If we're ever conquered and a tax is levied on us, pay it! If you're ever under a foreign government, obey it!

2. revenue means taxes for the support of the civil government. The whole rationale for taxes is in verse 6. Rulers do God's job and are entitled to support from the people. Tax evasion is not just a crime but a sin!

3. fear The NIV word *respect* is literally *fear*. We are only told to fear six times in the New Testament and every time it relates to God. Compare 1 Pet. 2:17, Mt. 10:28. I suspect this verse is almost like, *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's!* Pay your taxes to the government and give to God the holy awe, respect, and obedience that is due to Him above all others!

4. honor Here we have the respect due to men, to the king, the president, a parent, or whoever. Give to those in authority the proper respect that goes with it.

In short, authority applies to everyone and to everything, from taxes to registering for the draft, to the speed limit, to littering, to copyright laws, even to creel limits on fishing. We don't like to hear it and we all violate it from time to time, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not. But let's try together to be more careful, even in some of these little things, not only because it is right but because of the wonderful testimony it will be for Jesus Christ!

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 13:8-14 On Loving Your Neighbor

Since 12:1 Paul has talked about our relationship with God, with fellow believers, with enemies, and with the government. Here he proceeds to talk about how we should relate to our neighbor. Now, the question you're tempted to ask is, "Well, he's covered everybody from other Christians to enemies, just who is my neighbor?" Doesn't that ring a bell? Somebody asked Jesus that once when He had started talking about neighbors and to answer it, He told the parable of the Good Samaritan to make the point that your neighbor is anyone you come in contact with who needs you. They may be saved or unsaved; you may know them or not know them; they may live close to you or far away from you. The NIV translates well the term as *fellow man*. Paul is going to tell us how to relate to other people in general, who are not specifically our brethren in the local church nor our enemies, but just anybody who crosses our path. And he tells us that we have two very major responsibilities to every person who comes into our lives. The first is to:

I. Love Him (8-10) Here Paul harks back to the words of Jesus, *Love one another!* and to the words from Leviticus which Jesus used to sum up the Law, *Love thy neighbor as thyself*. If you could read Greek, you would notice that the word used here for *love* is the same word that was used back in 12:9 about our brothers in Christ, *agape*. We are to love all people with the same kind of love, the sacrificial, giving, committed love that God had in sending His Son. It is not that you love your brothers and sisters more than others. For them you add to your *agape* some *philadelphia*, that special attachment to family members. But the base line of all our human relationships is to be *agape* love, the love of God. Why?

1. it is a debt we owe him (8a) This verse is not a prohibition against borrowing money. The NIV does better than the KJV which says, *Owe no man anything*. *Debt* is one form of *what you owe* in verse 7 and continues the thought. Some people you owe taxes, some you owe honor, and all of them you owe love! The Bible never prohibits borrowing; it only cautions against it (Prov. 22:7). It simply says to pay what you owe on time. But the debt here is not money, but love and it is an outstanding debt, an eternal debt, one you are always owing and can never pay off. And you owe it, not because others have loved you back, but because God has said so! He has declared you an eternal debtor to Him for what He has done for you, but He has assigned payment on that debt to others! And since you could never begin to pay back the love you owe Him, your love debt to others is infinite! You can never say, "I quit! I've done my part!"

2. it is a duty we owe God (8b-10) It is not only a natural response to God's love, but a command that God has given us. Now Paul looks back to the Law of Moses, specifically to the 10 commandments and especially to those that concern others. And he says it is clear that God has a specific way in mind that we are to treat others and:

a. love is the summation of all duties If you had to list every "don't" about expected behavior, the list would get mighty long. And if you check the Old Testament, it makes a pretty good attempt at it! But there would always be some other "don't" that would be missed. Moses could never have written, "Don't let the air out of your neighbor's tires" or "Don't become a surrogate mother!" So, the command to love your neighbor sums up all the duties, because verse 10 says that love works NO harm to a neighbor. So, you may be pleasing God by avoiding all the "don'ts" you know of, but the real duty is to love. Yet love is more:

b. love is the consummation of all duties It is the fulfillment of the law. The same Greek word is found in Col. 2:9 which says that in Christ dwelt all the *fullness* of the Godhead (*pleroma*). Love is more than a short form for all the specific duties we have; it is the fulfillment, the final end result, what the law was meant to produce in our lives. We are no longer bound to obey the Law with all its don'ts, but we have a duty to God to do far more, to fulfill the Law by demonstrating the love for others that it never could produce! Now the second responsibility we have to our fellow man is to:

II. Live Before Him (11-14) Consider this section as a whole. Now Paul is going to spell out some specific kinds of behavior for us. And the thought is that we not only need to love our neighbor, but we need to live before him. We not only act TOWARDS him but IN FRONT OF him. And here's why:

1. our motive (11-12a) Jesus Christ is coming again! We have to know what time it is! In life, you don't know how to act unless you're aware what time it is and what is next on the schedule. So it is spiritually. The next event is the return of Christ and that means three things:

a. the danger of oversleeping Why is it dangerous? For the same reason it's dangerous to oversleep in the morning; you don't get done what needs done. If you oversleep spiritually and fail to live a godly life before others and be a testimony to them, it may not get done before Jesus comes. And I needn't remind you of:

b. the passing of time It goes so fast. It seems just yesterday we were children or young marrieds or our children were kids. And the older we get the more we are impressed that time is passing. Even though we don't know the day or the hour when Christ will come, there is one thing we know; it's nearer today than when we first got saved. It's nearer today than last year, than yesterday. Time to work is passing; opportunity is constantly being shortened. And what we are really seeing is:

c. the drawing near of Christ's return The *night* is this age; the *day* is the age to come. The day is drawing near. It is approaching fast. The Bible never says it will be tomorrow, but always that it is drawing near swiftly and will arrive suddenly. Before we are ready for it, the trumpet will sound and we will meet Christ. And that should make us remember our duty to live right moment by moment! Now what is:

2. our method (12b-14) How are we to go about living this Christian life before our watching neighbors? Paul gives a two-fold principle: Put on and put off. The same principle is found in Eph. 4:22-24 and Col. chapter 3. We must by God's power eliminate ungodly habits and actions from our lives and replace them with godly ones. First, he says:

a. put off dark deeds, deeds that belong to darkness, to unbelief. In verse 14 he spells it out as *gratifying your flesh*. Don't even think about how to gratify those illicit desires that come from your flesh. They are inconsistent with your new life in Christ. And he spells some of them out in three categories:

(1) behavioral inconsistencies The NIV term *orgies* is better the NAS words *carousing and drunkenness*. Carousing is the behavior that results from the drunkenness. Getting drunk or stoned on drugs and the loose behavior it causes must be put away; they are inconsistent with a godly life.

(2) sexual inconsistencies The word *immorality* is literally *going to bed* (that's where KJV gets *chambering*). It means adultery and fornication. *Debauchery* is shameless conduct; the word is used in 2 Pet. 2:7 of the way of life in Sodom and includes all other kinds of sexual perversion. These things must be put away; they are inconsistent with godly living.

(3) social inconsistencies *Dissension* means arguing and fighting. And you know what jealousy is. There is no room for these either. All of these things are inconsistent. When we do them, the watching neighbor is prevented from seeing Jesus in us and may be lost. What we must do rather is to:

b. put on the armor of light which is identified for us in verse 14 as the Lord Jesus Christ! It is the same Greek word you would use to put on your coat. We must cover ourselves with Him, wrap ourselves with Him, let Him fill our lives until love floods every human relationship we have and the life we live shows Him to our neighbors.

During the Korean war, a lady and a two year old child were walking down the road. An enemy patrol threw a grenade on to the road. Just before it exploded the mother threw herself in front of the child. It exploded and as she lay dying, she said, "Don't worry son, Jesus will take care of you." Later an American patrol came by and one of the men saw the boy crying over his mother. He took his hand and said, "Why don't you come with me; I'll take care of you." The little boy looked up and his eyes got wide with wonder. He asked, "Are you Jesus?" As far as this world is concerned, we are! Are you loving your neighbor and that means living a Jesus-filled life before him?

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 14 When Brothers Disagree

In chapters 12-13 Paul has been talking about the Christian's relationships. Chapter 14 he devotes to the very special area of how we should act when we disagree with our brothers in Christ on debatable things. Now, please be clear that as in 1 Cor. 8-10, we are not talking about issues clearly proclaimed as sinful by the Bible. Paul uses the eating of meat and the observing of special days as his examples. When it comes to issues like these, where sincere Christians differ in their opinions, there are three major principles we must follow:

I. We Must Give Reception (1-3) We must genuinely accept those who disagree with us on these things and regard them as fellow believers. We must fellowship with them and not, Paul says, with the purpose of deciding their conduct. Sometimes we receive others on false premises, not to accept them as sincere followers of Christ, but to make them like us or to argue them into our point of view. Rather, we must recognize that Christians are all at varying levels of understanding and maturity and therefore:

1. we must not look down on the "weaker" Here's a man who won't eat meat (probably because he's afraid some of it might have been offered to idols). We look at him and call him a "weaker" brother because he doesn't know what we know. We're not to treat him with contempt, to mock and scorn him. We all say "Amen" to that, but then I say that over here is a man who believes the KJV is the only Bible, that women should never wear pants, that boys' hair must be cut at a certain length. How do you feel about him? There is to be no looking down.

2. we must not condemn the "stronger" Sometimes we'll find the shoe on the other foot. Another Christian does something I just wouldn't feel the liberty to do. He is, in this case, the "stronger" brother. Boy, my natural reaction is to condemn him, to point out his action as a sin and his walk as hypocritical. You see:

3. God has accepted all of us in Christ We're not trying to dabble in sin and get away with things. We're both sincerely trying to please Christ and God loves us as His children and uses us because we're saved!

II. We Must Understand Responsibility (4-12) We are all servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and we must know that:

1. a servant is accountable to his own master (4) A household servant is not out to please the guests, but the master. An employee stands or falls in the eyes of his boss, not others. If you come into the office and tell my secretary to do something but I have her doing something else, who is she accountable to? We have no business judging someone else's servants, judging other believers. They must answer to God. In fact:

2. we must each do our best to please God (5-9) Each of us must determine the best we can how to please our Master. You see:

a. we are to live to God not ourselves We are servants who belong to God. Our lives should be lived unto Him. The goal of our lives should be to please Him. We do not live to ourselves; we are not the ones who will grade our own lives. If we did, we'd all think we were just perfect the way we are. It is not us we must please, but Him. And to do that:

b. we must do everything in faith (22-23) We must do everything in complete confidence that it is pleasing to God. If there is the slightest doubt about doing this or that, then don't do it, because to you it is sin and you would feel yourself to be sinning. And if the goal of your life is pleasing God, that's contrary. You don't want to do anything that would displease God in any way, so WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T! And here's why:

3. we will all stand Christ's judgment (10-12) Every servant has a day of reckoning, a day of giving account, a day when the Master looks at the finished work and sees whether he's done what he was told. And we too, all of us, Presbyterian and Baptist and independent, narrow-minded and broad-minded alike, will stand at Christ's judgment seat. If you can find fault with your brother, just think how well God knows you and all the fault He can find with you! You see, I am not responsible to make every Christian be like me. I am responsible to please God. So is the other. I have to give account and a critical spirit is not one of the things I want on my record! If we think of that day, we might be a little humbler now!

III. We Must Practice Restraint (13-21) Here is the same principle spelled out in 1 Cor. 8. In verse 13 we have:

1. the principle stated (13) Our responsibility is not to judge whether others are stumbling, but to make sure that we do not cause any brother to stumble. We are not to become a stumbling block, not to do anything which will cause our brother to regress spiritually or to fall into sin. The most important thing is not that we look at others to see what they do, but to look at ourselves to see how what we do affects others.

2. the principle explained (14-19) Now he spells out what he means fully. First, he wants us to:

a. understand real versus esteemed uncleanness (14) *No food* is literally *nothing*. Nothing is unclean of itself. There are no clean and unclean foods like the Jews had. There are no sacred and non-sacred days, no clean and unclean people. (NOTE: He is not talking about directly mentioned sins here, but non-moral actions.) Yet, if a person feels something like that is wrong, then for him it is! If he feels that mowing the lawn on Sunday is wrong, then for him it is. If he feels all dancing is sinful, for him it is. The key here is not enforcing my personal estimation on others as reality! So, those things which we don't consider wrong, can actually be wrong to others, and we want to be careful not to coerce others into doing that which is wrong for them! Paul has three don't's for us:

b. don't do what will harm others (15) Even if you have perfect personal freedom to do it before the Lord, if it will harm somebody else, if it will prove spiritually detrimental or mar their spiritual lives, don't do it.

c. don't do what others will speak evil of (16) He's not saying here to go around and try to prove your case and teach everybody that your liberty is not evil but good. Just the opposite. Don't do something that in itself might be fine, but you know it will be evil-spoken-of by others, that it will give them occasion to condemn you. That does not help anyone.

d. don't major on minors (17-19), which is really what all this is. The Kingdom of God is not all about what you eat or drink or wear or watch or how you dress or what you enjoy. It is about spiritual matters. Those things are very unimportant compared to having the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit and a righteous life. Don't major on minors as so many of our fundamental brethren do. Instead, major on building up, on edifying, looking for ways to build others up!

3. the principle summarized (20-21) Put God's work in the lives of others first. Don't ruin what God is doing for the sake of a small thing like food. Do nothing that will cause anyone to stumble. It seems to me that the best summary of the whole case is in verse 22a and it is the one thing we have most ignored in Christianity. We should keep our opinions on debatable things primarily between us and God and not broadcast them to others and cause controversy. Instead, we have often nailed them to our doorposts and brought divisions between ourselves!

Two goats met one another on a narrow plank across a river. If they were human beings, they would have argued about who had the right to pass and who should jump off and get wet. But the goats figured out all by themselves how one could help the other and at the same time help himself. One lay down and let the other leap over it! That's the attitude we must have in debatable things with our brothers. We must lay down our rights and let them pass so that both of us will be better off for it.

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 15:1-13 Principles For Christian Living

This portion of chapter 15 is really a continuation of chapter 14. There Paul talked about how to act when we disagree with each other on minor issues. Now he proceeds to give us five general principles for our Christian lives together. The first one is:

I. Bearing With One Another (1-3) Dare I say "Putting up with one another?" You see, spiritual strength is not in how much you know scripturally or how clearly you understand what the Bible teaches and can prove it. The really strong believer is the one who can bear with the failings of the weaker brethren in love, the one who can put up with their immaturity and inexperience and lack of knowledge and care for them and bless them anyway! There are three aspects to this:

1. not pleasing ourselves One clear mark of maturity is not insisting on your own way, not always looking to get what you want or enforce your thinking. And, of course, Christ is our ultimate example in this. He, the very Wisdom of God, the Lord of all, did not seek to please Himself, to do what He preferred. He lived a life and died a death of sacrifice, of bearing with, and so must we.

2. pleasing our neighbor That doesn't mean we always do everything others want, but that we try to do what is best for them, that which will cause them to be edified or built up in the long run. Your bearing with some brother's scruples and giving up some of your own liberty will be an example and testimony to him in the long run, rather than arguing and insisting on your own way. And it is also:

3. pleasing God, which is the most important thing of all. Paul quotes the prophecy of Ps. 69:7-9, saying that Christ endured suffering and scorn for the sake of the Father and for the good of others. It was true during His ministry. Verse 9a has a particular fulfillment in the cleansing the Temple and the rebuff He got for that. and of course, the ultimate fulfillment was the cross and the mocking crowd which jeered at Him, but He pleased God and stayed there! If Christ lived and died, not to please Himself, but to please God and to benefit others and had to endure suffering to that extent, then we ought to do the same and be willing to endure and bear with our weaker brethren in some of these minor matters! I thank God for how people in my churches have loved me and put up with me as I grew and learned and maybe insisted on some unimportant things and gave me room to grow! We must do that for others!

II. Learning Through the Scriptures (4) Now Paul talks about what he has just done in using the Scriptures to encourage us. The Bible can play a real part in our endurance of things. Compare 5:3-5. The process of life is that suffering produces perseverance which produces character which produces hope. Through suffering we learn patient endurance which molds our character which gives us a confident trust in God for our future. Now the Bible plays a role in this process alongside of our life experiences in two ways:

1. the Bible is our paraclete It is the encouragement of the Scriptures that helps us to endure. The word *encouragement* is literally *paraclete*, the same word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit. It means one called alongside to help. When trouble comes, we turn to the Word of God and there we see men and women of God who have endured suffering before us and we are encouraged to follow their example and endure. We see the precious promises of God and the love of God and are strengthened to endure.

2. the Bible is our hope-builder The end result of the Scriptures is that we get hope, a confident assurance that God has always kept His people and He will keep us too; our future is in His hands. We look at the Bible and it builds our confidence to endure. So, the principle that Paul is teaching is: read it, search it for encouragement and example, and make it a part of your life!

III. Uniting With Our Brethren (5-6) Not only are we to bear with them, but we are to have a spirit of unity, a singleness of mind and heart. Now, notice four things about our unity:

1. it is granted by God Paul prays God will grant it; it is not something we work up ourselves by simply trying to be alike. As God works in each life and conforms us to be more like Him, we are drawn to be more like each other. We need to pray for this too and ask God to make it work in our own lives.

2. it is toward one another It is among ourselves; between brethren. It only works in the context of all parties being believers.

3. it is according to Christ That is, following His example. Here is our part. The more we follow the example of Christ and work at reproducing His attitude and values in ourselves, the more we become like each other.

4. it is a unity of purpose It is not an identity of thinking or speech. It is a unity of goal and life purpose, to glorify God. We may have differing ideas and thoughts on how to go about it, but if our end goal is the same, to glorify God, then we will have a tremendous unity in spite of all our differences. If we have the same heart, our mouths will follow!

IV. Receiving One Another (7-12) We must accept one another regardless of our differences, our race, background, or anything else. We must receive one another on the basis of our faith in Christ as Savior. Now in this, of course, we have:

1. Christ our example Paul quotes Ps. 18:49, Deut. 32:43, Ps. 117:1, and Is. 11:1,10, all in a string, to prove the point which I'll try to simplify about Christ:

a. He belonged to the Jews He came in fulfillment of God's promise to the Jews; He was first and foremost the Jewish Messiah, the Savior of Israel. He had to do that; the promise was made. But:

b. He received the Gentiles by grace They were without God in the world, Ephesians tells us. They had no hope; they were strangers to God's covenants of promise. God didn't have to accept and save them. And remember, **THEM IS US!** God was under no obligation to accept us, to provide salvation for us. He didn't have to save anybody. But He did. In love and grace, He reached out and received those who were different, those who were lost and hopeless. And the Scriptures bear abundant testimony in every part, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, that God would accept the Gentiles by His grace. Now, the point is that if God accepted us:

2. we must receive those who differ If God would receive us poor lost Gentiles and accept us just like we are without making us become Jews first, then we need to practice grace like that and receive those among us who differ in much smaller ways! We need to receive them regardless of their background, their income, the way they dress, whether they talk too much or too little. If we have a singleness of heart, then we must accept each other and seek to edify each other. Verse 7 tells us this is what causes people to praise God. When we bite and devour each other and fight within our ranks as Christians, the world sits back and says "I don't want that!"

V. Being Filled With Hope (13) God wants us to have a certain confidence about the future. He wants to fill us with an unspeakable joy and a peace that passes understanding. And those things will give us a sure confidence about our future. The only requirement I see in the verse is, *as you trust Him*, that is, as we keep on trusting Him. And as we do, He will not only fill us with hope, but make us overflow with it! We'll overflow with the certainty that He's in control and our future is secure. And since we know that, we can endure anything. We can bear with each other and put up with our differences. We can endure the guff we get from the world, all because we know it will be worth it all when we see Jesus!

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 15:14-33 A Missionary Heart

At verse 14 Paul turns to a more personal level of writing as he concludes his letter to Rome. The pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my* now appear regularly. And what we really have is a glimpse into the heart of a missionary in the midst of his work. I think there are two ways in which we can apply this section to ourselves: 1) we can learn something about the missionaries that we support and how they think and how to pray for them and 2) we can get a missionary heart for ourselves. We can take Paul's spiritual values and make them our own. The text divides easily into three sections.

I. Paul's Missionary Principles (14-22) The first thing you see is Paul's explanation of:

1. his position (14-16) He is an apostle, **THE** apostle to the Gentiles. He wants them to know that He writes with that kind of authority to them, even though he has never been there. They don't know him; they have never met him, yet he wants them to accept his letter as from God and heed it and prepare for him to visit later. Then he shares what makes him tick:

2. his purpose (17-18) In summary, it is to glorify God the Father and Christ Jesus. A missionary heart has no room for pride. It has no room for looking back at its own accomplishments and thinking, "My, look at what I have done!" A missionary heart knows Gal. 2:20, *Yet not I, but Christ lives in me*. Christ does the work; I am but a channel of blessing, an empty vessel He uses and fills for His purpose. What makes you tick?

3. his past Now we see three principles that have governed his ministry as we have it recorded for us in Acts. He ministered:

a. in every way (18b-19a) He ministered by what he said; he was always preaching and teaching and writing to his churches. He ministered by what he did; he was stoned and shipwrecked but he got up and went on. His behavior testified of his faith. He ministered by the power of God through him in signs and wonders. God used him to heal the sick and raise the dead. God did special things through him, but the point is that Paul used every available way to reach others. Do you? Do you take advantage of the opportunities God sends your way, of the talents you have?

b. to everywhere (19b) He had been from Jerusalem all thru Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, all the way to Illyricum (the province next to Italy itself). Paul didn't see the world with blinders on. He didn't see just his own area. His heart was concerned for the world. Is yours?

c. to everyone (20-22) His heart was stirred for those who had never heard. He wanted them to hear too. He didn't want to duplicate efforts, to repeat the work of others and forget about those who had never heard the first time. His heart was concerned for lost people and especially those who were really lost!

II. Paul's Missionary Plans (23-29) Paul's plans were built on his principles. He spells out what he hopes to do and it is summed up in three places that we too have to be concerned about:

1. Spain - the regions beyond (23-24a) Spain was the longing of Paul's heart. Every place else had heard. The eastern Mediterranean had heard, Rome had heard. He wanted to go beyond, to Spain. We need a heart that longs to reach the unreached! But that was not Paul's only longing:

2. Rome - the established field (24) Did he just want to visit and vacation there? Look back at 1:11-13; he wanted to feed, fellowship, and have fruit among them! He wanted to build the saints. It was not enough to win converts. He wanted to make disciples and grow them into workers for Christ! And we must long for that too! But Paul could not forget:

3. Jerusalem - the home base (25-28) He was enroute there from Corinth as he wrote. He was taking an offering that had been collected in Greece among the Gentile churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem. He wanted to minister to the needs of the home base as well. Every missionary ought to be concerned for their home church; we ought to be as well, whether in a material way like this or a spiritual way. This offering would do more than help the poor; it would cement the Jew and Gentile churches together. See 2 Cor. 9:12-13. It was a spiritual thing. Paul wanted spiritual growth at home too! We must have a balanced vision like his: the regions beyond, the established fields, and the home base. All are important. And as every missionary knows, nothing of this can be accomplished apart from prayer so we have:

III. Paul's Missionary Petition (30-33) This is Paul's "prayer letter" to his Roman supporters. And in it he tells them:

1. how to pray (30) Two things are noteworthy here. First is the word *struggle* which is the Greek word *agonizo*. Paul wanted them in their praying to agonize, to struggle, to wrestle. He wanted their prayer to be sincere and fervent and deep, not simply "God bless Paul!" Then there is the word *join*. When they prayed, they joined Paul. Missionary work is not done alone. It is co-laboring. It is a joint work of prayer and deeds. When we pray, we labor together with those who work. But Paul gets specific:

2. what to pray (31-32) There are three things he wants prayer for and they are the same for all missionaries:

a. for protection He wanted prayer to be kept from unbelievers. He knew it was dangerous to go to Jerusalem, but it was dangerous anywhere for him, it seems!

b. for effectiveness Some folks don't want the good that you're trying to do for them. Paul wants prayer to be received by those he ministers to, especially the Christians! He wants to be effective!

c. for direction He wanted to go to Rome and be refreshed, but only by God's will, or Lord willing! He wanted God's direction in the next step.

Protection, effectiveness, direction. These are the very things our missionaries need, the very basics of our prayer life for them. All three of those requests were answered but not quite as Paul planned. Paul was delivered from the Jews (by being put under arrest!); the offering was accepted, and he did get to Rome (2 years later in chains!) God doesn't always do exactly what we ask, but He does what is best for that one we pray for! Do you have a missionary heart? A heart that longs for the lost? Are you a missionary co-laborer, a prayer warrior for those who labor? You can be! God would like to shape you that way if you'll let Him.

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 16:1-16 A List Forgotten

Almost nobody studies Romans 16. It is usually summarily dismissed as Paul's conclusion and personal greetings. But it is far more than that! It is an invaluable record of quite a few people who were Christians just like you, but who lived 2000 years ago. They lived in a different age and a different culture and under different conditions, but they were saved just like you are and lived godly lives just like you do. That's an awesome thing to think about! The relationship I have with Jesus Christ is just as real and vital today as it was then! Let's first see:

I. Who These Names Are Now the record is not detailed; in fact, it's rather sparse. Yet, by each name Paul mentions one key thing that he remembered most about that person:

1. Phoebe (1-2) - a protector She was the one evidently carrying this letter to Rome and the Roman Christians were to receive and help her. She is from Cenchrea, the seaport town of Corinth, where Paul wrote from. She was a *servant* of the church which in the Greek may be the same as *deacon*, so she may be a deaconess? But the thing Paul notes about her is that she has been a great help to many, literally a *protectress*, a patron who has looked out for the welfare of others. She was evidently a woman of some influence or wealth and not afraid to use it to help the brethren. Do you know any people like that who give to meet the needs of others, who step in and do what they can?

2. Priscilla and Aquila (3-5a) - tentmakers These are Paul's old Jewish friends who met him at Corinth and worked with him (Acts 18:1-3) and indeed risked their lives for him. The thing to note is *the church in their house*. Compare 1 Cor. 16:19. In Corinth the church met with them and now they are back in Rome, their original home, and have a church there. They are true tentmakers, not simply by trade, but wherever they went they planted a church in their

home! They used their home and business as a place where sinners were converted and saints were discipled. Do you know any people like that whose homes are given over for God's use?

3. Epenetus (5b) - a responder He was an early convert of Paul's, now in Rome. Paul remembers how he was the first to respond in Asia, how eager and ready he was, his desire to know spiritual truth, how he willingly opened his heart to the Lord without waiting to see if any others would stand with him. Do you know any people like that?

4. Mary (6), Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis (12) - hard workers Four women are greeted in this list, all with this same description. I have a feeling he's not talking about housework and child-raising. Verse 6 says *for you*. Compare Phil. 4:3. They were witnesses and prayer warriors! And they worked hard at bringing others to know Christ. Do you know any people like that who really put their all into serving Christ?

5. Andronicus and Junicus (7) - sufferers These two were relatives, probably meaning fellow Jews, and noteworthy ones too. They had been saved before Paul was and seem to be referred to as apostles, just as Barnabas and Silas were elsewhere. If so, then they were probably in the work of church planting like Paul, but at any rate, at some point (unknown to us) Paul had spent time in prison with them. They suffered for their faith and for their labor for Christ. They went to jail rather than quit or recant. They endured it and continued on undaunted. Do you know any people like that who stand up for Christ in the face of opposition?

6. Ampliatus (8) and Stachys (9b) - beloved friends Here were two that Paul literally *loved*. They were special friends to him. Why, we don't know. Perhaps they were people who had shared and prayed with him closely, personal confidants. At any rate, a love like that of David and Jonathan had grown up between them, a selfless caring, sweeter than even romance. Do you know any people like that whom you just love specially for some reason?

7. Urbanus (9) - a helper A fellow worker is one who works with you, that is, a helper. Urbanus had been a real helper to Paul at some point. Thank God for people like this. I don't know what I'd do without people like this who are always there to lend a hand whenever needed. Do you know any people like that?

8. Apelles (10) - a perseverer We don't know what the testing was, but Apelles stood it! Probably it was a long hard trial or a series of many. Others would, like Job's wife, have cursed God and given up. Apelles remained true through thick and thin, demonstrating the reality of his faith. Do you know any people like that who endure physical suffering, personal loss, tragedy and yet stand true?

9. households of Aristobulus and Narcissus (10b,11b) Two households are mentioned here. Narcissus is unknown. Aristobulus may be the grandson of Herod the Great. Wouldn't that be neat? The great thing is they came to Christ as families. These men were progenitors. They took Christ to their whole family and introduced them to Him. They led their families in becoming Christian homes. What a blessing! Do you know any people like that who have been the first to be saved and led their families to Christ?

10. Herodion (11), Rufus and his mother (13) - brothers and a mother Herodion is unknown but compare Mk. 15:21. If this is the same Rufus, his father Simon carried Jesus' cross and came to faith and now he too had taken up the cross and followed! At any rate, Paul felt so close to these folks that he called one a relative or kinsman and Rufus' mother had been just like a mother to him! Have you known of those mothers who are like the mothers or grandmothers you never had or of brothers closer than real ones?

11. two house church groups (14-15) Here are two lists of five names each, a reference to two house church groups that met in Rome. They were worshippers. They were known for being part of the church, not Christians who went off and did their own thing. They assembled with the brethren. Now let's stop and before we leave them see:

II. What These Names Are They are more than just people who lived and died long ago and who don't matter anymore. They are:

1. examples Here are people to model yourself after. Why not set yourself to be like some of them? Why not be that second mother or brother to some young Christian? Why not be that helper to someone in the Lord's work? Why not set yourself to stand for Christ at work or in the midst of the suffering and problems that have come to you? Why not be a hard laborer and work at winning others? They have left us an example to follow.

2. epitaphs Romans 16 is the only tombstone these folks have. The brief words written here are the only epitaphs the world remembers about them. One day you are going to die and many people will forget most things about you. But some things will be long remembered. I read this dedication by the author in a book on prayer, "My gratitude to my godly praying mother on whose tomb are the words *Ida Duewel - Intercessor*. What will your epitaph be? What will they carve on yours? What will that one thing be that lasts about you? Is there one thing in your life done consistently for Christ that will last or is your life full of wood, hay and stubble that will not count?

3. eternal friends W. R. Newell wrote, *This page is no mere relic of the past; it is a list of friendships to be made hereafter, and to be possessed forever in the endless life where personality indeed shall be eternal, but where also the union of personalities in Christ shall be beyond our utmost present thought.*" ([Romans, p.556])

My friends, these folks live. They wait for you in heaven. One day you will meet them and make their acquaintance. Then you can ask Apelles what things he endured; you can see the things that were so outstanding about them in life now glorified. The same is true of all the godly names in the Bible. All the saints are your brethren; you will meet them by and by! What a glorious thing the church is, one body composed of all the saints of all ages, past, present, and future. What a grand future we have to look forward to. And the grandest thing of all will be seeing Him who made it all possible!

ROMANS 9-16 GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND GUIDANCE

Rom. 16:17-27 Parting Thoughts

Paul is about done with his long letter to his Roman friends and we are about done with our study of it. But Paul could not close without some parting thoughts, as his heart was yearning for those believers there. There were three things he wanted to leave with them:

I. Warnings (17-20) They were doing so well; their obedience to Christ was known all over the empire. And Paul knew very well that that's just the time to be most on your guard. And the greatest danger is being led off base by a false teacher, one who looks so good and so right, but would lead you into believing wrong things and so eventually destroy your walk with the Lord. One of the signs of immaturity is ignoring danger, thinking, "It can never happen to me." Mature believers stay constantly vigilant and Paul warns us to do four things in regard to these false teachers:

1. recognize them (17) Watch out for them, be alert, recognize them when they appear. They may appear in very nice guises. They may be Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons or some smooth radio or TV minister who is not sound. You must learn to identify them by making sure you know what sound doctrine is! You must study and learn and grow so that you know what is fundamental truth and what are areas that real Christians may differ on. When a person starts hedging on fundamental truths like the Deity of Christ or the inspiration of the Bible or when his life begins to show that he is hedging on the moral principles laid down in the Word, you can be sure that person is not motivated by the Holy Spirit!

2. avoid them (17b-18) He doesn't say to battle them or argue with them or try to persuade them but very plainly to stay away from them, so they won't affect you. And here's why:

a. their motives are wrong You may have a hard time believing it, but God says it. They are not in it for God. Their interests are self-serving. At the bottom line they do not have your welfare in mind and further:

b. their methods are wrong They don't play by your rules. True motives and actions are covered by smooth talk and flattery. Their intent is to lead you into their heresy. Don't expect them to be totally honest and pure like you're trying to be! Avoid them and don't get burnt!

3. obey in spite of them (19) The Romans were doing well and being obedient. Paul says, "Keep it up! Be wise about false teachers and keep on obeying in spite of them!"

4. remember our triumph over them (20) Remember who wins! In the end Christ will triumph over Satan and all his henchmen and we'll be standing with Him in that day. Don't get discouraged! Sometimes I look around and see the grip that false teachers have on most of our major denominations, on our seminaries and colleges and I get frustrated and incensed. I look at how the cults and even liberal theology are succeeding all over the world. But I remember that in the end they lose; Christ wins! Come Lord Jesus!

II. Greetings (21-23) Paul was not alone where he was at Corinth. He had a team of people there with him and wanted to send greetings from them also. It's another list like the first half of the chapter and just as interesting, when we see the kind of people God put together as a team for Paul. He sends greetings first:

1. from a fellow worker: Timothy Look at Phil. 2:19-22 and see how Paul felt about him. At that later time, he was the only trustworthy one Paul had. They worked together as father and son with the same motives. They were true associates.

2. from relatives: Lucius This may be Lucius of Cyrene mentioned in Acts 13:1. **Jason** may be the Jason of Acts 17:5-9, who was Paul's host at Thessalonica and suffered in his place. **Sosipater** is probably Sosipater of Berea (Acts 20:4) who travelled with Paul to Jerusalem. These were Paul's traveling companions as he took the offering to Jerusalem and Paul calls them his relatives, probably meaning fellow Israelites. At any rate, they are his family in the Lord; He was close to them.

3. from a helper: Tertius, who served as Paul's secretary in writing this letter, a helper who was there to assist in needed tasks.

4. from a host: Gaius, probably one of Paul's early converts at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14), but noted here for his hospitality. He hosted Paul in his home and the whole church met there. He's like the other Gaius in 3 John who is known for his hospitality, supplying the needs of the saints.

5. from brothers: Erastus and Quartus, two Corinthian Christians, the first, a government official (city steward or director of public works), the second, simply a brother, but both Paul's converts and friends, those he was ministering to. Look what God gave Paul for his ministry: a trusted associate, close brethren, a helper in ordinary tasks, a host to meet his physical needs, and a flock to minister to. Do you ever wonder how pastors make it, how missionaries survive in their field situation? God does the same thing now. I feel like I have all these elements here; if I didn't, the ministry would be all but impossible. God has built for me a team and He builds support teams for all those who serve Him, if they go about it right. And we must remember that whenever we get the credit, much of it goes to our team!

III. Blessings (24-27) Verse 24 is in the NIV margin at the bottom because it isn't found in some manuscripts, but it certainly is genuine because Paul used it in the conclusion of every one of his letters! This section is Paul's benediction, his best wishes for the Romans. He wants three things for them:

1. grace (24) Grace is kind of a catch-all word that we tend to ignore, like the word *bless*. Paul wants the favor and love and power of Christ to be with them. He wants them to have the power and favor of Christ which enables us to live as believers in this world.

2. growth (25-26) He wants them to be *established* which means *to fix or turn resolutely in a direction*, just as Jesus set his face to go up to Jerusalem. Paul wants them to continue on firmly fixed in their walk with the Lord which means growth. And then Paul puts into a nutshell in one sentence all that he's been trying to explain through the entire letter. He wants them to grow:

a. in understanding the plan of God The mystery hidden for long ages is the mystery of the church. Compare Eph. 3:3-6, Col. 1:24-27. It is the mystery which Old Testament folks never knew, that Jew and Gentile alike who believe, would become one body, the church of Jesus Christ, by faith. Paul wants that to sink in and be understood. It has been his major theme throughout Romans. He wants them to understand it!

b. in understanding the purpose of God which is that the whole world might hear and be saved (26b). He wants that to be emblazoned in their minds; he wants them to live for it, to give their lives to that purpose, just like he has. And finally, he wants them to have:

3. glory (27), not for themselves but for God. His thought is that their lives might bring glory to God both now and forevermore.

What more could I wish for you? That you might have the grace of God to live the Christian life, that you might grow in your understanding of what God is doing in the world and your commitment to give your lives to His purpose, and that your lives might bring glory to Him forever! That's a wonderful way to close a letter and not a bad way to close a sermon either.

1 CORINTHIANS

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1 COR. 1:1-9 OUR BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

With this message we begin a series of studies in the book of 1 Corinthians. Now, it's no secret that the major portion of this epistle deals with problems in the church. We all remember that they had divisions, immorality, lawsuits, and greed. They were abusing the spiritual gifts and the Lord's supper. It was a church that had real problems. Yet as Paul begins to write to them, his first thought is thanksgiving. Compare verse 4. He was thankful for them because, in spite of all their problems, they were the recipients of the grace of God. This week we celebrated Thanksgiving. We sat back and counted our temporal blessings. We looked around and counted our family and said, "Thank you Lord". We looked at the mountains of delicious food in front of us and our full refrigerators and said, "Thank You Lord". We leaned back and remembered all the good times we've had and said, "Thank you Lord". And those things are all wonderful and are all gifts of God. But we have four things to be thankful for that go far deeper than any of those, especially when you consider that, like the Corinthians, we are problem people. So many of the problems Paul set straight among them are our problems too. Yet in spite of all of them, the grace of God has done four wonderful things in our lives which Paul reminds us of:

I. The Blessing of Salvation (1-3) What do you find here in this salutation that we usually ignore? Four groups of saved people. Look:

1. God saved Paul (1a) Paul, called an apostle! That's not what he used to be called. He used to be called Saul, the enemy of Christians, the persecutor, the insatiable hunter of Christians. But one day, walking down a road on another evil mission God saved him and called him to be an apostle, that is, a missionary! Oh what grace! But look:

2. God saved Sosthenes (1b) Know who he is? Now he is probably Paul's traveling companion and the scribe who wrote down this letter for him, but compare Acts 18:15. If this is the same man, he used to live in Corinth and used to be the ruler of the synagogue, a staunch Jew, but he became sympathetic to the Christian cause and got beaten for it, and now look what he is, a brother! See the grace of God! Now, if you really want to see something:

3. God saved the church at Corinth (2a) Do you have any idea of the kind of place Corinth was? Hear how the ancients thought of it. Plato referred to a prostitute as "a Corinthian girl"; Philetaerus, the ancient playwright, wrote a play about a lecherous man called "the Corinthian." Aristophanes coined a new word as a synonym for fornication; he invented the verb, "to Corinthianize!" Corinth was a city known all over the world for idolatry, materialism, and sex. Sounds like the society we live in! Maybe that's why many of the same problems are recurring in the church in our day.

However, wonder of wonders, in the midst of all this, God had an assembly, a church, a gathering of people who were made holy and called holy! Compare 6:9-11! But even more wonderful:

4. God saved us! (2b-3) This letter is addressed to us too; we're believers in Christ like them. We're saved just like them. Oh, I wonder sometimes whether we realize the blessing of being saved, whether we realize where we would be and what we would be and where we would end up, if it were not for the grace of God. Maybe you were never wicked like Paul or like the Corinthians, but you are a trophy of grace just the same! We have a Father in heaven instead of a Judge! We have a Master in heaven instead of an Executioner! What a privilege! But that's not all!

II. The Blessing of Enrichment (4-7) Let's say it more clearly; you have been made rich. And though Corinth was a rich town, a wealthy commercial center, and though most of us are actually rich when compared with the rest of the world, that's not what Paul is talking about. We have been made rich in Christ. We have not just been sent to heaven on a shoe-string. We have been given marvelous riches in the spiritual realm. First, there is:

1. the enjoyment of spiritual truth (5) Boy, had they been enriched in speaking and knowledge. People were speaking in tongues; they were prophesying; they were preaching. So many people wanted to get up in church and say something that the whole thing was confusion and Paul had to regulate it. But forget the problems for the minute, and see the point; they enjoyed spiritual truth. The people who once enjoyed immorality and pleasure now want to hear, learn, and communicate spiritual truth. They had a brand-new kind of joy. Oh listen, we have knowledge the world can't have or get in any other fashion except coming to Christ! We know many of the mysteries of the universe. We know how it all got here and what keeps it going. We know what lies beyond the grave. We know what it is that makes man different from the animals and what makes man behave the way he does. We know how to change a man and make him a new person! We are rich in knowledge! And God keeps dumping more and more on us as we study the Word each day and are taught in the body. It's a joy!

2. the experience of spiritual realities (6) Paul had come to Corinth and preached the Word of God. This church, these people, were the result of his preaching. They were living evidence that the Word was true and powerful. How rich we are in seeing the Word come true in our lives! We share the Gospel with someone and they are transformed, just like it says. We take a promise of God and count on it and it comes to pass, for example, His meeting our needs. We watch the very things God says happen every day!

3. the exercise of spiritual gifts (7a) They really didn't lack any. Paul listed all the gifts being exercised there and the variety was astounding. Of course, different individuals had different ones, but what a joy they had in serving God by the exercise of their gifts. What a wonderful thing it is to watch God work through you! To sing and watch God bless people by it. To type and watch your skill provide necessary information to people and meet their need. To teach and watch young lives change in response to it. Folks, we are rich spiritually! We know God; we see God at work in us and through us. Our faith is a living faith, not the cold dead practice of forms and rituals and ceremonies! So, we are blessed because of what God did in our lives, and because of what He's doing day by day, but there's more:

III. The Blessing of Preservation (7b-8) You see, it is not only great to have it, but to know that it will last! Now, there are two aspects to this:

1. the anticipation of Christ's coming This is not all there is. We're expecting something, always looking to the horizon. We know how this whole ball game turns out. We know Jesus Christ is coming again and further, that He is coming for us. While the world is running around worrying about what's going to happen next month or next year or next generation and pulling their hair out, we know what our future holds. We're waiting for it like a kid waits for Christmas, but the great part is:

2. the assurance of Christ's keeping I don't have to depend on my own efforts to stay saved, to hold on! I'm not holding on to His rope by the skin of my teeth; He took His rope and wrapped it around me with a knot that won't let go! I don't have to worry that tomorrow I'll slip and fall. Now, I'll try my best not to, but if it happens, He won't let go. He will preserve me safe and keep me and get me to that Day! So, I not only have a gracious past experience of salvation and a glorious present experience of God at work in my life, but I have a guaranteed future, a glorious future to look forward to! And there's one thing left:

IV. The Blessing of Fellowship (9) G. Campbell Morgan called this the key verse to the whole book. It is the real answer to all the divisions, disorders, and difficulties the Corinthians had. We have a faithful God who has brought us into a condition of fellowship with His Son. Now, that thought has a double meaning:

1. sharing a common life The Greek word is *koinonia* from which we get the English words *common* and *communion* and the central thought of it is togetherness. We share a common life with Him. He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit. Christ lives in me and lives out His life through me. So, I am never apart from Him, not even for a moment. He is always with me, always a part of everything I do, everywhere I go. But more than that, fellowship means:

2. partnership in a common venture The venture of my Christian life, then, is not just my venture, but our venture. Jesus and I are partners in a life that is being made to glorify Him. God is a faithful partner. If we are faithful too, this venture is indeed a glorious one. Just think, the God of all glory and power has united Himself to me and shares with me the adventure of life.

What a blessing! I read a poem one time about a humble Christian man named Jim. *For years each day he'd rise to pray and when in church, he'd bow his head and meekly say, 'Dear God, it's Jim!' And when he'd leave, we all could see God's holy presence walked with him. As Jim grew old, the chastening rod of years left him so ill and drawn, his path to church is now untrod; but in his heart each day at dawn he hears the words, 'Dear Jim, it's GOD!'* Oh, listen, my friend, we are saved, we are rich, we have a guaranteed future and we have a glorious fellowship that nothing can disturb! When was the last time you thanked God for these things?

1 Cor. 1:10-31 DIVIDED WE STAND

1 Corinthians is basically a corrective letter. The Church at Corinth was a large thriving body, but it was also filled with problems. These problems had been reported to Paul (verse 11) by some folks who came to visit him and it appears from 7:1 that the church had also written to ask Paul about some questions they had. This letter is Paul's attempt to correct their problems, and the first one he deals with is the problem of divisions.

I. The Problem Described (1:10-17) The church had fallen into a state of internal division. Perhaps it would help us understand if we knew a little of:

1. the history behind it (10-12) The names are instructive here: Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ. If you remember, Paul was the founder of the church at Corinth. Compare Acts 18:11. He began in the synagogue as usual and even got the synagogue ruler, Crispus (8), and also his successor, Sosthenes, saved! He stayed a year and a half. So, the first wave of Christians there remembered him with great respect. But he left and while he was off to Jerusalem and Antioch, Apollos was converted at Ephesus and then he went to Corinth (19:1). So, Apollos became the next pastor at Corinth and of course 18:24-5 says he was learned and eloquent, who knows, maybe moreso than Paul! Then of course, a good number of Jews were converted there and they would naturally look to Peter and the Jerusalem church for leadership. So, what happened is this:

a. factions had formed When a certain subject came up, those who had been close to Paul said, "Paul said this, I follow him...". Those who were close to Apollos and Peter did the same. Some, trying to be more spiritual, said, "I don't follow any man; I follow Christ..." and offered their own opinion. And soon:

b. they were quarreling with each other Differences of opinion lead to different ways of thinking which leads to arguing and infighting. My, don't we have this today! We could have it right here. We get on a certain theme and we all take sides. Then the next issue comes up and people find themselves hanging with the same crowd because they think alike. Pretty soon we've got a church full of little factions always trying to assert their power over the others! And it's sad to say that you can talk to pastor after pastor and find it's true in churches today!

2. Paul's reaction to it (13-17) Paul didn't want anything to do with it; he was appalled. If I could summarize the message of those three rhetorical questions, it would be, "Listen, Christ is the One who died for you, who saved you, in whose name you were baptized, not mine or Apollos' or anybody else's. And Christ is not divided! You are not really following Him!" And then we have:

II. The Problem Diagnosed (1:18-31) Dr. Paul cuts away the surface symptoms and goes to the root of the problem. His diagnosis is two-fold. Division comes from two sources:

1. it is a problem of human wisdom (18-25) They were not looking for God's wisdom; they were operating on their own sanctified common sense, each one pushing his own ideas that came from his own human thinking. If they all got their thinking from God, it would have been the same because God isn't divided. Paul tells them clearly in verse 17 that they are pursuing human wisdom, not God's wisdom. And then he reminds them that at the center of God's wisdom is a cross! And the cross proves two things:

a. God's wisdom is contrary to human wisdom The cross seems like a foolish thing to the human mind. Verse 22. The Jews demand miraculous signs. They would have had Christ come down from the cross and display his power to the world so that they might believe in Him. The Greeks demanded wisdom, logic. It had to make sense. They would have had to have a much more logical way for man to be saved than for God to send his Son to die on a cross. In short, nobody would have done it the way God did it; not Jew, not Gentile, nobody! God's ways are not our ways. We have to recognize that often God does things or wants us to do things that don't make a lot of sense to us, that don't fit the way we think things ought to be! However:

b. God's wisdom is better than human wisdom Verse 21. All the wisdom in the world did not bring man to know God. It took the cross! And the preaching of the message of the cross did it! God's way always works! And God does it that way on purpose; He frustrates our human wisdom and intelligence so we'll look to Him. In verse 19 Paul

quotes an Old Testament illustration from Is. 29:14. This is God's statement to Judah and, if you check the context carefully, you'll realize that in that time there was the threat of invasion from Assyria which had already conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel. The people had a humanly wise plan, ally with Egypt. Compare 30:1-3. But their wisdom didn't work. If you recall the story, God did it his own way; the angel of the Lord went out and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in their sleep! Not one arrow was fired in that battle! God's wisdom is better! So, what's the point? If we want to keep from having divisions among ourselves, we have to realize that our own way is not necessarily God's way! All of us have to be first and foremost committed to finding out what God wants of us and that will draw us together, not apart!

2. it is a problem of pride (26-31) Now Paul gets personal. He tells them to look around, to look at one another and themselves. There weren't many college professors and Ph. D.'s, there weren't many politicians and council members and influential people, there weren't many of the genteel rich of noble birth and high society. They were slaves and carpenters and fishermen and merchants and housewives. They had nothing to brag and boast about. They were nothing that God should be glad to choose them and use them as His servants. Look around, you'll find that we are in the same boat. We're a church full of common everyday people. What's his point? Divisions are caused by pride, by people thinking that they're more than somebody else. His point is:

a. in ourselves we are nothing Not one of us has anything to boast about before God. God didn't choose us because we were smart or influential or energetic. It was grace, so:

b. everything we are is from God Christ is our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our redemption. We didn't have any. We can only boast in Him!

Divisions are not only caused by wrong thinking, but by wrong attitude. Elsewhere Paul wrote, *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!* We have to keep the cross at the center of our thinking. God's ways are not our ways and we must be open to what our brothers and sisters think too. But most importantly, we need to keep the cross at the center of our attitude and be humble like Jesus was. My friend, is there a rift between you and somebody else today, particularly between you and a fellow believer? Well, I can guarantee you that one or the other or both of you either have a wrong thought pattern or a wrong attitude. And I can also guarantee you that God isn't pleased with it. Maybe there's something you can do to fix that today.

1 Cor. 2 OUR WISDOM

Now you'll remember from last week's study that in the first 4 chapters of this letter, Paul is dealing with the problem of divisions in the Corinthian church. And you'll also remember that in diagnosing the root causes of this problem, Paul said that depending on human wisdom was the chief thing that got them into this mess. We often don't realize that the Gentile world of Paul's day, and particularly Greece where Corinth was, was in some senses an intellectual place. It was his era that produced Plato and Socrates and Aristotle and all the great ancient writers and philosophers. Compare Acts 17:21. Athens, where Paul had preached just before Corinth, was the center of this intellectual movement. There were groups like (verse 18) the Epicureans and Stoics. There were Gnostics who professed to have special knowledge. It seems as though the world of Paul's day was bent on a quest for knowledge and placed a high value on the things of the mind. And no doubt that filtered down to the common ordinary people too and it also crept subtly into the church. And it was this air of having superior knowledge that helped cause the divisions. So, having charged them with leaning on human wisdom, Paul proceeds to explain in the whole second chapter what wisdom truly is. There are:

I. Two Types of Wisdom that are contrasted throughout the passage:

1. human wisdom The very terms Paul uses to describe it tell us some things about it:

a. it is based on the natural order (1:20) It is "wisdom of the world", the *kosmos*, the natural order of things. The wisdom which man has gained by observation, by looking at the things which he can see and observe and drawing conclusions about them.

b. it is rooted in the human mind (2:5) It is "men's wisdom", that is, it is a result of the action of the human brain. We look at the natural world and then the mind draws conclusions about it based on the human point of view. But there's a problem with that:

c. it changes over time (2:6) It is the "wisdom of this age", this era, this time. But what man discovers and believes in one age may change. There was a time when human wisdom looked at the sun passing through the sky and said the sun revolves around the earth. Later on, we figured out just the opposite was true! It was the same with the flatness of the earth. It was the same with medicine and the concept of bleeding patients to get rid of bad blood. Today it seems "wise" to most people to look at fossils and believe in evolution, but open minded scientists are finding out differently. Human wisdom is OK as far as it goes, but it is far inferior to:

2. God's wisdom (2:7) His wisdom is entirely different:

a. it is based on creation, not discovery His wisdom is "before time began." God does not look at things and figure them out, He made them! Who knows something better, its inventor or one who learns about it from scratch?

b. it is hidden to the human mind It is above and beyond what the human mind can comprehend on its own. It is in the mind of God and so is hidden to us. We can't see from His perspective, so if we are to have it:

c. it must be revealed by the Holy Spirit (11) Nobody knows your thoughts except you, your human mind and spirit. Nobody can know them unless you tell them. So, we cannot know God's mind either, but the Holy Spirit can because He is God and He dwells in us to show us the thoughts of God! He also is privy to all our thoughts and shows them to God! So, you can either go through life trying to figure out everything on your own, set your own values and make your own judgments, (and I guarantee you will miss being right quite often) or you can look to God for His answers to your questions and needs! Now Paul goes on to remind the Corinthians just what it was that brought them to new life in Christ and we can apply that to ourselves:

II. How We Came to Faith (1-5) The key is in verse 5. Our faith does not rest on human wisdom:

1. it was not the result of human ability (1) Paul wasn't a better speaker or a better thinker than others they knew. They didn't come to faith because they were impressed with him.

2. it was not the result of a complex message (2) Paul didn't come with some high-sounding philosophy that was hard to understand. He came saying "Christ died for your sins". It wasn't some complex thing they had to figure out.

3. it was not the result of human drive (3) Some people may not have ability, but they get by on drive or effort. Paul came weak and trembling. He'd been through some tough experiences and a lot of persecution and danger on that trip. Maybe he wasn't well. It wasn't extra effort that brought them to faith.

4. it was not the result of oral persuasion (4) He didn't play on their emotions by using rhetoric, as was popular in his day. They didn't get talked into faith.

5. it was the result of God's power (4b-5) Read the account in Acts. God moved in that city. He brought conviction to the hearts of men. He brought two synagogue rulers to Christ. He brought a number of Jews to faith. Compare 6:11, 9-10. He saved drunkards and prostitutes and transformed their lives into holiness and purity! And it was the miraculous transformation in lives that brought others. Human wisdom never did anything for them! But God's simple wisdom of believing on His Son transformed their lives! Listen, you didn't get saved by some fancy philosophy or some great orator's persuasion. You got saved by believing a simple message because you saw the power of God at work in someone else's life and felt it at work in your own! So, don't think you can now go through life figuring out your own path and making your own decisions. You need to seek God's wisdom day by day in everything you do. You need to know what He thinks about everything in your life. So, let's talk about:

III. How God Conveys His Wisdom to Us (6-16) How can we know God's thoughts, His direction for us?

1. it cannot be humanly discerned (6-9) I sometimes get tired of hearing verse 9 used to describe heaven. It is true that we can't imagine the beautiful things in our future. However, this verse has nothing to do with heaven. It means you cannot get God's wisdom, His thoughts, by human perception, by seeing or hearing or thinking. God's wisdom is hidden to the natural mind. Some of the wisest men of their day, who knew the Scriptures inside and out, crucified the Son of God, because they were following their own human wisdom and couldn't see what was right before their eyes!

2. it is conveyed by the Holy Spirit (10-12) If we can't get it by our own effort, then God has to reveal it to us and He does. The Holy Spirit is God and He knows all the thoughts of God and when we get saved, that same Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us. Why? So that He can take God's thoughts and reveal them to our minds as we need them! What a blessing this is. God wants us to know His thoughts and has given us the Holy Spirit that we might know them as often as we desire, when we earnestly seek them. And then:

3. it is conveyed by us to others (13) We are able to take those thoughts that the Holy Spirit has given us from God and put them into Spirit-guided words and give them to others who have the Holy Spirit in them, so that:

4. it is received by those with the Spirit (14-16) Nonbelievers, unless God is drawing them by His Spirit to Himself, think God's thoughts are foolish; they cannot identify them as God's truth. But the saved person who has the Holy Spirit and is controlled by the Holy Spirit is able to take those thoughts, recognize them as being from God, and make judgments about various issues on the basis of them. You see, nobody has known God's mind on a human basis, but we have the very mind of Christ; we can think His thoughts after Him if we choose because we have the Holy Spirit.

So, when you need wisdom, what should you do? You should ask the Holy Spirit to control your mind, immerse yourself in God's Word and allow Him to bring God's thoughts to you and keep doing it until God's thoughts are clear in your mind!

Be patient; sometimes it takes a little while! Folks, too many of us are living by our own wisdom. We make our decisions without consulting God, without even praying. We go into huge undertakings, change jobs, and even marry people, without seeking God's mind. We start ministries and build buildings and plan events, yes, and even preach sermons without seeking God's mind. God has given us the standing invitation that if we lack wisdom we should ask and it will be given freely to us. Now be forewarned, often the wisdom God gives will look like foolishness to those around you and they will deride you and make fun of you for following it. *Dwight Moody was preaching when someone passed a note to him through the usher. It had only one word, "Fool." Moody looked at it and said, "I've often received notes that people wrote but forgot to sign. This is the first time I've received a note that someone forgot to write but signed it anyway."* Proverbs tells us that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. It is only the fool that ignores God's wisdom.

1 Cor. 3 A PRESCRIPTION TO HEAL CHURCH PROBLEMS

No good doctor ever stops at diagnosis. He never says, "Well, your problem is..." and then says, "That'll be 125 dollars." No, he always moves on to treatment. He gets out his prescription pad and says, "Here, take 17 of these a day and it'll cure your problem." You wouldn't have it any other way. So, Dr. Paul has been diagnosing the problem of divisions in the church at Corinth, but now he goes on to write them a prescription that will heal their problems. In fact, if we would all take a good dose of what is in this chapter, it would not only solve any problems between believers that might exist now, but it would be good preventive medicine to keep any new ones from starting. Paul says there are three things that we must understand, and if we do, they will heal our church problems:

I. We Must Understand the Source of Divisions (1-4) It always helps the patient to understand the disease. He can cope with it better. He must be able to tell what are symptoms and what are root problems. So, it will help us if we realize that divisions and broken relationships between believers are only symptoms of some very basic problems:

1. they are a sign of spiritual immaturity You know, there are Christians who are 70 years old, but have never grown up in Christ. What do you say when you see two adults squabbling? "Quit acting like children!" Children squabble and fight. Adults, because of their maturity, learn to get along. Maturity in Jesus Christ means a maturing in love and humility and that will overcome differences that exist between us. When you see division in the church of Christ, somebody is spiritually stunted; somebody has a block in their spiritual life. They are not growing!

2. they are a sign of carnality The NIV word *worldly* is literally *fleshly* in Greek, and it means acting under the control and influence of human wisdom and human desire and human nature instead of the Holy Spirit. In other words, you have a believer who is saved and has the Holy Spirit in him, but is not allowing himself to be filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit, but rather the habits and patterns of his old life that he lived in before he was saved. It may be in a different area of his life; he may not go out and get drunk anymore but his old patterns are now causing him to act selfishly and proudly and quarrel with other believers. He's carnal! And if we understand that problems between believers are signs of immaturity and carnality, then when we see them in ourselves, we'd better take appropriate action. We'd better find out what it means to get under the control of the Holy Spirit, begin to spend time in the Word and prayer and do other things that will make us grow!

II. We Must Understand the Nature of Service (5-15) You see, part of the reason we have problems among ourselves, whether as individuals or in a church or between missionaries on the field, is that we have some basic misunderstandings of what it really means to be serving Jesus Christ. And Paul uses two very graphic analogies here to explain it to us:

1. it is like working a field (5-9a) He uses the common idea of a landowner having his workers produce a crop. One fellow plows, then another may plant the seed, and another may water and cultivate it. And so, it comes to grow and bear fruit. Now, it doesn't make any difference who plants or who waters. What matters is that God makes it grow! And the church is God's field! It is what He is growing today.

a. we are all servants with an assigned task We don't all have the same task. We simply do what the master tells us. Paul planted the seeds in Corinth and Apollos came along later and watered them and each was simply doing God's assigned task.

b. it is not the servant but God that is important Verse 7. The servants can't make seeds germinate and grow. They can't control the seasons and the weather that produce a good crop. God is the important one. He does the real work! You may think you're working awfully hard for God and that you're producing results. But listen, God produces results. God wins people to Christ. God changes little lives in Sunday School. God leads people to a closer walk or delivers them from addiction. And God pays the bills! Your service to God is simply being obedient so that through you God can accomplish what He wants. When you think of it as any more than that, pride gets in and human wisdom and division is next!

c. we share a common goal The servants are not in competition. They are partners in a common job, to grow the crop, not to show what good workers they are. So, we share the common goal of building the church, not getting our own way!

2. it is like building a building (9b-15) Now, that was an analogy for country folks; this one is for city folks. We're like builders building a building. It takes a lot of workers, each doing their part, to build a good building. And the church is God's building. He's constructing it on the foundation of Christ and His work on the cross (verse 11), using us as His workers.

a. we are all builders (9a) Some are carpenters, others bricklayers and painters and paperhangers and electricians. Every one of us contributes to the building of the church as we exercise the ministry God has given us, whether it be prayer, giving, teaching, or whatever. We're putting up a building for the Master!

b. we must be careful builders (10) You wouldn't want a sloppy carpenter building your house! God doesn't want it either. He doesn't want a church full of blemishes and crooked parts. He wants a church full of mature, holy, pure disciples of Jesus Christ!

c. we must use right materials (12-13) Here we have two lists of building materials. Gold, silver and precious stones are one set; wood, hay and stubble are the other. When we build, we must use the right ones. We must use:

(1) materials of quality You wouldn't want a cardboard roof or pipes made of straws. You want materials that will stand the test of use and weather. So, what we do as servants, we must do well. If we make disciples, we must make them strong to stand the test. If we plant the church, we must plant it strong. If we teach, we must do it thoroughly and with preparation; if we pray, we must do it earnestly with all our hearts!

(2) materials of value Why not iron, brass, and stone instead? They are just as strong, but they are not the things of value to the master! The master of this house wants a golden house inlaid with silver and set with gems. Those are His specifications! Sometimes we occupy ourselves in doing things for God, but we may be doing the wrong thing, building with temporal materials instead of ones of eternal value which the master wants. It is the eternal things God is after, souls brought to maturity in Jesus Christ, holy and pure, not programs and buildings and advertising campaigns.

d. our work will be tested (13-15) You see, God is the Great Building Inspector! Our work will be tested, as it were, by fire. The worthless stuff will burn up; only the real will last. Only the things we did which were truly serving Jesus Christ will remain. All those other things which we did to impress people or out of force of habit or to appease a guilty conscience or to outshine another believer will all be gone. Some of us are going to be mighty embarrassed in that day at the judgment seat of Christ. So, what really is Christian service then? It is God working through us to build His church. And we are responsible to let Him do that in all sincerity! And if we were all doing that, there would be no divisions! But lastly, to solve the problem of division and broken relationships:

III. We Must Understand The Warnings of God (16-22) Paul issues three warnings here to make it clear. We must guard:

1. against corrupting the church (16-17) This building that we're building is a Temple, a place for God to live. The church is where God lives, in the bodies of His people. The word destroy means literally to corrupt and so, to destroy by corruption. You can attack a pipe two ways. You can bend and break it from outside or you can let hard water attack it with minerals from inside and destroy it just as surely. This verse is not so much a warning to the dictators of the world who would destroy the church, but to those who would take a local church and tear it apart with factions and false doctrines and legalism or what have you! What strong language here! If you really love God, your effect will be to build the church, not tear it down! Second, we must guard:

2. against conceit in the mind (18-20) We must guard against thinking we're really somebody and really have it all together while so and so doesn't. Paul says to watch out for this and change your thinking, because pride goes before a fall. If there's any hint of conceit in your thinking, God has just the experience prepared for you that will remove it! And finally, we must guard:

3. against continuing in factions (21-22) Instead of separating from each other, let's claim the best of each other. Let's learn from Paul and Apollos and Cephas and take what we can from each of them without setting them up on a pedestal to follow. Everything is yours in Jesus Christ. Don't louse up your inheritance by petty rivalries!

Well, there's Dr. Paul's prescription for you. Now the question is, as with all medicine, will you take it?

1 Cor. 4 THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

There is a whole aspect of this problem of divisions the Corinthians had that Paul has not yet considered. He had talked about their shortcomings in following human wisdom and about their root problems of immaturity and carnality. But at Corinth there was at least one group of people whose slogan was, "I follow Paul," yet who were not acting like Paul would act at all! Wouldn't it upset you if people went around saying they were your followers, yet seeing your name maligned because of their misbehavior? Paul had a personal stake in this problem of divisions. They were divided over the issue of

following leaders. So, Paul set out in chapter 4 to teach them how they should regard Christian leaders and really, he lays out for us the meaning of Christian leadership.

I. Paul's View of a Christian Leader This, of course, does not only apply only to Paul or the apostles, but also to those who are Christian leaders today. Pastors, evangelists, missionaries, the elders of the local church, teachers, apply these things to yourself in whatever your role may be or to leaders you look up to. Even parents can apply it to themselves as leaders in the home.

1. stated (1-5) There are four basic truths in Paul's view of a Christian leader:

a. he is a servant of God (1) Paul does not use the common word for servant which is *diakonos*, but *huperetes*, which means an under-rower. It comes from naval use, meaning the guy who pulls when the captain says, "Pull!" The word emphasizes fact that he is under the authority of a superior, that he is a man who takes orders from a higher source. Christian leaders are not a law unto themselves; they cannot do as they please. They take orders from Christ and in fact, the Bible teaches that those in positions of authority have even greater responsibility.

b. he is a steward of God's things, literally a *house-arranger*, the manager of the house. It means a person entrusted with the complete care of the house on the owner's behalf, like Joseph in Potiphar's house. He was entrusted with the care of all the household matters to the extent that Potiphar didn't concern himself with anything except to eat his food and go to work! A Christian leader is a person to whom God has given responsibility to handle the secret things of God, such as God's word. He is responsible to understand it, to live it, and to communicate it to others.

c. he is responsible to God (2) A person under authority who has been given a job to do must prove faithful; he must do what he has been ordered to do. His master will require it. We are all responsible to God, not for how much we do or for what we do compared to what someone else does, but for whether we do what God has ordered us to do! Therefore:

d. he can only be judged by God (3-5) It does not matter if people look at you and say, "My he's doing a fine job." In fact, it doesn't even matter if you look at yourself and say, "I'm doing the best job I know how". They can only judge by outward appearances and many times you and I will never see our own faults. Only God is qualified to say whether we have been really faithful stewards or not and when the Lord comes, He will take care of the job of rewarding us.

2. applied (6-7) Paul makes two applications:

a. do not go beyond the Scripture Paul quotes a saying that was evidently well-known to his readers but is not an actual Old Testament quote. Don't go beyond what is written, that is, beyond the Scriptures. When you go beyond what you have there, you are liable to error. So, what does it mean? When you look at a Christian leader you have every right and even a duty to examine them by the Book. If they teach false doctrines, you have every right to oppose their leadership. If their life does not stand up to Scriptural standards of behavior or if they display unbiblical attitudes in dealing with people, then you have every right to judge. But when you get beyond that into the realm of preferences and methods and styles and personalities, and take pride in one over another, you are on dangerous turf! To use Gamaliel's words: you may be found to be opposing God!

b. do not forget your humble position Here's a good thought for all of us. It is only God that makes us different from each other. None of us is any better than the rest. Everything we are or have is a gift of God's grace. So, any time we put ourselves in a position of judging other believers, unless it has to do with Scriptural matters, we are usurping God's place. He is the Master of all of us!

II. Paul's Example as a Christian Leader (8-17) Paul didn't just talk a good show; He lived it. He provided in his life a personal example for others, an example that was exactly opposite of the way the Corinthians were behaving. So, from him we learn:

1. the kind of example leaders ought to be (8-13) Now Paul uses the illustration of a parade, a Roman parade, but don't think of mummers strutting down Broad Street. Think of a Roman general returning victorious with his army to Rome and marching through the streets. Back at the tail end of the procession are the prisoners of war, the captives taken in battle, the trophies of the conquest who were brought back for the arena, to be a public spectacle as they were devoured by wild beasts or forced to fight gladiators. Paul says, "I and the other apostles are like that. We are a public spectacle to a hooting crowd and headed ultimately to give up our lives for Jesus Christ. Paul and other apostles suffered things those Christians at Corinth in all their petty bickering had never endured and might never have to endure. But look how they reacted to their suffering:

a. enduring misery without complaint (11) The Corinthians were fairly well-off. They had homes, incomes and clothes to wear for the most part. Paul didn't but he didn't complain!

b. enduring labor without quitting (12a) It was tough enough just preaching, but he supported himself with tent-making also. Yet he didn't quit and give up.

c. enduring mistreatment without retaliation (12-13) Oh, the way Paul and the others were treated! They were cursed, beaten, flogged, persecuted, run out of town, and even, stoned. Yet they never displayed any retaliation, any fighting back, any hatred. That is the kind of example leaders ought to provide! Too many times we are worried about the way we dress or whether our speech is polished. The most important example people take from us is in how we endure our problems, not in how exciting and vivacious we are and how much charisma we have. But in how we take criticism, how we handle sickness and tragedy and how we deal with people who don't like us!

2. the kind of response we ought to have What about those who are not leaders? How should we relate to those who are our leaders in Christ?

a. we ought to keep a proper perspective (8) These Corinthians were like the prodigal son; they wanted their inheritance now! They wanted success and prosperity and pleasure right now. They wanted to reign with Christ in an outward and visible way right now. But now is not the time! What a difference from the example of Paul and the other apostles! We've got to be careful we don't go seeking after worldly goals like the Corinthians did and ignore the godly examples of our leaders. Instead:

b. we ought to follow their example (14-17) Not that we try to be like them and do the things they do and carry out the responsibilities they have. Paul says what he means, his "way of life." Compare 11:1. A leader strives to mirror Jesus Christ in his life. A follower strives to mirror Jesus Christ as demonstrated in the leader! You don't have to pick up all their idiosyncrasies and certainly not their faults. But as their life mirrors the very life of Jesus Christ, filled with love and forgiveness and tolerance, you should imitate them!

III. Paul's Warning as a Christian Leader (18-21) As he closes this whole section on divisions, Paul warns them that he intends to visit them in the near future and he lets them know that he wants it to be a loving visit. But in the process he says two more things we can apply to leadership:

1. regard power over talk It is not those who talk the best game that are true leaders; it is those whose lives and ministries display the power of God. Paul certainly did. People healed, blinded, demons cast out, the dead raised. and of course, thousands saved and transformed. When you pick a leader to follow as an example, make sure you choose one who has God evidently at work in his life.

2. prefer gentleness over discipline With leadership goes the right to correct and discipline. Build your own life on the godly example of others and so allow your leaders to deal with you in gentleness, rather than in rebuke and discipline. If the child listened to the kind voice that comes first, there would be no unpleasant paddling to come afterward.

In closing, I leave you with Heb. 12:1-2. In Heb 11, Paul listed all the great examples of faith who had gone before from Abel to David. We would also include Paul and Peter and John and a host of others. Maybe we could also add a host of other godly leaders who have affected our lives in this generation. Seeing we have such a great host of examples who have given all to follow Christ, let's throw away sin and pride and petty problems and determine like them to follow the course that God has laid out for us until, like the Lord Jesus, one day we sit down with Him on the Throne to reign!

1 Cor. 5 DARE TO DISCIPLINE!

As we leave chapter 4, Paul has finished with the subject of divisions and now he moves on to another category of problems that the church at Corinth had: derelictions, that is, things they as a church had neglected. There are three areas in which this church had failed to exercise its responsibilities: disciplining those who persisted in sin, disputes between its members, and the desecration of its members by dabbling in fornication. By the same token, these are three areas in which the modern western church has largely failed to exercise its responsibilities as well! And there is no more neglected area than the one we consider today, hence the title: Dare to Discipline! (stolen from the popular book on child-rearing). There is no doubt that discipline is rapidly disappearing from the American home but in the average American church it is already gone! However, the church has a God-given responsibility to exercise discipline within its ranks. So, let's begin by examining:

I. The Problem (1-2) Really, there are two parts to it.

1. an immoral man (1) Here was a man in the church, a man who professed to know Jesus Christ, a man who continued to attend worship and celebrate the Lord's supper. Yet he was involved in a sexual affair with his father's wife, probably his step-mother. This was something not only forbidden by Jewish law in the Old Testament, but even pagan Roman law made it illicit. However, the particular sin involved is not so important to our study; it might just as well have been theft, armed robbery, graft, or lying. What is worth noting is 1) that it was serious; in church discipline we are talking about moral failure, not unimportant secondary issues, and (2) that it was continuing; it was not an isolated incident but something persisted in.

2. an unconcerned church (2) This problem was even worse! The church knew about it! For that matter, verse 1 says everybody knew about it, literally "it is noised abroad". Yet they did nothing about it. What's worse yet is that they had no sorrow about the fact that one of their number should do such a wicked thing. Paul says, "How can you be so proud; how can you parade your spiritual superiority and yet allow such wickedness to be tolerated among you?" A church that is unconcerned about sin among its members is a sick church! It is a church in deep trouble and if you don't believe it, just read what Christ has to say to the church at Pergamum and Thyatira in Rev. 2! Discipline begins with the conviction that Christ is building Himself a pure church, a spotless church without spot or wrinkle. It begins out of the conviction that one of the primary concerns of Christ with our lives is holiness without which no man shall see the Lord!

II. The Process of Discipline (3-5) It was something they had never done before, so Paul told them how it works.

1. its practice: excommunication (2b,5a,13) It is already clear that the man is unrepentant and is going to flagrantly continue in sin, so Paul says excommunicate him; put him out of the fellowship, expel him. Call a meeting and declare that he is no longer to be counted as one of you, as a brother in Christ! The strongest phrase he uses is "hand him over to Satan." Here's a man who has chosen to allow Satan to rule his life instead of the Holy Spirit, so now declare it so; release him as a part of the church to fall fully under Satan's dominion. Now, those are strong statements, they sound severe, but remember Paul is already talking about the final end of the discipline process, not its beginning. Jesus laid that out for us. Compare Mt. 18:15-20. Note how every effort must first be made to bring the sinning brother to repentance. First individually, then by a small group and finally by the congregation at large. However, when a person resists the admonishing of the whole body, then he is to be regarded and treated as an unbeliever and no longer counted to be a Christian brother. And though the verses that follow are deep, they suggest that what appears to be true on earth is really true, that the church is merely reflecting what God already knows to be true and that the person is what he has been declared to be, an unbeliever. But having said that, note:

2. its purpose: restoration (5b) There is no room for a haughty spirit in discipline, a feeling of "better than thou". It is to be done in a spirit of great sorrow (verse 2) and with a view to restoration. Jesus said, *If he listens, you have gained your brother*. That's the idea! Paul says that the intended result is the destruction or ruin of the flesh. The meaning of the phrase is tough to figure out. Paul could be talking about physical death (there is a sin unto death, John tells us). Or he could be talking about letting the person be so miserable they repent and are delivered from the control of sin. But the point is that the action of discipline is with a view that the person will ultimately be saved, call on Christ and trust in Him for salvation. Compare 2 Cor. 2:5-10 where Paul mentions this same man again and says, "Now take him back; he's repentant, the discipline has had its effect, forgive him and forget it." If we treat a person as a pagan or a publican, an unsaved person, what does that mean? Should it be with scorn and self-righteousness? No, it should be done with love and caring like you would treat any unsaved person! That's how you go about practicing discipline in a local church when a member sins grievously and continually. It's a humbling thing, but God commands it to be done. But He does not command it without explaining it. Paul finishes up by talking about:

III. The Principles of Discipline He approaches them in two ways, first as:

1. applied to the church (6-8, 12-13) There are three important principles here:

a. the danger of tolerance (6) Church discipline is necessary because sin is like cancer; it spreads and multiplies. Paul compares it to yeast. A little bit of yeast put in a lump of dough will work its way through the whole thing; that's how sourdough keeps growing. And if one person in a church gets away with flagrant sin, it will spread. Others will be enticed and emboldened to try it and ultimately, it will be the ruin of that church as a testimony for Christ! Tolerating sin is dangerous!

b. the duty of purity (7-8) It's not just a matter of practicality; it's a duty to God. Paul, in using the analogy of leaven, now turns to the Old Testament for an illustration. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb began the feast of unleavened bread which lasted a week, during which time all leaven was to be removed from their houses, of course symbolizing purity. Well, Paul says, "Christ, the real Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed on the cross and we're living in the days of Unleavened Bread. We have a duty to God to stay pure and clean." Christ died for our sins; we have an obligation to live pure, to get rid of the leaven of sin when we find it in the house!

c. the delegation of responsibility (12-13) God is the judge of all the earth, the judge of believers and unbelievers. But as far as this earth goes, God has delegated the responsibility of discipline to the local church body; they are to discipline their own. God expects it as a part of our obedience and stewardship!

2. applied to the individual (9-11) Of course, the question then comes as to how to relate on an individual basis to people like this. There are two principles to remember:

a. the need to distinguish Some people have the idea that they can never associate with sinners. If a person has a bad habit or looks rough or is living with someone, they won't talk to them or have anything to do with them. That's how the Pharisees were. They accused Jesus of fraternization with sinners. Paul says to prevent that you'd

have to leave the world! Indeed, it is the sick who need a doctor! We need to build relationships with sinners, for the sake of sharing the Gospel with them! However, the case here is a professing believer who is involved in grievous sin like immorality, idolatry, drunkenness, or dishonesty. That is an entirely different case. We must carefully distinguish.

b. the need to dissociate As long as a person professes to be saved and practices sin, we are to break off personal fellowship, not to show approval or acceptance of them in any way. Paul says "Don't even invite them for a meal." Now, I don't think that means to be rude or mean to them or to turn your head when you see them coming, but simply to part company for your own protection and for their discipline. You keep on praying for them and caring about them and witnessing to them when you can, but they cannot be an accepted part of your life!

Now folks, you can mark it down that, given the character of our age, churches and in particular Glenside Bible Church is going to face situations like this one more and more. As our society grows more and more tolerant of immorality, it will creep into the church. And we will have to deal with those situations when they come. It's going to break our hearts, but we'll have to do it. I want you to understand it now, so that when it comes you will be ready. We must stand ready to discipline in love when we have to. *A tourist in Scotland was driving along and saw a flock of sheep in a field. But one sheep was far away from the flock, limping along with a broken leg, bleating and crying. The tourist stopped and the shepherd came over. She asked what had happened to the lone sheep. With tears in his eyes the shepherd said, "I had to break its leg. It always kept wandering away from the flock and I could not keep chasing it all the time. I find that when a sheep's leg is broken and I care for it and nurse it back to health, it always comes when I call."* So, God chastises His sheep to bring them back to Himself and we must be ready to be part of that process, even if it hurts!

1 Cor. 6:1-11 ON SUITS and SQUABBLES

It is only natural for Paul to move on from the subject of church discipline and the responsibility to judge those within the church, to a second area where the church had been derelict in its responsibility, the area of disputes. You know, as long as man has been on the earth, whenever two of us are close enough together to rub shoulders, we get on each other's nerves and argue. And sometimes we get into situations that tend to put us at odds with one another. When I was a kid, the neighbor's cows got loose and trampled our garden and we could have quarreled over it. Years ago, a man fell out front of the church and broke his glasses and blamed us for it. There will always be those kinds of things and we need God's wisdom to work them out, so let's go to Corinth and look at:

I. The Problem of Disputes (1, 6) Corinth is certainly not unique in the problem of having disputes, but note here four key factors that made it dangerous:

1. the presence of disputes between believers We are not talking about disputes with outsiders, but brother against brother! Something is wrong here. There are believers that have animosity toward one another, who want to hurt one another or at least vindicate themselves over each other. And it is not an isolated case like the man in chapter 5, but evidently it is fast becoming a common practice!

2. the appeal to secular courts They were taking their cases to the legal justice system of their day. Now, don't get Paul wrong. He himself used the Roman system of courts and justice in appealing to Caesar. It was not that Paul didn't feel you could get justice in a secular court. He was acquitted and dismissed by Gallio, the proconsul of Corinth when the mob took him in in Acts 18! The problem was believers taking each other to secular court.

3. the lack of church involvement Again, the church was not involved, not doing anything about it, not making any attempts to cause believers to settle their differences between themselves. Most churches are like that! We get too worried about violating people's private lives and so allow members to hold grudges and act in unchristian ways to each other without any reprimand.

4. the terrible witness of it Hear Paul's sad shock: *in front of unbelievers!* Believers airing their dirty laundry in front of unbelievers, how could they ever win them to Christ? That's where the old "the church is full of hypocrites" line comes from, because we let our sins and problems get out to a watching world instead of dealing with them and it drives people away from Jesus Christ! And with the press we have today, it doesn't take much for the world to know any problems that go on in the church! Now, Paul has two things to say to this whole subject and we would be wise to learn them and to heed them:

II. We Should Judge Our Own Disputes! (2-6) He says the place to judge disputes within the body of Christ is within the body! And just look at his reasoning:

1. we shall judge the world (2) Did you ever stop to think of that? You and I will one day have a responsibility with Christ as judges; we will reign with Him. Compare Dan. 7:22, 27. We're going to be entrusted by God with the responsibility of settling people's problems on earth during the Millennium. What a great deal of trust God has in us! But not only that:

2. we shall judge angels (3) What angels? Well, since God's angels do not sin there will be no need to judge them, but compare Jude 6. The angels who fell with Satan, many of them are confined in the pit, waiting for the end of the Millennium when Satan, their boss, will be finally judged and cast into the lake of fire. They will appear for sentencing in that day. So will all those who are not confined, the demons who wreak such havoc in the world. And guess who will be involved in their judgment, in passing sentence on them: YOU will! What a great deal of authority God has invested in us! So, Paul's point is:

3. we should judge among ourselves (4-6) If God will use us to judge the world, can't we handle little petty disputes among ourselves? If God will use us to judge eternal beings and their destiny, can't we handle the much less important things that happen in this life? He says the church is quite capable of handling these cases! Now, you need to know something about verse 4. It is possible to translate the Greek in two different ways, and the way the NIV has chosen doesn't fit the context well. Look in the margin of your Bible. The *men of little account* are not believers in the church, but the very unbelievers to whom they are running outside the church, men who have no standing (literally) with the church. His thought runs, "You're going to judge the world; you're going to judge angels; so, when you have little problems do you appoint as your judges people who are outside the church? Shame on you! Why would you run to those who are entrusted by God with less than you are!" Paul's point is clear: believers should not take each other to secular court to settle differences. How should they settle them then? Jesus told us; we saw it last week in Mt. 18:15-17! If your personal attempt at settlement fails, take with you several others (I would say it's a good role for the elders) and if that doesn't work, tell it to the church. The church has that kind of authority in the lives of its people! Now folks, this is serious business. I used some little petty type problems at the beginning, but think of some serious ones such as a husband and wife having serious problems and both are part of the church. The church has a responsibility to reconcile those differences, not a divorce court! Or what about employer/employee problems where both are in the church; it should go to the church not a court! You see, our problems should stay right here and we have the wisdom of God to solve them without turning to secular courts! But that's only one part of the problem:

III. We Should Not Have Any Disputes to Judge! (7-11) in the first place! It is not enough to settle disputes; the fact that there are disputes is bad to start with. The presence of disputes between believers is an indication; it tells us some things:

1. they are an indication of spiritual defeat (7) Satan is in the camp and he has used his oldest and most successful tactic on us; he has set us against each other so we stop being against him! Serious differences are not from God. God brings love and unity, so in such a dispute somebody, or likely both, have a spiritual problem!

a. one or both are not walking in love Love for that brother or sister is all gone; it has been replaced with distaste and dislike. How different from what Jesus said. Compare Mt. 6:23-24. To paraphrase, "Don't come to church and act pious and worship God with a dispute in your life. It is your responsibility to go and get it straight." And notice that the command is the same no matter which the case is. Mt. 18 says if your brother sins against you, you go. Mt. 6 says if he has something against you that you've done, go! You have to love that person and settle your differences before you can serve God!

b. one or both are not willing to sacrifice Paul says, "Why don't you just let yourself be wronged?" That's the spirit of Christ; that's what He did! There are times when you have to let the other person win in order to settle differences, when you have to apologize for things you otherwise shouldn't. You see, you may win the battle, but you'll lose the person in the end. How much better to lose the battle, but eventually win the person! You might have to pay a price to do it!

2. they are an indication of selfishness (8) The old lawsuit game got into their blood and they were wronging one another by it. It was an indication that each was putting self on the throne, instead of putting others before self. The great majority of disputes between believers have selfishness at the root.

3. they are an indication of carnal behavior (9-11) Now here's that famous set of verses that we often use, but we never notice they are set in this context of disputes between believers. Paul's thoughts run like this:

a. the unjust shall not inherit the Kingdom (9) And he gives a whole list of people who are sinners and reminds them that these are the very things many of them were in the old life. In the list is thieves, greedy, and swindlers! That's how they used to act, but:

b. you who were unjust have been justified God washed them from those sins, stood them in his heavenly court and justified them, declared them just or righteous. So, his point is:

c. you must act like what you are! They were acting like they used to act when their old nature ran the show. When we have squabbles between brethren, we're living carnally, acting like mere men, not men who have the Holy Spirit living in them. We must act like what we are! And if we would do that there would not be any disputes to judge in the first place.

We are brethren and Christ's heartfelt prayer was that we all might be one, without schism, without enmity. So, what will you do the next time you have a problem with somebody? Deal with it God's way? Or man's way! I remember two neighbors in my home town who built a literal wall down the middle of their shared driveway. I thought of it as "the hate wall". You can do like they did, take those differences and set them in cement and press your case as hard as you can and try to win and then have to live with yourself when it's all over. Or you can swallow all pride and selfishness and lean on the Holy Spirit and go and fix those differences and be glad for eternity you did. The choice is up to you.

1 Cor. 6:12-20 ON DESECRATING TEMPLES

The human body is perhaps the most marvelous thing God ever created. It is a wonder of intricacy and coordination. One of the most fascinating courses I ever took in college was human anatomy and my reaction after studying all the various systems of the body and how they work together was that of the Psalmist who said, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made!" To most people, the body is a very precious thing; you'll know all about it when its various parts start to fail you! But on the other hand, it is amazing beyond belief what some human beings do to their own bodies. I'm not particularly thinking of the things African tribes do in disfiguring themselves with their distended earlobes, stretched lips, and filed teeth! Some people pump their body full of drugs or chemicals or rip an unborn baby loose from its insides. Some kill themselves and disease their bodies with immorality. The Church at Corinth was evidently not only derelict in disciplining members who fell into sin and in allowing disputes between members to go unmentioned, but evidently a number of them had become derelict in the way they were treating their bodies.

I. Some Practices That Were Going On At Corinth Paul doesn't make an outright list so we'll have to read between the lines here to see them.

1. encroachment of worldly philosophies (12) Notice the NIV's quotation marks around the three phrases in verses 12-13. The reason they are there is that many scholars feel those words are a direct quote by Paul of a slogan the Corinthians were commonly using. They had adopted a favorite saying and more than that, a way of living, that said, "Everything is permissible; all is OK". Now where did that come from? Well, it may have been rooted in Paul's own teaching in regard to the Old Testament law. He taught that we are free from the law, no longer bound to obey it as Israel was. The Corinthians latched onto the slogan, but forgot its point. Then, to make matters worse, they lived in a time and in a city where some very prevalent ideas about the body abounded. The prevailing philosophy of their day said that matter was evil, and so the human body itself was evil. Salvation was a spiritual thing; it had to do with the spirit, not the body. Purification was in the realm of the spirit, not the flesh, so it was OK for the flesh to enjoy itself without restraint. Well, that thinking easily crept into the church and fit right in with "Everything is permissible". So, they were thinking wrongly about their bodies. After that came:

2. enslavement to "permissible" practices Paul alludes to this in verse 12b, but his example is in 13. They had another slogan, "Food is made to be eaten and the stomach is made to eat food!" Now, that could be a reference to gluttony and the ancient customs of gorging and feasting. But probably it refers to the idea of eating foods forbidden by Old Testament law or to eating meat sacrificed to idols, which he takes up as a subject in chapter 8. But the sense is that some of these eating habits, while entirely permissible, had become addictive. Eating is fine; gluttony is not! Eating food sacrificed to idols is OK, but doing it and blatantly offending your brother isn't. Letting anything, even a permissible thing, become life-dominating is wrong. The third level of the problem was:

3. engagement in actual prostitution (15) Evidently, some Christians were finding license in their beliefs to continue to visit prostitutes as they had in their pagan days. After all, Greek society and Corinth in particular was loaded with them. Prostitution was an accepted part of worship at idolatrous temples. It was not frowned on at all. And so, some Christians were desecrating their bodies by it. You see, first they thought wrong. Then they acted wrongly in little things. Then they sinned openly and immorally. That's how sin works. And I'm afraid that it is working that way right now in our own society. Like it or not, the world has colored our thinking to some extent. What the world thinks about morals and sexuality is not hidden. More and more today, Christians are involved in sexual sin; Christians are involved in desecrating their own bodies. Time after time I hear about it or read about it. If there ever was a time when this message of Paul's about our bodies was needed, it is now! First, let's see:

II. Some Facts Concerning Our Body

1. it exists for the Lord (13-14) Paul says food and the stomach are not the ultimate issue; they'll both be gone one day. The point is that God is concerned about the body. It is for Him; He made it to serve His purposes. The Psalmist put it this way in **Ps. 139:13-16**. God designed, planned, and made your body to be the way it is. It is His creation made for His purposes, not yours. God cares so much about this body that He is going to raise it from the dead and transform and glorify it, just like He did the Lord Jesus! The Lord has an eternal plan and purpose for this body of yours!

2. it is a member of Christ (15-17) Now, member is not like a member of an organization, but literally, a limb of the body, a body part, like an arm or leg. The church is Christ's body and individually we are his body parts (Paul talked

about that in 1 Cor. 12). However, it is not just your spirit that is a part of Christ's body, but all of you, the whole person. So, your physical body is a part of Christ's body; you are His physical replacement in the world. He lives visibly now through you! So, when you do something wicked with your body, like sexual immorality for instance, you are taking Christ's body and uniting it with a harlot and becoming one with her. Put simply, what you do with this body affects the Savior; you cannot act without affecting Him; your body is part of His body!

3. it is a Temple of the Spirit (18-19a) Did you notice that your body has a relationship to the Father and then to the Son and now to the Holy Spirit. In verse 18 the word *other* is not in the Greek, nor is it implied. "All sins a man commits are outside the body". That's not a technical statement, but a general one, that for the most part sins are external matters against others or in what we say or do. But sexual sin is especially serious because it is directly against the body and when you violate your body, you are desecrating a temple. The Holy Spirit lives in you; your body is His sanctified dwelling place. When you sin against it, you are polluting and defiling the Spirit's Temple and that's a serious charge.

4. it is God's property (19b-20) Your body does not belong to you; it was purchased by Christ. He redeemed you, spirit, soul, and body! And the price was great; it cost His life! But the point here is not the magnitude, rather that the transaction was completed by payment. You don't like it when you've paid for something, but somebody mistreats it. You say, "That's mine, I paid for it!" Well, God paid for your body; it is His. You are not free to do to it and with it whatever you like, only what He directs! So, since our body belongs to God by creation and by purchase, since it is a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit, let me give you:

III. Some Principles Concerning Our Body

1. we should treat our body beneficially (12a) We should care for its needs and see that it is not pressed beyond endurance. We should do what is necessary to keep it healthy and sound; do what is profitable for it. Proper eating, exercise, rest and all those kinds of things are beneficial treatment of God's property.

2. we should not allow it to be addicted (12b), to fall under the mastery or control of anything other than the Holy Spirit. That controlling factor might be alcohol or drugs, either narcotic or prescription! It might be habitual overeating or lust for sex. It might be caffeine! Whenever something has a pull on your body so that it is affected and controlled by it, that thing is out of line! It might even be a very permissible thing, but when it begins to desecrate the Temple, it must be stopped.

3. we should flee from sexual immorality (18) Here Paul gets very direct. The other principles are kind of slippery; you have to decide what's over-eating and what's not. But here Paul is clear. When it comes to sexual immorality, it is not merely, "Don't do it!"; it is "Flee!" Flee like Joseph did when Potiphar's wife was after him (but remember to take your cloak with you!) Run from the slightest temptation to it!

4. we should honor God with our body (20) It is not just a matter of abstaining from evil, but of positively using our bodies to glorify God through service. Use it for deeds of kindness and love and testimony to the love of Christ.

So, how are you doing on these things? What about your body? You may not like it; you may wish it were slimmer or looked differently. You may wish it were stronger or hurt less. But God designed it just for you to have, to carry out His will. If I might just leave you with a Scripture used backward from its context, compare **Eph. 5:29**. Paul's point is that husbands should treat their wives with the same loving care they do their own bodies, with the same care that Christ treats each one of us. My point is that you should be careful to nourish and care for your own body, just the same way that Christ nourishes and cares for you!

1 Cor. 7 THE MARRIAGE QUESTION

Verse 1 tells us that we have now come to another division of the Corinthian letter. Paul talked about their DIVISIONS in chapters 1-4, then about DERELICTIONS in chapters 5-6. Now, he moves on to their DIFFICULTIES in chapters 7-10. Evidently, the Corinthian church had written him a letter to get some questions answered in areas where they were having difficulties understanding what to do. Their first question had to do with marriage (chapter 7) and their second with eating meat sacrificed to idols or what we'd call questionable activities (chapters 8-10). As we then approach the subject of marriage today, I would like to approach the seventh chapter as a whole. So much attention today is concentrated on the divorce issue mentioned in verses 10-15, that I would like to save that until next time. That was only one small part of the bigger question they were asking, which was really, "Should a Christian be married, and if he is not now, should he get married?" Really, the question is that of celibacy. Evidently there was a party in Corinth who had come to advocate the position that it was more spiritual to be unmarried. That same party has always been around down through church history. It has resulted in the celibate priesthood and the convents of the Roman Catholic church. But on a practical level, it faces every young person and unmarried person in the church at large today. It faces your children and grandchildren and one day it may face you, so listen up anyway!

I. General Principles About the State of Marriage

1. singleness is good (1) There is nothing wrong with it. Paul was a Jew and in Jewish society marriage was almost mandatory. Sometimes we unwittingly give out the same impression. People think you're weird if you're not dating or not married by the age of 25 or 30. They pity older singles and call them "unclaimed blessings". Remember the greatest missionary that ever lived, the Apostle Paul, was single! He may have been widower, but during the whole time of his ministry he was single. It's OK!

2. marriage is good (2) It is not only good because it is God-ordained, but in a society like Corinth or America where sexual immorality so abounds that it is the norm, Christian, monogamous, marriage is a wonderful God-given deterrent to immorality. But it is only good when there is the complete fidelity of a single husband and wife.

3. sex within marriage is good (3-6) We'll save the details for next time, but the point is that sex is God-ordained part of the marriage relationship. There has often been in church history, and even to the present, a feeling that sex is a kind of evil necessity allowed in marriage, but totally wicked outside of it and in itself. Some Christians have tried to be married and live pure from it! It shouldn't be. Sex within marriage is normal, wholesome, and even commanded!

4. God's design is more important than yours (7) Paul had a wish. He found that being single helped him immeasurably to serve God and wished the same for others. However, Paul says God does not have the same design for everyone. God in His wisdom wants some to be married and some not. You may have a wish too. It may be like Paul's to remain single, or more probably the opposite, to get married. I've known people, especially young ladies, who were consumed with the idea of getting married! Listen, if God is the most important person in your life, then what He wants is the most important thing for you. And there is no decision you make in life which requires more praying about and care than the decision of whether or not God wants you to marry! And the time to think and pray about it is before your emotions get involved with someone, because then logic seems to go out the window!

II. Practical Thoughts About the State of Marriage If you analyze this chapter carefully, you will find that Paul says there are three key factors involved in the marriage decision:

1. the self-control factor (8-9) It is no secret that people are different; some have a far greater sex drive than others. It is part of their physical make-up. Some people find sexual temptations and lustful thoughts a constant and difficult problem that requires fighting. Others are not bothered much by it. Now, marriage provides a God-given, wonderful outlet for that kind of pressure and Paul says that if you're the type of person who would constantly burn with lustful passions and have to fight them and perhaps be weak enough to fall into immorality, then it is definitely better to marry, other things being equal.

2. the circumstantial factor There are two sets of circumstances to be taken into account:

a. your personal circumstances (17-24) The point of these verses is that being a Christian doesn't demand that you change your physical circumstances. Most of the Corinthians, of course, had been saved as adults out of idolatry. Paul says, "Where are you right now? If the Lord leads you to change, well and good. But unless you're in sin, there is no need to change, just because you're saved". That's the question to ask, "Where are you right now?" God's first design is for you to be serving Him to your utmost right where you are! If you're not, then don't expect God to lead you or that getting married will fix it! Don't change where you're at, unless you're sure it is of God!

b. your environmental circumstances (26) Paul mentions "the present distress". Perhaps this is a reference to anti-Christian sentiment at Corinth (remember the riot against Paul?) Single people would find persecution easier to handle. Perhaps there are other circumstances, like the burden of caring for a parent, the call to a dangerous field, and so on, that would indicate God might want you remain single. In other ministries, it would be far easier or even necessary to be married.

3. the service factor (29-35) The key thing in life is serving God and marriage certainly affects that. There are two aspects to consider:

a. the entanglement aspect (29-31) The truth is that the time is short. Whether or not Christ is coming soon is not the issue. Death is coming anyway. The time is short; you have only a limited opportunity to serve God before you go off the scene of history forever. Nothing we have now is forever, not material things, not our joys or sorrows, not even marriage. But all these things tend to bog us down in this world. I like the NIV word *engrossed* in verse 31. If being married will cause me to become engrossed in the things of this world and start living for those things and totally hinder my service to God, then I had better think twice about it!

b. the anxiety aspect (32-35) Marriage brings responsibilities, and necessarily so. A married person must care for their spouse and family and must please them as well as the Lord. That's not bad; it's just the way it is. It may not entangle your heart with worldly things, but it may bring to you a whole load of anxieties and cares that may hinder the service to which God has called you. Jim and Betty Elliot decided not to marry because of their individual call-

ings to the mission field; later they married on the field. The point is, BE SURE! DON'T MARRY BECAUSE ITS THE THING TO DO, OR BECAUSE IT'S EXPECTED, OR BECAUSE OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS!

III. Direct Applications to Those Considering Marriage Paul speaks directly to several groups here to make application of these principles. Please note that none of these apply to a person who has no scriptural right to marry (verse 11 says there are such), but rather to those who have legitimate freedom before the Lord to marry.

1. to those not currently married (8-9) *Non-married* might be a better translation. It seems to picture those who had been married, but were widowed, or perhaps those who were not married, but were involved in sexual immorality before salvation, so as not to fit the classification of virgins mentioned later. But it could apply to all currently unmarried people. There is:

a. freedom in the Lord They can marry; they are free, but the key is:

b. the self-control factor Can you control your bodily desires and passions? Can you live pure if you're unmarried? If so, then perhaps you should. If not, then perhaps you should look to God to marry. This factor is perhaps the bottom line factor.

2. to those never married (25-38) This seems to apply (verse 28) to both male and female. The whole section of verses 36-38 is confusing. The KJV and NAS translate it as though it is talking about a father allowing his daughter to get married. The NIV translates it as though it is talking about a young man with plans to marry a girl. You can't tell from the Greek, because the word *daughter* is not there; it simply says, *his virgin*. That could mean either his daughter or his fiancé! However, it doesn't matter, because in either case we are talking about never-married persons and the advice is the same:

a. freedom in the Lord (28, 36) It is not wrong to marry; there is complete freedom in the Lord to do it, but he urges never-married folks to consider:

b. the service factor (32, 35) Can you have undivided loyalty and devotion to God and obey Him and go where He says to go and be married? If you can truthfully answer yes, then well and good. If not, think carefully about staying single.

3. to those once married (39-40), the widows and widowers who are now alone. Note again that there is:

a. freedom in the Lord There is nothing to prevent it; marriage is not eternal, so that you are betraying that first spouse now in heaven. You are free, but consider:

b. the circumstantial factor Paul judges that you'll be happier without all the problems that it may bring. So, he implies that the factor of circumstances is the key. Compare **I Tim. 5:9-14**. Here's quite different advice. Young widows or widowers *should* marry out of the practicality of it in their own circumstances. Older ones are probably better off single. Again, the circumstances of your life and surroundings are key factor.

So, to the unmarried of every type, this chapter says that the most important thing in this life is not marriage, but God. You need to put God in first place. You need to be ready to do what He wants and please Him above all. Isn't that for all of us, married or unmarried? So, Paul's challenge is that you may have to be ready to lay down what you now consider the most important thing in life for Him. Are you?

1 Cor. 7:10-16 THE DIVORCE QUESTION

The questions the Corinthians had about marriage not only included the question of whether to marry, but also the whole problem of divorce. Evidently, divorce was a common thing in the pagan society around them and they were not clear as to Christ's position on this practice. Especially, there was the problem of people who got saved and now found themselves married to unbelievers. What should they do? It is obvious that God's answers to these questions are greatly needed in our day too when divorce is becoming more and more normal and acceptable, not just in the world, but in the church as well. The first thing Paul does for us is to lay out:

I. The General Principles of Marriage Let's begin a little ahead of our text:

1. fidelity (2) Notice it is each-their-own, singular. That means no polygamy or multiple husbands, no concubines, mistresses, or consorts, no third parties. Marriage is based on the commitment of one husband and one wife to remain totally consecrated to each other until death. That's what marriage is; at least that's what God says it is. Now, the world has a hard time with that, but fidelity is God's #1 requirement!

2. sexual regularity (3-6) The couple should have a regular, active, and mutually satisfying sexual relationship. That is to be characterized by:

a. meeting the other's needs The husband's body belongs to the wife and he must be first concerned to meet her needs. The wife's body belongs to the husband and she must first be concerned to meet his needs. And if both

practice that principle, there will be a satisfying relationship and temptation to be unfaithful will be greatly reduced. Notice that this is not a suggestion but a command! Paul only mentions:

b. the sole exception The only time that regular sexual activity can be broken off is if both agree to do it for a short period, so as to give themselves fully to prayer. But it is only to be a brief period and then to resume immediately, Paul says. And even this exception is not mandatory, but a concession, something allowable if both wish to do it.

3. permanence (10-11) Now Paul affirms that he is repeating what Jesus taught in Mt. 5, Mt. 19, Mk. 10 and elsewhere, that marriage is permanent. In other words, if a husband and wife want to obey God, then they will not divorce each other. Now, notice how specific Paul is about:

a. the command of no divorce The verbs he chooses here are important and so is the fact that he mentions two possible situations:

(1) no leaving yourself The wife (or husband) is not to leave, not to say, "Well, I'm tired of this marriage; I'm leaving." So, you can't just throw in the towel and quit and walk away. Conversely:

(2) no sending away the other The husband (or wife) can't send the other away, tell them to leave! Now please note that these things are a command, a "must not!" Some might feel, "Well, it's OK if I do it, as long as I'm ready to be obedient in taking the consequence of remaining single". No, this is a command. It is the leaving or sending away that is wrong in the first place! The consequences Paul mentions are for those who have already broken their marriage and are now convicted and want to know God's path! It is not a "take your pick" situation where you can choose to stay in the marriage or remain single!

b. the consequences of divorce Now, once a marriage has been broken and the person wants to know what to do, Paul has an answer:

(1) permanent singleness That is not something to be said lightly. It seems cruel to see a person who sinned by breaking their marriage without cause have to remain alone the rest of their life. But God knows best and God says that is the right path. It is either remaining single or:

(2) eventual reconciliation Here is God's real goal: to put it back together. Just as Israel His bride left Him and yet He is committed to bringing her back to Himself one day! Now, this whole subject opens up a real can of worms such as, "What if the divorce happened before you were saved? Or "What if you were an innocent party and your partner divorced you?" Or, "What about the exception clause or abuse?" But let's not get bogged down in all those things today. Paul is teaching a general rule; two believers who are married should not divorce, period, and if they disobediently do, they should be reconciled or remain permanently unmarried! However, having given the general rule, Paul does mention one:

II. The Specific Case (12-13), the case where a believer is married to an unbeliever, presumably because both were unsaved when they married and now one is saved and the other has not believed. What should they do? This was important to clarify because Jesus never covered the subject directly in His teaching and because someone might have been reading their Old Testament and read the book of Ezra and saw where the Israelites had married foreign women against God's commands and, now that they were repentant, God told them to break up those sinful unions. Well, things are different now. That was Israel. Some things God did differently with her. But now for the church age, Paul gives God's command. There are two cases:

1. if the unbeliever stays, don't send them away If the unbeliever wants the marriage and stays in it, you don't leave or send them out and here are two reasons:

a. you are a means of grace to them (14) Now, this is a strange verse to us, but perhaps not to anyone with Jewish background. Would not the union of a Jew and Gentile produce a mixed unholy offspring? That was the case of the Samaritans whom the Jews despised for their tainted blood! *Sanctified* here does not mean *saved*, but rather, *set apart*. The Christian spouse does not get salvation for the other family members, so they are genuinely holy. Rather, it means that the blessings and benefits that come to the Christian, abide on the home as well. The Christian influence on the spouse and children, the answered prayer, needs being met, and all of God's other blessings come to the home through you. You might feel it better to take the children out of such a mixed influence and leave. But God says, "No, stay! I will bless the home for your sake", just as Potiphar's house was blessed by Joseph's presence or Laban's by Jacob's. You are a channel of blessing to the family but further:

b. you may win them to Christ (16) If you leave, you never will! But if you stay, there is a good possibility that you may win that unsaved spouse to Christ, whether it is a husband or wife. Compare **2 Pet. 3:1-2**. However:

2. if the unbeliever separates, let them (15) If the unbeliever says, "This isn't the person I married; I didn't bargain for this Christian stuff" and separates himself, in that case there is a direct command to let the spouse separate, not to follow after them or try to force them to remain in the marriage against their will. Paul comments:

a. the believer is not "enslaved" This one word *bound* has caused more controversy than any other part of this text and requires careful scrutiny. Look with me at verse 39 and see it there. The Greek word there means literally to bind together, either physically or legally and it is speaking of the legal binding of husband and wife. It is said to be until death. It is the same in verse 27 (KJV), where the NIV says *married* and means legally bound in marriage. You find the same word in Rom. 7:2, where again Paul says the legal marriage bond lasts until death. However, the word in verse 15 is an entirely different word; it is from the Greek *doulos* (a slave) and literally means *enslaved*! Paul is saying that the believer is not in the slavery of having to follow that departing unbeliever about and putting up with every attempt of the unbeliever to get rid himself, fighting tooth and nail to keep that other. He is to let go; he no longer owes the duties and service that go with marriage to that person. See:

b. God's primary concern is peace A forced staying will bring constant strife. God wants peace in that home and between those two persons, and letting go will be necessary to accomplish it.

Now, this whole section has a general point: God wants your marriage to work. God's way is never to run out, but always to hang in there and pray and persevere and make it work. Unless death intervenes, you only get one shot, so you have to make it your best. Some of you today may have difficulties in your marriage that are known only to you. Commit yourself to solving them. Get help if you need it. Get Christian counseling. Some of you have an unsaved husband or wife and sometimes they make it rough on you and you feel like leaving or getting rid of them. Hang in there! Persevere. They can still come to Christ; it is not too late. I know one lady whose mother prayed 40 years for her husband and he finally got saved! Many of you have pretty good marriages. Maintain them. Guard them carefully. It is so easy for things to fall apart!

1 Cor. 8 THE LAWS OF LIBERTY

The second difficulty which the Corinthians had written to Paul about was whether or not to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Now, you must remember that the Christians in Corinth were, like us, a minority. Most people worshipped at one or more of the idolatrous temples. This idolatry was a life-dominating and culture-dominating thing. Much of the meat available in the marketplace came from the sacrifices offered in the temples. It could not all be eaten by the worshippers there and so was sold publicly. The Jews would not touch the stuff because it was associated with idolatry and was not 'kosher'; it had not been slaughtered properly to remove the blood. The Christians, however, were faced with a dilemma. They were not bound by Old Testament dietary laws any longer, but would the use of this meat connect them with idolatry? This question had several ramifications that Paul covers in his three chapter answer. Could they buy it in the market for personal consumption? What if they went to someone's home as a guest and it was put on the table? Or could they even attend one of these pagan sacrifices as an observer and sit down to eat the meal there like everybody else? These questions sound hauntingly familiar to us, don't they? All I would need do is change the word *meat* to *alcohol* and *temple* to *night club* or *bar* and the questions would hit home! This matter of meat raises for us the whole issue of Christian liberty or questionable things or things we call matters of conscience, things like the social use of alcohol, cards, dancing, movies, and so on, things that some Christians feel full liberty to do and others stand firmly against. The list changes with time. Things drop off as those issues are clarified, and new ones are added, but the principles we use for dealing with all of them remain the same. There are:

I. Two Laws of Decision-making (1-3)

1. the law of knowledge (1-2) We act on what we know and, being Christians, we know a great deal more in the spiritual realm than unsaved people do. It is God's gift to us. That is our first consideration "What facts do we know from Scripture that relate to the issue at hand." But knowledge by itself has two problems:

a. it is incomplete Paul spelled it out in the 13th chapter, saying, *we know in part*. Full and complete knowledge will not be ours until we get to heaven. We often make judgments without having all the facts because we can't see from all the angles God sees.

b. it puffs up self Knowledge tends to pride, the old "I know something you don't know" syndrome. We feel we are superior to others who have a lesser understanding of the issue.

2. the law of love (1c, 3) We also act on the principle of love for others as our basic rule and most important command. Now, love has some very positive things going for it:

a. it builds up others Knowledge tends to pride; love tends to humility. Knowledge looks to self; love looks to others.

b. it comes from knowing God The most important thing is not what you know, but Who knows you! The love that you practice is the outward demonstration of the fact that you know God and God knows you! So, in exercising our liberty, we must consider both these laws. Knowledge and love must somehow both govern our actions. Either without the other can go astray. So, the two questions to ask yourself in deciding on a questionable thing are, "What do I know about it?" and "What is the loving thing to do?"

II. Two Levels of Knowledge (4-7) The fly in the ointment here is that not all believers have the same level of knowledge. If we all knew the same truths, we would not disagree on these kinds of issues. But we don't. In thinking about what we know on any issue there are always two levels of knowledge:

1. our level (4-6) Paul lists the facts that he knows about the meat-eating issue. We know:

a. the nothingness of the item An idol is a nothing; it is a hunk of wood or metal or stone. It has no life and no power. There are not many gods, as the pagans claim, but only one God. Therefore, the physical act of placing meat in front of an idol does nothing to it. It is not magically contaminated. It is a hunk of meat. The principle we need to extend this is found in Rom. 14:14. Nothing is unclean of itself. There are no longer unclean foods that are forbidden as in the Old Testament. There are no longer unclean people that should not be touched (as God showed Peter in Acts). God has given us all things richly to enjoy, to make use of for good purposes. And we know:

b. the nothingness of the action (8) From the standpoint of knowledge, it doesn't matter if you eat the meat or not. It is not a sin and has no effect whatsoever. A playing card is a piece of paper with numbers on it; so is a dollar bill. Neither is unclean of itself and playing a game of fish or even poker makes no difference at all (Of course, when you try to take somebody else's money by doing it, that's an abuse of the principle!). Having wine with a meal is not in and of itself wrong; Jesus Himself did it and you can't prove otherwise. (Of course, drunkenness is wrong, as is the misuse or abuse of any of these things.) But see, those things are what WE know. Then there is:

2. the level of others (7) Some people who were converted from idolatry believed in Jesus as the True God, but may still not have learned that other gods did not exist. Or they may now have such a repulsion of idolatry that they consider anything even touched by it as sinful. Making a rule has always been the simplest way to deal with things. Many older Christians were taught for years that it was a sin to ever take one drink or ever go to a movie or ever have hair longer than a certain length. And they took what they were taught and never studied it carefully to find out why and whether it was true in the absolute. So, there are Christians out there with levels of knowledge different than yours!

III. Two Levels of Action (8-13) So here I am faced with the dilemma, to do it or not to do it. I have two levels of action to choose from:

1. selfish: knowledge-based (8) I can act purely on what I know. I can act based on the freedom that I have to eat based on what I know. I can use my "rights", my "liberty in Christ". Or:

2. loving: love-based (9-13) I can consider the effects of what I do on others whose knowledge level is different from mine. You see:

a. love considers the effects of actions (9-11) Love says, "What if somebody sees me sitting here in this pagan temple eating meat who believes this is a flagrant sin and says, 'If he can do it, then I guess I can do it,' so he does and it bothers his conscience and emboldens him to do other things like participate in the actual idol worship and it messes up his relationship with God and ruins his testimony?". Love says I am responsible to others because people watch me. Love says, "What effect will this have on others if I do it?"

b. love considers the cause of Christ (12) If my liberty hinders another believer, then I sin against Christ! Love considers, "Will my doing this further or hinder the cause of Christ?" So, the bottom line truth is:

c. liberty must be regulated by love (13) When knowledge says I have freedom, love must determine whether I exercise it or not! Knowledge gives me the "can"; love gives me the "ought to" or "ought not to". So, rather than give you a clear-cut series of do's and don'ts, I've given you a set of principles that you've got to apply to each of these issues and in every situation. You have to apply these principles day by day, to whether you drink alcohol, to the music you listen to, to the places you go and the things you do, to your personal habits.

I'll leave you with the verse that was on my college's seal, Jn. 8:32 *You shall know the truth and the truth and the truth shall make you free.* Of course, they liberalized the meaning to say that education brings freedom. But if you read the text, you'll find that our real freedom is the freedom from the bondage of sin. However, Paul writes in 1 Cor. 7:22, *He who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave!* Paul always called himself the "bondslave of Jesus Christ". We are at the bottom line servants, and he who would be greatest among us must be the servant of all! The real question to ask yourself is not, "What may I do?" but "How can I serve?"!

1 Cor. 9 THE LIMITATION OF LIBERTY

Remember from chapter 8 that Paul had laid down two laws to be used in deciding questionable issues, the law of knowledge and the law of love. His point was that love supersedes knowledge; sometimes we have to give up what we may have the freedom to do for the sake of others! What a message for us today when the cry is, "my rights!" We have rights for everybody today, except unborn babies and Christians who want to pray in schools! "Lay down your rights" is not a popular message now, nor was it then. Paul knew that many of the Corinthians would be upset with him over his

answer so he proceeded to do what every good preacher does in areas like this; he showed how he had practiced this in his own life! Now, the first 14 verses of this chapter are concerned with:

I. Paul's Rights as an Apostle (1-3) Paul was an apostle. That may not mean much to you but to be an apostle is a very heavy thing. The office of apostle was that of the highest leadership within the church. It was superior to the elders or deacons of the local church. An apostle was originally one sent by Jesus to plant the church in the world. Some of the Corinthians evidently had some question about whether Paul really was a legitimate apostle or not. Paul says, "I am an apostle; I have seen Jesus personally in a vision and He sent me to plant churches; I brought you Corinthians to Christ; you are the proof that I am an apostle. And if anybody should have freedoms and privileges, it should be an apostle!". Then he lists three freedoms he should have:

1. the freedom to eat (4) This refers back to 8:13, meaning the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols. He had already shown how he knew that there was perfect freedom to eat that meat because idols are nothing. And as an apostle who certainly should have knowledge, he, of all people, should have that liberty.

2. the freedom to marry (5) Paul was unmarried. Many of the other apostles weren't. This also refers back to what he said before. Compare 7:8, 28. He had complete freedom to marry, just as much as anyone.

3. the freedom to receive support (6) Now he mentions his right to have his physical needs supplied by the brethren, so he could be free to preach. But lest anyone might argue with that right, he establishes it in five different ways:

a. the natural examples (7) The nature of things tells you it should be that way. Soldiers are supplied with weapons and provisions by their country. They don't have to stop and make a living. Vineyard owners eat from their plants; they have their needs met by what they put their effort into. Shepherds who care for their sheep enjoy milk and wool from them. So, Christian workers have a right to support!

b. the unmuzzled ox (8-11) Paul says it was first intimated in the law. The rule about not muzzling an ox while threshing grain is not a humanitarian law for oxen, but a teaching that those who labor should enjoy the fruits of it and that applies to Christian workers!

c. the example of other leaders (12) Other Christian leaders were being supported by them and they felt an obligation to do it.

d. the Old Testament priests (13) The full-time servants of God in the Old Testament had their needs met by the worshippers and it was still going on. It was an acknowledged principle of God.

e. the teaching of Jesus (14) The Lord (Jesus) taught it also. Compare Lk. 10:7-8. Jesus expected that his apostles would be provided for by those they taught. Paul says it extends even further and is a church-age principle. That's why we have a paid clergy today. It's not that we pay them to do a spiritual job for us. We supply their material needs so that they can be free to minister to our spiritual needs! So, Paul had the right to expect support and all these other things, but see:

II. Paul's Renunciation of His Rights (15-18) Paul had more rights than any of them, yet he gave them all up! See:

1. the limits Paul imposed on himself While he had complete freedom to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols, he says in chapter 8 that he won't do it ever again because it might cause someone to stumble. While he had freedom to marry, chapter 7 makes it clear that he has no intention of it. All those years of serving God, for the sake of his ministry he never married. He gave up the comfort of having a wife and family so others would hear and be saved. And though the Corinthians had the obligation to support him financially, and he had the right to receive it, he never used that right there, so no one would say he was in it for the money! In Acts 18, which tells the story of the founding of the church at Corinth, the first thing it says is that Paul found Aquila and Priscilla who were tentmakers like himself and he stayed and worked with them. Evidently that was true the whole 1½ years he was there. He worked all day making tents and ministered during off hours and at night and whenever he could! He limited his own right, even once there was a real church established that could have supported him! He gave up his rights. Why?

2. the view Paul has of himself He is not some nice guy who voluntarily is doing some nice thing for which he should be rewarded. He is simply a slave of Jesus Christ under orders to go preach the Gospel in the best, most effective way possible. His rights don't matter to him; what matters is carrying out the charge the Master has given him! My, we Christians are always whining about how much we give up for Jesus, how we sacrifice this and that! Listen, we are simply carrying out the orders He has entrusted us with! You can have all the rights and freedoms in the world but if you're not ready to lay them down for Christ's sake, then something's wrong with your spiritual life. If you're not ready to lay down the use of alcohol or cards or music or anything else for Christ, then your commitment has holes in it! But you may still say, "Why should I? Wouldn't it be better to insist on my rights and change the thinking of others?" Well, look at:

III. Paul's Reasons for Limiting His Liberty (19-27) Paul has four major reasons why you should be willing to lay down your rights and privileges:

1. to save as many as possible (19-23) When Paul was with Jews, he observed Jewish customs, ate kosher food, and so on. He didn't have to, but he did or he would never have won any! When he was with Gentiles, he did not carry those Jewish customs over, but operated as a Gentile Christian himself. Why? So as to not turn them away from the Gospel. When he was with weak brethren who would never eat meat from the idol's temple, he made sure he didn't either. His rule was not to put anything in the way of people being drawn to Christ. And you had better not either! I don't want anyone someday to stand before God and point a finger at me and say, "I saw him do that and I figured if that's Christianity, I don't need it; he's no different from me!"

2. to win a reward (24-25) Paul wanted a crown, a prize. Paul says, "Be like an athlete in training. Deny yourself all the liberties you have, to get in shape so as to run to win the prize." But the prize is not a material reward, Compare 1 Thess. 2:19-20. The reward is in that day around the throne to see all those that have come to faith through our influence and have grown to maturity through our help and have affected others. Listen, it won't matter one day whether you got to listen to some of the music you liked or got to enjoy the taste of wine or got to live where you wanted to live or got to buy the cheapest meat in the market. Those things will be over and gone. A human soul is the only immortal thing in this world, the only thing you can take with you. And what a reward it will be to see those who have been influenced by you standing there with you on that day. How sad it would be to have no one there that you have helped!

3. to prevent discipline (26-27) Paul had a purpose, a goal in life. He didn't run like a runner without a course or finish line. He didn't box the air. He knew his life was meant to count for Jesus Christ and he was careful to discipline himself lest he should overstep the rules and be disqualified! The word is really *disapproved*. His fear is really that he would end up out of the race, that he would become useless to God and God would have to stop using him and take His hand of power and blessing off his ministry and discipline him! Conversely, the Corinthians were abusing every liberty they had, even the use of spiritual gifts and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and what does Paul tell them? Compare 11:28-32. Paul doesn't want that. He wants God to be pleased with his life and ministry and to bless it to the end. I hope you do too.

I don't know what rights and privileges you may be concerned with. It may be a legitimate opportunity that you forego for the sake of appearances. It may be an apology that is due to you but you forego waiting on it and take the first step. It may be a place you'd like to go or a thing you'd like to do but you can't because of others. If you dwell on those things, you'll get mighty frustrated. Dwell on this instead: One day in the twinkling of an eye you'll be in heaven and there will be a throne and on it will be Jesus. And all the angels of heaven will be gathered around in shimmering white and with them a vast multitude so great that no man can count them all, those who have been redeemed thronging around the throne. And one by one the names are called: Peter, Luke, James, and Lois, Tom, Mary and at last your name is called and the attention of heaven focuses on you and at last the word comes, *Well done, good and faithful servant!* And a chorus of AMENs goes up all around you and you look and there is the paper boy who you treated so kindly and gave a tract to and there is the neighbor you so carefully witnessed to and there is the little child you let sit on your porch swing and gave up time for, now grown up. And on and on and on. Friend, I'd give up anything for that, wouldn't you?

1 Cor. 10:1-13 THE DANGER OF LIBERTY

There is a great danger any time you have a privilege and that is presuming upon it, presuming that your privilege will carry you through, no matter what your behavior is! Put simply it is to think, "Because I am this, I can do this and get by with it!" For example, "Because I am the boss, I can come in to work late and nobody will say anything." Nowhere is this danger more devastating than in the spiritual realm. "Because I am a Christian and I am secure in Christ, I can sin and get by with it, God will forgive me anyway!" Paul's been talking about limiting your liberty in questionable things out of love for others. But what if I don't! What if I don't want to give up my rights and lay down my freedom for someone else. After all, I know I'm saved and can't lose it. I don't HAVE to do it! Well, Paul's closing remark in chapter 9 is, "I discipline myself carefully so God doesn't put me out of the race, so He doesn't discipline me!" No, you won't lose your salvation, but God may discipline you for your behavior and, as we saw briefly in the end of chapter 11, that discipline may go as far as taking you out of this life if you can no longer be used! Now Paul gives:

I. The Illustration of Israel (1-10) Paul says twice (verses 6,11) that God dealt with Israel in such a manner as to make her an example to us, literally in the Greek it says a *type*, an Old Testament illustration of a New Testament truth! Israel, as a whole, pictures the believer in Jesus Christ. She never lost her standing with God which she had by grace through God's promise to Abraham, but when she fell into sin, God disciplined her severely! In fact, look at:

1. the general case of their overall experience in the wilderness. Note two things:

a. all were privileged in the things of God Look how many times the word all appears here. All..all..all. They all had the privileges but:

b. most perished under God's discipline (5) An entire generation died there in the wilderness in 40 years. We are talking about a million graves! In fact, only two made it across the Jordan into Canaan, Caleb and Joshua! Even Moses and Aaron died on the other side. God's discipline extended even to physical death! An entire generation were disapproved, taken out of the race, cast away as far as God's use of them and plan for them was concerned. Now let's look at the five specific examples that Paul gives, five cases of things that could disqualify you and I from God's service and bring discipline.

2. Case # 1: Lust Paul first lists the privileges and then the failures. They seem to correspond to each other and we'll look at them together in five cases.

a. they knew God's care (1) They were under the cloud. It went before them to guide them and extended back over them to protect them from the sun with its shade and at night it became fire to warm them in the desert cold! They knew the care of God and how He was leading them and protecting them, but still:

b. they desired evil things (6) This seems to point to Numbers 11 where they were on the way to Kadesh and got tired of eating manna. They remembered the delicious variety of foods they had in Egypt and demanded that Moses give them meat! They always wanted the world and its pleasures! So, God sent them quail to eat for a month, but He also sent a plague that killed hundreds of people and guess which ones (11:34), the ones that craved, and they called the place *Kibroth Hattaavah*, the graves of craving! Some of the Corinthians missed their meat too, didn't they? (chapter 8). Some believers miss the things they used to enjoy too! The fact is, getting caught up in wanting things God doesn't want you to have is a pretty quick way to get put out of the race!

3. Case # 2: Idolatry

a. they knew God's power (1) They had passed through the sea. They had stood and watched the Egyptians dead on the seashore and knew that the Lord was mightier than all the idols of Egypt! But at the first opportunity:

b. they practiced idolatry (7) You remember the story of Exodus 32 and the golden calf. They heard God say, "Don't make any graven image" with their own ears, yet they did it anyway. But you may not remember what happened next. Moses drew a line and said, "Whoever is on the Lord's side cross the line!" and then sent the Levites out with swords and 3,000 of the worst offenders were killed! Some of the Corinthians missed going into their idolatrous temples too! They were asking about going back to eat! But you know, letting anything get into first place in your life other than God is dangerous. It might be a job or person or a hobby, but you could end up out of the race!

4. Case # 3: Immorality

a. they were united with Moses (2) The word *baptized* here must have another meaning, because they didn't get wet! And it does, *to identify*. Baptism identifies us with the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through their exodus, they were identified with Moses their leader and through him to the Law he brought them. They said to Moses, "We will obey!" But:

b. they committed fornication (8) While they were on the plains of Moab across Jordan in Num. 25, the Moabites used a piece of advice they got from Balaam the hireling prophet, and used their pretty young women to entice the Israelite men into sin and idolatry. It worked quite well. This time 23,000 died under God's discipline for uniting themselves to another. Some of the Corinthians were going down that road too. Remember chapter 6 and Paul's advice about taking Christ's body and joining it to a harlot? The warning stands. Sexual immorality will put you out of the race; it will keep you from being used of God as His servant and hearing "Well done" one day!

5. Case # 4: Contempt for God

a. they knew God's provision (3) They ate spiritual food. The Psalmist calls their manna, angels' food, Jesus mentioned it as bread from heaven. They knew God was providing for them but:

b. they tested the Lord (9) This is in Numbers 21. They said, "God is not providing; this stuff isn't real provision and there is no real food or water". This time His discipline was poisonous snakes. Many of them died and many more would have, except in repentance they turned to look at the serpent up on the pole and lived. Some of the Corinthians were testing God by the way they treated the Lord's Supper and in other things. Some of them were already getting God's discipline. Treating the things of God with contempt is another way to get put out of the race!

6. Case # 5: Rebellion

a. they were shepherded by Christ (4) Paul alludes to the water they got from the rock on two occasions, but says the real *Rock* that was meeting their needs was Christ. He was with them those 40 years in the wilderness, shepherding them and caring for them and giving them life but:

b. they rebelled against Him (10) The murmuring was not simply complaining in Numbers 16, but rebellion against Moses' authority by Korah and his friends saying that they too had God's authority. In reality, they were re-

bellings directly against it and this time the ground opened up and swallowed them and 250 others were burned in fire. Some of the Corinthians were awfully proud too and trying to rebel against Paul's authority over them in Christ, but really against Christ Himself. Some believers today want to say "No" to God about this issue or that one. This too can bring discipline and you can be set aside.

II. The Application to Us (11-13) Israel is our example. She had great privilege with God, but that did not prevent God's discipline. She stands as a warning to us. And Paul concludes this section with two great truths:

1. your standing never avoids God's discipline (12) This verse doesn't simply mean that anybody can sin, though that is true. It means that nobody, not Paul, not even you, is immune to God's discipline for sin, even though you are saved. It's a great presumption to think, "I can sin and God will not punish me!" whether you're saved or not. And you know, we have lost something today. We are not afraid of God anymore. Oh, I'm not talking about terror and being afraid to pray to Him. I mean the healthy fear that a boy used to have for his dad because of some trips to the woodshed! We ought to know God loves us and is close to us, but we ought to be greatly afraid to displease Him! Paul was!

2. God will always help you to avoid sin (13) It's not that God just says, "Don't sin" and then it's up to us to fight off temptation by ourselves. He has committed Himself to help you in two ways:

a. He limits the temptation for you He puts a limit on it; He won't let any temptation come into your life that is too strong for you to handle with His help and then:

b. He makes a way of escape for you He always makes a way out, and often that way is as simple as the next verse, "Flee!" Don't go near it! So, you have no excuse for sinning. You can't say, "I couldn't help it, there was no way to avoid it, it was too much for me."

And that leaves responsibility squarely on your shoulders. You have great privileges in Jesus Christ but you must still choose to obey Him or risk His discipline. *A little three-year-old boy didn't like soap and water. One day his mother said, in trying to reason with him, "Surely you want to be clean, don't you?" "Yes," he replied, "But can't you just dust me off?"* God wants clean children and if He needs to, He'll scrub hard! So don't abuse your liberty by using it for sin!

1 Cor. 10:14-33 THE PRACTICE OF LIBERTY

In this section Paul finishes up his discussion of the issue of Christian liberty which was brought on by the issue of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. He had given the Corinthians the general principles to apply: knowledge and love. He had shown them how right it was to lay down their own freedom for the sake of others. He had warned them against falling into sin through liberty. But he couldn't leave the subject without giving some concrete answers to their specific questions as to what to do. In essence, he walked them (and so us) through how to apply liberty in practice. Now there were:

I. Three Situations Requiring Application (14-30) The first is:

1. the case of public participation (14) He's not merely advising against idolatry, but answering the question of whether they could eat in the idol's temple. Could they in public sit down with idolaters in a temple and eat meat that had come from the altar? Paul's answer was an unequivocal "NO! Flee it!" Paul says, "NO WAY" and then gives his reasoning:

a. the illustration of the Lord's supper (15-17) He challenges us to think about our communion meal. It does two things. First, it is literally "a fellowship" in the body and blood of Christ; it identifies us as ones that are trusting in Christ. Second, it identifies us with the others who partake as one body, one "fellowship". He then uses:

b. the illustration of Jewish sacrifices (18) The Jews would bring their sacrifices and offer the required portions on the altar and then they would get to eat some of the meat. And that eating identified them with God, to whom the sacrifice was made, and with each other as worshippers of God. Consequently:

c. the application to the idol's temple The same basic thing would happen when a believer would enter an idol's temple and sit down to eat the meat with the pagan worshippers.

(1) it identifies you with demons (19-22) Now the actual idol statue is nothing and the meat offered is just meat, pure and simple. But the worship that goes on is not simply ignorance that does not matter; it is the worship of demons! Behind every false type of worship is Satan and his demons. So, to go into the temple and participate identifies you with the worship of demons, with something God has expressly forbidden! Further:

(2) it unites you with idolaters It binds you together in a fellowship and oneness with unsaved people who worship idols; it makes you one with them and you're not! Remember how God disciplined Israel for this very thing!

(3) it hurts your testimony (23-24) The physical action of eating itself may be permissible, but in the public context it is not constructive and is not for the good of others! It ruins your testimony for Christ! So, when it comes to publicly participating with unbelievers in questionable things, the answer is a direct, NO! It identifies you with the world, with Satan's crowd, and ruins your testimony. Don't do it.

2. the case of private consumption (25-26) But what about the meat that was sold every day in the marketplace and was so common that it wasn't even marked anymore as having come from the Temple? Could a believer buy it and take it home and eat it? Should he ask where it came from? Paul says, YES. Buy your meat and eat it and don't ask questions. There seem to be two thoughts here:

a. if no others are affected, there is freedom Since the eating is at home and the buying is not offending anyone, it is ok to use what liberty you have in Christ. Simply:

b. regard it as created and given by God Give thanks for it and regard it as you would any other piece of meat. So, when it comes to the private use of liberty where it doesn't affect others and doesn't cause any stumbling in your own family and can't be misconstrued by anyone, then you may use your knowledge and exercise your freedom in Christ.

3. the case of personal invitation (27-30) What about when you're invited to someone's home, particularly an unbeliever, and they feed you meat? Do you have to ask if it came from the temple? Should you then refuse to eat it? Paul says, Yes and No. He gives two determining factors:

a. don't raise questions that offend your host The host is an unbeliever. Your job is to be a witness to him. Don't raise questions of your own Christian liberty that are going to offend him and turn him off to Christ. There is nothing worse than a Christian who goes to someone's home and then acts offended by them doing something that bothers him! Use your liberty in a way that will win them. But:

b. do respect the conscience of others present Suppose some other believer is present who is really offended by eating meat sacrificed to idols and he points it out to you. Then don't eat, so as not to offend your weaker brother, so that while you are giving thanks to God, he won't be sitting there condemning you in his mind as a hypocrite! Paul says we should do the most loving thing for all those who are present in a personal situation like that. If you have liberty to do either thing, do whatever is for the highest good of others. So, if we can make a general rule of thumb that Paul gives here concerning questionable practices, it would be this: in a public situation, No; in a private situation, OK; in a personal situation with others, do what will best minister to those present. Now, before leaving the subject entirely, Paul gives us:

II. Three Principles For Determining Action (31-11:1) I've restated them in the form of three questions that you can ask yourself as a test in any given situation. First, ask yourself:

1. Can I do this to the glory of God? (31) - THE KNOWLEDGE QUESTION It deals with whether the thing is sinful in itself or not. Can I do this and be sure that I am not sinning? Do I feel that I could talk to God while I'm doing it? If you have any doubt, don't do it. Paul wrote the same thing to the Romans in 14:23. If it cannot be done in faith, in complete confidence before God, then it is sin to you; don't do it! Now, once you've answered that, ask:

2. Will I cause anyone to stumble? (32-33) - THE LOVE QUESTION It deals with the effect of the action on others. If I do this, will it hurt anybody, my children, other believers, unsaved people who don't understand? Will it in any measure hinder anyone from coming to Christ or from growing in Christ? If it will, don't do it! Then, once you've answered this, ask:

3. What would Christ and godly leaders do? (11:1) - THE ADVICE QUESTION It deals with the input of others who are examples to you. Unfortunately, the chapter division interferes with the connection here; verse 1 belongs to this whole subject in chapter 10. Ask, "Did Jesus ever face anything similar?" or "What would He do if He did face this situation?" That will usually settle it! But also ask, what do other godly leaders do about this? You are certainly not the first one faced with your problem. Other godly people have faced it before you and are continuing to face it. What is their example and advice to you? Proverbs says that in many counselors there is wisdom; get some!

Daniel faced this exact same thing many centuries before the Corinthians or Paul ever did. He was a teenager, carried off from Judah to Babylon as a captive, chosen by the idolatrous king of Babylon to be trained to enter the king's service. And the king sent him a daily ration of food and wine from his own table, which had been dedicated to idols. And Daniel's reaction is recorded in 1:8, *But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.* With a little study they could have learned from Daniel's example. Perhaps we can learn from Daniel and his three friends who not only wouldn't eat, but wouldn't bow to an idol, and make the same kind of commitment, "We resolve not to do anything that will defile us and make us unfit for God to use."

1 Cor. 11:1-16 THE SUBJECT OF DRESS UNVEILED

At chapter 11 the Corinthian letter enters its third major section, DISORDERS, things that were being taught or practiced wrongly in the church. The fourth disorder concerned doctrine, the teaching of the resurrection in chapter 15. The third disorder in chapters 12-14 concerned spiritual gifts and their use in worship. The second disorder concerned the Lord's Supper, and the first, which we look at today, concerns the subject of dress. Many a sermon has been preached on this theme from that day to this, but very few of them on this passage. Some people who are greatly concerned about dress are quick to say, "the Bible says..." when they talk about how we should dress or how long our hair should be, but are short on actual Biblical proof. Others are totally unconcerned about dress because, after all, it is only an unimportant, outward thing and it doesn't matter to God. And they err in the opposite direction. I hope that we can get a balanced view of the subject, so let's begin with:

I. The Outward Problem (5) Word has come to Paul about a practice that is going on in church meetings at Corinth. Women are getting up to pray or to prophesy unveiled. Please note: The problem in this passage is not women speaking in public or leading worship. The question of women's role in the church comes later. I would have you notice that Paul does not forbid them to lead in prayer nor to prophesy (speak the Word of God), not at all. In fact, he assumes they will continue to do that. The Scripture carefully saves the leadership roles of elder and pastor and deacon for men, but it does not forbid women to have a role in ministry to the congregation. However, what concerns him here is their dress when they do it!

1. the cultural custom of the veil In first century culture, it was the normal practice for women, and particularly married women, to wear a *kalumma* or veil. This was true among the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans. It was not the Moslem or Oriental face veil meant to hide the identity, but usually what we would call a hood, an extension of the garment that was pulled up over the head as a covering. If you notice, verse 6 says that to go about unveiled for a woman is equivalent to having her head shaved or shorn. That was the punishment for an adulteress. For a married woman to go in public without the veil was culturally similar to a married woman today refusing to wear her husband's wedding ring. It marked her in some sense as available, perhaps loose. So, in the church you have:

2. the public display of improper dress Now of course, in the home a wife would not have to keep a veil on, but in any gathering they would. But now women were getting up before the congregation to pray or testify improperly dressed, much as if a woman in our church would come up to pray in a bathing suit or dressed in some revealing fashion. Why were they doing it? Probably because, as in chapters 8-10, the cry at Corinth was "all things are lawful". "We don't have to worry about those minor things anymore; we are free in Christ. Veils are hot and unbecoming, neither practical nor beautiful. We can throw away that custom and tradition; we don't need it anymore."

II. The Deeper Problem There is a deeper problem here and to understand it, you must first understand:

1. the principle of headship (3) The word *head* here is the word for a physical head, but is used, as we do in English, in another sense, the sense of source or leader. We talk about the headwaters of a river or the head of an organization. Paul says:

a. God is the head of Christ Here is a truth hard to understand. The Father and the Son are both God. They have equality of Being. But while in Jn. 10:30 Christ said, *I and my Father are One*, in Jn. 14:28 He said, *the Father is greater than I*. What can that mean? Christ submitted Himself to the will of the Father; He placed Himself under the authority of the Father. A similar, more understandable situation is this:

b. Christ is the head of man He is our source, our authority, the One to whom we belong. And in similar fashion:

c. the husband is the head of the wife This is not talking about all women and all men, but about those in a husband and wife relationship. Within that God-invented relationship, God has placed man as the head of the home and family. That was done by God in Gen. 3:16, *Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you*. They had equality of being, but the husband was given the headship position. Now we are ready to see:

2. the problem with improper dress It is three fold:

a. it brings dishonor to your spouse (4-5) If a man covers his head in worship, it brings dishonor to His head (Christ). The Rabbis started the custom of men wearing a veil, a *tillah*, to cover their heads in the synagogue as a symbol of unworthiness. Paul says that ought not to be. We have open access to the Father through Christ. To cover the head is to do dishonor to the finished work of Christ our Head as though it weren't enough! But for a woman to unveil, to dress improperly in public, brings dishonor to her head, that is, to her husband! What would you think if the wife of one of our elders got up to pray wearing a bathing suit? You'd think, "What kind of a rebellious wife does that man have? Don't they have a good relationship? How can he let her do that?" It is a sign of rebellion in the home. Further:

b. it brings disgrace to yourself (6) You'd think something else too, "What a floosy! Who'd ever dress like that in public?" It would disgrace not only her husband, but herself. When you dress improperly, it not only dishonors your spouse but also yourself, because we do judge by outward appearances, don't we?!

c. it defiles your spouse's glory (7-9) Man was created in the image of God; He displays God's glory. God delights in mankind; He loves and treasures us. He built the world for us. He's preparing heaven for us. We are His glory, but when we dress wrong, we defile the thing He treasures! When a man in Paul's day covered his head, he was defiling God's glory. And a wife is the glory of her husband, the thing in which he delights, his treasured one. When she dresses improperly, she defiles her husband's glory, mars his treasure! So, Paul says, wear the veil. Show that you belong to your husband as an obedient wife. Dress properly so all will know it. And just in case anyone was still reticent about it, he adduced three other reasons to wear it:

II. The Reason This Problem Matters I'll just mention briefly:

1. it is observed by the angels (10) There is lots of discussion about this verse. I think angels are God's book-keepers; they are always present to record our works as believers.

2. it is anticipated in nature (13-15) Women have almost universally from early times let their hair longer than men. It is a kind of natural covering that distinguishes them from men. It is not unfair that women should wear the veil and men not. Nature seems to have anticipated this custom.

3. it is practiced by others (16) It was universal church practice to conform to this cultural standard. However, lest it slip by unnoticed, Paul puts here:

III. The Caution Concerning This Problem (11-12) Lest any man should become proud, thinking that this argument of Paul's teaches the superiority of men, or lest any woman should become angry, thinking this argument teaches the inferiority of women, Paul sets the record straight. God created both mutually dependent on each other. He used man to bring forth woman, but now uses woman to bring forth man. Neither is independent or can do without the other. This problem is not a superiority/inferiority issue. It is a question of God-given order among His servants! But most important of all, let's look at:

IV. The Application of This Problem to Us The most obvious question is, "Where are all the veils? Does God still want us to follow this custom?" Some churches have answered, "Yes," like the Amish and Mennonites and many of the Brethren churches and even the Roman Catholic nuns who wear head coverings. But obviously, the majority of the church of Jesus Christ does not do so. Why not? The answer is that most of us feel that Paul is here dealing with a cultural situation that applied in his time, but which no longer applies in the same way. The wearing of a hood or veil has no significance in our culture; it has lost all trace of its original meaning so as not to apply to us directly, much the same as the Old Testament ceremonial laws do not apply to us since we are not Israel in the land of Canaan. What we do need to do, however, is to pull out and apply the truth that Paul is teaching here and I think it is two-fold:

1. our dress should honor God The way we dress, man or woman, is important because we are living representations of Christ. What people think of us as they see us will ultimately reflect on Him. If our dress is old and stodgy and unattractive then people will think that about our faith in God. If our dress is revealing and sensuous, then folks will question the purity of our faith. If our dress is clean and appropriate, then people will get good impressions of us and be ready to listen to us about our God.

2. our dress should honor our spouse Our dress should never be the kind that will tempt others to look at us with lustful thoughts. It should be the kind our spouse would be proud to have us wear, that he or she would be proud to have their most precious treasure seen in.

Have you given any thought to the way you dress lately? Have you thought about what others might think when they see you? Is your dress honoring to God? It doesn't have to be expensive and it doesn't have to be new. But is it clean and modest and proper? Will it stand in anyone's way to hinder what you might say to them about Christ? I know it's what's on the inside that counts, but the world doesn't. And we'll never get to tell them if we don't think about the outside.

1 Cor. 11:17-34 WHOSE SUPPER IS THIS?

The second disorder in the Corinthians' church life concerned the Lord's Supper. Now, when you think of the Corinthians celebrating the Lord's supper, don't think of the way we do it today. Don't think of a fine church building; there were none. Don't think of little cups and racks; there were none. In fact, don't think of a thumbnail-sized piece of unleavened wafer and a sip of grape juice. They celebrated the Supper much differently from the way we do.

I. The Observance of the Supper When Jesus initiated the Lord's Supper it was at the Last Supper, which was a Passover Meal. He used the normal unleavened bread that was broken early in the Passover meal and the last cup of wine that

was part of it. When the early church began to celebrate it, they, of course, did not celebrate it as a Passover meal when they met together weekly, but it seems they did begin the custom of sharing a meal together and celebrating the supper in the context of the common meal. By the time Paul wrote, it appears that they had a clear two-part approach. First was the common meal called the *agape* or love feast, which was then followed by a separate bread and cup called the Eucharist or Thanksgiving, which we call the Lord's Supper. In later generations, the meal was completely detached, leaving the Lord's Supper to stand by itself, as we usually do it. Various manners of observing the Supper have evolved down through the years. Some use a common cup while, others use an individual cup. Some go forward to the chancel, while others stay in their pews. The exact manner in which we celebrate the Supper is not so important; Jesus was not instituting a ritual, but a remembrance. Whatever manner causes us to think of Him is OK. But though their manner of observance was quite different from ours, the ways in which they abused the Supper are much the same:

II. The Abuses of the Supper (17-22) Paul was really upset with the practices that were going on at the love feasts. It seems to me there were three major problems:

1. disunity with one another (18) There were divisions, cliques, little groups, that ate together, probably the same divisions he was referring to in the early chapters of the book. They came together to celebrate the symbol of the body of Christ, yet they had divided the living body of Christ! Christ does not want you to come to His table with bitterness and an unforgiving spirit in your heart toward other believers. He does not want you coming with bad feelings and divisions. The Supper is the sign that makes us one. Compare 10:16-17. We cannot come divided.

2. disrespect for the Lord (20) Some of them used the Supper as a time of feasting, of indulging in eating and drinking to quench their hunger and thirst. Some rushed to eat without waiting for others. Some even became drunk. It was not really the Lord's Supper they were eating, but their own! They showed disrespect for the very thing that was to remind them of their blessed Savior. That wouldn't apply very much the way we celebrate the supper, although it might give us something to think about for covered dish dinners when you see the plates piled a foot deep! But we can show disrespect for the Lord and His table in other ways, like coming to it with known unconfessed sin in our hearts or by having an area in our lives where we have refused to obey God. That is not taking seriously the fact that the Supper reminds us of. Jesus died for our sins; how can we any longer live therein? We could do it by taking the Supper as just another religious ritual, not remembering Christ. We must come with hearts right toward God!

3. disregard for other believers (22) Theirs had evidently become kind of a bring-your-own type of affair and some had lots to bring, while others were very poor and had nothing. And the ones who had lots flaunted it and showed no care for the poor with their crust of bread. The love had gone out of their love feast! And you don't have to be divided to be uncaring and selfish. Don't come to Christ's table with a heart that is self-centered, one that doesn't care about the other members of the body, that stands idly by and refuses to lend a helping hand when someone is sick or in trouble, one that doesn't even take time to pray for the needs others express. Come with a heart that's in love with others and puts them first! No, the supper they've been taking is not the Lord's Supper. He proceeds to remind them of the true meaning of the Supper.

III. The Meaning of the Supper (23-26) It is a three fold reminder:

1. the bread is a remembrance of His body It is to remind us of the suffering that His body endured for us on the cross, how it was "broken" there on our account. The key is "for you". It was an unselfish act.

2. the cup is a remembrance of His blood The color reminds us of His blood shed for us on the cross, the fact that He gave His very life for ours. It was our very life that was at stake and He sacrificed His for us.

3. the supper is a proclamation of His death and return It is more than a reminder; it is a proclamation, an announcement, a message in symbol, that Jesus died for our sins and that because we are still doing it, we are yet waiting for His return. That is the Lord's Supper, not a ritual but a remembering of the most sacred fact of our faith. *I read the story of a Christian who had a dream and, in his dream, he saw the Lord going up Calvary, crown of thorns on His brow and blood flowing from His beaten back. He watched as a cross was laid down and Jesus stretched upon it. Then a man began to drive the nails and, in his dream, he began to cry, "Stop, stop". He couldn't see the man's face but kept yelling until at last the man turned around and he saw in horror that it was himself! He awoke in a sweat and realized anew the true meaning of Christ's death. He had nailed the Savior to the tree by his sins.* That's the story this Supper proclaims. I eat it; I take it in me; I recognize that His body was given for me, that His blood was shed for me. It's a serious matter, which brings us to look at:

IV. The Seriousness of the Supper (27-34) We can boil these verses down to three key facts that show how serious the Lord's supper is:

1. abuse of the supper is against the Lord (27) When you come to the table in an unworthy manner, you sin against the body and blood of the Lord. He's not talking about having the ceremony exactly right. He means that if you come to the table with known sin harbored in your life, with strife between you and another believer, or with a life full of selfish-

ness, then you are, by your life, tramping on the very cross that this Supper reminds you of. It is a sin in God's sight; like trampling the Son of God underfoot (Heb. 11:29) and counting the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing!

2. abuse of the supper will bring discipline (28) Just like any other sin, God will not let us cling to it without disciplining us. Some of these folks had become sick and some had died. God had taken them home to stop their dishonoring His name. Sometimes discipline comes in other ways like failure, loss, lack of supply, and so on, but the important thing to know is:

3. self-examination will avoid discipline (31) If we scrutinize our own lives and change what needs changed and repent of what needs repented of, God won't have to discipline us! If some of those Corinthians had just stopped and looked at themselves, they would have been alive and healthy!

So, verse 28 tells us what we ought to do: examine ourselves, search our own hearts and be honest before God. Are you in a state of disunity with somebody? Determine to make it right. Is there known sin that you're hanging on to? Have you been caring about others? Exercise 1 Jn. 1:9. Let's all bow our heads in prayer and prepare to celebrate the supper.

1 Cor. 12 The Nature of Spiritual Gifts

The third disorder in the Corinthian church had to do with the use and abuse of spiritual gifts. It seems to me the primary problem related to a rampant, uncontrolled, and confusing use of the gift of tongues. And it must have been a major problem, because Paul gives three chapters to dealing with it. In chapter 12 he talks about the nature of spiritual gifts, in chapter 13 he lays out the motivation behind spiritual gifts which is love, and in chapter 14 he explains the exercise of spiritual gifts in worship. Today we'll consider chapter 12. First of all, Paul tells us that spiritual gifts are:

I. Based on Commitment to Christ (1-3) These verses are written against the background of pagan idolatry from which these Corinthians came. Christianity is not the only place where some of these actions occurred. You may not be aware of it, but the phenomenon of tongues, going off into ecstasy and speaking, occurs in many other religions including Islam, Hinduism, and animism. It occurs in the cults today. I once met a man who was part of The Way International who said he spoke in tongues, but would not say that Jesus is God. There are also sometimes healings or other signs. But it is basically associated in these contexts with demon possession! The presence of what looks like spiritual gifts in itself does not make it so. The bottom line is whether a person confesses Christ as Lord and Savior. Without that commitment there are no true spiritual gifts.

II. Explained in Detail (4-11) Three terms are used here, *gifts* (4) which means capacities or abilities given by God, *service* (5) which means ways or opportunities to use what you have to serve God, and *workings* (6) which means ways God works in people's lives. So, a spiritual gift is some capacity or ability you have, which you use in some way to serve others, and God uses to work in their lives. Now Paul tells us four general things about gifts.

1. the gifts summarized

a. they have a variety of appearances (4-6) They may appear to be very different. Some seem very spiritual like preaching or teaching, while others seem very mundane, like helping or organizing. However, what they are doesn't matter as long as you use them to serve and God can use them to work in people.

b. they have a common Source (4-6) No matter what the gift is, it is from the Holy Spirit, used to serve the same Lord Jesus, and used by the same God to change people's lives! A spiritual gift is not something you do, something that should swell your head with pride. It should be acknowledged as coming from God!

c. they are for the common good (7) Gifts are not meant to build you up personally, but to bless others. That's what's wrong with a lot of the modern charismatic or Pentecostal movement in their emphasis on tongues as a personal gift to draw you close to God. All gifts are for ministry to others, to build up others in the body.

d. they are distributed by the Spirit (11) They are not something you seek, but something you discover and develop. The Holy Spirit puts them there according to His plan and will! If God wants you to preach like Billy Graham, He'll give you the ability. Gifts are not something that should be personally sought after in that sense. You don't have to pray for God to drop them on you. Rather, ask God to help you see ways that you can use the talents and abilities He's given you for Him!

2. the gifts listed (8-10) Rather than try to identify all of these specifically, let me point out that this is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Verse 28 adds more! The gifts that God gives are changing; new ones are added all the time, like flying an airplane, using a computer, or photography. Don't try to limit what God can use!

III. Illustrated In The Human Body (12-26) The way the gifts function can be best seen by using the illustration of the human body and comparing it to the church, which is called Christ's body. Here are four important truths:

1. we are a unity of many individual parts (12-14) There are fingers and toes and eyes and heart and liver and stomach. We are a bunch of very different parts gloriously united into one functioning unit. That is true worldwide. We are people from every land, every language, every walk of life, every appearance, yet united into one Body by the Holy Spirit. It is also true in the local church body. We are all very different in many ways, yet one Body in Christ.

2. each of us contributes to the whole (15-20) Just think if you were merely a whole pile of fingers grown together. You'd feel well but couldn't see to do anything! Every part serves a necessary function for the good of the body, even eyelashes and fingernails. And so, every one of us contributes some necessary function to the whole body and just as God designed your human body to function, so He has designed the church body with everything it needs to function. So, note:

3. we cannot exist without each other (21-25a) Every part is indispensable, so your eye can't tell your feet to "bug off" and go it alone. Each of us need what the others of us provide spiritually. The next time you wonder what good some person is, remember that you need them, even if you think they're worthless! You are not the big cheese, the most important part, no matter what you think. That's why divisions cripple the church so badly! Hence:

4. we must be concerned about each other (25b-26) I've noticed with my teeth that if an upper one aches, the lower one hurts too. You can have a headache that upsets your stomach. All the parts share in some measure the feelings of the others. So, we must learn to relate to each other that way, to realize that we are one body and that what happens to each other matters a great deal. When someone else gets hit by a car, it's just like me severing a finger. When another has a problem, it is my problem.

IV. Applied In the Church (27-31) Verse 28 tips us off that now Paul is going back to the local church context where the gifts are utilized, and giving us some principles to apply in relating our gift to the local body we're in.

1. God has placed us within our local body God did the appointing. God takes just the right people with the right gifts and puts them in the local church. The fact that we have the gifts we do and that we belong to this local fellowship is no accident but part of the design and purpose of God.

2. we should emphasize those gifts which edify most There is an order here assigned to the gifts, an order of importance. Now, this is a broad list ranging from the gift of apostle to the gift of helping others. No gift is unimportant or useless. But the Corinthians have been stressing speaking in tongues and the personal edification they get out of it. Look where Paul puts it in the list! Last! They wanted to emphasize and glorify the gifts that they enjoyed most. Paul emphasizes those which benefit others the most. He says in verse 31 that if you are going to desire gifts, desire the greater ones, the ones that bless others the most. He'll pick that theme up again in chapter 14.

3. we should not envy the gifts of others (29-30) We can't all be apostles or all be teachers, as there would be no students left! It would not be healthy. We should not go around envying the gifts others have. Rather we should concentrate on developing what we do have to God's glory. You will never be a Billy Graham, but he'll never be you either! Don't look at others and think, "Oh, I wish I could be like that!" In the hallway after a concert at our church, I heard a young lady say to the soloist, "I wish I could sing like you" and her reply was, "Oh no! You be what God wants you to be; that's what's important!"

What should you do? First, ask what your gift is. Ask others that know you well. Second, ask how you can better use it in the context of this local church, what opportunities for ministry there are here. And third, get busy using it!

1 Cor. 13 The Motivation of Spiritual Gifts

This is one of the most beautiful and oft-quoted chapters in the Bible. It is, no doubt, the most complete description of just what God's *agape* love is really like. But when studying it we must remember that it lies squarely between chapter 12 and chapter 14, which have to do with the problem of the abuse of spiritual gifts in the church. Paul did not simply have a digression in thought and compose a beautiful ode to love and then excuse himself and return to his subject in chapter 14. As 12 ended, he was showing that we relate to each other as different parts of Christ's body and that our spiritual gifts minister to one another. In 13 he's saying that love is what makes the gifts work; it's the motivation behind the use of our gifts. In fact, love has a three-fold relationship to spiritual gifts:

I. Love Completes Spiritual Gifts (1-3) Here Paul mentions five spiritual gifts: tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and giving. All of them were gifts being exercised at Corinth, all of them very wonderful gifts. But none of them were complete in themselves. Each one was lacking something. Without being exercised in love, they were useless. In fact, they ceased to be spiritual gifts at all. We've all heard of charlatans who could preach wonderfully and yet in the end were found out to have been living ungodly lives all along. Without love, using a gift is just another action. Love is the completing factor. It gives them three things:

1. it gives them power (1) The sounding gong or clanging cymbal are just noise by themselves, electrifying for the moment, but gone instantly. A gift without love has no spiritual power, no reality. Love makes the gift a tool of the Holy Spirit and causes it to be used in people's lives!

2. it gives them purpose (2) I can have eloquence and understanding and faith enough to move a mountain, but all those things are no good without love. If I don't use them in love for other people, they have no purpose.

3. it gives them profit (3) Here's a man who gives away everything he has to others and even sacrifices his own life. But he doesn't do it out of love for them. He does it to be seen by others, to make a name for himself, or he does it by force. It does him no good; he already has his reward, as Jesus said. You can teach and preach and help and organize, but unless you love, there will be no reward for it at the judgment seat of Christ!

II. Love Characterizes Spiritual Gifts (4-7) Now, if love is to be the root and source every time we use a spiritual gift, then we can say that love characterizes the gifts. The things that are said here about love itself are also being said about spiritual gifts being exercised in love. The list divides into three parts:

1. those using spiritual gifts should be: (4a)

a. patient The KJV word *longsuffering* is more true to the original. It means the ability to endure others, to be wronged and not retaliate, just as Christ endured the worst that his captors could hand out in silent suffering. A person truly exercising their gift in love can be wronged and not seek to return it, unlike the Corinthians who, in chapter 6, were dragging each other into court!

b. kind Kindness is consideration for the needs of others and in love trying to meet those needs, unlike the Corinthians who in chapter 11 would sit at their "love feast" and feast and pay no attention to the hungry poor brethren at the next table. Rather it is being like Jesus who was touched by the fact that the crowd hadn't eaten all day! I've seen preachers embarrass mothers with crying children by saying, "Take them out of the service". That man has obviously never sat in a pew with a child! A real spiritual gift is exercised with kindness!

2. those using spiritual gifts should never be: (4b-6) The first three of these are similar:

a. envious We should never be jealous of somebody else's possessions or position. Love doesn't care that somebody else's gift is more public than our own, that somebody else gets patted on the back and clapped for, while we go unnoticed.

b. boastful This is when you're on the other end, when you're the one in the forefront. Those with true spiritual gifts never point them out, never brag about them, never draw attention to them. When you see some brother who has done a very fine thing saying, "Look what I've done", then look out!

c. proud Boastful has to do with the mouth. Proud has to do with the heart and is the root of boasting. Pride (the negative kind) is the very opposite of love; it is really self-love. Here are the Corinthians, abounding in spiritual gifts, tongues, prophecies being made and so on, but all the while divided against each other, each envious of the other and boasting that their group was the right one. Proud! True spiritual gifts cannot operate like that!

d. rude Rude is the opposite of kind; it is being inconsiderate of others, insensitive to their needs, not caring how what you say and do will affect them. Often this comes out more in our speech. This kind of rudeness was going on in the very worship at Corinth in chapter 14. People were disrupting the service and interrupting each other. There is no spirituality in that.

e. self-seeking This means looking to see that our own needs get met before the needs of others. That's where the whole issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols comes in. Many were more concerned about their own stomachs and having plenty to put in them, than about the spiritual effect it would have on others.

f. easily angered In fact, there's no *easily* in the Greek. Love has a hold on the temper. A person with true spiritual gifts is not prone to anger; he or she does not fly off the handle and lose control.

g. unforgiving This is a book-keeping term that means to keep a record of wrongs. A person serving by the power of the Holy Spirit doesn't have a little black book in which he writes down the sins of others and says, "I'll get even!"

h. delighting in evil instead of truth Isn't this what they were doing back in chapter 5 where they had a man living in incest and were taking pride in him rather than expelling him? Those truly exercising gifts of the Holy Spirit are not tantalized and delighted by sin; rather they love right and truth and morality!

3. those using spiritual gifts should always: (7) Here are the four universals of love. A person using his gifts in love does these things:

a. protect This is literally to *roof* someone, that is, to shelter them from harm or pain. Love watches out for the weaker brother and the dangers that lurk for him.

b. trust does not mean to be willingly blind, but rather means continuing to trust those who have proven trustworthy. It is not suspicious and always ready to believe the worst or the next rumor that goes around!

c. hope is a trust in God for the future, with the certainty that what God has promised is coming. Those using spiritual gifts are to be looking ahead, not moaning about their circumstances.

d. persevere means to remain true in all circumstances. People with true spiritual gifts stick and stay; they are not the type that fall away when difficulty arises or problems come. Now, if you see a person using a "spiritual gift", no matter what it may be, yet there's no love, if these characteristics are not true of him, then he is not motivated by the Holy Spirit. He's motivated by the wrong spirit. In fact, love is so important that it not only characterizes all the gifts, but:

III. Love Surpasses Spiritual Gifts (8-13) It is the greatest quality we can possess or display. And here's why. Paul tells of:

1. the temporariness of the gifts Spiritual gifts are temporary; they are for the here and now. They are not intended to continue on forever. Gifts are intended to bring the church to maturity and when it is finally mature, they will no longer be needed. When we get to heaven, faith and hope will be obsolete; we will have reality instead. No one will be oppressed or needy and need help and we'll all sing pretty! Spiritual gifts are tools for the maturing of the body, not ends in themselves. They are only temporary. But see:

2. the permanence of love Love never fails; it never stops, ceases, or becomes obsolete. It stays the same forever, both our love for God and for each other.

You see, the outward acts will cease, but the motive behind them, the driving force of love is forever. So, it is far more important that you have a heart full of love, that the Holy Spirit fills you with love, than that you have some great gift, talent, or ability. As 14:1 says, *Follow after love!* That is how all men will know that we are His disciples, not because we speak in a tongue or preach with eloquence or sing with great beauty or have a wealth of Bible knowledge, but simply because we love.

1 Cor. 14:1-25 WHAT ABOUT TONGUES?

One of the most frequently asked questions in the Christian world is "What about tongues?" It has been one of the most confusing and divisive issues of our time. There is a rather large segment of the modern evangelical church who are our brothers and sisters in Christ who claim to exercise or at least seek after this gift. And it seems that in the early church of the first century, there was also one particular segment in the church at Corinth which was doing the same thing. The gift of tongues is never mentioned in any of the letters to other churches; indeed outside of 1 Cor 12-14 it is only mentioned four other times in the entire New Testament! Yet the exercise of this gift had become so prevalent at Corinth and caused such a problem in the church that Paul in essence gives three chapters to correcting it. Let's look at the tongues problem in Corinth and maybe we can get an answer to the modern question "what about tongues?" Let's look first at:

I. The Practice of Tongues (1-5) There is no better place to go than the source where it all started:

1. in Acts - 2:4-11, 10:44-46, 19:1-7 Tongues only occurred three times in Acts that were recorded for us, first on the day of Pentecost and the other two instances were similar, so let's concentrate in Acts 2. Notice three things about tongues. It was a:

a. gift of unlearned existing human languages The word *tongue* means language, so to "speak in a tongue" means to "speak in a language". Note in verse 8 that they were speaking existing human languages which this crowd could identify and understand. The incoherent babbling that is often described as tongues today actually occurs in other religions. It was quite common in the mystery religions at Corinth. What made the tongues-speaking of the Christians of note to anyone was that it was actual distinct languages! Note in verse 7 that these were languages that those who were speaking them did not know. Now, secondly, their speaking:

b. communicated a message to the hearers Verse 11 shows that those who heard them understood the content of the message. What astonished them was the fact of the speaking, not the message, but the message was clear to them. Then note that their speaking was:

c. not continued nor exercised at will We never read that this group, having done it once, did it again. We do not see them practicing it in the fellowship of believers. The gift was bestowed for a particular occasion, and that was also true in the other two instances. It could not be exercised by the person at their own discretion as other gifts like teaching could.

2. at Corinth Things were quite different here. They were getting up in the worship service and:

a. speaking languages no one understood (2) There were not people there to interpret or understand these languages. In fact, the speakers themselves did not understand what they were saying. The speeches were mysteries, known only to God, requiring His divine gift to interpret and He wasn't giving it! Secondly, they were:

b. speaking for their own edification (4) It obviously wasn't doing anybody else any good because they couldn't understand it and verse 14 tells us that those speaking really didn't learn anything by it either. Yet it built them up. How so? Not by the content of what was spoken, but simply by the fact that they spoke. It confirmed to their minds that they were God's children, that they had a spiritual gift, and so it made them feel good and safe and secure and close to God to do it. And it seems that they put quite an emphasis on this gift; it seems they held it up as the highest of the gifts, the one to be sought after above others. Have you noticed by now that the modern use of tongues follows very closely the Corinthian pattern rather than the Acts pattern? I have been in meetings where people "spoke in tongues" and have talked to many who claim to exercise that gift and it is almost always in this same pattern, where nobody understands and where they don't understand it, yet it makes them feel close to God! So they regard it in an elevated position above all the gifts and seek after it!

II. The Problem with Tongues (6-19) of both the Corinthian and the modern variety. If indeed the speaker is actually speaking a language and not just emotional gibberish, he still has four problems to overcome:

1. it does not benefit others (6-12) It doesn't impart a message to anyone or teach anyone anything. In fact, it is totally useless to others. To prove it, Paul uses some natural observations:

a. the purpose of sound is to communicate (7-8) In music, nobody understands the tune unless the notes are distinct from one another and arranged in a pattern. When they play "charge" on the bugle, nobody will know to move unless the trumpet plays a clear audible pattern. The very purpose of sound is to communicate. Almost every sound we make, even a scream or "Ouch", is to communicate something, even if that something is a mood or feeling. Now look at speech:

b. the purpose of language is to convey meaning (10) Languages or tongues are arrangements of sounds for the purpose of communication, for conveying meaning. Now, here are people speaking languages, but with no attempt to convey meaning. It is contrary to the purpose of sound and of language itself! It loses all normal function and does nobody any good because they can't understand it. And though being useless is bad enough:

2. it hinders fellowship (11) We are supposed to be one as brethren, but when a person speaks in a non-understood language like this, rather than drawing us together, it drives us apart; it makes us seem like foreigners to each other. Remember the Tower of Babel? Men could not stay together once their languages were confused! It drove them away from each other in frustration, while those that communicated in the same language stayed together! And this is especially true when this gift is put up on a pedestal as the most important gift. It divides church after church. My home church went through it at one point years ago!

3. it does not benefit you (13-15) It's nice to feel good inside, to be joyous in your inner self, but tongues really does not benefit you, because you have no understanding of what is being said. And that component of knowing, understanding, and learning is very important. That is what distinguishes us most as being in God's image. Animals feel. People reason and think and learn. So, it does not genuinely cause you to grow spiritually. Further:

4. it prevents agreeing in prayer (16-17) When we come together, we are to pray and Christ will be in the midst. We are to agree together in prayer and it will be granted. But how can we agree if we don't know what the other person is saying? How can we say, "Amen", "So be it," if we don't know what we're agreeing with? So, Paul finishes in verses 18-19 by saying that in the church five understandable words are better than 10,000 in a tongue that you can't understand. Now, by this time you must be asking, just what is:

III. The Purpose of Tongues (20-25) Paul spells it out for us:

1. they were for a sign to unbelieving Jews (20-22) Paul goes back to the Old Testament and quotes Is. 28:11-12, which is a prophecy about the nation of Israel, that God would speak to them by using people speaking foreign languages and even by Gentiles, but they still wouldn't listen to Him. 1 Cor. 1:22 says that the Jews demand a miraculous sign in order to believe something. That is what they were used to in their history. That's why they said to Jesus, "Show us a sign!" Tongues were originally meant to be a sign to unbelieving Jews that the message of the Christians was genuinely from God. Remember all the three cases in Acts. The first in Acts 2 is to convince a crowd of Jews of the truth of the message Peter was about to preach! The second in Acts 10 is where Cornelius and his Gentile friends receive the Holy Spirit and the Jewish apostles don't want to believe God that would save Gentiles, yet they are convinced by the sign of tongues! In Acts 19 we have Jewish proselytes, followers of John the Baptist, and when they receive the gift, it convinces not only them, but they, no doubt, go along with Paul into the synagogue and become his

proof to the Jews! The gift of tongues was the method God chose to validate the message of the apostles, primarily to Jewish unbelievers. But even even at that time Paul says:

2. they are confusing to unbelieving Gentiles (23) If now this sign gift is used in a church service with no interpreter present, Gentiles would be confused rather than impressed. 1 Cor. 1:22 says that Greeks demand wisdom! They want understanding, something they can grasp. Just think what your reaction would be, even as a believer, if you walked into a place where everyone was speaking in unintelligible languages? You would be uncomfortable and want to leave, wouldn't you? But:

3. intelligible speech saves unbelievers (24-25) Prophecy, the declaring of God's word, intelligible meaningful communication, is what builds up the saints and is what saves unbelievers! I have yet to meet the person converted by observing tongues, but I've met plenty who were converted by the preaching of the Word!

So, my friend, maybe you've sometimes wondered about this. Maybe you've had a friend who urged you to seek the gift of tongues or read a book about it or heard a speaker on the radio or TV who championed it. Maybe you've been a little confused about it and puzzled by it and maybe it has even brought you doubts about the depth of your own relationship with God? But see, that's the problem. It doesn't edify; it doesn't build up! But now you have an answer. If a person seems to have this gift and it makes them feel good, well OK. I don't say that God can't give this gift today, but I'd have to know every language on earth to really tell for sure if a person was speaking a genuine language or not. I just remember what Paul said in verse 19. But notice also that even though Paul didn't agree with them, he still didn't break fellowship with them and discredit them. In verse 6 he calls them brothers. And we must be careful to do that too!

1 Cor. 14:26-40 THE EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

At verse 26 Paul comes to the conclusion and summary of his teaching about spiritual gifts. In chapter 12 he taught the Nature of the gifts, in chapter 13 the proper Motivation of the gifts (love), and now he's telling us how to Practice or exercise the gifts in the context of the assembly, that is, when the church is gathered for worship. Really, he's giving to us the principles that should govern our public worship.

I. The Rules for Using Spiritual Gifts (26-35) Look carefully into each of these verses, not for the exact behavior that was going on then, but for the principle Paul is trying to get across.

1. edification (26) Gifts must be used for the edification or building up of the church. When we are all together, a real variety of gifts and abilities is represented, but when they are used, it should only be for the purpose of building up the others in the congregation. So, no matter what the actual content of our worship service, we should never allow things that tear down, divide, or confuse the body, even if the person is exercising a spiritual gift, like the tongues-speakers at Corinth.

2. comprehension (27-28) Paul hits the tongues-speakers again. He says if there is no interpreter, keep quiet. Why? There must be comprehension. People must understand what is going on. That applies, no matter what the gift is. Someone could get up to preach and speak in such a complicated and high-sounding fashion that no one follows. Or someone could get up to sing and do it in such a garbled fashion that no one knows what is being sung. Everything we do in worship should be clear and understandable.

3. evaluation (29) Why should prophets have to be evaluated, if they speak by the Spirit of God? The answer is that nobody has moment by moment inspiration. Everybody makes mistakes sometimes and confuses some truth a bit, not intentionally, of course. We grow in our understanding. There are some minor things I taught years ago that I don't agree with now because somebody taught me better. And then sometimes Satan will inject his thoughts into our minds and we parrot them. So, preaching has to be evaluated carefully and sifted through by the hearers, and perhaps corrected if need be. The same is true of all the gifts. They should stand the test of being evaluated by others as profitable and edifying and proper.

4. participation (30-31) The exercise of the gifts should not be monopolized by one person. God has gifted all of us and there should be room and opportunity for all to exercise theirs. This applies in worship services too. Not all in one service, but different people should have the opportunity to sing, testify, and even preach as God leads. Worship is never to be a one man show.

5. regulation (32-33) Evidently, those who were prophesying were just as disorderly as those speaking in tongues. What a confusing mess those Corinthian worship services must have been! God says He is a God of order and peace. The Holy Spirit does not move people to go off into uncontrollable frenzies of speaking. If the Spirit is in it, then it can be done in a decent, orderly fashion. Our worship doesn't have to be rigid and follow some prescribed pattern from memory, but it should never be disorganized and shoddy or confusing.

6. submission (34-35) How'd that get in there? Now remember that Paul is straightening out problems that were going on in the worship at Corinth. And evidently some of the chief offenders were women! We already saw in chapter 11 how some of them were getting up in public in improper, immodest (for their day) dress and were dishonoring their husbands. Evidently, a number of them were also involved in the confusing array of speaking in tongues were chief offenders causing disruption in the orderly flow of worship. So, Paul lays down a rule here for them. Now, does this mean that no woman can say anything in church, that they must be totally silent. Well, if it means that, then we have some problems because that is in contradiction to other Scripture passages where they have:

a. the permission - 11:5. Paul could easily have said not to pray or prophesy at all, but he didn't; he said "Dress properly when you do!" That verse explicitly implies that women CAN lead in prayer and even prophesy or communicate the Word of God. Compare Acts 21:9. Philip the Evangelist had four daughters who prophesied. This is later than when 1 Corinthians was written and Paul stayed with them without complaint. Paul writes in Timothy that older women are to teach the younger ones. Verse 34 mentions the Old Testament Law; well in the Old Testament there were frequently prophetesses who brought God's Word to the people. One was a judge over the whole nation, Deborah! These verses can hardly mean that women can never speak in public assembly. So, let's look at:

b. the problem - Compare 1 Tim. 2:11-12. The real problem going on here is not that women speak in church, but if you look carefully, it is the same one Paul wrote Timothy about. The word here is not *utter silence* in the Greek but *stillness, quietness*. Paul says the woman is not to be teaching men nor to be usurping authority over men. Now, that doesn't mean that a woman can never teach a man anything or that she can't give a testimony or even teach a Bible lesson when men are present. It means that she is not to have a regular ongoing teaching ministry to men which puts her in a position of authority over them. It doesn't mean she can't hold any office in the church, but that she cannot take a place of leadership that rightfully belongs to a man. She can exercise her gifts as long as she is doing so in submission to the Lord and to her own husband and that brings us to the problem at Corinth:

(1). lack of submission We've already seen that in chapter 11. By improper dress the Corinthian wives were dishonoring their husbands and showing lack of submission. Now he says they are doing the same thing by their tongue speaking and prophesying in disorderly fashion, trying to usurp the floor and control the service. And their second problem was:

(2). lack of knowledge Some of them didn't know what they were talking about. They were not being taught and nourished properly in the spiritual realm by their husbands at home. What they were saying was not always right. Paul encourages them to earnestly seek knowledge from their believing husbands in the home setting. So, we see:

c. the principle is submission That is what the Law says, that a wife is to be in submission to her husband. She should be still and quiet and orderly and if she exercises any gift, it should be in full submission to the authority of her husband and bring him honor, rather than disgrace by speaking out of turn. And, if I might apply that principle further, it works for all of us. We are to submit to one another in love. That is to be true in life and also to be true in worship. You may very much like a particular style of music or not enjoy using video clips in church. Another may benefit from the very things you are not fond of. In worship we must defer to one another, be willing to esteem others better than our own selves. You may wish you could sing every week, but have to defer to others to give them a chance. Submission is a primary rule!

II. The Marks of Improper Use (36-39) As Paul closes the subject, he spells out for the Corinthians the two things that disturb him the most. These are signs, marks that the worship going on is not right:

1. disregard for the Word of God It doesn't matter how spiritually gifted a person may seem to be. If he ignores the Word of God, acts contrary to the Scriptures, then something is deeply wrong.

2. disorder in the worship of God When there is disorder, God is not in it! Paul's point is not to forbid the use of spiritual gifts, but to see that they are used in a decent and orderly way.

Now, here at GBC we try to follow these principles. We try to do everything, including our worship, in accord with the Word of God and the principles it lays down. We try to see that in our worship there is edification, comprehension, evaluation, participation, regulation, and submission. Sometimes, no doubt, we fail, I suppose, in some areas, but if we do, it isn't from lack of trying, but rather from human frailty. But I wonder whether you have that commitment in your personal life. Do you try to do everything according to the Word of God? Whether it is worship or work or school or your home, do you try to the best of your ability to apply the principles God has laid down for you in those areas? Or is the Word of God something for Sundays only? *The captain of a ship looked into the dark night and saw a faint light in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south." Promptly a return message was received, "Alter your course 10 degrees north." The captain was angered; his command had been ignored. So, he sent a second message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south-I am the captain." Soon another message was received, "Alter your course 10 degrees north-I am seaman third class Jones." Immediately the captain sent another message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "Alter your course 10 degrees south-I am a battleship." Then the reply came: "Alter your course 10 degrees*

north-I am a lighthouse." God's Word is a Lighthouse built on an immovable Rock. Against it we must test all our experiences, all our desires, all our actions. And if the order comes to alter our course, we must obey!

1 Cor. 15:1-19 CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

At the core of our faith, we celebrate an event that occurred nearly 2000 years ago. When you think about it, it's quite incredible. A dead man came to life and left his tomb empty, a man who was scourged and beaten severely to the point where He could not carry his cross and then was nailed through wrists and ankles and hung there for six hours. Then he lay in a stone tomb for two days. That is the man whom we believe rose! It is humanly unthinkable. It is not logical and exceeds all normal limits of human belief. Yet here we are, 2000 years later, convinced of it. Two questions come to my mind: 1) How do we know He rose? and 2) What difference does it make to us? Paul answers those very questions for us in the first half of 1 Cor. 15. First, he gives us:

I. The Proofs of Christ's Resurrection There are three primary pieces of evidence that attest to Christ's Resurrection:

1. the witness of the Scriptures (1-4) Notice twice he says, *according to the Scriptures*. The death and resurrection of Christ were predicted in detail hundreds of years before they occurred. When Peter got up to preach on the day of Pentecost, He proclaimed the death and resurrection of Christ and then quoted Ps. 16:10 where David said, *You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay*. David predicted 1,000 years ahead of time that the Messiah would rise. When Paul got up to preach in the synagogue in Antioch, he also quoted Ps. 16:10. We know Is. 53:9-11, that great chapter which predicts so many details of Christ's death, also predicts that he would see the light of life and would prolong his days after His suffering. God said it would be so, that He would rise. God cannot lie. Jesus himself repeatedly told His followers that He would die and rise again the third day. It was so well known that the Jews demanded a guard be posted at the tomb to prevent His disciples from faking it! Jesus can't lie. From our perspective, if Christ did not rise, then the whole of the Bible is untrue and unreliable, because it teaches a false truth that Jesus rose. But everything else the Scriptures said about Christ's life and death was fulfilled; so it must be with His resurrection.

2. the witness of the apostles (5-7) There were eyewitnesses who saw Him alive after His death. Paul lists most of them here. Peter saw Him, the Twelve saw Him, on one occasion a crowd of more than 500 of His disciples saw Him, probably in Galilee. As Paul was writing some 30 years later most were still alive and could be asked about it in person. They were so convinced that they did not doubt what they had seen, even though 30 years had gone by! And not only that, but many of them were so sure of what they had seen that they gave their lives for it! They would not deny it in the face of persecution and death! Nobody dies for a hoax! Nobody dies for an uncertainty! When John begins his first letter he writes, "We heard with our own ears, we saw with our own eyes, we touched with our own hands the Word of Life!" And we accept their testimony as true.

3. the witness of personal experience (8-11) Here is the bottom line, personal experience. First:

a. the personal experience of Paul You know the story of the Damascus Road. Here was Paul, an enemy of Christ and Christians, a blasphemer and a persecutor hard at work, some time, perhaps years, after Christ had returned to heaven. No one was seeing Him anymore. Yet he appeared to Paul and the change in his life is obvious. He became the greatest Christian missionary the world has known, not because he believed an idea or accepted a doctrine, but because he saw Jesus Christ living and well! And I would include here:

b. our own personal experience While we have not seen Him with our eyes or touched Him with our hands, millions of us Christians over a period of 2,000 years have experienced a changed life through personally inviting Christ to come and live in us. I was 15 when I did that and there was a definite change in my life. I have watched dozens of others ask Him to come in and have seen the change in their lives. This evidence is available to anyone. Invite the living Jesus to come live in you sincerely and genuinely and you will know that He rose and is alive! But so what? What difference does it make that He rose?

II. The Importance of Christ's Resurrection The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event of all history. And here are three reasons why:

1. it is vitally related to ours (12-13) There were those at Corinth who were going off into error saying there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul argues that our resurrection is wrapped up with His.

a. if we do not rise, then He did not rise You can't say that Jesus rose, but we'll just live on as spirits and never have bodies. You can't have one without the other. But Paul's real point is:

b. since He rose, then we must rise This is really the whole argument of chapter 15. He rose, therefore we will rise. His resurrection is our guarantee of a wonderful future. We will not live in some shadow world of spirits as the ancients believed. We will live in a world as real as our own bodies; we'll have a life that is as real as the one we have now!

2. it is the central fact of Christianity (14-16) Christianity is built on the resurrection of Christ. Take the resurrection out and:

a. without it, Christianity is empty It is vain; it has no content, nothing to say. Without it, the huddled, scared disciples would have remained in secret and died off. There would have been no church. When Peter got up to preach, he would have had to say, "God sent Jesus, but you killed Him and we'll never have a Messiah now!" What kind of message is that? But I tell you that thousands of people in churches have that kind of empty message! They believe Christ was a great teacher or an example, but don't believe He got up bodily out of the tomb. My Bible says He is risen and seated at the right hand of God as Lord of all! That's the only message that gives Christianity meaning! But worse:

b. without it, Christianity is deception Its central message is that Jesus rose. If he didn't, then Christianity is a lie, a hoax, at best an ignorant faith based on some mistaken people's reports! You see, I either believe in the resurrection of Christ or I am not a Christian. That's why Paul writes to the Romans that you must believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead in order to be saved!

3. it is the guarantee of our salvation (17-19) Paul teaches that the resurrection is the sign, the proof positive, that our sins are paid for, that the cross was enough to pay for them once and for all. Without the resurrection, we don't know who won, whether death and sin were the victors or Christ was the Victor. Without it, our faith is futile, empty of effect; it cannot save us.

a. without it, the dead have perished Those who have died trusting in Christ are gone, lost; we don't know what happened to them. We have no certainty of what lies beyond the grave or whether our sins can be forgiven. Further:

b. without it, the living are pitiable Think about all the things those early Christians suffered for their faith. Think about all the things Christians today suffer around the world. What a sad travesty it is, if their message is not true, if Christ did not rise. What a sad waste of life and effort. If we cannot be sure of the resurrection of Christ, we cannot be sure of anything!

But the good news is in verse 20. Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! I do have a guaranteed future. The song writer said, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow!" My faith is not resting on speculation, but on a sure fact; Jesus Christ is alive! *Houdini, the great magician, told his wife that he would attempt to return to her from the dead, even if he had to go to hell to do it. For 10 years she carefully followed the conditions and instructions he left. On the tenth anniversary of his death the final seance was held at the Knickerbocker Hotel in Hollywood CA. 25 other seances were held round the world simultaneously. For more than two hours they prayed, pleaded, and begged for Houdini to manifest his presence. Finally, Mrs. Houdini said, "I now turn out the light. It is finished."* Houdini could not resurrect himself. We know he was mistaken and his promise a lie. Jesus Christ made the same promise and fulfilled it on the third day. He is Lord!

1 Cor. 15:20-55 OUR RESURRECTION

Chapters 11-15 deal with disorders in the church at Corinth. The last of those disorders that Paul deals with is doctrinal and we're going to consider it first. Some of the Corinthians, according to verse 12, had gone off into error, teaching that there is no bodily resurrection of the dead. After dealing with the resurrection of Christ, Paul moves on to give the most detailed explanation in the Bible of the fact that you and I shall be resurrected. Now, beginning at verse 20, we see first:

I. The Fact of Our Resurrection (20-22) The Bible does not simply teach the immortality of our soul; it teaches the resurrection of our body. One day, even though our body dies physically and disintegrates, God will give us a new resurrection body. Note two important things:

1. the certainty of it We KNOW this. How? Because we know Christ rose bodily from the dead. He is the firstfruits. Any farmer knows that the firstfruits are the guarantee of the crop. The first beans to poke their tops out of the soil are the sure promise that the rest of the crop will follow. We shall be made alive bodily!

2. the extent of it The key word is ALL. It is not just for the lucky few or those who achieve a certain level. Every believer will be resurrected; YOU will be resurrected. But when?

II. The Time of Our Resurrection (23-28) This is a deep doctrinal passage for the study of relationships within the Trinity, but for now let's stick to the subject. Notice in verse 23 the words, *each in his own turn*. The Greek word is a military term which refers to a company or rank of soldiers. What John in his writings calls *the first resurrection* or *the resurrection to life* does not occur all at one time, but it occurs in stages, as a military parade of companies passing by. Christ first; believers later at His coming. In fact, New Testament believers (the Church) will be resurrected when Christ appears at the Rapture before the Tribulation Period. The Old Testament saints and those who believe during the Tribulation will be resurrected at Christ's return to the earth to set up His Millennial Kingdom. And finally, people who are born during the Millennium and believe will be resurrected at the end of the Millennium when it is time for the Great White Throne in Rev. 20. The time

when Christ comes for each group is the time of their resurrection. For us, it is at the Rapture of the church. So, let me be clear; if I die, my soul is in heaven with Jesus immediately, but when He comes to rapture the church out to heaven, I will get my resurrection body, just as surely as Christ rose the third day.

III. The Importance of Our Resurrection (29-34) We might be tempted to think, "So what?"; after all, what does it matter if I'm in heaven with or without a body? Well, if we spent more time in the Bible, we wouldn't think like that. When you deny the resurrection, you ultimately end up denying the afterlife altogether or at least in the way we conceive of it. That's where the Sadducees got off the track. They denied the resurrection, but that meant they gave up believing in angels and the existence of spirits. They became annihilationists. God created us to live forever as whole beings, body, soul, and spirit. Our eternal life is a resurrected life. The time between our death and resurrection is only temporary. So, the importance of being raised is the very importance of eternal life itself. Look what it does for us:

1. it gives value to those who have died (29) This verse is a good candidate for being the least understood in the Bible. The Bible Knowledge Commentary says up to 200 explanations have been given of it! To me, it seems most natural to take it at face value. Paul doesn't say that believers *should* be baptized for the dead; he says that some people *do* it and that it would be a foolish thing if there is no resurrection. Essentially, he's saying, "Look, even people who don't know proper Christian doctrine know there's a resurrection!" Or it could be, as Scofield says, that Paul is talking about us following on in the path of those Christians who have died before us, being baptized and filling in their ranks. What use is it without a resurrection? But no matter how you cut it, Paul seems to be saying that the doctrine of the resurrection is important because it connects us with those who have gone on before us. They are not annihilated; they live. We are not separated from them forever, but can follow confidently on, knowing we'll be together.

2. it gives courage to face dying (30-32) Paul says, "If I didn't believe in the resurrection, I'd quit this apostle business and settle down to a peaceful life of tentmaking! This is too dangerous. There's no use in laying your life on the line; rather, you ought to protect it and do everything to prolong it!" We can face death with confidence; we can be unafraid to put our lives on the line for Christ because we know there is a resurrected life, an eternal life for us.

3. it gives incentive for right living (32b-34) If you don't believe in a resurrection life, you might as well adopt the "Eat, drink and be merry" philosophy. You only go round once, so grab for all the pleasure you can get. The resurrection keeps us from being lax and falling into sin; we shall be with God one day!

IV. The Manner of Our Resurrection (35-50) This section is for those who want the specifics, the "hows"! First, we see the resurrection:

1. illustrated in nature (35-41) Paul points out two facts:

a. there will be continuity He is back to farming again. When you plant a seed, it dies, so to speak. It disintegrates and out of it comes a new plant. The seed you plant determines what grows. Bean seeds don't grow onions! So, there will be a continuity between your natural body and your resurrection body. It will be enough like the one you have now to provide recognizability and also:

b. there will be individuality Every seed produces its own specific individual plant. Paul says to look around at the variety of matter that exists in the universe. God has given variety even to the sun and stars and to species of beings on earth. We will not all be clones and look alike. You will be YOU and nobody else.

2. explained in detail (42-44) Paul gives four key facts about the nature of the new body we will have:

a. our body will be imperishable It will not grow old or get sick. It will never die. It will be eternal and immortal. Wow!

b. our body will be glorious It will be perfect, beautiful, shining with glory. Ladies, you can throw away the make-up; gents, forget the bald spots and spare tires!

c. our body will be powerful It will never grow weak or tired like it does now. It will have entirely new powers and capabilities this body doesn't, like immediate transportation, to name one!

d. our body will be spiritual It will have a nature that is oriented toward God, completely without sin. It will fit us to walk with God for eternity.

3. demonstrated in Jesus (45-50) The point is verse 49. It will bear the image of Jesus. Think of Jesus in His resurrected state, of the new and different body He had when the disciples met Him. Think of how He appeared and disappeared and was unlimited, yet was recognizable and very real and touchable. As John says, we shall be like Him!

V. The Moment of Our Resurrection (51-53) But what if we live until Jesus comes? These verses form a beautiful picture of how that moment of resurrection will be. It will be sudden, swift, as quick as the blink of an eye. God's trumpet will sound and, if we have already died, instantly our souls will be in their resurrected bodies and with the Lord in the air. If

we're still living, in that same instant we shall rise to meet Him and on the way, our living body will be transformed, metamorphosized, into a spiritual body, as a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. All together, the whole church, the body of Jesus Christ, is transformed in the same instant! But lastly, we must turn to:

VI. The Message of Our Resurrection (54-58) What does it mean to us in a practical way right now?

1. we need not fear death (54-57) Death has no sting left. The sting was sin and Jesus took care of that, so now it is a glorious door to heaven. Death is a conquered enemy who has become a servant, a doorkeeper to let us into heaven.

2. we do not serve in vain (58) All that work, all that service, is not lost. It is not in vain, nor forgotten. There is an eternity of life out there and what I do here and now makes a difference in the responsibilities I will be given there. So, hang in there. Don't quit. If the going gets tough, don't despair or give up. Serve the Lord whether anybody notices or not, whether you're tired or not. There is a resurrection and a life eternal. It's as sure as Jesus Christ Himself.

1 Cor. 16:1-4 CONVICTIONS ABOUT COLLECTIONS

Chapter 16 forms the conclusion of Paul's letter to the church at Corinth. Before he closes there are a couple of practical matters which he wants to take care of. The first one concerns the taking of a collection or an offering which was already in progress. This is one of those marvelous "nutshell" passages in the Bible where God blesses you with the outline of an entire teaching subject in 1 or 2 verses, like John 3:16 which gives the Gospel in a nutshell or 2 Tim. 3:16 which lays out all we believe about the Bible in a nutshell. So, verse 2 here is a nutshell verse about Christian giving; it lays out for us all we need to know about Christian giving in brief, rememberable form. And when you take the surrounding verses with it, you have a lot of information about what God expects of us in the stewardship of our material possessions.

I. The Grace of Giving (1) The collection he's talking about is a special offering that all of the Gentile churches in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia are gathering together for the poor in the church at Jerusalem. Let's get a little background:

1. the need at Jerusalem - Acts 8:1,3 Though the church at Jerusalem had grown by leaps and bounds in the early days, persecution was soon upon them. Their lives and well-being were threatened and great numbers of them fled the city and settled elsewhere. But the ones who remained no doubt had a very difficult time of it, being discriminated against by the Jews. **11:27-12:1** On top of that there was a famine not long afterward affecting the area. The Christians at Antioch were moved to send money to Jerusalem to help. Now compare **Gal. 2:10**. This records the outcome of the conference in Acts 15. Again, the apostles ask the gentiles to remember the poor in Jerusalem! Evidently the church at Jerusalem suffered horribly in those years with most of its members being poor and destitute. On the other hand, here were all these Gentile churches that Paul had started all over the Mediterranean, where there was not yet outward persecution and there was relative prosperity among the believers in many areas. They were moved by the plight of their brothers in Jerusalem and decided to take up a huge collection for them and have it delivered to Jerusalem by representatives. Paul is going along to deliver it as he returns from his third missionary journey. But he writes the Corinthians about it from the church at Ephesus as he prepares for it.

2. the effects of the collection - 2 Cor. 9:12-14 Paul wrote the Corinthians a second time on the eve of his coming to them and spent two chapters on this offering. For now, let's just note its effects:

a. it met needs God used their giving to meet the needs at Jerusalem. When we give, God uses us to meet the needs of others, to answer their prayers, to keep His promises. We are often His means of blessing through our giving. And further:

b. it brought glory to God The recipients would praise God for them and for the grace given to them, not only the grace of salvation, but the grace of giving. Giving is a grace; it is God moving and working through you and it brings Him much glory as you do it.

II. Guidelines for Giving (2) Here in a nutshell are the guidelines for how this grace ought to be exercised. Test yourself against these principles:

1. the time of giving - the first day of the week, on Sunday when they met together. Giving is both an individual and a collective matter. It is individual, in that the individual decides how much to give. It is collective, in that it is done in the context of being together. We give when we are together. That's why we take offerings during services. We could just mail envelopes and let you mail them back or encourage everyone to give electronically, but giving is an act of worship; it is an act of praise to God as much as praying or singing. That's why God says to do it when we are together!

2. the regularity of giving - "every week" Sure, some may get paid once a month and give once a month to cover the whole month. In those days, many were probably paid every day for that day's work. I think his point is regularity, consistency. Giving is not just to be done when you are moved by an appeal. Giving is to become for you a habit of life, a considered thing that you plan out and do on a regular basis.

3. the participants in giving - "every one of you" Giving is not for the rich, not for those with lots of money, not for those who don't have financial problems. It is for every one of us. Compare 2 Cor. 8:1-5. The Macedonians didn't have it easy; they were impoverished, but they gave. The key is, they gave themselves first! Giving is for you. It is for you, young person, if you earn money or if you get money, God expects you to give. Giving is not simply letting Mom and Dad hand you a dollar and dropping it in a plate. That's transfer. Giving is where you take what God has given you and you give out of it back to Him!

4. the manner of giving - "a sum of money in keeping with his income" How much should I give? Let me start off by saying that the word *tithe* is not found in connection with the New Testament church. Literally, the tithe was an Old Testament income tax of 10% levied on Israel by God to provide for the needs of the tribe of Levi and the priests. God does not require that of us. It may be an example for us to start with, but we are not under the law. What does God require of us? Even more, that we give according to His blessing. If I make \$100,000 and give 10% to God, that leaves 90,000 for me. I'm not sure if that was me, that God would feel that I had done anything very significant. If I make \$10,000 and give 10% of that, it would be very significant because I am hurting already and I need that cash I gave. Don't try to treat God like the IRS with percentages closely calculated. Look at what God gives you and then give significantly out of that. It is not the amount that counts (remember the widow with her two mites?); it is the willingness to sacrifice! And that brings us to:

5. the motive of giving Paul doesn't want to them to give out of embarrassment or coercion when he arrives. He doesn't want any last minute forced appeals. He wants them to have given because they want to. Compare **2 Cor. 9:5-7**. God loves a cheerful giver! He wants you to give because you love Him, because you are thankful for all He's given you. He wants you to give because your heart is touched by the need of the brethren and of the world. He wants you to give because you want to, as a result of the Holy Spirit being in you! Somebody said, "It isn't what you have in your pocket that should make you thankful, but what you have in your heart!" The same is true of giving!

III. Godliness in Giving (3-4) There is still the matter of what to do with the money once the collection has been received. We must not only exercise the grace of giving according to the guidelines God has laid down, but corporately we must make sure we deal with what is given in a godly fashion. There are two principles that Paul mentions here:

1. acceptability to the congregation The congregation would appoint men to bear the offering to Jerusalem and carry out their wishes. Individuals give, but it is the body which decides how that which is given should be distributed. It is not the whim of the pastor or of some church leader. The distribution of funds must occur with the knowledge and concurrence of the congregation.

2. accountability in distribution Notice how Paul was very careful not to handle the money himself. He would go with the men from the churches, but they would handle it. Why? Compare **2 Cor. 8:20-21**. Paul didn't want anybody saying that his hand was in the till. He wanted to do what was right before God, but also to make sure he appeared right before men. He wanted to be accountable for this. It is so important that we subject ourselves to scrutiny in this area. Listen, our books are open. We have nothing to hide. We publish a financial report four times each year, accounting for every cent of giving. We have no secret funds and hidden accounts and we audit our books (not edit). We want to be good in our distribution of the giving which is entrusted to us!

Well, how about you, my friend? Are you giving according to the guidelines God has laid down? Are you giving sacrificially out of a glad heart or does God get the left-overs? *A man had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. He could receive little company and was not to be excited. While in the hospital a rich uncle died and left him a million dollars. His family wondered how to break the news to him with the least amount of excitement. It was decided to ask the preacher if he would go and break the news quietly to the man. The preacher went, and gradually led up to the question. The preacher asked the patient what he would do if he inherited a million dollars. He said, "I think I would give half to the church" The preacher dropped dead.* Let's not let good giving become so rare that it shocks us!

1 Cor. 16:5-24 HOW TO TREAT WORKERS

Today we finish our study through 1 Corinthians and look at Paul's closing exhortations. In these verses Paul talks first about himself, then Timothy, then Apollos, then a group of other Christians from Corinth who had just brought him a gift. The key word that stands out to me in these verses is the word *work*. Find it in verse 9 (*effective work*), verse 10 (*the work of the Lord*), verse 15 (*the service or work of the saints*), and verse 16 (*joins in the work and labors*). The work of the Lord is his subject and these men he mentions are the workers. Paul is trying to tell the Corinthians how Christian workers should be treated by them. It shows how should we treat Christian workers, whether they are the missionaries we send overseas or those who labor right here among us. It may apply to those in full-time service or those who work as part of the local church. There are four guidelines which we should be following in our relationships with them:

I. A Worker Should Be Helped (5-9) Paul talks first about himself and lays out some of his personal plans. He's at Ephesus and wants to go around through Macedonia and down to Corinth. He hopes to spend some time, perhaps the whole winter, with them. For the moment, he wants to stay where he is and continue the present work which is prospering. There are two things to note:

1. a worker's strategy depends on the Lord Note the little phrase, *If the Lord permits*. Paul recognized that all his plans were tentative; the Lord has the ultimate say in how our plans for ministry work out. Sometimes it is beyond us to know why one of our own wants to go here or there and do this or that work. Other times we wonder how they ever ended up where they did, having gone into the work with completely different intentions. Churches don't understand why pastors sometimes move. Well, that's God's business. It was God who opened the door for Paul's ministry there. A worker's strategy of ministry depends on the Lord's guidance and leading, and often His hindering. But:

2. a worker's service depends on us Paul says that when he stayed with them, he would need their help. Wherever God was leading him, it would take their help to get him there. That help would be in the form of material gifts, no doubt, the supplying of his needs. But it would also come in the form of prayer and encouragement while he was with them. The ministry our workers have depends on us, on our giving, on our prayers, on our help in very practical ways. So often we'd like it the other way around; we want to give them strategy and let them depend on God for the help! But God works through us to enable the workers to serve.

II. A Worker Should Be Accepted (10-11) Paul, since he is not ready to go to Corinth, is thinking of sending his trusted son in the faith, Timothy. Paul is worried over how Timothy will be treated there because of all the factions and problems; he's concerned that some would refuse to accept him. There are two aspects to this:

1. he should not be disregarded The words *refuse to accept* are literally *to regard as nothing*. They might pay no notice or attention to him. I wonder how many missionaries feel forgotten or abandoned or perhaps feel like outsiders when they come home. They are there in the limelight for a brief moment during a service and then forgotten. I wonder how many pastors are discouraged in the work because people pay no attention to what they preach. Acceptance means listening, learning, and caring. But the second aspect to this thought is:

2. he should not be troubled Paul was afraid people might oppose Timothy or make it tough for him. Christian workers are often troubled from without; they don't need it from within too. Believe it or not, there are those who deliberately make trouble for pastors and missionaries, sometimes from within their own flocks. No, a worker should not be neglected or troubled:

III. A Worker Should Be Loved (12-14) Here's good old Apollos, the one who had gone to Corinth to minister after Paul had left. Now he's at Ephesus with Paul, laboring together in the work. Yet at Corinth these two men are the objects of war cries in the church, "I follow Paul" or "I follow Apollos". He wanted to send Apollos so that those of the Paul faction would learn to love him and so Apollos could help those of the Apollos faction to love Paul! But Apollos did not feel led to go right then. Paul sums up in verse 14 with an admonition that applies always, do everything in love. Workers should be loved. A worker should be loved:

1. whether he is present or not It shouldn't matter whether Apollos goes or not. He should be loved anyway. A worker should be loved as much when he is away, as when he is present. But oh, how our love tends to grow colder when a worker is not with us, especially when they are far away, perhaps for several years or more and are only able to write at long intervals. Real love persists in caring!

2. whether he agrees with us or not It persists whether he does what we want him to do or not. Paul wanted him to go; he didn't want to go. Paul still loved him. and we ought to love those who work for the Lord. We may not agree with them on every point or every method, but we should love them! So many times, we break fellowship over some little point. Love is able to transcend differences!

IV. A Worker Should Be Recognized (15-18) A trio of men arrived from Corinth bearing a gift for Paul. These men had devoted themselves to ministering to the needs of the saints. They had become workers. Paul said such men should be *recognized*; in Greek that means to know a thing as it really is. They should be treated as being what they really are, servants of God. How? In two ways:

1. by submission We should willingly place ourselves under their authority, recognize the authority they have from God to do the work, and also:

2. by support They recognized Paul was doing a work of God and brought a gift which refreshed him and supplied his lack. Paul urged the church to honor that and to join hands and labor along with them. We not only have to acknowledge workers, but need to get our hands dirty and labor with them, become workers ourselves like Stephanas did.

Well, how do you treat Christian workers? Whether our pastors or any of our missionaries or those within our congregation who have definite ministries like the teachers or elders. How do you treat them? Do you help them when they need it?

They cannot serve without your assistance in prayer, materially, or by volunteering your own time and hands to do what needs done. It may be doing a mailing for a missionary or painting in the church building. Do you help them? Do you accept them by listening to them and learning from them and smoothing out the path for them instead of making waves? Do you love them, no matter where they are and how long they've been gone and whether you agree with them? Are they in your prayers and on your heart? Do you recognize them as being God's workers and honor them as such with your submission and support? Remember, they love you. You are on their hearts as they minister to you or on your behalf to others. Compare verses 19-24. Paul greeted them, wished the grace of God on them, and expressed his love for them. I do the same for you along with all the other workers we have. And I share with Paul and with you in a common wish and prayer, *Maranatha*, "Come Lord Jesus"!

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

1) The Problem Of Divisiveness - Chs. 1-2

Today we're going to begin a brand new series of studies based on the book of 1 Corinthians. This is a letter that addresses a series of problems that were occurring in that church one after another. Paul writes, *"I want to talk to you about this... and now about this... now about this..."*; that's how the letter is written and that's how we're going to study it. We're not going to attempt a verse by verse exposition where we explain every verse in the letter; that would take pretty long. Rather we're going to look at each of these 11 problems that Paul addresses and think about how they recur in our situation today and what we should do about them. The problems range from divisions between people to sexual immorality to singleness, marriage and divorce issues, to issues of personal liberty. They are all things we face today just as they did. Now, where did all these problems come from? Well, the city of Corinth in which this church was started and from which all these believers came was a city filled with pagan immorality. *Towering above the ruins of old Corinth is a 2,000-foot mountain fortress called Acro-Corinth. In Paul's day, the temple of the fertility goddess Aphrodite was located at the top of this impressive summit. As many as 1,000 priestesses carried on immoral sexual activities in the worship of this pagan deity. It is said that these "hospitable ladies" would come into the city wearing specially designed sandals that left these words imprinted in the sand: FOLLOW ME. You can imagine how many Corinthian citizens and visiting sailors accepted and followed their tracks to the Temple.* Aristophanes coined a new word in the Greek language which transliterates: *to Corinthianize* and it referred to fornication, much like the concept "to Americanize" is thought of today among the Muslim peoples of the world! We are not so much different from Corinth. In the last half century, sex and immorality has become America's goddess also; her lure is everywhere you look. And many of the people who came to Christ in Corinth came out of this thinking and these practices and that is tough baggage for new believers to bring into their Christian lives. The change was drastic for them and the old ways were hard to let go of. Paul got to Corinth about 51 AD and this letter was written some 3-4 years later so the most mature believers in the church were only recent converts and the church was floundering in immaturity. Believers were still living in old patterns they had brought with them from their old lives or had reverted to after they were saved. The generation of people coming to Christ today is much like that. They do not have a Christian upbringing or the heritage of a moral society. They come from broken homes; they enter marriage having had multiple partners and often children from other relationships beforehand. They have not been given a Christian worldview or work ethic and all the things that we older ones think are just common sense to us in family life have never been modeled for them at all. The problems of our society are streaming right into the church with the people who come into our doors, so the church today needs a letter like this one! Now the first issue Paul writes to them about is not a moral one; it is:

I. The Problem Of Divisiveness In Corinth Let's read the description of it in **1:11-12**. Some travelers from the household of a believer in Corinth named Chloe had stopped to see Paul and shared with him some of the quarrelling that was going on in the church since he had left and how its unity had deteriorated terribly. If you think about it, you can see how this happened through:

1. the succession of leaders The names Paul, Apollos and Peter are instructive there. Turn with me to **Acts 18:11**. Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth. Over that time, verse 7 says that MANY people believed. Paul disciplined them, pastored them and, no doubt, some leaders were developed, but then he moved on back to his home area of Antioch to report in after his journey. That first wave of Christians held Paul with great respect. Now, look down to **24-27**. So, Apollos comes to Christ and he eventually comes to Corinth. He's a gifted man, learned and eloquent, a great public debater, and who knows, maybe better than Paul! And more people come to Christ and these now hold him in great respect! Of course, a good number of those who came to Christ were Jews and knowing that Peter was the leader of the church in Jerusalem, some wanted to hold him up as an example. So, when people in the church began to disagree over things, they began to divide out into camps. "I follow Paul!" "I follow Apollos!" "I follow Peter!" And some who were really trying to be spiritual said, "Well, I don't follow any man; I follow only Christ!" When differences of opinions arise in churches, it is easy for people to look to the ones they feel closest to for support and that leads to:

2. the development of schisms Verse 10 mentions *divisions*, literally *schisms*, breaks in relationship, believers separating themselves from one another and forming factions even within the same church body. People don't talk to each other; they ignore one another. They only respect their own little group and disregard the others. And that naturally leads to:

3. the growth of strife between portions of the body Paul says, "You are quarreling with one another!" Arguing, fighting, yelling! Things that should have no place in the body of Christ.

My how that problem of divisiveness has plagued the church down through the centuries and it is still very much alive and well today. Our own history reflects it. When I got here in 1979, what was then Wharton Baptist Church had just lived through one in the previous couple of years. A faction had formed who were "against the pastor". Others desperately wanted to be faithful and preserve the church and were perceived as being "for the pastor". People drew others to their side and there was no talking to each other and eventually there was quarreling and fighting and deep emotional hurt between people who were formerly good friends. Because he stayed tenaciously, those who were "against the pastor" even-

tually pretty much left and went to other churches. He finally left, but divisiveness had done its work. A church of 300 dwindled to 70. All missionaries were dropped from the budget by necessity. "Divide and conquer" has been a known military strategy through the ages and Satan uses it regularly against the church. Again, in the mid-80's what was then "Ardsley Chapel" experienced divisiveness. The greater majority felt they should combine to form Glenside Bible Church. A small minority vehemently felt they should not. I understand there were some very hot words in some business meetings. Eventually the minority left and the majority did combine, but again there was deep emotional hurt between former close friends. Neither of these conflicts had to do with doctrine or morality or unbelief or anything else of paramount importance. To be honest, like most conflicts, they were really mostly about power and control and who gets to have their own way. The history of the church is replete with divisiveness, ever since Paul and Barnabas arguing about whether to take Mark with them on their second missionary journey and parting company over it, and rare is the church body which does not experience it in some degree. We live in constant danger of becoming "a house divided against itself" like Corinth and as Jesus said, that house "cannot stand". Now, speaking to a church falling into that situation, Paul strongly reminds the Corinthian believers of:

II. The Unity To Which We Are Called (1:10) That word *appeal* in English doesn't quite do justice to the Greek. It is more literally, *I call you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...* Unity among us is not an option. It is not some wonderful thing that it would be nice if we could have. We are called to it in the name of Jesus! The night before He died, Jesus poured out His heart in prayer to the Father in John 17 and asked Him for this very thing: *I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* - Jn. 17:20-23. That's what Jesus wants! Complete and perfect unity among us right here in the body on earth, the kind of unity that He and the Father have, the kind of unity that He has with us individually. We are called to that unity by Him, summoned to it; it is not an option and when we break it, when we act in a divisive fashion, when we build sides and break relationships, we DEFY the Lord Jesus Christ! Look at verse 10:

1. we must give out the same message Agree is literally to *speak the same thing*. We don't have to agree on everything in life. I want a green carpet; you want a blue one. I don't want to wear a tie; you enjoy wearing a full suit. We don't have to like the same color or dress the same. But we have to give out the same message of grace and love and acceptance in Jesus. We have to say the same kind and loving things about each other and about others. We have to speak out of one heart. It's not an option; it's a necessity. If we don't give out the same message, the world will never know that Jesus is really in us. And:

2. we must break down any relational barriers between us so that we become *perfectly united*; that word means *completely fitted* together, like the dovetail joint on a fine cabinet drawer. It can also mean to restore something to that state. When unity is broken by division, we are called to restore it, to break down the walls that stand between us, to go to one another and seek forgiveness. The "Paul contingent" needs to seek out the "Barnabas contingent" and admit their wrong thinking and wrong words and wrong treatment and vice versa and restore a depth of relationship. It is not optional; we're called to it. In fact, in our GBC church covenant, we PROMISE to do it! And, Paul says:

3. we must become united in our thinking and judgment How we think about things that matter and how we evaluate and choose what to do must be the same. We need to grow into unity so that we end up on the same page and act as one. I have been continually amazed over the years at how consistently our Board of Elders has pursued this principle. It has not always been perfect but 99% of the time, no matter which men have been part of the group, no matter how tough the issue we face, in their maturity we end up thinking the same thing and moving forward unitedly in what we should do. You have no idea what a blessing that is, especially when you hear stories of what happens in other churches! But we are all called to that, not just our leaders.

So why don't we always have it? Well Paul mentions later on in the chapter:

III. The Root Of Divisiveness: (1:29-31) You see, boasting is what they were doing, isn't it? *I follow Paul! I follow Apollos!* Each was boasting in something about themselves, something fleshly. The root of all divisiveness is **Pride!** It is thinking more of ME than of Jesus, more about what matters to ME than what matters to Him. I separate myself from you because I don't get MY way, because MY feelings are hurt, because I need to be right or to be recognized or because I need to be in control or be in charge. When relational breaks are not over a matter of genuine biblical right and wrong or a matter of truth and error, they are ALWAYS about self, about someone elevating himself above others and the Lord. They are always about pride. Paul saw that spirit of inflation instantly and wrote three things to bring them back down to earth. First, he said:

1. remember it is about JESUS, not about us (1:13-14) He said, "Now wait a minute, let's get one thing straight...Who was crucified for you anyway? Paul wasn't crucified for you! Apollos wasn't crucified for you! Peter wasn't crucified for you! JESUS was crucified for you!" Paul doesn't matter; Apollos doesn't matter; Peter doesn't matter. What you want doesn't matter. Our life is not about us; it's about JESUS! When you're into this kind of divided state, nobody ever thinks about Jesus and what He wants, but He's the One who died for us in the first place so re-

member what HE wants! When you're tempted to divide from some brother or sister, think about that and it'll change your tune. Second, he said:

2. remember what we are, humanly speaking (1:26-28) Just look around you. How many people with doctorates to you see? (Besides our dear Dr. Anu who is one of the most humble people I know!) How many college presidents or tremendously educated people? How many millionaires do you see? How many CEO's and corporate executives and big business owners? How many senators and congressmen and government officials? How many of the rich and famous and well-to-do people of this world end up in the church? Not many! Most of us are just common ordinary people who, in the scheme of things, don't matter a whole lot in this world. We would never accomplish much of anything on our own. Everything we are and everything we've done we owe to Jesus! He has taken us and done great things with us; we're just ordinary vessels, jars of clay. Who would boast about the jar; it's the treasure inside that deserves the glory and should be boasted about! *One young man received an award for an outstanding achievement and he took too seriously the extravagant praise that was given to him by the one who made the presentation. So, when he got home, he repeated to his mother all that had been said. Then he paused and mused out loud, "How many great men do you suppose there are in the world today?" And her wise reply was, "One less than you think, my son."* That's what Paul's reminding us of. Then third he says:

3. remember the Spirit's power in bringing you to faith (2:1-5) So quickly we forget how we came to Jesus, how we were lost and undone and the Spirit of God opened our eyes by His mighty power. I read such a refreshing testimony the other day: *About a year after I was married, a co-worker invited us to church. Every week she nagged us about coming to church with her family. Finally on April 9, 1974 we went to church to get her off my back and I heard for the first time that God loved me and had a wonderful plan for my life. Over the weeks that followed I learned that I had many misconceptions about who God is. On July 21, 1974, I surrendered my life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. God's prevenient grace had been actively at work in my life prior to this date. God had not abandoned me. As I reflect on my spiritual journey, I recall that many people shared the gospel with me, but I simply did not understand. However, on July 21, as I listened to the sermon, 1 John 1:9 and Ephesians 2:8-9 became "alive" and I responded by accepting by faith the relationship that God extends to us through Jesus. God's justifying grace filled me with love and joy. We didn't come to Christ because some preacher was eloquent or some wise person out-argued us. It was a direct work of the Spirit of God convicting our hearts and we simply believed at last and accepted the gift that was offered. You didn't do ANYTHING to be what you are today; GOD did it all. HE saved you. HE changed you. JESUS transformed your life; you've got nothing to boast about. The only place to stay is humbly kneeling before the foot of the cross in worship and thankfulness. If you stay there, you'll never become divisive!*

So how are we going to stay there? How are we going to remember that it's about Him, not us? Well in the rest of chapter 2 Paul gives us:

IV. The Remedy For Divisiveness (2:10-16) We don't have time to study this great passage in detail; I just want you to notice four things that it says:

1. we have all been given the very mind of Christ in the Person of His indwelling Spirit (2:10, 16) The Holy Spirit is God and so knows all the thoughts of God, all the things that go on in God's mind. And God put the Holy Spirit inside us when we believed, to live in us permanently. Therefore, we have the very mind of Jesus Christ, the very thoughts of Jesus Himself, living and residing inside us in the person of His Spirit! We possess the very mind of Christ! It's simple. All we have to do is learn to listen to Him! And since the same Spirit lives in each of us, if each of us is listening to Him, doesn't it follow that:

2. we will have the same mind as we listen to the Spirit (2:12) If we listen to the Spirit, we'll understand the very thoughts of God; we'll think God's thoughts after Him! That's awesome enough, but the point is that we'll all think His thoughts instead of our own. All our self-oriented stuff will be out of the way and we'll all be of one mind. And therefore:

3. we will give out the same message as we listen to the Spirit (2:13) We'll speak spiritual words, words taught by the spirit, instead of all the words we say out of our "earthly experience" or our self-centered "wisdom". We'll speak the same thing, give out the same message, the one the Spirit wants, instead of all our "I this" and "I that". And:

4. we will have the same judgment as we listen to the Spirit (2:15) We will judge and evaluate all the things we come across in the same way because we'll hear HIS judgment and share it.

And so, if we simply learn to listen to the Spirit inside us, we'll BE all the things Paul says we are called to be, perfectly united in thought and judgment and in what we say and how we feel about each other. All we have to do is listen! *The inventor of the telegraph, Samuel F. B. Morse, was once interviewed by George Hervey who asked him, "Professor Morse, when you were making your experiments at the university, did you ever come to a standstill, not knowing what to do next?" "Oh, yes, more than once." "Then what did you do?" Morse said, "I've never discussed this with anyone, so the public knows nothing about it. But now that you ask me, I'll tell you frankly - I prayed for more light." "And did God give you the wisdom and knowledge you needed?" "Yes, He did," said Morse. "That's why I never felt I deserved the honors that*

came to me from America and Europe because of the invention associated with my name. I had made a valuable application of the use of electrical power, but it was all through God's help. It wasn't because I was superior to other scientists. When the Lord wanted to bestow this gift on mankind, He had to use someone. I'm just grateful He chose to reveal it to me." In view of these facts, it's not surprising that the inventor's first message over the telegraph was these words: "What hath God wrought!" Samuel Morse learned to stop and ask God and listen for a reply. That kept him humble. If we simply learn to do the same, to stop and get on our faces and pour out our hearts to God over issues that come up between us and listen for His Spirit to speak to our hearts, that process will keep us humble. And if we listen, we will NOT be divided.

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

2) The Problem Of Carnality - Ch. 3

We're looking at each of the 11 problems that Paul addresses one after another in this letter and thinking about how, they recur in our situation today and what we should do about them. The first problem he addressed in chapters 1-2 was Divisiveness; believers were dividing into factions against each other and we saw how precious UNITY is to the Lord Jesus. In Chapter 3 Paul continues to address that same behavior by getting at its root problem. Read verse 1. Now I really struggled to choose a name to call this problem by. The NIV uses the adjective *worldly*, but in Greek it is an adjective built on the word *sarx* which means *flesh* and would literally be translated "*fleshly*", if that were a word in English! The NAS says, *men of flesh*, but the King James had a great word, the word *carnal*, and preachers for centuries preached heavily on this verse using it and talking about "carnal Christians" and "spiritual Christians". So, like it or not, carnality is the name I chose to give this problem but it's more important to me that you:

I. Know The Meaning Of The Word - (1-3) *Carnal* is from the Latin for *flesh* so:

1. carnality means being controlled by the flesh instead of the Spirit And flesh is not referring simply to this meaty stuff I call my body; it has a much broader meaning in Scripture. *The flesh is the sinful patterns by which we have learned to get our own physical and emotional needs met apart from God.* It is the ways that we have been trained to live by the people and the environment in which we developed. Today we often call this our "*stuff*", or our "*baggage*", or our "*history*". Maybe I learned growing up that by being loud and yelling I can intimidate people and get them to do what I want. So now I'm a believer and when you do something I don't like, instead of approaching you in love, I get loud and yell at you. I am being carnal; I'm choosing to let my flesh, my "stuff", control me instead of the Holy Spirit. Or maybe as a female I learned that by batting my eyes and smiling coyly and using a flirtatious tone of voice I could get a guy to do what I wanted. So here I am now as an adult believer, but when I need help instead of genuinely asking for help as a sister to a brother, I trot out my "stuff" and "lure" some guy to do what I need done. I'm being carnal, choosing to let my flesh control me instead of the Spirit. Being carnal:

2. it means thinking and acting like people who don't have the Spirit It's thinking and acting the same way I did before I got saved, before Christ's Spirit came to live in me. It's living as though none of that happened, as though I wasn't transformed or born again, as though the Spirit of God wasn't living in me and joined to my spirit.

3. it means thinking and acting like the people of the world around us act The nonbelievers all around us use all the means they have learned. They push others out of the way to get ahead. They criticize others to make themselves feel better. They use alcohol or drugs or sex to numb their emotional pain. They lie or at least hide the truth when it suits their purpose. It's all they have! It's the only way they know to do life. Why should I expect anything different of them? They don't have the Holy Spirit! But I do! My ways of thinking and acting should be different from theirs, not the same! Further, Paul says that carnality:

4. it is a sign of immaturity When you see an adult acting like a child, it's readily apparent, isn't it? What do you think when you see a woman who always has to be the center of attention and will always find a way to talk about herself and never listen to what you have to say? Or what do you think when a man leaves dirty clothes lying all over the floor in the bedroom thinking his wife will pick them up or when he leaves the sink pile up high with dirty dishes figuring that she'll get to them eventually? We see childishness readily and know what maturity looks like, don't we? We expect a person to be self-centered as a child, but to come to care about the needs and the feelings of others as an adult and to take responsibility for themselves and things like that. Well, God expects us to "grow up" in Christ, to move along to maturity and the demonstration of maturity is Christ Himself who was ALWAYS controlled by the Holy Spirit so He never acted selfishly, never hated others or was jealous of them; in short, He always thought and acted HOLY. And when He sees us acting carnally, like we used to act before we had the Holy Spirit, He sees us as spiritual infants, as babes who've never grown up, because we are **not growing into the image of Christ!** Now, this flesh-controlled way of acting and thinking:

5. it is the root cause underlying most other problems Most of the problems that were going on in the church in Corinth were caused by the immature, flesh-driven thinking and acting of its members. They were quarreling with one another; some guy was sleeping with his step-mother; others were still involved in sexual immorality; some were taking each other to court; marital relationships were all messed up. And these problems all boil down to the same thing, car-

nality, living out of the old patterns of self-centered thinking, instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to be in control and make changes. And most of the problems that crop up in the church today, and in this church body here, boil down to the carnality of people, believers letting their flesh patterns control them instead of the Spirit. Let's just:

II. See How Carnality Can Display Itself In The Church Though all the problems addressed in the book are the result of it and it can take many forms, let's just read verses 3-4 closely and look at the specific area that Paul focuses on, this whole matter of the church being divided into factions. It reflects pretty accurately what the church has done even today. He says that:

1. believers were zealous toward one another The NIV word *jealousy* in the Greek is really *zeal*. They were passionately indignant toward one another. Each was convinced that his was the right way and could not tolerate others who would dare to think differently. It was not about core issues like who Christ is or His providing our salvation, but over secondary, human oriented issues, such as "Paul always said this and I follow Paul!" or "Apollos always did it this way and I follow Apollos!" How much energy has been expended in the last century by zealous believers defending positions like, "Women shouldn't wear pants; you should only use a King James Bible; spiritual believers should never dance or drink any alcohol." Or it might be over what you believe about the return of Christ, over whether you're reformed or dispensational, or whether you're charismatic and practice tongues or healing. It may even be over how we plan to spend money or whether we should have a stained glass window in the building. And it is always from a haughty, self-righteous attitude that says, "I'm right and you have to agree with me! I'm better than you!" It is never out of a love that cares about the other and seeks to help them. The key word in carnality is always "I"; the flesh is always zealous about self. Now as a result of that:

2. believers were quarreling with one another Because each group passionately believed they were right, they argued about it. There was fighting and arguing and yelling among people who were part of the same body, who had the same Spirit, who were brothers and sisters. It led to pride and actual boasting about themselves, "I follow Paul!" "Well, I follow Apollos!" And it led to division, to separating from one another. Now, look with me at where that comes from. Compare **James 4:1-2**. Where does quarreling come from? From the flesh, from the "Big I", from not getting what I want. Carnality is the root of all the arguments you hear of in congregations. *Dr. John Cannon was once called in as a consultant by the board of a church that was having a great amount of dissension. Two committees had given conflicting recommendations on how to redecorate the building. One said it should be painted white; the other insisted that yellow would make it look more attractive and up-to-date. After the two groups vigorously restated their cases, the dispute became bitter, harsh, and divisive. Dismayed by the angry speeches that were disrupting the fellowship of the entire church, Dr. Cannon said quietly, "Here's my advice to you. Don't paint it white; don't paint it yellow; paint your church black! It will be very appropriate for an assembly that ought to go into mourning for having such a shameful quarrel." That sharp arrow hit its mark. The members saw that their ranting and spiteful comments had grieved the Holy Spirit. After calm reflection, a peaceable agreement was reached.* You may laugh, but the first vehement argument I ever saw in a church was in a business meeting over what color carpet to put in the sanctuary! Believers quarrel over anything, the pastor, the music, the sign out front, you name it.

When we let our flesh reign, when we live to get our own way, when we insist on our own need to be right, to be better, to win, to be noticed, to have control or whatever it is, it tears us apart from each other! Now Paul addresses carnality by helping us to:

III. Understand What Our Lives Are Truly About Look at (5-6). He says:

1. we are all merely servants and that word here is not slaves, but literally, ministers, *diakonoi*, *deacons*, *ones who serve*. A servant is one who executes the commands of another, who carries out the orders and the wishes of the one in charge. We are in the service of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul and Apollos were merely the ones whom Jesus sent to run His errand of taking the Gospel to Corinth and bringing the Corinthians to believe. That's what we all are. We are not masters, people in charge. We are those who serve Him, who minister to Him, who attend to His needs, who do what He wants done. And:

2. we all have tasks assigned to us by Jesus Paul was sent first. He planted the seed of the Gospel in Corinth. He won the first converts. He disciplined the first believers and trained the first leaders. But then Jesus sent him on elsewhere and He sent Apollos to Corinth and his task was to water what was already planted. He won more people and did more teaching and training. But neither Paul nor Apollos were anything in themselves. They were just servants told to go to the field and carry out orders. And that's how we all need to see ourselves. When we start to take "ownership" of the ministry tasks we're involved in, when chairing the committee becomes "mine" or leading the worship becomes "mine" or running the nursery becomes "mine", that's when carnality is rearing its head and quarrels are soon to follow. We need to hold our tasks loosely. They're just things Jesus has sent us to do. He could have sent anybody He chose to do them, because none of us are anything. We can't make anything grow:

3. it is God who produces all the results, not us (6-7) Apart from Him we can do nothing! The growth of the church at Corinth was God's doing. It was HIS work, not Paul's or Apollos'. And if what God sends you to do accomplishes anything, it will be God that does it, not you or I. If He blesses anyone by this service this morning, it will be His doing,

not ours. Jesus instructed us, *So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'* - Luke 17:10. He didn't mean we're supposed to feel worthless and unloved; that's the issue of our relationship to Him and in that realm we are beloved children. But when it comes to what we DO, to our ministry and service, it is all Him doing it; we are just doing what He's told us to do. Take no credit. Don't let carnality raise its head and get puffed up. You see, what we're on earth for is this:

4. we share the common purpose of growing or building His Kingdom (8-9) God is building a Kingdom on earth, a Kingdom of human beings who are His subjects through faith in Jesus. No matter who we are and where we live and what type of things Jesus tells us to do, we're all about the same task. We're all about seeing people come to faith and grow in Him and become part of His body the church and reach out to others in ministry. Whether we're framers or masons or drywallers or roofers, we're all putting up the same building and we should aid each other and work with each other in that task, not compete and quarrel with each other! Every one of us has a part in building the building, but:

5. we must focus carefully on pursuing our ministry tasks (10) Just because you're merely a servant doesn't mean that you can be sloppy about your assignment! These guys were messing up. They were all builders, but the flooring guys were arguing with the carpet guys and each trying to push the other to do it their way. And the painters were pushing the trim guys to hurry up and get done so they could get finished sooner. So, the building was looking like a set of jobs instead of a house. Do you get the picture? We must focus carefully on what we're doing and not let the flesh get hold of us in the process. Why? Because, Paul warns:

6. if we live a carnal life, our life will be wasted and our reward lost (11-15) When it's all done, God's going to set fire to the house and see what still stands afterwards! I know the analogy doesn't quite fit our modern building methods, but the point is that one day when the task is all done and He comes, it's payday! Jesus is going to reward His servants, not with money, but with things that will have value in eternity. And if we have spent our life as a believer living carnally, living for self, living the old way out of the old stuff, we'll get there and discover that it was all for nothing. In a "poof" it will be all gone; there will be nothing lasting that we've accomplished. Oh, we won't lose our salvation, but the house of cards that we've built with our lives will go up in smoke and we will have wasted our opportunity to do something that will last forever! On the other hand:

7. if we live a spiritual life, our service will be eternally rewarded Jesus told the faithful servant in the story, *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!* - Mat. 25:21. In another story Jesus put it like this, *Well done, my good servant! ...Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.* - Luke 19:17. God has plans out there. He has a universe to rule. He has wonderful responsibilities to entrust to us for our enjoyment in His eternal administration. If we get it right here, if we live by the Spirit instead of the flesh, who knows all the wonderful things that will result from it. This life on earth is our proving ground! What we learn here fits us for there! Don't waste it. In fact, just in case his building analogy didn't resonate, Paul closes the chapter by saying:

IV. Heed These Clear Warnings From God There are three of them:

1. DO NOT do damage to His church (16-17) The *you's* in verse 16 are plural. The church is God's Temple; *you* are His house that He's building; it's where He lives. DON'T tear it apart! Don't divide it. Don't corrupt it. Don't use it for your selfish purposes. If you work destruction in His house, if you defile it and ruin it and mess it up, He will not take kindly to it! He will do the same to your life!

2. DO NOT deceive yourself by thinking your carnality is wise (18-20) Any time you think you have all the answers, that your way is the best and the only, that you have it all together and everybody else is off base, you're in big trouble. You have set yourself against God and He will trap you in your own foolishness. God loves you too much to let you go on with a puffed up heart and attitude. He'll shrink you down to size. So, don't let your own flesh deceive you. Stay humble. And:

3. DO NOT continue sinful behavior (21a) Once you see it for what it is, don't keep it up. Don't persist in self-inflation. Instead try a new approach to life **(21b-22). Appreciate all things as gifts.** Paul was a gift to the church; Apollos was a gift to the church. Peter was a gift to the church. The church was blessed by all and everyone could benefit and learn something from each. Everything that comes your way has something in it that is a benefit from God, so instead of allowing it to stir up your flesh and reacting in a carnal way, receive it as a gift and look for how God wants to use it and bless you with it!

Carnality is a deadly thing. *I read the story of a boy who became a sailor while very young. He rose rapidly in the profession and was soon made the captain of a ship. At the end of one particular voyage, he was approaching land when a passenger who was familiar with maritime procedures asked if he intended to anchor the ship and call for some help in entering the harbor. He replied, "Anchor? Not me! I expect to be in dock with the morning tide." The passenger persisted, urg-*

ing him to signal for a pilot. "I am my own pilot," came the abrupt reply. Determined to reach port by morning, he took a narrow channel to shorten the distance. His crew of weathered seamen just shook their heads. Passengers said that they were in no hurry and hoped he would take the wider course. He laughed at all of them and repeated that he would be on land by daybreak. Indeed, he was on land before daybreak. But the ship was wrecked, and his own life was lost because of his arrogance. When you become your own pilot, when you revert to living your own way instead of the Spirit's way, a wreck is imminent. It can kill you, it can wreck your life and it can cost you your eternal reward. As we close, ask the Lord to show you where carnality may be creeping into your own life, where you may be running the show instead of Him, where you are doing what you want instead of what He wants.

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

3) The Problem Of Contempt - Ch. 4

The third problem that Paul addresses in his letter to the Corinthians is still connected to the subject of the several factions that had formed in the church. The first problem was the issue of divisiveness itself, breaking the unity of the body. The second problem was the issue of carnality which caused it, letting self-centered flesh patterns control their reactions instead of the Holy Spirit. The third problem is the attitude which the Corinthians had developed in the process. As we read this fourth chapter there are a number of indications that:

I. The Corinthians Were Judging One Another And Paul Instead of simply admitting that they had differences over non-essential things, those who were of the "I follow Apollos" party had developed a judgmental attitude toward those who were of the "I follow Paul" party and along with it a judgmental attitude toward Paul himself, now that he had been gone from them for several years. And, of course, the same thing was probably going on in the other direction. If we look closely at the words of this chapter, notice Paul says that:

1. they had become arrogant (18) That word *arrogant* literally means *puffed up*. They had an **inflated self-estimation**. They thought more of themselves than was really true. Paul warned us all about that in **Rom. 12:3** where he wrote, *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.* That's exactly what had happened. They were thinking more of themselves than they should have; they were thinking of themselves as being better, smarter, more spiritual or more you-name-it than the other groups or than Paul himself. Their group jingle might have been the anonymous poem, *Faults in others I can see; but praise the Lord, there's none in me!* Now, we would never say that because it appears too outwardly arrogant, but a good many of us actually believe that and tend to live based on it. We think that we're always right, that our way is the best, that nobody gets it like we do, that nobody can do it like we can. And I'm not talking about famous sports figures with inflated heads; I'm talking about us right here in the church and in our families, believers whose self-esteem has become piously overinflated, who think too highly of ourselves because of our education and training or our experience or our expertise or simply because it's Sunday! Now, these believers in their immaturity:

2. they had become judgmental (3) Paul knows that some of them are judging him, saying that he's wrong, that he's not worthy to be an apostle. He tells them how they ought to *regard* him (**1a**), to reckon him. They were evaluating him because they had become **critical of others**. Their prevailing attitude was not to encourage and love and build up, but to condemn and criticize and cut down. We all know people like that, even people in the church, who never have a kind word to say, whose glass is always half-empty, so they always tell you what you did wrong instead of what you did right. *Many of you remember watching Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood on TV with your kids for years; maybe you didn't know that Fred Rogers was also an ordained minister. He writes, "I remember so keenly one of the times I learned how individually the Spirit can work. It was years ago, and my wife and I were worshiping in a little church with friends of ours, another husband and wife. We were on vacation, and I was in the middle of my homiletics course at the time. During the sermon I kept ticking off every mistake I thought the preacher, who must have been 80 years old, was making. When this interminable sermon finally ended, I turned to my friend intending to say something critical about the sermon. I stopped myself when I saw the tears running down her face. She whispered to me, 'He said exactly what I needed to hear.' That was really a seminal experience for me. I was judging and she was needing, and the Holy Spirit responded to need, not to judgment."* [Christian Century, Apr 13, 1994. Page 383.] If I don't catch myself, I can be exactly like that! So can you! We can be critical, judgmental, looking down our nose, thinking how we are better than the other person! And in the process of that:

3. they had become satiated, that is, satisfied with who and how they were, so that they were **blind to their own need (8)** In their eyes they had it all already! Jesus talked to the church at Laodicea like that in **Rev. 3:17**, *You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.* It is so easy to see the faults in others and be completely blind to our own. A serviceman stationed at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, tells about an inspection that was being conducted by a full colonel. Everything went smoothly until the officer came to a soldier who had overlooked one small detail about his uniform. The colonel stopped, looked the man up and down and snapped, "Button that pocket, trooper!" The soldier, more than a little rattled, stammered, "Right now, sir?" "Of course, right now!" was the reply. Whereupon the soldier very carefully

reached over and buttoned the flap on the colonel's shirt pocket. [Pulpit Helps, April 1992. Page 28.] We don't see that we're proud; we don't see that we're arrogant; we don't see that we're hurting people and driving them away and dividing the body and dishonoring Christ! And where this all leads is this:

4. they developed an attitude of contempt toward others. And I tried to define that word a bit; it seems to me to have three elements. There is a **disrespect** for the other person. They become lesser or lower than me in my eyes. They are beneath me. And that disrespect becomes a **disregard** for them as a person. I don't care about what happens to them or how what I do affects them or how they feel. And that disregard often intensifies into an actual **dislike** for them. I don't want them around. I avoid them. I react at the very thought of seeing them or talking to them. *Barbara Beevers writes in Discipleship Journal: "I once learned a valuable lesson in being judged by my own standard of judging. In an orientation group before an overseas trip, there was a woman who dismissed or disagreed with everything I said. Others in the group noticed it and asked her why she didn't like me. She had to think about it awhile before she realized that the reason was my Eastern Seaboard accent. That was a surprise to me, but God also used it as a wake-up call. I thought back to the time when I had first moved to the South and a well-known Christian speaker lectured at our church. My husband was impressed with the man's insights, but I could hardly listen to him because of his strong Southern accent. His regional expressions sounded like poor grammar to me. I sat there thinking, "Who is this man to instruct us? He doesn't even speak proper English." I missed a lot that week. It took a couple of days for me to get past judging his knowledge by his accent before I could learn from him."* [Discipleship Journal, Sep/Oct 1994. Page 35.] She's not alone. We ALL do it. We all view certain people, even other believers, with contempt because they talk too much or they're brash or they're slow or this or that. And I just know the Spirit is bringing at least one name to your mind right now!

The problem of contempt is alive and well, even here among us, just as it was in Corinth. Now in the first few verses Paul lays out exactly:

II. How We Should Regard Ourselves And Others First of all:

1. we are servants of God (1) That is not only true of Paul; it's true of all of us. No matter how important we get in our own eyes, no matter how many our achievements, how great our knowledge or how proficient we are at what we do, we are all still simply servants of Jesus Christ. And the word Paul uses here in Greek means *one who rows under another*. It comes from the naval world where you have a coxswain (pronounced *koksun*) in charge of the boat steering and giving orders to the rows of oarsmen who are rowing and when he says "Stroke", they all pull together. At the bottom line, we are all those who simply follow orders. We're just people at the "beck and call" of Jesus Christ. We're all the rowers, not the captain, just people doing what He says. And He's given us a job to do:

a. we have been entrusted with His truth Who Jesus really was and what He did are a secret, a mystery to most of the world. They don't know anything about Him and His salvation, but we do! By saving us, He has entrusted this knowledge to us and given us the assignment of sharing it with the whole world. He left the job in our hands and told us to get on with it. We have the best news, the most vital information in the world and we're told to give our lives to getting it to everyone everywhere, yet here in Corinth we sit, admiring our reflections in the water and looking down our noses at one another like we own the boat! To bring them down a notch further, Paul points out that:

b. we received everything we have from Him (7) Everything about you, everything you have, from looks and abilities to your position in life, it's all a gift from Him. You have not one thing that you did not receive, not even this next breath you take. Everything is His, given to you, entrusted to you to use wisely during the time that He's given you on this earth. You and I are only servants who've been left a whole bunch of stuff to care for and:

2. we are required to be faithful to God's trust (2) If I ask you to take care of my car while I'm gone, I have some expectations. You know that I'm coming back and when I do, I'm going to hold you accountable that the car is unwrecked, that its gas tank isn't empty, that it's clean. I'm going to require of you that you prove to be faithful to your assigned task. And so is Jesus. He gave us everything we have, did all the work to save us, entrusted us with the saving news of the Gospel, told us to share it with the world and left. And when He returns and we stand before Him, He's going to expect us to have been faithful! That's how it works, but the point is that:

3. He is the One who will decide how faithful we have been (3-5) It doesn't matter if you judge how good a job I've done. It doesn't even matter if I judge how good a job I've done:

a. He is the only one who has the right to judge us Turn back with me to what Paul said in **Rom. 14:4**. You're not the Master; I'm not the Master. HE's the Master; we're all servants. If I work for Bud, it doesn't matter what Keith tells me to do, does it? If I serve Jesus Christ, it doesn't really matter what you think I should do or even what I think I should do. My job is to carry out what He says I should do and He's the only one with the right to evaluate me! And I have no right to judge you, to evaluate the way you're serving; that right belongs to Jesus Christ. And one day He'll return to do just that and each one of us will receive the praise that we deserve from Him! It's His right, but more than that:

b. He is the only one who has the ability to judge us We all have this little problem that the Lord mentioned to Samuel when he was trying to figure out who would make the best king of Israel. He said, *...The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*" - **1 Sam. 16:7**. You can't see inside me and I can't see inside you. But God can! That's what He looks at. He looks at your heart. He looks at your motives, at why you do things, not how much you accomplish. That's why it's so dangerous to criticize and judge one another; we can't see hearts like God can and we make BIG mistakes. I was talking to someone the other day about Benny Hinn. You may have seen him on TV in these giant crusades and people falling down, being "slain in the Spirit". Years ago, I would have criticized his theology and put down his practice and generally talked about him with contempt, but you know, I've heard the man explain the Gospel clearly and challenge people and pray for people to give their lives to Jesus Christ. Who am I to judge another man's servant? I'm not about to preach his theology or to imitate his methods, but who am I to say he is not pleasing his master? Who am I to say that my brother who wears an all black suit with a white clergy collar is less spiritual than I am because he sings music that was written a thousand years ago? If we both know Jesus Christ, then we stand or fall in His eyes alone and He is able to give both of us grace to make us stand, if we are willing to receive it!

So, how are we going to keep this judgmental, critical spirit, this contempt for others from creeping into our lives? Well, the text gives us an idea:

III. We Should Imitate The Example Of Godly Leaders Like Paul (16) What a novel idea! Look at people who are living the life you know Christ wants you to live and model your life after theirs! We're so fortunate because first of all:

1. we have the example of Paul and the other apostles themselves (9) It seems like God put them all on parade for the world to see. Not the kind of parade we have here on July 4th. He's talking about the kind of victory parades that Rome had, where the returning General would parade all of his victorious legions through the streets of Rome and at the end of the train would come the captives, the prisoners of war, destined for the Colosseum to have their death by wild beasts and gladiators made into a public spectacle for all of Rome to watch. We don't have time to tell their stories, but every one of the Apostles lived a bold and vibrant life and gave themselves to the task of taking the Gospel to lands where it had never been. In their short lives they got as far as India on the east and Britain on the west and every one of them died a martyr's death, except John and he lived a martyred life, exiled to the mines of the island of Patmos. Crucified, beheaded, burned or killed with the sword, they gave their "last full measure of devotion" as President Lincoln put it. But look how they did it; look how Paul did it:

a. they endured tremendous misery without complaint (11) Turn with me to the second letter Paul wrote to Corinth. The catalog of Paul's Christian life reads like this, **2 Cor. 11:23-28**. Yet he never complained. To him it was worth it all for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ and making Him known to the world. Imitate people like that, people who are willing to suffer and sacrifice without complaining because they love Jesus. And that last part reminds us that these men:

b. they endured demanding labor without ceasing which Paul mentions back in **(12a)**. Paul worked hard; he sewed tents everywhere he went to support himself. Imitate people like that, people who are willing to work hard and long for the sake of the Gospel. And then here's the kicker:

c. they endured awful mistreatment without contempt (12b-13) They loved the very ones who hated them, who caused them all their suffering. Imitate people like that! Imitate people who bless the very people who curse them, who show love to the very people against whom others would be plotting revenge. Imitate Stephen, who as he was being stoned prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" Treat no one with contempt, *especially* our own brothers and sisters in the church!

Now, fortunately, it's not only the example of Paul and Peter and the others from that day which we have:

2. we have the example of godly people in our own lives (14-17) All of us:

a. we have our own "fathers and mothers in Christ" who impacted us, who led us to faith, who discipled and taught us, who modeled for us the kind of life Jesus meant for us to live. If I say the word *godly*, just think who comes to mind. Fix your eyes on them; imitate them as they walk after Jesus. And the one characteristic I know they all have in common is that they are humble. They are not big shots; they don't blow their own horn. They are not wise in their own eyes. They are simply servants going about their Master's orders with fervor and loving the people they come across, ALL the people. Like Paul:

b. their way of living matches what they teach or what they profess; so must ours We talk about loving one another as Christ loved us. We talk a good talk, but those who are really spiritual giants walk a good walk that matches. Let's imitate them.

I read about a businessman who keeps on his desk a fairly large stone on which is lettered one word: FIRST. It acts for him as a constant reminder of Jesus' words, "He that is without sin..., let him first cast a stone." When he looks at it, it helps check the carnal desire within him to be hasty in criticizing and condemning others. When he recalls his own flaws, he finds it less difficult to show grace to others who are weak and erring. This remarkable paperweight also serves a sec-

and purpose for him. When people come into his office in an angry, critical mood, he quietly hands the stone to them at an appropriate moment. Of course, they are surprised, but they usually examine the stone carefully, and then ask what the word "FIRST" means. As they listen to his explanation, it isn't long until their attitude toward others changes. So, I leave you, not with a rock, but with this one word, *FIRST*. When you feel contempt rising up in you, think about yourself and who you really are. Are you really ready and qualified to be first in line to cast a stone? No, only Jesus is.

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

4) The Problem Of Tolerance - Ch. 5

Let me review for you the problems that Paul has addressed in the church at Corinth in the first four chapters. The first problem was the issue of *divisiveness* itself, breaking the unity of the body by dividing into factions. The second problem was the issue of *carnality* which caused it, letting self-centered flesh patterns control their reactions instead of the Holy Spirit. The third problem is the attitude which the Corinthians had developed in the process; they had developed *contempt* for one another and for Paul. At chapter 5 Paul moves on to address an entirely different kind of:

I. The Problem In The Corinthian Church (1-2) The subject of this chapter is actually that of church discipline, how the church as a body should deal with members who sin. They had a case of it going on right then and it was a well-known case. Paul had heard about it hundreds of miles away in Ephesus where he was writing from. That kind of news travels, doesn't it? We call it a scandal. When a well-known TV evangelist is caught with a prostitute or is arrested for embezzling listener contributions, that's front page news. Hypocrisy like that didn't fly well then and it doesn't fly well today and the world is quick to cry, "Fake" and to discredit belief in Christ because of it. Well, in Corinth, the problem had two aspects. The first was obviously:

1. the practice of sin by one of its members One of the believers there who professed to be a follower of Jesus Christ was openly committing a form of incest. He was either openly sleeping with or had actually married, his father's wife, his own step-mother. This was expressly forbidden, not only by Jewish law in Lev. 18:8, but even by the laws of pagan Rome itself. It was detestable and abhorrent in the eyes of the whole society. But the particular sin itself is not so important. Paul goes on in verse 9 to include a host of others. It could have been greed or embezzlement of money. It could have been drunkenness or drug addiction or armed robbery! The point is that Paul is addressing it because:

a. it was a "grievous" sin, to use a common term; we might call it a *flagrant* sin. Every believer sins and most of us daily. We are unkind or rude; we think wrong thoughts, display wrong attitudes and fail to pray or to help or a hundred other things that we should do. Paul is not advocating the idea that the church is to act as a kind of Christian "moral police" like the Taliban in Afghanistan, beating men without beards or women with uncovered heads. This sin was serious; it was grave. It was outrageous, shocking, something so serious that it violated everyone's conscience, not just believers', and the whole world knew it was evil. So, here is a guy in the church doing something that everybody knows is "against nature", plus:

b. it was continuing and the offender was unrepentant It was not a mistake that he fell into one time and then quickly got out of. He was coming to worship. He was singing the songs and praying. He was taking the Lord's Supper just like all the rest. And all the while he was openly continuing in this flagrant sin without even a hint that it was wrong or that he had any intention of stopping it. Now, that's a problem, but what made it really a problem was:

2. the tolerance of sin by the church body What really shocked Paul was that:

a. there was a lack of concern They all knew about it. It was no secret. Yet nobody seemed to care. Nobody's heart was broken over it. And Paul chastises them: "And you are proud! You're pointing fingers at each other over stupid little stuff and saying, 'I'm more spiritual than you!' You should be filled with grief and sorrow and shame that one of you would fall into this kind of sin!" They didn't appear touched by it at all and:

b. there was a continuing acceptance of the offender Nobody did anything about it. The church didn't throw him out. They didn't warn him. They let it go on without even confronting the guy, it seems.

Tolerance. It's a popular theme today. Everybody today has a "zero-tolerance" policy about weapons or about drugs or about fighting or something. But when it comes to sexual behavior, it seems that the pendulum has swung the other direction to a "complete tolerance" policy in our society. Actually being "intolerant" is seen as a sin. If you take a stand that homosexuality or abortion or sex outside of marriage are morally wrong, for instance, you are seen as a bigot. We are encouraged on every hand to tolerate behavior that God has a zero-tolerance policy about! And that attitude of tolerance has crept slowly into the church. In this last decade, several major denominations have not only ordained people living in homosexual relationships to the ministry, but some have made them high-level leaders, bishops! In Dec. 2004 a United Methodist minister had her credentials revoked because she lived an openly lesbian lifestyle, but the Philadelphia church that she served offered to employ her as a lay associate and 6 months later a church court reinstated her credentials! We all read for months about the huge scandal of hidden sexual abuse of children by priests within the Roman Catholic Church and how some of it was known but was covered up for years. But I don't want to focus today on other wings of the church where people may profess Christ but don't really know Him. This same tolerance also creeps into evangelical churches like ours, with genuine believers who hold firmly to the Scriptures. In Nov. 2006 the well-known pastor of a mega-church in Colorado Springs and president of the National Association of Evangelicals was forced to resign under

allegations of sexual misconduct with a male prostitute and admitted that a number of the allegations were true and that he had deceived and lied. He was publicly preaching against and politically lobbying against what he was doing in private. Fortunately, that church did the right thing by removing him, but he is only one in a long list of genuine believers who have fallen into serious sin and every church, even ours, is faced with this issue. We have faced it several times in my many years here and it is always a difficult and painful thing when someone who is one of us ends up in this kind of sin and the church is forced to do something about it. But what if we didn't? Some churches don't; the pain of taking a stand like that and the rifts that it will cause is too great. Well, Paul explains:

II. The Reason Tolerance Of Serious Sin Is A Problem (6-8) First of all, if we let such serious sin go on in our midst and do nothing about it:

1. it is a great danger to the whole body because sin will spread It multiplies like yeast when you put a pinch of it into a fresh batch of dough. I know most of you don't bake your own bread anymore, but what happens? The little bit of yeast will soon work through the whole batch of dough and cause it to rise. In bread, that's a good thing! In the church, that's a bad thing! If one person openly practices something evil, others are enticed to join them or they are emboldened to do other things just as bad. Soon the whole church is affected; its testimony is corrupted and eventually God has to do something to defend the honor of his own name. If you remember, when the Israelites were on their way out of Egypt, Balak the king of Moab wanted to curse and conquer them but Balaam the false prophet actually ended up selling him some effective advice, *Invite them to your feasts and get them involved in your sexual orgies and the worship of your gods and then God Himself will have to destroy them for you!* And it worked! God had to purge and cleanse Israel and when His church becomes tolerant of sin, periodically Christ has to do something to purge and cleanse it also! So, tolerating sin endangers the church's testimony and its very survival because it spreads. But there is a deeper reason why it must not be tolerated and it's this:

2. we have a great duty to God because of Christ's sacrifice Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us! In Israel when the Passover Lamb was sacrificed, the Feast of Unleavened Bread began. For a whole week there was to be no speck of leaven or yeast in the house anywhere. All the dough was baked without yeast! And that yeast was, of course, a picture of sin. When the Passover Lamb dies, sin is to be removed and we are to live holy! In New Testament terms, Christ, God's very Son, was sacrificed to take away all our sins. How can we deliberately and knowingly practice flagrant sin knowing that? We have an obligation, a duty to God to live in purity because Jesus gave His life for us! And as a church body we have an obligation to see that our loaf is kept without leaven for the same reason, that our body remains pure because it is a local representation of the body of Jesus Christ. So, what are we supposed to do about it when it happens? Paul spells out clearly:

III. The Action That Must Be Taken He says point blank twice that:

1. the offender must put out of the body (2b, 13b) Since he is not repentant and shows no hint of either stopping or asking forgiveness, remove him! Expel him! Put him away from being among you! And how do you do that? Paul spells that out too. He says:

2. it should be done publicly (3-5) Call a meeting and declare it publicly that this man is no longer one of you, that he is no true believer in Christ or he would not be doing what he is doing and that he is no longer a part of the body! The strongest way of putting it is in verse 5, *Hand him over to Satan for that his flesh may be destroyed!* What that means is that here's a man who has chosen to allow Satan to rule his life instead of the Holy Spirit. So, now declare it for what it is! Release him from the protective umbrella of being part of the church to fall fully under the dominion of the master he has chosen! In Acts 5 when Ananias and Sapphira purposely lied and misrepresented themselves Peter didn't mince any words, he said, "Satan has filled your heart so that you lied to the Holy Spirit!" Up in Samaria, when Simon the magician offered to buy the ability to give the Holy Spirit by laying on his hands, he was living in greed even though it says he had believed and been baptized. And *Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."* - Acts 8:20-23. "Your behavior proves that you are not right with God, that you belong to Satan and you're not one of us!" Paul says, "Tell him that! And tell him that publicly!" Those are harsh words, aren't they? We can hardly imagine ourselves doing that? But we have to remember that:

a. this is normally the final step in a longer process which Jesus Himself spelled out for us. Turn with me to **Mt. 18:15-20**. Note how every effort must first be made to bring this sinning brother to repentance. First, you talk to him personally, show him his fault privately. If that doesn't work, take some other folks with you who can confirm what you say; maybe he'll listen. But if he's obstinate and refuses and intentionally continues on in his sin even though he's been warned, THEN tell it to the whole church and let them try to convince him, but if he won't listen to the church, cut him off from the church. Call a meeting and tell him that he is no longer part of you, that he is for all intents and purposes like any other nonbeliever! Don't count him any longer as one of your number. And the last verses there are really deep, but they suggest that what appears to be true on earth IS really true, that the church is

merely reflecting what God already knows to be true and that the person really is what he has been declared to be, an unbeliever! But even if you have to go that far, Paul still says that:

b. the ultimate purpose of expelling the man is restoration (5b) There is no room for a proud and haughty spirit in this kind of discipline. According to verse 2, it ought to be done in great sorrow and with a view toward restoration. Jesus said, "If he listens..., if He listens..." That's the point and Paul says the intended result is the destruction or ruin of the *sinful nature* in the NIV, but literally the Greek says, *the flesh*. He says, "Let Satan destroy and ruin this guy's life that is built on living according to his flesh so that he'll repent! So that in the end when he's tired of living the hard way, he'll come to Christ and find true forgiveness and salvation and a transformed life. In fact, it seems that the Corinthians did indeed throw this guy out and that it worked! And look what Paul writes about him in the next letter, **2 Cor. 2:5-10**. "Now that he's repentant, take him back! Restore him to the body! Forgive him and know that he is forgiven in Christ!" That's the goal; that's what God always wants! But He will not force us to it; He gives to each of us the free will to choose Him or not.

Now, Paul goes on to explain that this expulsion:

3. it should be followed by dissociation (9-11) As long as a person professes to be saved but still practices the sin:
a. there must be a breaking of fellowship He or she can't just come and do the things they've always done and be treated the way they were always treated. To say, "You are not one of us any more" must mean something in a continuing sense. Jesus said, treat the person as you would an unbeliever or a publican (a person who collected taxes for the Romans, that is, as a person who makes a living doing something you despise). Break fellowship with them. Make it clear that there is now a line, a difference between you. Paul says, "Don't invite them over for a meal or go to their place for one!" In other words, let them go; separate your life from theirs. You don't have to be rude and unloving about it and certainly you shouldn't stop caring about them and praying for them, but there has to be some distance put in place between them and you as a reminder that they are not one of the body any more. Now Paul inserts here a huge note of **CAUTION** which I'd like to echo. He says:

b. this principle must NOT be applied to nonbelievers He is not teaching that you should never be around or have anything to do with nonbelievers who practice sin. Some have taken these verses and others that way. They don't want to be around anyone who is involved in sin of some sort. Well, first of all:

(1) it would be impossible The people all around us do this stuff. At one point a few years ago 5 of the 10 or 11 houses on my block had couples living together without being married in them. If I had nothing to do with them, think how impossible it would have been to avoid. You work with people who routinely sleep around and get drunk on the weekends and do all kinds of sinful stuff. It's all around you; to avoid it you'd have to leave the world. But the point is that:

(2) our business is to save unbelievers, not judge them (12) Judging nonbelievers for their sins is God's business; it's our business to save them, to mix our lives with theirs and reach them. Jesus was called a friend of publicans and sinners. He ate and drank with them in their homes because it is the sick who need a doctor! No, this command to dissociate ourselves:

c. it is to be applied to professing believers who act like unbelievers after they've refused every attempt to turn them back and rescue them from the course they've chosen. Their souls are in grave danger and our reaction to them is God's means of warning them and calling them to come back.

Does it work? Well, if you mean, "Does the person ever repent and come back?", sometimes it does. Sometimes it doesn't. In the case of this man in Corinth, it did. *Vic Borden, pastor of Red Bridge Baptist in Missouri writes: "We've had this happen in recent months with a long-time church member, a very high-profile person, who just decided he was done with his wife of 20 years," Borden said. "Ultimately that came before the congregation and after a measure of time—gut-wrenching anguish and prayer and crying out to the Lord, calling this person to repent—the answer was, 'I'm going to do what I'm going to do.' And so, with tears, in a church business meeting, we removed his membership and (now) count him as an unbeliever. That is the way it works."*

On the other hand, Peacemaker ministries has this testimony on its website: *Sam told his wife Kathy that he was filing for divorce and moving in with another woman. When Kathy was unable to dissuade him, she went to their pastor for advice. Pastor James gave her several suggestions on how to persuade her husband to change his mind or at least to come in for counseling. But nothing Kathy said to her husband during the next few days had any apparent impact, and he began to pack his things. In desperation, she returned to her pastor and asked him to talk with her husband. At first, Pastor James declined to take such an active role, saying that he "did not want to scare him away from the church." "How can you take such a position," Kathy asked the pastor, "in the light of Matthew 18:15-20, Galatians 6:1-2, and many related passages." After a long and heated discussion, he finally realized that he was neglecting his responsibilities as a shepherd. As a result, he went to visit Sam that evening and offered to help him work out his marital problems. When Sam adamantly refused to change his course, Pastor James pleaded with him to change his mind and offered all of the resources of the church to help solve the problems in his marriage. When even that did not dissuade Sam, Pastor James finally said,*

"I can't stop you from filing for divorce, but I must tell you that you will face church discipline if you deliberately violate Scripture as you are planning to do." After he got over his initial shock, Sam asked what he meant by "church discipline." When Pastor James explained, Sam's jaw dropped and he said, "You mean I'll be kicked out of the church for divorcing my wife?" "Under these circumstances," Pastor James replied firmly, "yes." Hearing this, Sam lost his temper and ordered Pastor James out of his home. Early the next morning, however, Pastor James received a phone call from Sam, who wanted to talk with him again. Their conversation yesterday had begun to sink in, and Sam was carefully considering the ramifications of his own proposed actions. They met an hour later, and by 10:00 AM Sam was on the telephone telling "the other woman" that he would not be moving in with her. Later that afternoon, Pastor James began counseling with Kathy and Sam, and together they started to work out the deep problems that had brought them to this crisis. Ten years later, Sam and Kathy are still raising their family together and thanking God.... Sometimes the story has a happy ending. Often it doesn't. But ultimately the important thing is that the church, the body of believers, is protected. Tolerance destroys a church. Discipline protects and purifies it as Jesus intended.

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

5) The Problem Of Disputes - 6:1-11

The first major issue Paul dealt with in this letter was that the church was all divided up into factions. It took him four chapters to deal with all the roots and ramifications of that. Then in chapter 5, he addressed the fact that there was this member openly living in shocking, flagrant sin and the church was tolerating it. Now, in the first half of chapter 6, he brings up another issue. Evidently:

I. There Was A Problem With Disputes At Corinth (1, 6) That word *disputes* is referring to legal cases, matters of law, and it has reference specifically to commercial or business transactions, not criminal acts. In other words, these were not purely personal matters. It is not just that people were arguing with one another over this or that; we already know they were doing that back in chapter 1! These were legal matters, things they could go into a Roman court and bring charges about, but they were not criminal charges either, like assault, robbery or murder. Those belong in a civil court according to Romans 13. These were civil charges or what we would call today lawsuits. *William Barclay says in his commentary: "The Greeks were naturally and characteristically a litigious people. The law-courts were in fact one of their chief amusements and entertainment... In a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. The Greeks were in fact famous, or notorious, for their love of going to law. Not unnaturally, certain of the Greeks had brought their litigious tendencies into the Christian church; and Paul was shocked."* We should be able to relate to that. *Doug Goins of Peninsula Bible Church comments: ...if baseball is the great American pastime, litigation is moving into second place. Our criminal justice system in this country is big business beyond belief. It's also turning into a great entertainment value for the dollar. The legal frenzy that we seem to be wrapped up in is driven by some of our favorite national slogans: "I've got my rights." "I don't have to take that from you." "I've got it coming to me." The words "I'll sue" are two of the most over-used words in our American vocabulary today, because everybody is suing everybody else. Children are suing parents, pupils are suing teachers, players are suing coaches, homosexual lovers are suing states, spouses are suing their marriage partners. This isn't limited to non-Christians. Christian neighbors are suing each other. Christian faculty members are now filing suit against the administrations of Christian schools. Churches are suing one another. Churches are suing their pastors, and vice versa. Brothers and sisters in the family of God are actually pressing charges, demanding their rights, sometimes to the exclusion of any attempt to reconcile face-to-face. I was reminded of a cartoon I had seen in Christianity Today many years ago. It's Sunday morning, and on the church platform the soloist is about to sing a number as the pianist waits to play the introduction. With microphone in hand he says, "I'd like to share a song with you that the Lord gave me a year ago...and even though He did give it to me, any reproduction of this song in any form without my written consent will constitute infringement of the copyright law which grants me the right to sue your pants off...praise God...."* [<http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/6421/4519.html>] Now, notice the particular situation he's addressing in our text:

1. these disputes were occurring between believers He's not talking about believers defending themselves against vicious outsiders or the government trying to hurt them. He's not talking about being in an accident and suing an insurance company to get fair reimbursement for damages. These were people within the church, brothers and sisters in Christ, hurting one another in material ways. Maybe Joe does a job for Sam and Sam won't pay him what he owes for whatever reason. What does he do? Maybe Sue and Sarah made a business deal together but Sue isn't holding up her end of the bargain. What does Sarah do? These kinds of situations happen. Over the years, I've had a number of people come to me and tell how there was an issue like this with some brother or sister. And they ask, "What should I do with a dispute like this?" Well, in Corinth:

2. they were appealing to secular courts to settle them They were taking their cases to the legal justice system of their day and letting secular judges settle them. Now don't get Paul wrong. Paul used the Roman system of courts and justice. He declared his rights as a Roman citizen to protect himself. When on trial he exercised his right of appeal to Caesar. It was not that Paul felt that you can't get justice in a secular court. He himself was acquitted and his case dismissed by Gallio, the very proconsul of Corinth when the mob took him while he was still there in Acts 18! But Gallio

was wise enough to see that religious matters didn't belong in a secular court; the Corinthians weren't. They were dragging one another into court to settle their problems. And:

3. the church was allowing this to happen without getting involved It was not doing anything about this. It was not making any attempts to move these believers to settle the differences between themselves. Sadly, most church bodies are like that. We get all worried about violating people's private lives and so we allow members to mistreat one another or hold grudges against each other and act in unchristian ways to one another without any kind of reprimand. And the sad fact is that:

4. it was a terrible witness to nonbelievers You can hear Paul's shock in verse 6, *this in front of unbelievers!* Believers acting like this, showing this kind of hostility, acting in unjust unfair ways to one another, and doing it openly expecting nonbelievers to settle it for them? What a terrible testimony! What would these pagans think of Jesus Christ? Of the church? How would believers ever win them with this kind of hypocrisy openly going on? Jesus said, *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" - *John 13:35*. Our special love for one another is our trademark; it is the thing that draws nonbelievers to follow Christ. When it is gone and we act like the world toward each other, basically all men doubt that we are His disciples or they doubt He even exists, if He doesn't make a difference in the lives of His followers! And so, Paul doesn't mince any words. He says clearly that:

II. Disputes Between Believers Should Be Settled Within The Body The place to settle disputes within the body of Christ is within the body of Christ! If these kinds of serious matters exist here between us, we ought to settle them here. Why? Just look at his line of logic. First, he reasons that:

1. we shall one day judge the world (2) Have you ever thought about that fact? We, you and I, will one day rule with Christ; we'll be the administrators and the judges of His Millennial Kingdom. **Dan. 7:27** says, *Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.* We will reign with Christ. We will settle people's problems on earth during His Millennial reign. Who knows what we will do in the new heavens and new earth for all eternity? God is willing to entrust this business of judging to us so...***we ought to be able to judge trivial matters!*** Like the problems we have with one another now! We're competent. We have His Spirit. We are equipped to do this. In fact, Paul goes on to say that:

2. we shall one day judge angels (3) - Jude 6 tells us that God has confined some of the angels who fell with Satan in the pit, waiting for the end of the Millennium when they and their boss will be cast into the lake of fire. In that day they will appear for judgment, for sentencing, and so will all those hordes of demons who have been allowed to run free and wreak havoc on the planet all these centuries. And guess who will be involved in that judgment, who will they will appear before - US! We will judge angels, so, Paul says, ***...we ought to be able to judge things in this life!*** The point is that God is going to entrust us with immense eternal responsibility as judges giving righteous decisions for Him, therefore:

3. we are responsible to judge disputes among ourselves (4-6) We are quite capable of handling these kinds of things so ***...why would we appeal to those who have no standing in the church?*** Why would we go to people who don't have the Spirit of God, who don't have a love for the members of the body, to settle our disputes instead of appealing to the body itself? Even those who may be least among us are quite capable of seeing and understanding the problem through the Spirit and the church has the ability and the authority to deal with it! In **Mat. 18:15-17** Jesus made it clear. If your brother is at fault, you go and talk to him privately. If that doesn't work, take some witnesses to confirm what you're saying. If that doesn't work, ***tell it to the church!*** And let the church tell him he's got to stop or make it right. And if that doesn't work, the church should throw him out, just like the man we studied in chapter 5 last week! The church is commanded to get involved when one brother or sister injures another!

Now this is serious business. Sure, there will be small problems of the type I mentioned earlier. But how about when a husband and wife in the church are having serious problems and separate and want to divorce. Should they let a secular court solve their problems? Paul would say, "No, if they're serious believers, they should be willing to let the church step in and help them settle their issues before it gets that far!" Or how about an employer/employee problem where both are in the church? Should they go to court to settle their differences? Paul says, "No, they should be willing to let the church step in and settle it!" Unfortunately, few believers in our day are willing to let the church act in that role. They usually run away first; they disappear. They take their problems and go settle them the way they want to without interference. Paul cries, "NO, if you really know Jesus, when there are problems between you, the church is where you should go to find God's power to settle them!" And then Paul goes even further and strikes at the bottom line of the problem, which is that:

III. These Kinds Of Disputes Should Not Occur In The Body We shouldn't have them in the first place! Paul says:

1. disputes are an indication of spiritual defeat (7) The fact that such things are present at all says that Satan is already winning the battle. He's already having his way; we're already following his agenda. Jesus made it perfectly clear that:

a. we are to settle issues between ourselves immediately Turn with me to **Mat. 5:23-24**. To paraphrase it, "Don't come to church and sing all piously and "Amen" the message when you know there is a problem between you and someone else in the body. Go fix it!" You have a responsibility to go and get it straight first. You can't worship together if your hearts are not united as one. The minute we decide to let problems continue and grow, we lose! The love we are to have for our brother turns to anger and bitterness and eventually hatred and God won't have it, not among His children. Paul says, "Why don't you simply let yourself be wronged if there's no other way to settle it?" That's the spirit of Jesus. That's what He did! He greeted Judas with a kiss in the very act of betrayal. Sometimes the only way to settle things between you is to let the other person win, to let them have their way, even if it isn't fair, even if it isn't just. Again, Doug Goins shares this testimony from his church, *Two brothers in the body here were in a business venture together a number of years ago. They invested several hundred thousand dollars in a business and were defrauded. It's an amazing story. These two men sat down with the man who had defrauded them and his lawyer and asked for full restitution. They said that was what was right morally and legally. He owed them and their other investors full redress. Then they gave him a letter that said in essence, "This is what we want from you because it's right. However, if you choose not to meet the moral and legal obligation, we forgive the debt." The lawyer read the letter and said, "Give me a minute, please...I'm a Christian, but never in all my years of legal practice have I seen Christians take the Bible this seriously." These brothers were willing to suffer loss, and they even gave the man who defrauded them a Bible as a parting gift. I don't think to this day they know if he's ever come to faith in Christ. But their conviction was that his eternal destiny was more important than their getting redress in court. They were willing to lose for the sake of God's kingdom.* [\[http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/6421/4519.html\]](http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/6421/4519.html) That's the attitude that Jesus had, the one He wants us to have. Turn over with me to **Col. 3:12-13**:

b. we are to have an attitude of forbearance and forgiveness Bearing with somebody means putting up with them, being willing to endure things that come your way from them without growing angry and retaliating, because you love them. Think about how much stuff we put up with from one another inside our own families. We say hurtful things to one another, we ignore each other's needs and we apologize and make up at the drop of a hat. Why? Because we love each other and that's part of loving. Peter said, *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.* – *1 Pet. 4:8*. Love is willing to put up with faults and flaws and to forgive sins. If we love, disputes will not be occurring. However, the other side of this is that:

2. disputes mean at least one party is practicing wickedness (8) In many of these cases someone is actually doing wrong:

a. one is committing injustice and even stealing from the other Somebody's cheating. Somebody's taking money that isn't theirs, taking advantage of the other in a way that's wrong. Many times, both parties are wrong, but at least one of them has to be doing dirt to the other in order for disputes like this to exist and:

b. directing it toward our own brothers and sisters makes it doubly bad Yes, stealing is stealing and it is bad enough to steal from your employer or a stranger, but when someone would steal from their own mother, we think that is the lowest of the low, don't we? Well, fellow believers literally ARE brothers and sisters in Christ; they ARE family. How could we even think about hurting one another like that? And Paul goes on to put it even more graphically:

3. disputes mean we are living out of our flesh like we used to live (9-11) These are beautiful verses which we often quote, but we never look at their meaning in its true context. Paul is chiding the sinning party, the cheating party, and he says, "Don't you know..."

a. the practice of wickedness bars people from the Kingdom of God People who commit immorality and adultery and get drunk and steal things and lie about people and swindle them don't get into heaven. Sin sends people to hell. Sin keeps people from God. And, to our shame:

b. that is how many of us acted in our lives before meeting Christ Those are the things we were! We practiced those things back there. Sure, some of us were raised in Christian homes and got saved young and maybe we didn't get into a lot of this stuff, but if I were to ask for a show of hands (and I'm not!) of how many of US used to be adulterers, fornicators, thieves, and so on, I think you'd be amazed at the hands that would go up if we were honest. That is what some of us were! But, Paul says:

c. we have been cleansed, made holy and pardoned from these things Jesus came along with His marvelous grace and said, "I know what you are! I know what you've done! I forgive you! I pardon you completely. You are justified! No matter how dirty your life was, I wash it all away from you; now you are clean. I make you holy, pure and perfect like Me!" Oh, what a marvelous thing it is to be washed in the blood of the Lamb! But the point is, having all this, knowing all this, how can we go back and act like we used to act! How can we go back and swindle and cheat and lie and violate our marriage vows the way the world does and act like people who are barred from the Kingdom forever? No! Paul is saying:

d. we must act like what we are! We ARE all those things. Now we have to act like it! And if we do, there won't be disputes among us. We'll bear with one another and forgive one another the way Christ forgave us because we'll love one another the way He loved us.

Beloved, I don't know at this moment of any legal issues between any of us, of any huge things where one of us is hurting another, but maybe talking about this issue brings someone to mind, some wrong done, some hurt received, some grudge you're holding, maybe someone who wounds you regularly and you don't even tell them. What will you do? *The late Dr. Wallace Hamilton, novelist and playwright, liked to tell the story of an Indian sheep farmer who had a big problem. His neighbor's dogs were killing his sheep. It got so bad that he had to do something. So he considered his alternatives. First, he could have brought a lawsuit and taken his neighbor to court. Second, he could have built stronger fences so that the dogs couldn't get in. But he had a better idea. He gave some lambs to his neighbor's children. When the lambs began to multiply and a little flock began to develop, the neighbor tied up his dogs, and the problem was solved. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."* [Homiletics, Apr-Jun 1991. Page 13.] What will you do? You can take the steps to tell it to the church; there's nothing wrong with that. It's biblical. But you can also choose to endure suffering wrong and try letting God reveal to you some way to love and bless that offending party first. That's what Jesus would want to see in His church.

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

6) The Problem Of Misusing Our Bodies - 6:12-20

Paul has just finished chiding the Corinthian believers for having disputes among themselves and going to law courts to settle them. He challenged them in verses 9-11 to live like what they are: we are washed and sanctified and justified so we ought not to be greedy and self-centered and cheat one another! That's our old way of life; our new one is different! It's pure and holy. And then at verse 12, he moves on in the rest of the chapter to apply that to another serious issue in the church. To see it clearly let's look ahead to verses **(18, 16)**.

I. The Problem Paul Is Dealing With Is Sexual Immorality If you remember, when I introduced this series, I told you that:

1. in Corinth religious prostitution was an accepted part of idol worship I told you how on the highest hill of the city stood the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of fertility, served by as many as a thousand "priestesses", temple prostitutes. To worship Aphrodite was to make an offering and be united with her by engaging in sex with one of her servants. Consequently, Corinth had probably the lowest view of sex in the Greek world. It was practiced between anyone, anywhere, in any form, so much so that even pagan Greeks saw it as scandalous and knew the city as having a vile reputation. Well, Paul mentioned sexual immorality using several terms back in verse 9 and said, *Such were some of you!* Many of these believers came from deep involvement in the practice of such things and it was hard to let go of! Evidently some of them had slipped back into practicing sexual immorality at whatever level and at least a few were still making visits to one of the religious prostitutes on occasion. The concept of chastity, of sexual purity, was virtually an unknown thing in this culture, just as it is becoming in ours today. Sexual sin crept back into the church in Corinth and it has already moved in and taken up housekeeping in the American church today. Now, let's be very clear exactly what we are talking about. It may help for you to know that the Greek word in verse 18 is *porneia* (sound familiar?) and:

2. *porneia* means ANY form of sexual activity OUTSIDE of marriage God created our bodies to fully enjoy sexual activity inside the boundaries of a permanent lifetime marriage between one man and one woman. It is a wonderful gift of God, but when it is used outside of that context it is *porneia*, immoral sex. Of course, that includes adultery, being unfaithful to your marriage partner. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. It would naturally include any form of incest or sexual abuse of children. It would include homosexuality and lesbianism or even sex with animals (yes, perverted people do that) as a violation of God's created order. It includes prostitution, paying for sex as a service. We all recoil from things like these. But it includes more. It includes looking at what we call pornography to stimulate yourself sexually whether it is on the internet or a picture in a magazine. That has become a huge issue within the church because it's so easily and privately accessible. That is having sex with somebody in your mind and it's wrong. It includes having sex without being married, whether you're a teen experimenting with the opposite sex or an engaged couple who plan to get married or simply two people living together to "try it out". It's wrong; it's immoral. It's sin before God. But then I have discovered that I have to be even more specific because Christians I keep running into have tried to say, "Well as long as I don't have actual sexual intercourse, I'm not committing immorality." So, we have young people doing all kinds of sexual acts that stop just short of that, exposing their bodies to one another, openly touching each other's bodies to stimulate them, or sometimes doing it under their clothes or through their clothes, and feeling that they are justified. Well, let this be emblazoned in your mind: all of these things are part of the sexual process; they ARE sex and unless you are already married to the other person, they ARE wrong and immoral! They are the *porneia* that Paul is talking about! Parents, you need to realize that young people today have been acculturated to see all of this kind of stuff as normal and acceptable and have learned to excuse it in their minds with this kind of lie! Teach them clearly and

specifically. Spell it out for them, embarrassing or not! Everything around them, the TV, movies, their peers, it all feeds them the lie that sexual activity is OK. *James Dobson uses the illustration of building model airplanes in his childhood: "In those days, one could buy inexpensive kits that included a sheet of balsa wood on which the parts of the model had been stamped. It was a big chore to cut them with an exacto knife and then glue all the pieces together. Once that was finished, tissue paper was pasted to the frame. The final result was a beautiful little plane to hang in your bedroom. I wanted to build one of those models in the worst way, but I never got it done. Repeatedly, I bought a kit and began cutting out the pieces, but I couldn't finish the project because I was too impatient to wait for the glue to dry. I wouldn't leave the fuselage alone, and it would fall apart in my hands. That's more or less the way a courtship period should be constructed; it takes time for the glue to dry. A proper bond between two people is severely damaged if the process is rushed. The emotional connection between them is weakened especially by early sexual contact. If they kiss passionately on the first date, engage in heavy petting a month later, or have sexual intercourse before marriage, something precious is lost in their commitment to one another. They have not allowed the 'glue' to dry. Unfortunately, that's how the entertainment industry presents the ideal romantic relationship. A young man and woman are shown being introduced, and the next thing you know, they're making passionate love together. That exploitation for momentary pleasure carries serious implications for the future of the relationship."* [Letter to Focus on the Family supporters, Sept. 1995. Page 5.] Enough said. Now, going back to our text, Paul identifies two of:

II. The Popular False Philosophies Feeding The Problem in Corinth as well as here. Notice in verses 12-13 that three of the phrases are in quotation marks in the NIV. The reason for that is that Paul appears in those phrases not to be speaking his own words but to making a direct quote of a well-known slogan that the Corinthians were using. They had, for instance, adopted a favorite saying and a way of living that said:

1. "Everything is lawful for me" (12) The NIV word *permissible* is literally *lawful*. Paul had probably taught them, of course, that they were free from the Law of the Old Testament. They didn't have to be circumcised or to keep the feasts or keep the Sabbath day. On top of that, the prevailing philosophy of their day had taught them from little on up that matter is evil, so the body itself is evil. Salvation is a thing of the spirit, not the body, so it doesn't matter what happens to the body. The Corinthians were justifying their sexually immoral behavior by saying, "Everything is lawful. We are free from the Law; we don't please God by keeping rules. Our spirit is the important thing, not our body." Today we would put it, "I have the right to make my own decisions. Nobody can tell me what to do." Well, Paul quoted that back to them and then told them the truth about it. He said:

a. some things are not beneficial to me Some things hurt me and they hurt other people. Some things destroy and ruin my life and my health. Being free from the law doesn't mean we're free to do those things. Those things are wrong. In fact, he went on to add that:

b. some things take control over me They master me. They become addictive. They take over control of my body and soon I am living for them and can't stop. We know that can happen with alcohol and drugs, but sexual immorality is another one of those powerfully addicting things. For instance, once pornography becomes a habit it is terribly addictive and hard to break. It ruins lives; it ruins marriages. Once your body is in the habit of being sexually active, it is powerfully hard to stop, so what people may call "sexual freedom" rapidly becomes slavery. Being free from the Law doesn't mean we are free to let other things control us; Jesus is supposed to do that! Another slogan floating around at Corinth was:

2. "Food was made for the stomach and the stomach for food" (13-14) Let me re-phrase that slogan for you, "Our bodies are made for sexual activity and that drive is meant to be satisfied, so having sex is just a natural part of life like eating." That's how people in our society have come to see it. So, parents are allowing and even guiding teens into sexual activity in their early teens in some instances. And it has a piece of truth in it. We ARE created as sexual beings and that drive we have IS meant to be satisfied, but only in the context of the marriage bond. Paul replies with the truth that:

a. both my body and the things it craves are only temporary Eating is a here and now thing; in heaven it won't matter. Sex is a "this world only" thing. In heaven it won't be. If I give my life to simply using my body to pursue the things that it craves, whether that's food or sex or whatever, I'll waste my life. One day none of that will matter. Life is not about getting my bodily drives satisfied. You see:

b. my body was made for Jesus to inhabit and use for His eternal purpose. Jesus created my body so that He could come and live in it with me, so that He could live my life together with me. And He planned to do that so that He could use my body to bring Him glory while it is on this earth. In fact, Paul points out, Jesus wants to be glorified in my body so much that **He plans to raise it from the dead and keep on using it eternally!** The body is not evil; it is not worthless. Jesus took a human body and He raised it and kept it forever. We'll keep ours forever; they're important. God has plans for them. So, what we do with them here on earth matters! Here is:

III. The Scriptural Truth About Our Bodies First:

1. our bodies are the very members [and members here means body parts] of Christ (15-17) It is not just our spirits that are joined to Christ; our very bodies are the members, the arms and the legs and the mouths of Christ! Our

bodies are Christ's physical replacement in this world. He lives visibly now through us. He walks about and speaks to the world using our physical bodies to accomplish His work. So, what that means is that:

a. I involve and implicate Jesus in everything I do with my body If I lie with my mouth, Jesus is right there in my body and represented through my body and I involve Him in my lie, whether I am aware of it or not! If I cheat someone or hurt someone, it is the body of Christ doing that. He is right there and involved in it, whether I know it or not. Now, when we move into the area of sex, the Bible teaches that:

b. my spirit is joined to Him as one Verse 17 repeats that fact that when the Spirit of God comes to live in me that He is joined to my spirit and Jesus and I are one; we are inseparable. In fact, biblically, **this is the model for understanding the sexual relationship**. When husband and wife have a sexual relationship their two bodies are joined into one. God created that as an outward physical reflection of the way that He has joined them together as one spiritually. They are joined the way I am joined as one with Jesus. So, the point is that:

c. in sexual sin I involve Him in a deeply unholy relationship Here He is, in my body right there, my body being His and for His use, and I am making Him be in it right with me as I sin sexually. Not only am I ruining His reputation and making Him appear impure, but I am involving His member, His body, in a deeply unholy thing. The old argument that "it's my body and I can do what I want with it" is simply not true! The truth is that:

2. our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (19-20) The word for *temple* here in Greek is not the general word for the whole building. It is the word for the inner sanctuary, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, the very place where God was to dwell. When I got saved:

a. God literally placed His Holy Spirit inside my body; He now lives there inside of me permanently. So, **I am His sanctuary**; my body is His temple, the house in which He, the Holy One, lives. I can no longer use it for unholy purposes. It is sacred! Moreover, since my body is HIS temple:

b. my body does not belong to me anymore; it belongs to Him. He bought me and He owns me! He paid a price to have me and the word *price* is literally the same as the Greek word for *honor*. In other words, it is not simply that Christ paid for me, so He claims ownership. The point is that **Christ honored me with the price He paid to dwell in me**. Look at the cross. Look at Him leaving heaven and taking a human body. Look at Him accused and condemned and scourged and nailed to a tree. Look at Him laying down His life, all so that He could have me and live in me and live out His life through me! What a price! He didn't get me as a piece of unwanted junk at a yard sale. To Him I was precious; He wanted me so badly that He bought me with His own blood! What an honor! So, the point is:

c. I am absolutely obligated to use my body to glorify God How in the world can I even think of using it for anything else? He made my body His precious personal sanctuary at great cost so that He could use it to bring Him glory all the days of my life. How could I think of using it to drag him into the depths of unholiness and impurity through sexual immorality? When Potiphar's wife was literally tearing Joseph's robe off and begging him to have sex with her, he said, *How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God!* He knew how wicked it was, what an awful evil thing it would be, how it would impact his relationship with the very God who had cared for him all the way through his enslavement. So, he fled out the door of the house! Paul may have had that very story in mind when he penned the words of verse 18 which give us:

IV. The Bottom Line: Flee From Sexual Immorality (18) I think those words, though few, are significant. Paul did not simply say, "Avoid sexual immorality." He did not simply say, "Don't do it." He said, "FLEE from it! Run away when it presents itself! Get out of there, now!" Why did he say that? Because:

1. sexual sin requires the greatest caution The power of its attraction is great. It has snared men as close to God as David, so never assume that you are immune from it. The list of Christian leaders who have fallen in this area is longer than you or I could imagine. Don't put yourself in a position where you are liable to be tempted. And when you sense temptation, very often the godly thing to do is as simple as leaving the room, hanging up the phone, changing the channel or closing the browser. Flee! Get out of the situation before it moves further. But the real reason that sexual sin requires such great caution is not simply that it is so enticing:

2. sexual sin does the most significant damage to our own selves Other kinds of sin are primarily external to you. If you steal something, it's outside you; it's not part of you. You take it, you repent of it and return it; it's wrong and you feel bad about what you did. But when you sin sexually, it wounds you deeply, as well as the other person. It touches your soul, the most intimate part of your being. It violates the most sacred part of yourself. The wounds are of the deepest kind there is.

And yet remember that Paul says, *There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. You have been made right with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.* If this is about you today, if you've fallen at some point into sexual im-

morality, know that Jesus can heal the deepest emotional wounds you have. He can wash away the vilest sin you've committed. Go to Him. Listen to the testimony of a young lady named Sarah who fell into sexual immorality as it was shared in Christianity Today, ...*it definitely changed my relationship with God. I felt too ashamed to even talk to God, much less ask him for help and forgiveness. That's when I felt that wall start to go up—the wall I thought would hide me from God. I had been a Christian my whole life, and I'd never gotten into any trouble before. But the guilt I felt after having sex was overwhelming. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to keep me from doing it again. Instead, I tried to justify what Derrick and I were doing. I told myself it wasn't a big deal, that it was just a physical act. I tried not to let it bother me. But it did bother me—a lot. By the time Derrick and I broke up a few months later, I could hardly look at myself in the mirror. When I did, I saw someone dirty, someone who couldn't control herself, someone who was slapping God in the face on a regular basis.*

After the breakup, I felt like my only hope was to turn back to God and repent for what I'd done. I tried to do my regular devotions, but I couldn't. Every time I read the Bible, it seemed like I found a verse about sexual immorality that just made me realize how much I'd disappointed God. I couldn't even pray. I had always known God forgives sins. I had even told other friends that God would forgive them for the sexual things they'd done. But now that it was my turn, I just couldn't believe that God could wash all that sin away. It seemed like too big a job, even for God. It took me months of struggle to finally ask for forgiveness. The wall I'd put up between me and God finally came down, but I still had to live with the "bricks"—my feelings of guilt—that were piled around me. I knew God had forgiven my sin. The trouble was, I couldn't.

It's been a few years since Derrick and I broke up. And every single day, I struggle to trust in God's forgiveness. Every day, I have to fight off my fears that God will punish me someday. My biggest fear is that I will never find a Christian man who'll be able to live with the truth about me. And even if he can, I'll have to live with the knowledge that I stole something from him. I've made it impossible for him to enjoy God's gift of sex with someone who saved herself for him. Back when I started having sex, I was focused on the pleasure I wanted right then. If I'd only known how much pain it would cause, believe me, I never would have given in. [\[http://www.christianitytoday.com/cl/9c5/9c5036.html\]](http://www.christianitytoday.com/cl/9c5/9c5036.html) Don't give in! Don't go there! Flee, Paul says! And if you have given in, RUN! Run right to Jesus! He can and will give you a fresh start. And He is able even to heal that deep emotional pain Sarah described with His truth, if you are willing to let Him and seek proper help. You don't have to live with guilt and shame and fear and fight it every day. Jesus is willing to take even that away. I've watched Him do it.

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

7) The Problem Of Singleness and Marriage - 7:1-9, 17-40

Chapter 7 begins with the words, *Now for the matters you wrote about...* Paul has been writing the Corinthians about things that he heard from afar and saw as being serious problems, things like divisions and lawsuits and immorality. But the Corinthians had evidently written Paul a letter to ask his direction about some questions they had and issues which perplexed them, so now he begins to answer them. The first question on their minds is, "Now that we are Christians, what about marriage? Some of us who have believed now find ourselves married to nonbelievers; should we divorce them? Some of us are unmarried; should we get married? Would it be more spiritual to stay single? Some of us are widowed; can we re-marry?" These are the issues Paul is trying to answer in chapter 7. We're going to spend two weeks on it. Next week we'll focus on the whole subject of marriage itself, its permanence and the divorce question, but let's spend today looking at the issue of singleness as opposed to marriage. This is a question the church has wrestled with down through the centuries and some wings of the church have basically answered it by saying that the most spiritual people remain single. They take a vow of celibacy; they are "married" to the church, to Jesus, and that doctrine is built largely out of the teaching in this chapter. So, is that right? Am I less spiritual because I'm married? And, of course, this is a question that every young and unmarried person among us faces and should wrestle with. It faces your children and grandchildren, and one day it could even face you. So, Paul begins with:

I. Some Basic Facts About Singleness And Marriage First of all:

1. to be single is good (1) There is nothing wrong with it; it is not some "lesser state". Despite that fact that all the relatives always say to you, "What's wrong with you? Why aren't you married yet?" or "So when are you going to settle down and get married?" People begin to give you vibes that you're weird if you're 30 and you're not married. Do any of you older singles know what I'm talking about? Listen, God doesn't see it that way! Singleness is OK. It is good not to marry! You can live a happy, fulfilled, spiritual life and not be married, if that's what God wants for your life! The greatest missionary we know, the Apostle Paul, was apparently single. We don't know whether he was married and widowed early in life or not, but for all that we read of his life, he was single and if God can use his life as a single that way, then He can use yours. To be single is good. But on the other hand:

2. to be married is also good (2) Looking at it from another point of view, marriage is something God invented and ordained. And in a sex-crazed society like Corinth or America where immorality is the norm, Christian monogamous marriage is a wonderful God-given deterrent to immorality. Not only is the couple blessed by their own faithfulness to one another, but those around them are blessed by their example because it really sticks out! So, to be married is good and not only that:

3. sex within marriage is good (3) We'll save the details of these few verses for our study next week, but Paul doesn't want to leave the impression from last week that sex itself is bad or evil. No, on the contrary, within marriage the sexual relationship is a wonderful God-given thing to be celebrated and enjoyed. Various portions of the church throughout history have given the idea that sex is a kind of evil necessity in marriage, a bad thing that you get to do because you're married. Not at all! It is normal; it is wholesome; it is even commanded by God - FOR married people. Marriage is good; sex in marriage is good; but:

4. marriage is not mandatory (6) That refers back to verse 2 where he says *each man should have his own wife...* That wasn't meant to be a command. You don't have to marry. Among the Jews, the rabbis saw marriage as "an unqualified duty for a man". It was more or less mandatory and it still is that way among many of the world's peoples. How many young girls are brutally bridenapped in Kyrgyzstan because parents tell a young man that he is now 19 or 20 years old and he MUST marry NOW! So, he steals the first nice looking girl he has access to, his family puts a scarf on her head and her own family and the society FORCES her to be married to the guy. For them life is about marriage - you MUST be married. And while our customs are different, our culture can still apply the same kind of pressure. How many a young lady marries the wrong guy, simply because he's the one who asked and she doesn't want to be "unmarried" any more. All her friends are getting married and she doesn't want to be left behind. Well, you won't feel that pressure from God! Marriage is good, but singleness is good too. In fact, here's the full truth:

5. God's plan is more important than our own (7) Paul was single. He found that being single helped him immeasurably to serve God and he wished the same for others, however he recognized that God does not have the same design for everybody. He has gifted some people to be single and live a successful life, while others would struggle terribly under that circumstance. And He has gifted some people to marry and live a successful spiritual life, while others couldn't imagine the complications that would bring. In my mind the fundamental question is not, "What do I want?" but "What does GOD want?" Listen, I have known SO many young people in their late teens and 20's who were literally desperate to get married. And I always share what God did in my life. There was a person I thought I was going to marry who didn't think that in return and I was crushed and God dealt with my heart until I was willing to surrender this area of my life to Him. I was miserable until I could tell Him, "Lord, if you want me to be single, I am willing! Your will is more important than mine!" THEN He gave me LuAnn. Young people, it's a lesson He wants all of us to get! He is Lord of your life and His plan for your life is more important than your own. So, surrender; give up! Say, "Lord, I accept your will; being obedient to you is more important than anything on earth, including being married; show me your gift for me!" Then you'll be free to make a good decision about marriage and a whole lot less likely to yoke yourself to a bad situation. But how do you know what God wants for you? Well, He doesn't usually appear in a vision and say, "You will marry Joel" Rather He expects you to make a wise decision with His guidance. So, as you read the rest of this chapter, you'll find that Paul gives us here:

II. The Important Factors Involved In The Decision Whether To Marry There are three key factors that play a role. The first one is:

1. the factor of sexual drive and self-control (8-9) It is no secret that people are created differently. Some have a far stronger sexual drive than others. It's a part of their physical makeup. Some people find that sexual temptations and lustful thoughts are a constant and difficult battle in their minds. Marriage provides a wonderful, God-designed way of satisfying that need. So, Paul says if you're that kind of person who would constantly burn with lustful passions and have to fight them and might perhaps be weak enough to fall into immorality, then you have to take that into consideration. It would definitely be better to marry, all other factors being equal. The second factor is:

2. the factor of the circumstances you find yourself in Let's read Paul's whole discourse in (17-24). Now what I think that means is:

a. God has called you first to serve where you are and as you are Becoming a Christian doesn't demand that you change all the physical circumstances of your life. Now, it may demand that you change your *moral* circumstances, the way you live, but not the circumstances themselves. If you come to Christ in an unbelieving home, you don't have to move out. If you come to Christ and your spouse refuses, you don't seek to leave them. If you come to Christ and you're a Jew, you don't have to stop celebrating the Passover and the things that are meaningful to you. If you come to Christ, you don't have to sell all your possessions and become a missionary and move overseas. Paul's point is: learn to think a new way. Think about where you are right now and what you are. God's first design for you is to be serving Him to the utmost, exactly where you are. Do you work on a construction site? God's first concern for you is not to find a better place to work, but to use you as an effective witness where you already work! Are you married? His first concern is to use you as a testimony to your unbelieving spouse, not to find you a better one! Are you single? His first concern is to use you effectively in ministry as a single, not to marry you off to a believer. But all that being said:

b. your present circumstances must be considered in your decision whether to marry or not. Speaking to single people, Paul writes verse (26). When he mentions *the present crisis*, we don't really know what he was talking about. It is possible that the church at Corinth was undergoing some sort of persecution. You might remember the

riot in Corinth in Acts 18 where Paul was dragged before the proconsul. Perhaps that anti-Christian sentiment had spread and Christians were being discriminated against or persecuted and having to meet discreetly. So, maybe this wouldn't be the best time to choose to get married. Being single would make it easier to stand up and resist the danger without trying to protect your family. Is God sending you to an extremely dangerous assignment somewhere in the world? Are you saddled with the burden of providing care for an elderly parent? Are you a single mom left with the care of two children stricken by the loss of their father? Are you in the middle of a serious illness? Well, if things like these are going on, maybe this isn't the best time to think about marrying. What are the circumstances God has put you in right now? He's not calling you to leave those circumstances; He's challenging you to ask the question, "Will marriage truly be a good thing in these circumstances?" That's the second factor. The third is:

3. the factor of your calling and ability to serve God Paul warns us that:

a. we must not become engrossed in the things of this world (29-31) The truth is that time is short. Whether Christ is coming soon or not, death is. You and I have only a limited opportunity to serve God before we pass off the scene of history forever. Nothing we have now is permanent, not material things, not joys and sorrows, not even marriage. But we tend to get bogged down in all these things, caught up and engrossed in them. It's so easy for life to be about the job or the house or the family, instead of about the Lord. And that's where Paul points out that:

b. singleness affords a level of freedom that marriage does not (32-35) Marriage necessarily brings new levels of responsibility and care. A married person must put a lot of energy into meeting the needs of their wife or husband and of their children. Where a single person can pour hours and hours into prayer or ministry experiences, a married person may have precious little time for the things that really count and when they do, they can barely keep their eyes open. So, if I marry, what will that do to my calling from God and my devotion to His will? Will it distract me and engross me in things of this world or will it be a vehicle to enhanced and greater service? That's a factor I have to take into consideration.

Vernon Grounds tells the story of a young woman named Mildred Cable. She grew up in Great Britain and fell in love with a man who felt that the Lord had called him to be a pastor in that country. Mildred was convinced that the Lord wanted her to serve as a missionary in China. When the man asked her to marry him, she faced an agonizing decision. One night after much praying, talking, and weeping, she told him she could not accept his proposal. With heavy hearts they said goodbye and went their separate ways. Vernon Grounds writes, "That night she died to her own desires, her own hopes, her own humanly legitimate dreams. She died to her own will [and chose] to carry out the will of God. She went to China where God gave her an extraordinarily fruitful ministry." [Yes, But How? Getting Serious About Your Faith] After 20 years of ministry in one city, she traversed the entire length of the Gobi Desert on the Silk Road five times sharing the Good news of Jesus. She was perhaps the first to share it with the Kyrgyz people in Northwest China whom we're praying for today. I wonder who would have told them if she had decided that being married was more important to her than God's call. What is God calling you to do? Will choosing to marry hinder or enhance it? That is the third factor. Now I want you to see how Paul applies these three principles to three distinct groups as he gives:

III. Direct Advice To Those Who Are Not Married In the beginning of the chapter he speaks:

1. to all who are not currently married (8-9) Whether you are never-married, divorced, widowed, unless you have no biblical right to remarry under the circumstances of verse 11, if you are not married:

a. you have freedom to marry in the Lord You may choose to marry, not just anyone of course, but someone who is a believer. You are free to do it, but you are also free to stay single. The question you need to consider is this:

b. will singleness cause you to struggle perpetually with lust? Can you control your bodily desires and passions? Can you live pure and remain unmarried? If you can, then perhaps you should. But if not, if that is a great struggle for you, then perhaps you should look to God to get married and start praying about it. That's kind of a bottom line factor and, to be honest, it affects the great majority of us. Most people are not gifted to remain single and pure. Second, Paul has a word of advice:

2. to those who have never married (25-28)

a. you have freedom to marry in the Lord You may marry. It is not wrong. It is not a sin. Look further down at verse (36). From the Greek it is tough to tell if this section is talking about a virgin who is engaged to marry or about a man who has betrothed his virgin daughter to someone to be married. That's why translations differ. But the point is the same, the person who has never married has complete freedom to do it in the Lord, yet here's the question you ought to consider:

b. will marriage detract from your service to the Lord? (32, 35) Can you have undivided loyalty and devotion to God if you marry? Will you be willing to obey Him and go where He says to go and do what He says to do and will your potential spouse do that with you? Is his or her heart in the same place. If you can truthfully answer "yes", then go for it. And finally, Paul has a word of advice:

3. to those who were once married, but their spouse has died (**39-40**). If you are a widow or a widower, now alone again (and I would say the same thoughts apply to a believer who finds themselves alone after a divorce but hasn't caused it):

a. you have freedom to marry in the Lord There is nothing to prevent it. Marriage is not eternal as the Mormons teach. You will not be married in heaven; you are not betraying that vow you made to them. That is perfectly OK if the new person is a believer, but the question you need to ponder is this:

b. what circumstances will a new marriage create? It will bring with it a set of problems and concerns you can't avoid. Are there children? How old are they? How are they going to react to it and what will it do in their lives? In

1 Tim. 5:9-14 Paul says plainly that younger widows should probably remarry; they're going to have trouble making it and staying godly in their circumstances. Older ones may be better off single and be better able to serve the Lord.

*The names Jim and Elisabeth Elliot should be familiar to you. Jim Elliott went to Wheaton College in 1945 with one purpose – to be an overseas missionary. Everything he did was to prepare him for a rugged life as a missionary. In Jim's third year of college, he met a girl named Elisabeth Howard. Once, after there had been many private times together talking, Jim asked Elisabeth to walk with him to discuss their feelings for one another. Elisabeth was headed to Africa to be a missionary and Jim to South America. She writes in her book, *Shadow of the Almighty*, "Now we faced the simple truth - we loved each other. Hardly aware of our direction, we wandered into a gateway and found ourselves in a cemetery. Seated on a stone slab, Jim told me that he had committed me to God, much as Abraham had done his son, Isaac --it was exactly the figure which had been in my mind for several days as I had pondered our relationship. We agreed that God was directing... We sat in silence. Suddenly we were aware that the moon, which had risen behind us, was casting the shadow of a great stone cross between us." They literally gave each other up to obey God's calling in their lives. But over the next few years, as they individually obeyed God step by step, they both ended up serving on the same field in Ecuador and in 1953 they married in order to better serve God as partners. What a happy ending it would be, except that 4 years later Elisabeth had to give Jim up all over again to as he died under Auca spears on a sandbar in the Curare River. In fact, Elisabeth later married again and lost her second husband to cancer and now has her third husband. She's faced the question at least four times and God has given her an extremely powerful ministry to women all these years that has touched many of you personally. It is her and Jim's attitude that exemplifies what Paul is talking about. You see, the most important thing in life is not marriage, but God. To every unmarried person this chapter says, "You need to put God in first place and be ready to do what He wants and please Him above all! You need to be ready to lay down what you may consider to be the most important thing in your life for His sake!" And, after all, isn't that exactly what He has called ALL of us to do?*

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

8) The Problem Of Divorce - 7:10-16

The questions that the believers in Corinth had about marriage must not only have included the question of whether to marry or not which we looked at in Chapter 7 last week, but also the question of whether to divorce or not. Evidently with all the immorality that abounded in Corinth, the concept of marriage had been lowered and divorce had become more and more common. And that should sound familiar to us because the same thing has happened in our society. The most recent information from the US Center for Health Statistics says that there are roughly 1 million divorces in the US every year which obviously means that 2 million married people go through the pain of a divorce every year. The Barna Research Group reported at the end of 1999 that 11% of our adult population was currently divorced and 25% of adults had experienced at least one divorce in their lifetime. And what's even more shocking is that they found that the divorce rate among conservative Christians was actually significantly HIGHER than other faith groups, including atheists and agnostics, with some 27% having been divorced! That study raised a lot of eyebrows and anger, but it points out what I think we all know, that the problem of divorce is not just a problem out there in the world; it is a huge and serious problem IN the church. And therefore, it points out that the church is somehow failing to nurture the concept and the practice of marriage! Thus, Paul's words on this subject could not be more timely. Now, he begins to address this subject by laying out:

I. The General Principles Of Marriage He mentions three of them. First:

1. there must be absolute fidelity (2) No polygamy or multiple husbands. No concubines, mistresses or consorts. No old boyfriends and no new girlfriends at the office. No third parties, period. Marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman to be husband and wife for life, to keep themselves ONLY unto the other, as we say in the vow. That's how we have to enter into marriage; when I stand at the altar, I am literally saying that it is YOU and nobody else, ever! As soon as one party begins to violate this mindset, even if it is only in their thinking and wishing, the marriage is in trouble. Paul says, *Flee from sexual immorality!* Run from it when even the mere thought of it raises its ugly head. There must be absolute fidelity for a marriage to work! Secondly:

2. there must be regular intimacy (3-6) To put it in today's wording, a husband and wife should have a regular, active and mutually satisfying sexual relationship. Evidently some of the believers had gotten the notion that sex was evil and it would be more spiritual to live celibate within marriage. Portions of the church, particularly dating from the time of the

Middle Ages, have taken the position that sex is somehow by nature evil and intended only for procreation. That impression has persisted quite pervasively to the point that many of the parents of people in my generation still held that "necessary evil" mentality toward it. Paul says no such thing. He said that:

a. each spouse has a loving duty to fulfill the other's sexual need *Marital duty* is not like military duty. It's not saying that this is some act you have to mechanically perform because you're married. He says literally that it is a debt of kindness owed to the other. Your spouse has needs in this area and God has given you the responsibility to love the other by fulfilling those needs in his or her life. In sexual immorality, sex is a selfish act; it is trying to get pleasure from the other for yourself. In marriage sex is an unselfish act; it is loving your spouse by giving them what their body needs. I think of a couple of sad lines I've heard through the years in counseling, like the wife who feels totally rejected and says, "He hasn't touched me in six months; he doesn't love me anymore." Or the frustrated husband who doesn't know what to do with his sexual drive and confesses, "She will only have sex with me once a month..." No, the husband has a loving responsibility to show his wife that she is continually cherished and desired in this way and the wife has a loving responsibility to show her husband that she understands his inner need and wants to fulfill it regularly. And Paul goes even further to say that:

b. in marriage we yield authority over our own body to our spouse The old line, "It's my body and I can do whatever I want with it!" is no more. It died at the altar. When I married, everything I had became LuAnn's and everything she had became mine. My car was now her car even though I drove it most of the time and her car was my car even though she drove it most of the time. I could no longer simply decide what I was going to do with *my* car, nor could she. And we did that willingly. We gave that authority to each other as part of marriage. Well, when we married, we were made one in body. I no longer had sole authority over my body. It belonged to her too; it was her body. And hers belonged to me; it was mine. When we marry, we willingly yield up control; we say to our spouse: "My body is your body. It is here to meet your needs. How can I use it to minister to you?" So, the bottom line is that there is to be regular sexual intimacy with one another and:

c. neither is to withhold their body from the other unless three conditions are met. First:

(1) both parties willingly agree to it I can't just say, "Well, I've decided to take a year off and be celibate so I can focus on my spiritual life!" The decision to refrain from regular sexual activity must be a joint one; both must want to do it. Second:

(2) it only lasts for a brief period of time and immediately resumes Not indefinitely, not a year, not 6 months... A brief period of time and a definite period of time, so both will know when the end of it is in sight. And third, we're not to do it unless:

(3) it is for a spiritual purpose, to better serve God somehow. Paul mentions **a special season of prayer** as an example. So, if the two of you decide to fast from sex and give yourselves to prayer for a few days or a week or two to seek God, OK, but, Paul says, resume it quickly because:

d. this is God's ordained means of preventing temptation to *porneia*, immorality. If you are married and your needs in this area go unmet for long, your mind and your heart are going to be a prime target for the enemy to attack. He will see that somebody shows up to tempt you. Proverbs says that the way to avoid adultery is to *drink waters from your own cistern, running water from your own well!* - Prov. 5:15. God uses this regular ministry to one another to protect each other from the snares of the evil one! Now third, Paul says, in marriage there must not only be absolute fidelity and regular intimacy, but:

3. there must be lifetime permanence (10-11) Do you hear what Paul is saying?

a. we are firmly commanded not to divorce He emphasizes it by saying, *I give you this command*, instead of just saying it. And then He says, "Don't think this is MY command personally; this is JESUS' command! I'm just repeating what Jesus commanded us!" Look with me at **Mk. 10:2-12**. Does it get any stronger and clearer than that? We cannot just change partners. We cannot just quit the marriage we're in and go marry somebody else! We can't just get tired of our spouse and make them leave! In the vows we make before God in this culture, we say plainly, "until death do us part". That means, "I am yours until I die or you die!" The vow has lifetime permanence that reflects the lifetime permanence that God built into marriage itself by making the two into one. Married people are no longer two; they ARE one! They are bonded, joined as one in every way by God, so human beings don't have a right to take apart what God has joined. That's why in **Mal. 2:16** God says, *...I hate divorce...* Now please hear me, He doesn't hate divorced people, but He hates the act of divorce; it is a tearing apart of what He has joined. That's as strong as it gets! Proverbs 6:16 lists seven things the Lord hates including pride, lying and murder; read it sometime. And divorce is in the same category as all of those! So, when you decide to divorce your husband or your wife and go marry someone else, you defy God Himself! And in verse 11:

b. we are clearly told the consequences if we choose to leave our spouse anyway. We read where Jesus said that to marry another is to commit adultery, so Paul says, if we leave, if we separate in defiance of God's command, then either:

(1) we must remain single and not re-marry - ever! Marrying another person adds adultery to the sin of separating from our spouse. **OR...** Paul says:

(2) we must be reconciled to our spouse and this would be the ideal. Go back and fix whatever is broken and rebuild the relationship.

Now please listen to my heart. I know this is an issue that is close to many of our hearts. There is not a family here that doesn't have a divorced loved one somewhere in it or at least a close friend. There are people I love here today who are in second marriages who are fully accepted both here and before God without any stigma and are even leaders in this fellowship and the point of this message is not to dig up pain from your past. So again, please hear me say that these are the general principles for marriage. If you enter into marriage or if you are married right now (regardless of how you got there), understand that this is God's standard for you! God demands absolute fidelity, regular intimacy and lifetime permanence. But even Paul now goes on to talk about some:

II. Special Circumstances Where Divorce Is Permissible (12a) He means, "There are some cases that the Lord Jesus did not cover in His teaching and they require some discernment and I want to give you my judgment about these kinds of special circumstances..." The first of those would obviously be:

1. when one partner has been unfaithful to the marriage covenant Even Jesus Himself acknowledged that:

a. this may occur through sexual immorality - Mat. 19:9 *I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.* This is the famed "exception clause". One partner may be unfaithful and the Greek word is *porneia*, have sex with somebody else, become involved in pornography, visit a prostitute, and so on. They may violate the absolute fidelity of the marriage vow. Well, in this case the other party MAY decide to end the marriage and is free to marry another. Do note that it is not mandatory and, in my view, it should be a last resort. If it was a one time offense and the spouse is repentant, you should get help and try to make it work. In the Old Testament we have the example of Hosea whom God told to love his adulterous wife and go take her back again. That's God's ideal. However, if the other person continues and persists in immorality and shows no genuine repentance or actually divorces you and marries someone else, then you are free. But sexual immorality is not the only way to be unfaithful to a spouse:

b. this may occur through other severe violations of the vow. Paul offers judgment on one specific case, abandonment, which we'll talk about in a moment. But there are other cases just like it that Scripture doesn't mention, but obviously fall in this same category. For instance, **abuse**. We've all heard cases of wife-beating; we've seen pictures of battered women who've been pummeled by their husbands and had horrible things done to them. And oddly, many of them stay! Listen, if that is you, run! Get away! You are not bound to stay and endure that! It is just as severe a violation of the vow as adultery. Another example would be **deception**. What if you marry someone and find out that they deceived you; they're not really who they said they were? Maybe they belong to the mafia and are involved in organized crime; maybe they have a whole past history of horrendous things that they hid from you. It's rare, but it happens, and if it does, the vow is false; it is built on a lie. You are not bound. And I'm sure there are other severe violations that have occurred, but note the word severe. We're not talking about, "I don't like his bad habits!" "She spends our money faster than I can make it!" "He's married to his job and never spends time with me!" "I don't love him anymore!" Bad as those things may be, they are things that need fixed, things that may require help, but not grounds for divorce like the things we're talking about here. Paul goes on to talk specifically about another kind of situation that occurs. Divorce is permissible:

2. when one partner chooses to abandon the marriage (12b-16) There were tons of cases there at Corinth where married people heard the Gospel and one or the other believed and became a follower of Christ but the spouse didn't. This occurs everywhere the Gospel is preached, even here. The couple is going along OK and all of a sudden one partner has their life absolutely transformed by Jesus Christ and now here they are married to an unbeliever, and often the unbeliever doesn't like the change and makes things hard for them! The Corinthians wanted to know what to do in this case. Well, Paul said plainly:

a. we must never divorce a spouse for refusing to believe Our vow to follow Christ does not negate our marriage vow; it does not give us the right to divorce our spouse because they don't want to follow Christ or because they make life hard on us because we follow Christ. We are one and we must stay together, even if it is hard. If anything, our following Christ should make us a BETTER husband or a BETTER wife to our spouse! And Paul points out that:

(1) we are a means of God's grace to them and our children (14) That doesn't mean that your husband or your children are saved just because you are. It means "set apart". Through your believing God has marked them as targets of His grace. The blessings and the benefits that God bestows upon the believer in the family flow over to the family members. He blesses the home for their sake and works in the lives of the family members. We become His emissary, His means of grace to show mercy in their lives. And, Paul adds:

(2) we may win that spouse to Christ (16) You don't know! So never give up! Never stop praying for them. Never stop asking God to use you in their life. **1 Pet. 3:1-2** says, *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.* That works the same for husbands. The transformation and the love of God in our life may impact them and win them! However:

b. if our spouse abandons the marriage, we are to release them (15) If they choose to leave, if they say "This is not what I bargained for when I married you!" and they want out, let them go. Release them.

(1) we are no longer bound to them in such circumstances Marriage takes two parties and if the other abandons it, it is over and you're free. But you may say, that's an unbeliever; what if my spouse is a believer and abandons me anyway? Well, here's the scoop. If your spouse is part of the fellowship and wants to abandon you, you would normally follow Matthew 18. You would confront them and eventually tell it to the church and if they remained unrepentant, we would eventually expel them from the body and we are told to count them AS an unbeliever. We can't see their hearts, but their actions are those of an unbeliever, so we are to regard them as such. So, if they abandon us, the case ends up being one and the same; the "unbeliever" abandoned us and we are free! Paul explains that:

(2) God's desire is that there be peace in our homes. If we strive and try and maneuver to keep that spouse who wants out bound to us, to preserve the marriage at all costs, it will result in war right in our home, in front of the children. But God wants peace. If they want out, do everything possible to show love to them, but let them go. You're free. They're not...but that's their problem. You are.

Finally, let me just say this. You may be here this morning as a married person, but have a divorce in your past. You may be thinking, "But it doesn't fit any of these cases. It WAS my fault. I was in the wrong. I was the unfaithful one. I did the abandoning. I did remarry. Is God going to bring that up to me? Am I fully forgiven?" The answer to that is the same as it is for the murderer, the thief, the idolater or for any other of us ordinary sinners: *There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. You have been made right with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you.* - 6:11. You are washed; you are sanctified; you are justified. You are free, free to live 100% in the marriage you are in today. You see, the real lesson today is not about divorce; it is about marriage and how seriously God takes it. We should too, every one of us. *In his book Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives, James Dobson quotes a heart-touching letter his father wrote to his mother before they were married. It reads in part: "I want you to understand and be fully aware of my feelings concerning the marriage covenant which we are about to enter. I have been taught at my mother's knee and in harmony with the Word of God that the marriage vows are inviolable, and by entering them I am binding myself absolutely and for life. The idea of estrangement from you through divorce for any reason at all (although God allows one-- infidelity) will never at any time be permitted to enter my thinking. I'm not naive in this. On the contrary, I'm fully aware of the possibility, unlikely as it now appears, that mutual incompatibility or other unforeseen circumstances could result in extreme mental suffering. If such becomes the case, I am resolved for my part to accept it as a consequence of the commitment I am now making, and to bear it, if necessary, to the end of our lives together."* That, dear friends, is God's attitude toward marriage. Is it yours?

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

9) The Problem Of Personal Liberty - Chs. 8-10

The Corinthians had written Paul with questions about marriage and divorce which he answered in chapter 7. But they also wrote him with questions about another matter which was evidently so important that he spent three whole chapters of his letter, 8, 9 and 10, answering their concerns. It was the issue of whether or not they should eat meat that had been offered in sacrifice to idols. The question itself seems almost irrelevant to us today, but in Corinth it was no small matter. The city was awash in pagan temples. The short list includes temples to Apollo (two of them), Athena, Poseidon, Glauke, Hera, Aphrodite, a Pantheon (temple of all the gods), Heracles, Hermes, Octavia, Jupiter, Asklepios, Demeter and the Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis. On top of the great hill of AcroCorinth was that great temple of Aphrodite with its thousand sacred prostitutes. And in all of these, worshippers were continually offering animal sacrifices. Typically, each sacrifice was divided into three portions, one burned up, one given to the priest, and one given to the worshipper to eat. The temple of Demeter, which was in heavy use in Paul's day, has been excavated and it contained a number of dining rooms where worshippers would eat their sacrifices. You can easily see that the proportionately small number of priests could never consume all the meat that came their way so it ended up being sold in the meat market, the *makellon*, which stood near the Lechaem Road to the north. It has also been excavated and was a huge commercial building with a paved court surrounded by colonnades and small shops. It was like "the mall" to the Corinthians, or maybe a "Giant" supermarket, and people regularly went there to buy meat and other food items. So here is the best source of meat in the whole city, but the meat has been offered in pagan ceremonies to false gods. Does that contaminate it somehow? Are there demonic forces attached to it now? If we eat it, are we giving some sort of allegiance to the idol? What about if we actually go into the din-

ing room at the Temple and eat there; is that different? These are the questions our brothers and sisters had, the same ones we would have had if we had lived in their day. Every culture has its own specific issues, cultural practices that everybody does and that we're pressured to do, but things that at some level appear to have spiritual significance and perhaps violate our obedience to Christ. If a native American comes to Jesus, should he dance the dances of his people any longer or is that invoking the spirits? If a young Hindu gives his life to Christ, should he still go and bring his parents the flowers each morning which they offer in *puja* (worship) at the little shrine in their home or is he participating in idol worship? If a Muslim comes to Christ, he has been taught all his life that Allah says it's evil to drink alcohol, yet Christians do it? Should he? If a Muslim or even a Jew comes to Christ, can he now eat pork, which is forbidden in the Old Testament and how does he feel when he does it? And these are the same kinds of questions we ask too, only about other matters. "Is it wrong to gamble or does that displease God; am I trying to steal money somehow? Can I play the lottery? What about if I go to a casino to gamble?" Or how about alcohol, "Is it wrong to drink or does that displease God? What about in public, at a restaurant? Can I go into a bar and order a drink?" What about working or even doing homework on Sunday; does that violate the Sabbath command? I know some Christians who feel pretty strongly that it does. We could ask questions about how we should dress, about whether we should watch movies with violent or sexual content or a myriad of other things, things that are not expressly forbidden in Scripture, yet at some level they begin to impact our faith and we know when carried out to certain degrees they are wrong. We usually call these kinds of things issues of "personal liberty", things where I don't have a clear command, where I have to make a choice as to what pleases God, and where Christians often choose differently from one another and then turn around and judge one another for the choice they made. Now that's why chapter 8 is important, not because it talks about meat sacrificed to idols, but because it explains to us:

I. The Guiding Principle In Matters Of Personal Liberty Actually:

1. there are two key principles involved (1-3) First, there is:

a. the principle of knowledge We make choices based on what we know. And we know a lot! That's part of our problem. We know so much that we think we know it all, but we don't! Paul points out that no matter how much we know about the situation, we don't know everything we ought to know. We can't see like God sees. Our knowledge is incomplete and it puffs us up. We take pride in "what we know". We feel like we have all the answers and others should know it too. So, knowledge is good but it has built in dangers. However, there is a second principle:

b. the principle of love, which Jesus commanded and which emanates from God Himself. The more you know Him, the more you are filled with His Spirit, the more you will love and the thing about love is that it **always builds up others**. It always thinks about the other person first and seeks the well-being of the other person first above our own.

So, what does any of this have to do with meat and idols? Well, let's find out in **(4-8)**. You see, when considering any of these kinds of issues that involve personal liberty:

2. there are two levels of knowledge involved There is:

a. the level of our own understanding We know there is only one God and there are no others. Idols are just manmade statues, lifeless objects. They have no power, so placing meat in front of an idol and saying words over it does nothing to it. It is not magically contaminated; it's just a hunk of meat that can be eaten just like any other meat. And by the way, Rom. 14:14 clarifies for us that there are no longer any foods that are unclean in themselves. God showed Peter that in Acts. You can eat pigs and rabbits and camels, stuff the Jews couldn't eat. God made it all for you to enjoy. If you like gopher, go for it! We know that. The trouble is that NOT EVERYBODY knows that. We always have to take into account:

b. the differing level of understanding that others may have Here's a fellow who believed in Jesus last week. He spent all his life worshipping idols. He has probably seen demonic spiritual power manifested. He's seen some pagan priest put a curse on somebody and seen them die. He's not so sure about all the fine points of theology; he's trying to make a clean break and having nothing to do with anything associated with the way he used to live. So, he looks at meat that came from the pagan temple and runs the other way! Now, our tendency in operating from knowledge is to say, "Well, he should just know more! He should know better. We'll just teach him what we know and then everything will be alright!" The problem with that is people. We don't work like that.

Take, for instance, the man who's been an alcoholic. It's ruined his life and his marriage. Finally, he comes to Christ and eventually gets delivered and is living a sober life. Then we come along and tell him that wine is a gift of God and that he should be free to enjoy it! But he knows what we don't know. He knows how much he used to enjoy that. He knows the power it had over him. He knows the pull he's going to feel if he takes that first drink. And he knows the pain he felt as it ruined his life; he knows what you can't learn in a theology book. So, Paul's point is that if we operate on knowledge, we could push a man back to destruction. But:

3. love always considers the effect our action will have on others (9-12) Here's Joe Corinthian, graduate of "Dalminster Theological Seminary" in Corinth who was raised in the faith and knows idols are nothing. He also knows the cheapest place to eat is down at the "McTemple" where everybody goes, so it's supper time and he goes in and sits down and buys his "temple burger", bows his head and says grace. On his way home from work, Sam, another be-

liever who worships together with Joe passes by and glances in and there's Joe. Now Sam used to be an idol-worshipper and he used to go there all the time and worship in the temple that was attached. He stopped all that when he believed; he didn't know you could go in there and eat. So, he goes in and joins Joe who gives him the "you're free in Christ" lecture, so he starts going regularly and meets all his old friends he used to know and they begin to say, "remember when you used to do this with us... remember the girls?????" And he begins to be tempted and, in a few weeks, he's quit going to the Christian meetings and slides back into idolatry. It was more fun! And whose fault is it? Joe's! If we choose selfishly in these areas, if we choose to always do everything we're free to do, just because we're free to do it:

a. it may lead a brother with weaker faith or knowledge into sin It may embolden them to do what they otherwise wouldn't have done; it may tempt them do things they feel like are wrong. And Satan may use that to ruin, wreck and destroy their spiritual lives! So, we can't operate on the principle of knowledge alone. We must operate on the principle of love and:

b. love always chooses a brother's well-being over our own liberty (13) Paul says, "If eating meat takes somebody away from Jesus or keeps somebody from Him, I'll become a vegetarian for life! Jesus and bringing people to Him and maturing them in Him is what my life is all about. No meat is worth that! No personal freedom is worth that!"

Now let me make a brief side comment here. You all know someone who will say, "I've been a Christian for 50 years and I believe it's wrong to touch a drop of alcohol. And I'm not so sure you ought to be dressed in those clothes in church either! When you go and have wine in a restaurant or drink beer while you're watching a game, you're sinning against God and you're offending me; you're causing me to stumble!" When you run into them, I want to give you an answer you can share. "You're not the person Paul's talking about. You haven't stumbled and left Jesus yet and you're not going to because of me. You're just a crochety old believer who doesn't want to change anything in his life and wants to control mine!" Paul is talking about people who are vulnerable, who are new in the faith, who come out of difficult situations, who could be easily led astray. They're the ones God has a heart for; Jesus said, *...if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.* – Mat. 18:6. That's a pretty stern warning. Love those weaker folks; consider your choices and make sure you don't contribute to their spiritual downfall! Then in chapter 9, Paul goes on to share:

II. How Paul Limited His Own Personal Liberty He was a prime example of it:

1. he had certain rights as an apostle, including that of support (1, 4-6) To be an apostle was to be a special person in the life of the church, to be one sent out by Jesus Himself to plant the church all over the world. And certainly, he had a right to eat and drink, he had a right to be married like others were and by rights the churches ought to support him and provide for his needs to free him up to do ministry. He goes on to prove from the Scriptures that he had the right to financial support from other believers. However:

2. he chose not to exercise any of his rights (12, 15) He limited what he ate for the sake of others; he never married so he'd be free to travel and plant churches and he never took money from any of the churches. He made tents and supported himself the whole way. Why? So nobody would say he was in it for the money! He didn't want to give anyone an occasion to stumble or to keep them from trusting the Savior. In fact, that was his principle:

3. he always limited his own freedoms for the sake of the Gospel (19-23) Think about the tremendous variety of peoples and cultures he met as he planted churches in place after place throughout the Roman Empire. He often began preaching in synagogues. In a synagogue, men always covered their heads as they went in. Paul didn't say, "I'm free; I pray with my head uncovered," (as he did in chapter 11) when he went into one of those; he covered his head so he wouldn't offend them and they would listen to the Gospel. And when he was with pagans, he didn't insist on a kosher diet when he sat down to lunch; he ate what they ate so he wouldn't offend them and they would listen to the Gospel. When he was with people who had scruples about eating meat sacrificed to idols, he was careful not to eat it. No matter where he was or who he was with, he thought about them, not about himself, because he loved them and he wanted to see them saved and brought to maturity in Christ. Think about who you're with! Think about what you do! How are they going to perceive it? What is the impact on them going to be spiritually? Will it draw them closer to Christ or will it push them away from Him and if it will, don't use your freedom! It's not worth it!

Now, as we move into Chapter 10 Paul gives us a powerful warning. He says:

III. Our Liberties In Christ Can Easily Lead Us To License in 10:1-13. He uses the example of Israel back at that time when God set them free from bondage in Egypt and was bringing them to the promised land. He says that:

1. the Israelites had tremendous privileges given them by God (1-4) God did a real work in their lives, ALL their lives. They saw God do incredible things. They saw His saving grace. They willingly gave their lives to Him and committed to be the Lord's people and God bound them to Himself, all of them, just like He has done with us! And yet, he says:

2. most of them perished under God's discipline pursuing their own way (5) A whole generation died there in the wilderness over 40 years. More than a million graves pockmarked that desert! And why? What happened? Well, he goes on to give examples. Some of them chose to worship a golden calf; some of them chose to commit sexual immorality; some of them tested the Lord and grumbled against Him after all He'd done; they rebelled against what He said. Bottom line? They disobeyed God and did things their own way and instead of enjoying and growing in their privileges and ended up under the dirt. And his point is that:

3. we must be careful so we don't fall into disobedience as they did (11-12) Liberty is a dangerous thing! Having the freedom to choose can ruin your life. They thought they were so privileged that they were standing firm, that nothing could knock them down. But they turned their liberty to license. Instead of rejoicing in the freedom they had and being willing to let God tell them how to use it, they insisted on using it their own way and doing their own thing and buried themselves! And you and I can do the same! If we go around hurting and destroying the faith of others by doing what WE want to do, we're being disobedient and are in danger of God's discipline! So that's why:

4. we must rely on God to protect us from this temptation Look at this famous verse: **(13)**. I'm not sure I ever noticed this before, but it's not really talking about the weaker brother who is being tempted to fall back into idolatry or addiction or immorality. It's talking about you and I. If you will look to Him when you are tempted to rely on your own knowledge, to think that you stand firm, and do your own thing that might hurt or ruin somebody else, God is always there to limit that temptation and to make a way out of it for you! So here in the end of chapter 10 are:

IV. Paul's Conclusions About The Matter Of Personal Liberty - 10:14-33 Here's the straight advice. First:

1. when it makes you a participant in evil, FLEE! (14, 19-21) You can't go into that idol's temple and participate in the ceremony in order to get the cheap meat, telling yourself, "I don't really believe this in my heart". You would be offering allegiance to the demonic forces which are behind the whole system of idolatry. When doing what you're tempted to do makes you a participant in something that's evil, don't just walk; RUN from it. But:

2. when it is merely a personal enjoyment, GIVE THANKS! (25-26) If you want to have wine with your dinner, thank God for it, and enjoy it. Want wear your hair long or grow a beard or wear bright green clothing or eat tofu with snails or do your homework on Sunday or whatever else it might be, as long as it has no spiritual impact on anyone else and doesn't keep anyone from Christ or lead them to fall into sin, go for it! And be thankful while you're at it! However:

3. when you receive a private invitation, BE WISE! (27-29) Look for their motive. If someone says, "Hey, let's do this!" and you know the person is testing you, if you know that somehow they're going to feel like they've won you over and gotten you to violate some religious taboo by getting you to do this thing, whatever it is, then don't do it! But if they don't seem to really care about it and you don't see anything wrong with it, go for it. Just be wise. Really think about the consequences of your action. Here's:

The Bottom Line: DO WHAT WILL BRING GOD GLORY! (31) Look at the situation, the choice you have and think, "What will bring God glory in this situation? What will result in Him being glorified and magnified? That's what I'll choose to do." *A missionary to Uganda was invited to a rural village to play the piano for a worship service. While she was traveling to the remote church, an unseasonable rainstorm deluged the village, and the shelter the people had erected for the service. The piano was so thoroughly doused that it was unplayable. The villagers adjusted by accompanying the hymns of the worship service with some of their traditional tortoise-shell instruments. One of the church's elders later profusely apologized to the missionary lady for his people's use of tribal instruments in accompanying the Christian hymns. She was confused by his embarrassment and asked why he would apologize for using instruments that added a wonderful cultural flavor to a worship tradition that is usually so foreign to his people. "'Don't you know?' asked the elder. 'My people have sometimes used tortoise-shell instruments in devil worship!'" "Oh," replied the smiling missionary, "you should see how my people have sometimes used pianos."* [Using Illustrations to Preach with Power by Bryan Chapell. Zondervan, 1992. Pages 30-31.] You can take a tortoise shell and use it to the glory of God. You can do the same with a piece of meat that has been offered to an idol or a glass of alcohol or a wallet full of money or a piano. You can take anything that is neither right nor wrong in itself and use it either to glorify God and advance His kingdom or to puff yourself up and hurt others. The choice is yours. Choose to glorify God.

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

10) The Problem Of Dress - 11:1-16

As we arrive in our study at the first half of chapter 11, we come to a very difficult passage, one that has been interpreted in different ways and argued over greatly and I'll demonstrate why. It's about dress, specifically women's dress in worship, and if you simply read it at face value with no background knowledge, you'd come away with the fact that all of you married women here this morning should be wearing a head-covering. Now, I happened to notice that none of you are! May I ask why? Well, the answer could be that you are all rebellious and, if you lived in ancient Corinth, that would probably be true. But I know you too well to think that, so the answer must be that you believe that for some reason what Paul is say-

ing in this passage does not apply to you in the same way it did back then. Am I right? Well, let's begin then by talking about:

I. The Cultural Practice Of Appropriate Dress You see:

1. there is a difference between a principle and a practice Look at verse (2). That word *teachings* means things that were given to you, important things. We could call them doctrines, authoritative teachings, but I think the word *principles* says it better in today's language. The Corinthians were holding on securely to these and not varying from them and Paul praised them for it. Now:

a. principles are timeless: they are meant **to be followed always by all** believers and everywhere. Instructions to love one another, to give to the poor, to live a holy life, these kinds of things don't change over time and are just as binding as they ever were. Paul urged the Thessalonian believers, *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.* - **2 Thes. 2:15**. Where principles have been passed on to us, we want to stand fast and hold firmly on to them. They never change. BUT:

b. practices are variable: We often pray by closing our eyes and folding our hands. In Kyrgyzstan believers pray with open hands and pass them over their face when done, saying "*Oomin*"! We take the Lord's supper using chunks of matzoh and little cups of grape juice. Other believers use whole loaves of leavened bread and break them and use real wine. These things are practices; **they vary by culture and change over time**. And much of the way that we go about practicing or expressing our faith is bound up in these. We sing the music we do because it's appropriate in this generation here where we live; two hundred years ago, it would have been strange and probably rejected. We meet Sunday at 10:45 AM because that's our tradition; in China or the Muslim world that might not work so well because Sunday is a work day. So many of the things that are important to us are actually practices that may be great for us but are not meant to be for everyone everywhere. The problem comes when we get mixed up and think they are and try to force our traditions as Gospel principles that others must accept. What Paul is teaching us in this whole section of the letter is that while we must cling doggedly to principles:

c. in practices we must limit our freedom for others' sake Remember that from last week? The first verse of chapter 11 actually belongs to the end of chapter 10. Read **(10:33-11:1)**. Paul continually varied his practices depending on who he was with. He changed what he ate or some of his other Jewish habits depending on who he was with, for the sake of the Gospel and he urged us to do the same. This next issue of dress is a continuation of the same thought. We have to be willing to limit our freedom by changing our practices in the area of food or even of dress for the sake of others, so that they won't be alienated from Christ. Now let's look at:

2. the struggle that was occurring at Corinth Paul seems to be describing it in verse (5). Evidently:

a. in Corinthian culture married women normally wore a "veil", a *kalumma*. Not a veil to hide their face like you might find in the Muslim world or parts of the Oriental world, but a wrap of cloth covering the hair. Today we might call it a hood or a head-scarf. Sculptures and drawings from that era depict women with this kind of covering in place. It was in many ways a cultural sign of marriage, of belonging to a husband and being unavailable, similar to our concept of wearing a wedding ring to let the world know we have a spouse. Of course, this was not done inside the home, but primarily when out in public. For a married woman to appear in public with uncovered hair was not only unusual, but it was like a married woman deliberately taking off her wedding ring. However, what was happening was that:

b. in the church women were publicly leading in worship "unveiled" with hair hanging free. We can't be sure why, but I'm guessing that it was an expression of their freedom in Christ which Paul had so clearly taught. He said that in Christ there is neither male nor female, that men and women both are equally loved by God and free to approach God. The Jews had long before developed the concept that only the MEN go in to the inner chamber and they cover their heads with a *tillah*, a prayer cloth as a sign of humbleness and unworthiness. Paul taught that because of Christ men were free to go into God's presence, that nothing stood between them. They didn't have to cover their heads and grovel. And women had the same freedom and access to God, so naturally some of them probably wanted to express that outwardly. They didn't have to come to God with covered heads either! So, here were women standing up in the assembly of believers to lead in prayer or to bring an exhortation to the group - and by the way, notice that Paul isn't fazed by that! He doesn't say they shouldn't be leading in worship! Ladies, you are just as welcome at the Throne and in the church as any man. But the problem was that:

c. this freedom rebelled against cultural practice and caused scandal Did they need to have their heads covered to pray or approach God? No! But it flew in the face of cultural practice. Because of the cultural meaning of an uncovered head, those who looked on were seeing something else; they were seeing married women who appeared to be rebels, wanting to show they were not under the authority of their husbands. Culturally it was an inappropriate way to dress, and it created offense, much as we might be offended here if a married woman got up front with a very short skirt or a really low neckline and no ring. We'd have some real reservations about her character, and so did Paul! But instead of launching right into criticizing the practice, he begins by explaining:

II. The Timeless Principle Of Headship which is the really important underlying issue. Read verse **(3)**. The word *head* in this context basically means *leader*. God is a God of order and He establishes lines of authority and leadership in everything He creates. Even within the Trinity, the three persons of the Godhead who are co-equal and co-eternal, God has established leadership. Even though they are completely one, the Father is the Head of Christ the Son; how many times when He was on earth did Jesus say things like: *I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.... for I always do what pleases him.*" - John 8:28-29. And Christ is our Lord and Leader, our Head; *He has been made Head over all things to the church which is His body....* So, in like manner:

1. God declares the headship of the husband in the family If you want to read it more clearly, turn with me to **Eph. 5:23-24**. Now, I'm sure you noticed that wasn't done by vote or earned by performance. It is a timeless principle of the way things are. The husband is appointed by God to be the leader of the family and the wife and children are to follow his leadership. That's just the way God has set things up to be. In fact, Paul argues that God:

a. He established it at creation (7-9) Even though God made both male and female in His image according to Gen. 1:27, He created Adam first out of nothing. Later He created Eve literally out of Adam and because of him, so that he would not be alone, so that He would have a helper, a complement that would be everything he needed, one who would be his glory, his treasure. So, from that very first pair, the husband is to be the leader and have the authority of headship in the home and so it is to be in every generation since, however, in Corinth:

b. culturally the veil was THE public sign of that authority (10) We'll let that phrase, *because of the angels* go; interpreters have argued over the meaning of that for centuries. We'll probably have to wait until we get to heaven to really understand it. But the reason the woman in Corinth needs to wear the veil is NOT because of angels or of anything at all about her being or identity, but rather because it is the sign by which everybody knows she is married and under her husband's leadership and doing this with his blessing.

c. it is NOT a sign of inferiority or weakness It does not mean that men are superior to women; in fact, many women I know are far superior to their husbands in any number of ways! It is not a statement that women are somehow of lesser worth or too weak to lead or anything like that. And Paul wants to make sure nobody misunderstands him; look at **(11-12)**. God used man in the creation of woman; now He uses woman in the creation of man! Neither is better; we are both absolutely dependent on each other; we NEED each other! Just as headship in the Trinity is not about superiority and inferiority, neither is headship in marriage. It is about God's appointed order for getting His purpose accomplished on earth by His servants. And, by the way, this does not imply that all women must submit to all men. There is nothing wrong with a woman being a leader in business or leading ministries within the church. Headship is about husbands and wives. And, Paul adds:

d. it seems to be anticipated in universal human instinct (13-15) From the earliest times in virtually every human culture, women have grown their hair long and men have most often cut theirs short. Now, how long and how short have varied, but this an almost universal human custom; it seems to be a built in instinct. And in any culture when a man tries deliberately to look like a woman or a woman like a man, it's repulsive. Longer hair seems as if it's God's gift to the woman; it's almost like a natural head-covering, as if God was anticipating this cultural practice which the Corinthians had of the woman covering her head to show her respect for her husband. But before we get lost in this, the point is that:

2. when our dress is culturally inappropriate, three things happen. First:

a. we dishonor Christ, our Head (4) There, if a man got up dressed like a woman with a covered head, it would reflect on Christ. When a woman got up with an uncovered head, it reflected on Christ. If our worship leader dressed in a dirty T shirt with a beer advertisement on it, or dressed in Gothic black with chains and black makeup, that would send a louder message than his voice, wouldn't it. Even though clothes don't matter in themselves (you can pray to God with or without them and no matter what kind they are), his inappropriate choice in this culture would send a message about how he regards God. We'd see it as dishonoring. These women in Corinth were dishonoring God through their built-in culturally inappropriate choice. It was reflecting on God. Second:

b. we dishonor our spouse (5) LuAnn has always told me that the way I dress is a reflection on her; that's why she picks out my outfit for Sunday! She doesn't trust me! In truth, she wants me to look my best and if I don't, she feels responsible for it. But if I chose to wear a T shirt that said, "Want to join me for a one-night stand?", wouldn't I be totally dishonoring to her and my relationship with her? Even if I didn't mean it? The same thing is true if I join in with the guys at work in their lewd comments about some woman walking by. My appearance and my words can dishonor her. And if she were to go out in church or in public with an appearance that looked loose and inviting to men, it would dishonor me and her relationship with me! Again, these women in Corinth were dishonoring their husbands through their culturally inappropriate choice. Then third:

c. we disgrace our own selves (6) The reference to shaving the head is not clear. Many writers seem to say that the numerous pagan temple prostitutes in Corinth shaved their heads or wore their hair short and man-like to indi-

cate their distinction from other women and their availability, but I don't really know if that's true. In some places adulteresses were driven out with heads shaved. Others point out that for a woman to leave her hair loose and flowing was a sight reserved only for her husband and to do that in public was a mark of looseness and that if she was going to do that, she might as well go all the way and shave it and disgrace herself totally. What seems really clear is that for a woman to have her head shaved or buzzed close was a disgrace in that culture and that not wearing a head covering sent the same negative message and it wasn't good. When I dress inappropriately, it sends a message about me, about who I am and about my values, and perhaps a message I don't wish to convey! I disgrace myself.

So, should women wear a veil in church today? Some entire denominations have taken this command as a principle instead of a practice. Mennonites and Amish and some Brethren groups do this. Their women wear little head coverings to this day. Even Roman Catholic nuns wear a habit to cover their heads. But if the command is merely about a practice, the way we understand it, how do we go about:

III. Applying The Timeless Principle To Our Cultural Practices? I loved this quote I read on the web: *In applying these verses, then, the question becomes, "Would wearing head coverings in our day honor this principle?" Consider a quote from the following article by Kenneth T. Wilson, entitled, "Should Women Wear Head Coverings?": "The headship established by God should not be disregarded. To overlook God's distinctive function for men and women is disgraceful. That is true in any culture. The expression of disregard in the Corinthian culture was the removal of women's head coverings. Paul's response was to tell them to wear what was the **normal** cultural expression of male-female distinction. In the Greco-Roman culture that distinction was revealed by women wearing head coverings. However, to require women today to wear head coverings in church is to ask them to do something **abnormal** rather than normal. This is exactly what Paul wanted to avoid. He wanted women to do what was **normal** in their culture in reflecting their womanhood and the creative order and distinction set forth in verse 3. To be obedient to this passage Christian women should not dress in a way that blurs the distinction between male and female."* That says it in a nutshell, but let me add three things:

1. we must be willing to consider cultural norms and how the wider church has reacted to them (16) We don't get to be independent in the way we dress and simply do what we want. We have to consider the message it will send and how it will be perceived by the people we live among. And we have to consider how the people of God, of whom we are a part, are choosing in our time to obey God in this area. It DOES matter what everybody else thinks...they just might be hearing the Holy Spirit!

2. our dress should always honor God in the context of our culture Our daughter lived in the country of Jordan. In the city in which she lived (which is very HOT), she did not go out in public without either having long sleeves or $\frac{3}{4}$ length sleeves. To have shown her arm would have been a sign of looseness there and further, because people knew she was American, they assumed that she was a Christian and it would have reinforced the impression they already get from American TV and movies that Christians are immoral people! It would literally have dishonored Christ. If she went to a remote village which is less used to modern ways, she was always careful to wear a head scarf and long skirt outside. Otherwise, she would have dishonored God in that subculture. Our culture just now is given to an extreme amount of body exposure for women. Designers are impacting the way our young ladies dress with lots of midriff exposure and low cut V's. It may take some ingenious shopping to find things that are tasteful and still look good, but don't let the popular trend cause you to be unaware of the message that the way you dress may send. We should dress in a way in our culture that those around us will perceive as being wholesome and pure and normal for a person who professes to love God. Finally:

3. our dress should always honor our spouse in the context of our culture If we are married, it should indicate that we are happy and satisfied in our relationship and not trying to attract the eyes of others. If it is honoring to God, it will be honoring to our spouse.

John Hess-Yoder shares this story: *While serving as a missionary in Laos, I discovered an illustration of the kingdom of God. Before the colonialists imposed national boundaries, the kings of Laos and Vietnam reached an agreement on taxation in the border areas. Those who ate short-grain rice, built their houses on stilts, and decorated them with Indian-style serpents were considered Laotians. On the other hand, those who ate long-grain rice, built their houses on the ground, and decorated them with Chinese-style dragons were considered Vietnamese. The exact location of a person's home was not what determined his or her nationality. Instead, each person belonged to the kingdom whose cultural values he or she exhibited... [Leadership-Vol. 7, #3.]* The values you exhibit in the way you dress send a message; they advertise clearly to the people around you what Kingdom you belong to. Dress in a way that advertises God's Kingdom in a positive light and shows that you belong to it.

Eleven Problems In The Church - 1 Corinthians

11) The Problem Of Disregard For The Lord's Supper - 11:17-33

Today we're going to come to the end of our series as we end chapter 11. The Corinthians obviously had more than 11 problems, but we've already studied the ones that follow in the remaining chapters in other series, so we'll end today by

looking at a problem that would probably never even enter our minds. Paul chides these believers at Corinth because they were showing an utter disregard for the Lord's Supper. Now, so that you will understand what Paul is saying, let me give you some background about:

I. How The Lord's Supper Came To Be Celebrated When you think of the Corinthians celebrating the Lord's Supper, don't think of the way we do it here today. Don't think of a whole congregation in a church building with stained glass windows; they met in small groups in homes. Don't think of golden trays and little plastic cups and pew racks; there was only an ordinary loaf of bread and ordinary drinking cups at a table or a mat spread on the house floor. It is amazing to me how far we have taken such a simple thing away from its original context.

1. it originated as part of Jesus' last Passover meal Verse 23 says it began on the night Jesus was betrayed, at that last meal He had with His disciples. It was a Passover seder and there was a lamb on the table. But Jesus didn't point to the lamb. He took the *matzoh*, the unleavened bread, from the table and as He broke it and passed it to them, He gave it new meaning: *This is my body; eat this to remember Me*. And when they came to the last cup of wine of the meal, He gave that new meaning also: *This cup is My blood; drink this to remember Me*. It passed right over their heads that night, but later, after He returned to heaven, they realized that Jesus meant for them to do this whenever they ate and drank together. They realized that HE was the real Passover Lamb who had been slain for their sins and that, just as the Passover meal was a regular reminder of the Exodus that had saved the Jewish nation, so the bread and the cup were to be celebrated as a regular reminder of the cross where their true Passover was sacrificed. They figured out pretty quickly that He didn't mean for them to do it only once a year at Passover and once people from all the nations began to believe, they didn't celebrate the Passover anyway, so this act of taking the bread and the wine was separated out from the Passover in their thinking and:

2. it became known as the Eucharist (or Thanksgiving). It comes from verse 24 where Jesus took the bread and gave thanks. And it IS an act of thanksgiving, a time of giving thanks to God for the unspeakable gift that He gave us when He gave His Son to the cross for us. Now, this special act of *eucharist* or giving thanks:

3. it was originally connected with a common meal Paul mentions it as the *Lord's supper*, the term we usually use, in verse 22. Eating together was one of the first things the new believers did in Acts. They came together in each other's homes to share a meal and to worship. The meal became known as the *agape* meal or love feast. Everybody would bring food and they would eat together and then use the bread and a cup to give thanks and remember the Lord's death. That's what you're reading about in this chapter and that practice continued for a century or so, but as the Eucharist was given more and more significance as a ritual act with memorized words:

4. it was soon detached by the 200's AD and made into a stand-alone act. And the meal, believe it or not, was eventually banned in the 300's because of abuses. So much bad stuff happened at meals which were supposed to be love feasts that the church at large banned them and threatened those who held them with excommunication! Now, that says something to me! This problem here at Corinth is a real problem, one that grew to epic proportions throughout the world!

And you know what, it's still here today! We may not celebrate the Lord's Supper in the same manner or as part of a love feast like they did, but we can still abuse the occasion of it exactly like they did! So, let's look at what Paul says about:

II. How The Lord's Supper Can Be Abused (17-22) We already studied back in the first four chapters that the church at Corinth had become divided into factions, cliques, groups that wouldn't associate with each other, each insisting on doing things their own way. So, when it came time to have a love feast and celebrate the Eucharist together, they came with all of that still intact, despising one another in their hearts. And just so, one of the things that displeases God greatly is that when we come to the Supper:

1. we may disregard the unity of the body (18) The one thing that Jesus prayed for that very night as they were leaving the Upper Room is that all His followers would be ONE. He prayed that they would be brought to perfect unity. And the Lord's Supper is about what truly makes us one. We can have all kinds of differences in how we go about serving and following Christ. We can dress differently and sing differently and have different ways of raising money and methods of evangelism, but there is one thing that unites us, one thing that binds our hearts: Christ died for us. And the Lord's table is our reminder of that. Look back at 10:17. We are His body. And the fact that we all partake of the one loaf which represents His body, says we are one. The hymn says, *We are not divided; all one body we!* So, when we come to the Table and we detest other members of the body, we abuse it. Don't come to the Table, to this great celebration of love, with feelings of anger or hatred or disdain in your heart toward someone like they were doing. Then, another way we can abuse the Supper is that:

2. we may disregard the sacredness of what we celebrate (20) They were eating supper, all right, but it wasn't the Lord's Supper. They were eating and drinking with no real thought about Jesus and about what His death meant to them. Now, this one is very easily possible for us to do today. In the first place, it is so easy for us to let anything like communion become a meaningless ritual, an act that we do without even thinking. We just go through the motions because that's what we do in church, but our minds are out on the golf course or pondering the afternoon football game

or watching the new girl in the front pew, with no thought at all about Jesus Himself. *Roger Rose said that when he was a boy, his family lived on a farm alongside a dirt road. Only on rare occasions would an automobile pass by. But one day as Roger's young brother was crossing the road on his bicycle, a car came roaring down a nearby hill, struck the boy, and killed him. Roger said, "Later, when my father picked up the mangled, twisted bike, I heard him sob out loud for the first time in my life. He carried it to the barn and placed it in a spot we seldom used. Father's terrible sorrow eased with the passing of time, but for many years whenever he saw that bike, tears began streaming down his face." Roger continued, "Since then I have often prayed, 'Lord, keep the memory of Your death as fresh as that to me! Every time I partake of Your memorial supper, let my heart be stirred as though You died only yesterday. Never let the communion service become a mere formality, but always a tender and touching experience.'"* The Lord's Supper is deliberately getting the bike out to stare at it all over again. It's a remembrance of something so precious, something that saved our lives forever. We don't ever want to get over that; to treat it with indifference as though it's just some meaningless ritual is blasphemy! Or worse, maybe we're sitting here supposedly celebrating how Jesus saved us from our sins and the whole time we're involved in some sin in our lives and we have no intention of giving it up. The thought doesn't even enter our minds that we're continuing to do the very thing that Jesus died for. When we come to the table like that, with utter disregard for all it means, we abuse it. And thirdly, as we come:

3. we may disregard others and their needs (21-22) Evidently, the idea was originally that everybody brought something and they all shared it together, kind of like our pot-luck dinner. But somehow the ones who had more wanted to bring their own and eat it, leaving the ones who had little or nothing without much to eat. And those who were better off could leave their work and get there earlier; slaves and servants couldn't come until later after their duties were finished. But the early birds didn't want to wait for the rest; they brought their own stuff and dove right in! They ate and drank their fill without any regard for anyone but themselves. Oh, do we come to the Lord's table with utter disregard for the other members of the body and their needs? Do we come only thinking of ourselves or do we come with a heart full of gratitude for the brothers and sisters around us, fully engaged in praying for them and helping them with their needs. It is truly a feast of love and if we are not loving one another the way Christ loved us, which is what we are remembering at the Table, then we are abusing the Supper, just as surely as the Corinthians were. Now Paul goes on to explain clearly:

III. How The Lord's Supper Should Be Understood (23-26) First of all, I have to point out that:

1. it is not an ecclesiastical ritual but a sacred symbol Jesus was being plain and simple. He said, "I want you to break bread like this and drink the cup to remember ME, to remember what I am about to do for you, to remember that I am your Passover who was sacrificed for you." It was to be a memorial, a symbol to keep us from forgetting and a sacred symbol because what it represents is such a holy thing, the kind of thing that makes you take your shoes off because you're on holy ground as you remember it and think about it and give thanks for it. That's how it started, but in the centuries that followed, the doing of the act itself came to be regarded more as something that is a means of receiving in some form the salvation it was meant to remember. Today the Roman church teaches transubstantiation, that the bread and the wine turn into the actual body and blood of Christ and that He is sacrificed over again and we literally take HIM into ourselves in the Eucharist. It is the central act of every service, of the very life of the church. Other denominations teach consubstantiation, that Christ's spiritual presence is IN or WITH the bread and the wine as we take them. Listen, His Presence is ALREADY IN US; His Spirit lives in us! We'll never have any more of Him than we already have! Communion is a sacred symbol that I do so that I will never forget the act that made that possible! Jesus said that:

2. it declares that I participate in the New Covenant with God that was made through Christ's sacrifice Look back to **10:16**. By taking these simple elements, we declare that we belong to this New Covenant Jesus made.

a. the bread symbolizes His body which was given for me His bodily sufferings, His passion, the floggings and the beating and the torment and the nails and the agony of the cross - that was for ME! He did that in MY place. I deserved that; I deserved the very wrath of God that was poured out in all its fullness on Him. Yet He took it for me and when I take this bread, I declare that I am trusting that He is my Substitute. And:

b. the wine symbolizes His blood which was shed for my forgiveness Yes, I know we use grape juice, not real wine. That's largely because of the American temperance movement of the late 1800's and early 1900's and a minister by the name of Charles Welch who figured out how to pasteurize grape juice, built a company out of it, and convinced his church and many others to use it to this day. Through the centuries and in most of the world, it's always been wine. (And by the way, the little plastic cups come from the American consciousness of sharing germs by sharing a cup; they really don't help the symbol much.) But the point is not the alcohol content or the vessel we receive it in, it's the color! The red color of the wine is to remind us of Christ's blood, to remind us of how He shed it for us there on the cross, of how they pierced His side and it came out. The Old Testament says clearly, *The life of the flesh is in the blood...* It was His very life that was drained out for me, for my sins. It was the precious blood of His pure, innocent, perfect life that was shed, instead of mine, and it bought my forgiveness. It washed away my sins and made me white as snow before God. So, when I drink it, I say, "This is MY covenant; Jesus has saved ME by His sacrifice!" And then Paul adds in verse 26 that:

3. it proclaims the message of His death until His return (26) It is not only a reminder; whenever we celebrate it, it is a proclamation, a message in symbol form that Jesus died for our sins, a simple two-act play that we are to keep doing over and over until He returns and the fact that we are still doing it says that we are still waiting expectantly for His return! We are looking for Him to come back! We're planning on it! And until He comes, we keep on reminding ourselves of His death and proclaiming it to the world until that day when we see Him in person! Then finally, Paul closes by explaining just:

IV. How Serious The Lord's Supper Is (27-34) Let's boil those verses down to three things that are clear and easy to remember about the Lord's Supper. First:

1. taking it in an unworthy manner profanes Christ's sacrifice It is not that the bread and the juice are mystical sacred objects, but when we come with malice in our hearts toward others or without love for them or take it in a light and flippant manner or do it as a matter of rote, we fail to recognize the seriousness of what they represent. It is a kind of blasphemy. It is like saying that the death of Christ doesn't matter to us. **Heb. 10:29** says, *How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?* That's what we're doing when we treat this sacred symbol in the wrong manner; we're thumbing our nose at Jesus' death, treating the holiest thing in the universe as if it were nothing; we're blaspheming! And that's why Paul says:

2. taking it in an unworthy manner may bring God's discipline in (28-30). A good number of the folks in the church at Corinth had become sick or were physically weak and some had even died because of it. God disciplines His children! He loves us too much to let us go on being such a poor testimony to His grace. And in this matter of something so sacred and serious, He may even take one of his children out of this world for it. John said, *There is a sin unto death!* In Acts 5, one couple in the church, Ananias and Sapphira, lied about their giving and God struck them instantly dead because they dishonored Him so! And Luke adds that *great fear seized the whole church when they heard about these events.* Man, we never think about that! I wonder how many brothers and sisters through the years have dishonored the Lord's table enough that He has had to send serious illness into their lives to wake them up and draw them back to a place where they take Him seriously! I wonder how many He has sent to an early grave because they would not heed the warnings of His Spirit in their hearts! I wonder whether He has ever done that here with people we know? Of course, we have no way of knowing if He has, but those verses apply as much to us as they did in Corinth and I sure wouldn't want to be found taking the death of Christ lightly. Now please, don't sit in fear every time you take communion, wondering, "What if I'm taking this in an unworthy manner??" Listen, the very fact that you'd worry about it is the best evidence that you're not! The good news is that:

3. taking it in an unworthy manner can be avoided by self-examination If we examine and judge ourselves, God won't have to do it for us! Read verse 28 again. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, it is a time to examine our hearts, to search ourselves before God and see that we're truly honoring Christ's sacrifice with our lives. And if we're not, if His Spirit brings to mind something that is not right, then we have opportunity to fix it, to repent, to change! And that very willingness to repent, to change our minds because of what Christ did for us is exactly what God is looking for in us!

*Shortly after dawn one August morning in 1944, the citizens of the small French village of Plelo were herded into the town square to face a German firing squad. The night before the Germans had routed a small unit of French underground freedom fighters. Among the villagers lined up in the square was a 15-year-old boy. He didn't really understand why, but he knew that they were all about to die. He thought about the days before the war when he had roamed the green countryside. He thought about how much of life he would miss out on. More than anything, he was afraid of dying. He wondered what the bullets would feel like as they tore through his body. Then, suddenly, the boy heard explosions in the distance. Tanks could be heard approaching the village. Quickly the Nazis ran from the square to defend themselves against a unit of 20 American soldiers led by a Corporal named Bob Hamsley. One of the fleeing freedom fighters had asked Hamsley to come to the aid of the villagers. Three hours later 50 Germans were dead, and the other 50 were prisoners. Nearly half a century later in 1990, in the same square where scores of Frenchmen came so close to death, the town of Plelo held a ceremony to honor Bob Hamsley. The man who tracked Hamsley down and made the arrangements for the ceremony to be held was that same 15-year-old boy, who was now a former mayor of Plelo. He had purposed in his heart to find and honor the man who had saved his life. The point? **A savior is not easily forgotten.** [From Leadership, Winter 1992. Page 49.]* The story of Calvary that we tell over again in the Supper is far more dramatic than this. It is the story of the One who saved your life eternally by sacrificing Himself. And if you are truly saved, if you know that you have been rescued from eternal death, then you must realize this truth: A Savior is not easily forgotten! Let us remember Him as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's Table.

2 CORINTHIANS

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The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7 The God Of All Comfort • 1:3-11 • The Issue Of Presence

I. Introduction To The Series As I was reading through the book of 2 Corinthians in my devotions, God impressed the first five chapters upon me in a new and special way. I noticed:

1. the intense sufferings with which Paul was afflicted This letter is overflowing with words like "suffering, trouble, hardship, danger, distress, hunger, persecution, sorrow, tears, and weakness". And it dawned on me that for all the glory in which we paint Paul's life as "the ideal Christian", "the greatest missionary" and so on, it was really a life of pain and misery. He was continually jailed, beaten, run out of town, threatened, argued with and criticized. He traveled repeatedly and lived in constant danger. Some of you can relate to that. I thought about how many painful things I've been walking through with so many of you over these past years: debilitating diseases, terminal illnesses, the fear of your own death or that of a loved one, financial distresses, marital problems, separations and divorces, conflicts with other people and the list goes on. Our lives are filled with sufferings the way Paul's was. But I noticed another thing in these chapters:

2. the eternal glory on which Paul focused Every time he mentions suffering, in the next breath there is glory. The words "comfort, joy, rejoicing, triumph, and glory" abound. It is spelled out in **4:18-19**. There's the key to surviving suffering: focus on the glory! That's how Paul made it through. His eyes were riveted, not on the suffering he was experiencing, but on the glory it was working in and through him. And that's not just for him; it's for us! The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in and to us! But how do we keep that focus? How do we keep looking at the glory in the midst of the pain? Well, I also noticed throughout these first five chapters:

3. the key expressions God has given to keep us focused on the glory through the pen of Paul, key phrases we already all know which, if we can hold onto them, will point us to the glory when we suffer. Phrases like, "The God of all comfort", "Not yes and no; always yes", "the guarantee of what is to come", "treasure in jars of clay", "a house not made with hands", and more, each of which addresses in a nutshell the key issues that bombard us when we suffer, issues like, "Where is God?", "How can I be sure?", and "What if I don't make it?" They are precious gems of truth that we desperately need.

And so, out of all my "noticing" today we embark upon this brand-new series of studies which I've called "The Suffering And The Glory". The first phrase I want to impress upon you is in verse 3, "The God of All Comfort". The first meaning of the word "comfort" in the dictionary is the first one that comes to our minds when we hear it, "to soothe in time of affliction or distress". We always picture our mother or somebody bending over and trying to calm us, going, "There, there, don't cry; things will be alright!" That works OK on a child who stubs their toe, but it doesn't go too far in the deeper sufferings that life brings. In order to understand the true nature of comfort, you first have to understand:

II. The Nature Of Our Sufferings (8-11) Paul never pretended with people. He didn't put on the smiley face and say, "Oh, I'm just fine" when he was dying inside. He was on his third missionary journey and had just left Ephesus in Asia Minor after spending three whole years. He had left after a riot by the silversmiths in Acts 19 and he told the Corinthians honestly about the hardships he endured during those years. In his description we find:

1. the elements of our sufferings And, by the way, notice the plural forms. hardships, sufferings, and so on. Life is not one long misery of suffering. There are incidents of suffering interspersed with incidents of joy and other things. Each suffering is individual, though there are many of them. And Paul uses three key words to describe them:

a. hardships: The Greek word (the same one translated *troubles* in verse 3) means to squeeze under pressure, to be crushed like a grape until you pop. One element of our suffering is that we are **crushed by the pressure of the situation**. We would call it **stress**. A loved one is dying and you are called upon to decide whether to pull the plug on the respirator. You feel great pressure; you're torn between the love which makes you cling to that person tenaciously and the knowledge that says you have to let them go and release them from suffering. The boss tells you to make bricks but he won't give you any straw. He wants 80 hours' worth of output in 40 hours' worth of paid time. Pressure. The situation demands more of you than you can produce, no matter how hard you try. Life is full of hardships, pressurized spots. Then Paul uses the word:

b. sufferings: (verse 5). The Greek word comes from *pascho* from which we get our word "passion" and the sense of it is to feel the suffering, to be **wounded by the hurt of the situation**. Suffering brings **pain**, sometimes physically and even more often, emotionally. Your spouse or your little child dies suddenly in an accident. Your eyes well up, you begin to wail. How do you describe what you feel? You call it anguish but it just hurts deep inside! Then Paul uses a third word:

c. pressed down: (verse 8, *under great pressure*). It means to carry a burden that is extreme, that forces us down like the donkey who is overloaded and falls beneath the weight. Sometimes you are simply **disabled by the weight of the situation**. The burden is so great that you can do nothing to lift it, to change it; you are left in **helplessness**. You're the victim of a crime, a kidnapping or maybe even a rape or perhaps a terminal disease or AIDS; it is the sense of helplessness, powerlessness, the inability to protect yourself, to do anything to change it, that devastates you most. You can become like Job who could only sit on the ash heap for days and scratch himself.

Stress and pressure, agonizing pain, overwhelming helplessness, these are some of the key things that incidents of suffering send crashing into our lives. And no matter who you are or what you do, they crash into yours too; Paul found them all in the course of the ministry! Now note:

2. the intensity of our sufferings As Paul says about his in verse 8:

a. they may be beyond our limits of ability The stress may be so great that it is literally, "beyond measure", "beyond the mark," beyond what we have ever been able to cope with, have ever been able to handle, beyond all our resources and knowledge to face and:

b. they may require more strength than we possess Either physically or emotionally the pain may be so intense that it is not possible to bear up under it. In fact, sufferings may go so far that:

c. they may destroy our belief that we can survive Paul became convinced for a time that he was going to die; he felt the sentence of death. He did not believe he was going to survive; he was sure that his life would be lost in the process. Glenn Hoerr writes: *"It was one of the most beautiful and historic places in central Germany. The guesthouse I was staying in was clean and comfortable, and the people were friendly. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Why then was I so miserable? I had never felt such loneliness before, nor have I since. In fact, I felt so lonely I was convinced that if I went to sleep, I would die. I had been in Germany for about three weeks, as a civilian working with the Army Chaplaincy to train soldiers how to study the Bible and lead Bible studies. It was for a minimum of six months, and there was no question I was where God wanted me to be. One fateful day, however, was the culmination of a series of events that left me paralyzed with loneliness and fear. I spoke no German, my car had broken down that afternoon on the autobahn, I was traveling alone, the person I was to meet at the Army base was not there or even expecting me, and the girl I had dated for the past five months was 9,000 miles away. After what seemed like the longest day of my life, I sat in my cozy room, overwhelmed by the loneliness I felt. My mind raced through one scenario after another, each one leaving me feeling a little worse. Glenn was afraid he would die. You say, over a car breakdown, a missed appointment, separation from a girlfriend, loneliness??? You can't gauge the intensity of suffering by academic evaluation! It can be extremely deep and penetrate to the very core of your being. But the true issue in suffering is not the size of WHAT has happened to me. It is an issue of Presence: I am alone. There may be people all around me, even loved ones, but nobody's with me in the tension I face, nobody's feeling the intensity of the pain in my heart, nobody can pick up my burden and I can't move it, not even God. Where is He? That's the issue: "Does God care about my sufferings and if so, where is He?" "He should be here! I don't see Him; I don't sense Him; if He were here, He would never let this happen to me. I'm alone and I'm dying here!" God pointed out this problem back in the garden: it is not good for man to be alone. He's not created that way. To survive he must know that he is not alone or he will lose all hope. Suffering comes in varying degrees but that's where it ultimately takes you; that's where it took Paul. But now, let's go back and look at:*

III. The Nature Of Our God (3-4) Oh listen! **He is the:**

1. Father of compassion, not simply a compassionate Father, the very Father of mercies. He invented feeling! The reason you can feel pain down in your gut is because you're made in His image; He FEELS pain! And the reason you can be cut to the heart by compassion over the pain of others is that **He is moved by the intensity of our sufferings**. Hebrews says, *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities...* - Heb. 4:15 (KJV) We don't just have a Savior who came down and bought our salvation and went back to heaven to wait for us! We have one who is touched with what we're feeling, who knows our pain to its very depths. *"Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth or song, as the burdens press and the cares distress and the way grows weary and long? Oh yes, He cares! I know He cares! His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long night dreary, I KNOW my Savior cares!"* How do I know? It's His very nature. He can't NOT care. He is the Father of compassion, the source from which all compassion flows. If nobody else cares about what's happening to me, HE cares. And then He is the:

2. God of all comfort The Greek word is **paraclete**, the same word Jesus used in the Upper Room when He told his disciples about the Comforter who would come, the Holy Spirit. It means **one who comes alongside to help** us in our situation. Comfort is not merely soothing somebody. It is coming and standing alongside them to help so that they will not be alone and left to themselves. The Holy Spirit is the comforter, not because He soothes us when we feel sad, but because He has come to permanently take up residence inside our mortal bodies, so that wherever we are, He is! Whatever we experience, He experiences with us. The word *comfort* comes from the Latin *conforte* which literally means "together strong", "to brave together". We have a God who says, "Fear not, for I am WITH you... My Presence shall go WITH you... Lo I am WITH you always..." We have a God who is WITH us; that's our comfort! Paul says:

a. His Presence is with us in all our sufferings He's a *paraclete*; He's with us not just in some, but not in others; He is with us in every last one of them. I never told you the end of the story of the man in Germany. He wrote: *"After hours of useless wallowing in self-pity, I decided to begin reading through the book of Psalms. That choice of last resort, which should have been the first, brought me to Psalm 37. Like a light being turned on in a dark room, I was reminded that I was in no way alone, for the Lord was holding my hand. With that in mind, I allowed myself to believe God was with me, loved me, and understood how I felt. The paralyzing fear lifted, and I slept soundly the rest of the night. Once I got my mind thinking right thoughts, I effectively handled being alone, without feeling lonely. That day is a constant reminder that I never need to be crippled by feelings of loneliness ever again."* [Time Out! compiled by Clint and Mary Bechwith. Evergreen Communications, 1989. Pages 145-146.] He is WITH me and He has promised never to leave me or forsake me! And because He is WITH me:

b. His Presence provides peace, strength, and hope What I can't cope with, I know HE can. When I focus on Him, I have peace that defies understanding, confidence that He is in control and we face the circumstances together, no matter how out of control things seem. What I have no strength to bear, He is there to bear with me. If I have no physical strength, He made my body and He can infuse it with His own mighty power that hung the stars in space so that together we carry the yoke. And if I have no more strength to bear the emotional hurt and pain, His Spirit is one with my spirit so that I cry out, "Abba, Daddy!", and we feel it together! And when I see no way out and am feeling the despair of my very life, He is there as the God who raises the dead! Whether I live or die, I belong to Him and He is with me! There is my comfort; He is WITH ME and we face life together! But notice Paul also points out that:

c. His Presence is most often evident through His people God often comforts us, reveals His presence with us in our suffering through His people coming along side us. The answer to our desperate cry for His help is often answered through the presence of one of His children who enters into our situation alongside us, who "braves our misery together with us". *Sister Alice was a Christian in China. Her husband was in prison. She was forced to push heavy wagons of construction rubble and shovel cement over her head for 80 cents a day to feed her six children and her mother-in-law. The day came when there was no more rice; they had already been without vegetables and meat for many days. That night she prayed in despair, "God, you promised to take care of me and now there is no more food!" Immediately she remembered what she had read that evening, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" She was convicted and fell on her knees to ask forgiveness. She thanked Him for being her provider and fell asleep. The next morning at 5 minutes to 6 there was a knock at the door. There stood an elderly lady holding a big box who said, "Are you Sister Alice; I've had a hard time finding you." She set the box on the table and went quickly out without identifying herself. She simply said, "I have no name; just thank God for that box." Inside was a large bag of rice, some meat and vegetables and at the very bottom an envelope. And inside the envelope was the equivalent of 50 dollars, a fortune to a woman who makes 80 cents a day. Folks, that lady was God with her, God comforting her, facing her poverty with her, providing what she could not! And that is most often God's way: He walks through our hardships with us in the shoes of His people. But why, our questioning minds ask, does He allow them at all? And the answer is that:*

IV. The Glory Of God Is Revealed In Our Sufferings (4-7) Comfort means:

1. we experience His fellowship in our sufferings Because we are with each other and share these deep experiences together, we experience our oneness with Him more deeply than at any other time. Paul said in **Phil. 3:10**, *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings...* He shares in mine; I share in His; our sufferings are one and the same because we are one and in that sharing is a deep communion only known by those who are co-sufferers together. And it is in the depths of our sufferings that:

2. we learn an absolute reliance upon Him (9-10) When you are squeezed past your limits, hurt beyond your endurance and helpless to do anything, all that is left is to cast yourself completely on His mercy, to count all on Him and nothing on you. And that's where you must get to, so that He may have His proper glory. You can't get there any other way. It's not an academic thing you learn. You learn to rely on God completely only at the end of your rope. Suffering breeds in us that whole new way of life, His life, life lived in His strength, not ours. And the icing on the cake is that:

3. we become His instruments to come alongside others in suffering He comes alongside us always so that we learn, not to soothe others and tell them everything will be all right, but to step into their lives and endure their pain, their heartache, and their loss together. We become His hands, His feet, His answer to their prayers in despair. We learn how to be a comforter.

*His name was Joseph Damien. A Belgian priest, he was sent in 1873 to minister to lepers in Hawaii. As soon as he arrived on Molokai, he began trying to build friendships with the residents of the leper colony, but they rejected him. He poured himself into this ministry, building a small chapel and holding worship services. But hardly anyone came. After 12 long years, he gave up. While standing on the pier about to board the ship that would take him back to Belgium, he looked down at his hands. The white spots he saw could mean only one thing. He had contracted leprosy. So instead of going home, he returned to his work in the leper colony. The news of the missionary's disease spread through the community within hours, and soon the lepers--hundreds of them--had gathered outside his hut. They understood his pain and despair. The following Sunday when Damien arrived at the chapel, the small building was filled to overflowing. That was the beginning of a long and fruitful ministry. What made the difference? Now the lepers knew that he understood their condition. There was no question about whether he cared or not. In the same way, we have a God who has identified with our situation. [Adapted from Moments for Pastors by Robert Strand. New Leaf Press, 1994. Day 11.] We have a God who braves all our suffering together with us and He proved it once and for all by becoming one of us and giving up His very life for us on the cross. It is out of that incarnation, that becoming one with us, that He comforts us, not just with these words, but by doing what they say, *Lo, I am WITH YOU always, even unto the end of the age!* And one who knows what it is to be comforted becomes a true instrument of comfort to others.*

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

Not Yes And No; Always Yes • 1:12-20; 23-2:4 • The Issue Of Faithfulness

We are continually getting mixed messages in life. David Egner writes that he got a letter from his credit card company saying, "Mr. Egner, you are one of our most valued customers. We would like to raise your buying power by \$3,000. The next day, because he was late in sending a payment of \$36.96, he got another letter from the same company. It made him feel like a terrible person. It seemed to be saying that if he didn't pay up immediately, they would take action against him, Which was he? A valued customer or a terrible person? Even more, how was he going to handle these mixed signals? On one hand, he was urged to go out and spend a lot more money. On the other, he felt threatened because he was late in making a payment. It's like the signals our society sends young people. In some ads, movies, and videos they're told to indulge themselves now - with sex or alcohol. Yet at other times they are warned about AIDS and drinking while driving. People send us mixed messages, one moment "yes" and one moment "no". They seem to say one thing and then do another or they tell us something is OK today but not tomorrow. They change their minds. There is a fickleness and a self-centeredness about us that pushes us to say and do whatever is in our own best interest, regardless of what we've said and done before. Much of the time we can handle this inconsistency in small things, but when we enter the arena of pain and suffering in life, when the chips are down, we begin to apply it to God and it becomes a deep problem, because it keeps us from seeing and focusing on the glory God is producing. Let's look together at an example of the problem in:

I. The Accusation Paul Faced from the Corinthians he was writing to. As Paul wrote he was concerned about the way they would respond to him because of:

1. the change in Paul's travel plans Now, before you scratch your head and say, "What's the big deal about that?", let me ask you this, "How do you feel about someone who promises you that they are coming to visit you on a certain day?" Because they're coming, you plan, take a day off of work and buy extra food. Then they call later and say, "Oh, I can't come; I've decided to visit my Aunt Sadie instead." So, you cancel all your plans and then they call back two days before the originally appointed day and say, "Oh, can I still come; my other trip didn't work out?" And now you've made other plans and you're wary of being disappointed again. Mixed messages; "yes and no". And what's the effect? Mixed messages ruin the person's credibility, right? Paul had made a similar change in his travel plans. Originally there was:

a. Plan A: Ephesus→Macedonia→Corinth→Judea (1 Cor. 16:5-8) He was at Ephesus and he planned to leave there, go across to Macedonia in the north and then south to Corinth before heading to Judea. However, things must have changed. Here we read:

b. Plan B: Ephesus→Corinth→Macedonia→Corinth→Judea (1:15-16) He now planned to sail straight across the sea to Corinth first, then go up north to Macedonia and come back, making it a double visit, spending more precious time with them, and then sail home to Jerusalem. Now, what you don't see here is that in between these two letters there is a:

c. the "missing" visit (2:1) Most scholars think that because of these words, Paul had made a brief trip across to Corinth sometime during his three years at Ephesus which is not recorded. It evidently was painful and did not go well and Paul went quickly home and wrote another letter which he mentions in (2:3-4), which is now lost to us but caused the Corinthians much grief. Now, ultimately what Paul did when he left Ephesus was this:

d. the final trip: Ephesus→Troas→Macedonia→Corinth (2:12-13) Back to plan A! And he wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians enroute before he arrived! So now, the Corinthians had heard, Plan A, Plan B, the in-between "showing up and leaving" and now back to plan A. And Paul knew what they would be thinking; he knew what those who were against him would charge him with:

2. the charge against Paul: inconsistency (1:17) "He says one thing and does another. He talks out of both sides of his mouth. You can't count on him." You know the all the lines, but look closer. Considering Paul to be inconsistent meant:

a. he considered them of little importance He made his plans lightly. His promises weren't important to him and that meant that he didn't consider them important enough to make them a priority. In fact, it meant that:

b. he was self-centered, doing what he wanted no matter what he said He would tell them whatever was to his advantage at the moment. He was like a used car salesman. I know a politician who I regard that way; he says yes to whoever approaches him, even though it may contradict what he's said to others. Inconsistency is self-centered, self-serving. The person does whatever is to their own benefit at the moment. But that's not the real issue in itself. Here's:

II. The Fear Paul Had: He was afraid their view of him would be a **reflection on his message and God's character (1:18-19)** He was the one who had preached the Gospel to them and disciplined them. He had taught them the truth. He didn't want them to think that what he'd taught them was also inconsistent, that it was for today but not for tomorrow. And since he had proclaimed it as a message from God, He certainly didn't want them thinking that God was inconsistent, that His promises were "yes and no", that He was undependable and self-centered. Now, we wouldn't normally think that, except when we suffer! However, when we're in pain and stress and tension, our flesh rises up to accuse Him the same way. **The Issue: God seems to be inconsistent - He does not do what He says.** "He says He loves me but He's letting me suffer all this pain. He says He'll provide for me but he's letting me go hungry or lose this or that. He says He'll be with me but nothing is changing in my circumstances. His promises only work some of the time, not all of the time! Or He does them for others and not for me!" When we suffer, those thoughts come! God sent Moses down to Egypt with the promise, that He would deliver them out of bondage to Pharaoh. So, Moses obeyed and strode up to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go!" Whereupon he was laughed out of the court, the people were forced to make bricks without straw and they turned against Moses and said, "May the Lord judge you for what you've done to us!" And Moses went right to God to say, *O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.* - Ex. 5:22. "Lord, You didn't do what you said!" I wonder how many a missionary has gone around the world at God's direction, trusting His promise, only to get there and find that his kids get sick and his health deteriorates and some of his supporters drop him and the very people he's going to don't respond to him. And in his heart, he finds himself pondering, "Is this why You sent me? Lord, you didn't do what you said!" I wonder how many a pastor has excitedly gone off to his new congregation, only to have a negative experience of suffering and has ended up with the same questions in his heart? And I wonder how many a believer has found himself facing terminal illness or being left by a spouse in a messy divorce or caring endlessly for an autistic child and saying in his heart, "God, I did what you said; Why am I here? You didn't do what you said!" *Larry Christenson writes: "When I was four or five years old, I used to climb up on my dad's lap and ask him to read me the funny papers. If he didn't have time, I'd badger my older brother into doing it. 'I'll be glad when you get into school,' my brother would sigh. 'Then you can read the funnies yourself.' That became the goal of my five-year-old life: When I got into school, I'd be able to read the funnies by myself! When my first day of school finally arrived, I was all dressed and ready--sitting out on the front steps at 5:30 in the morning. At last, the hour came, and I trooped off to school. Our class went through the routine of the first day, having seats assigned and getting acquainted. At the sound of the bell, I rushed home, came tearing into the house, threw open the evening paper, and flopped down to look at the funnies. And then I burst out crying. I couldn't read! My hopes were so fixed on the promise that I had failed to grasp the process by which that promise would come into fulfillment. It was perfectly true as my brother had said that when I went to school, I could read the fun-*

nies, but there was a process, a time gap, during which I would move into the fulfillment of that promise." [The Renewed Mind by Larry Christenson. Bethany, 1974. Pages 76-77.] Oh, it sounds so simplistic, but that's exactly what we do. We count on the promise to be fulfilled in the way we expect at the moment, in a way we recognize instantly and when it doesn't happen that way, we blame God for being inconsistent. But the truth is that in our limited human understanding we fail to see the process by which the promise is coming to fruition. So, how do we fix this about ourselves? There is only one place to begin and that is exactly where Paul goes. We must be absolutely convinced of:

III. The Faithfulness Of Our God (1:18-20) Did you hear it? God is faithful! Three times in his two letters to the Corinthians Paul repeated it so they'd get it: GOD IS FAITHFUL! *He who called you into fellowship with His Son is faithful. When you are tempted God is faithful and will make a way of escape.* And when the circumstances are screaming at you that God is inconsistent, God is still faithful. He does not say yes and no, but always YES! He can't help it:

1. He is faithful by very nature He can't change it any more than I can change the fact that I am a human being who is mortal. It's my nature to die. It's His nature to be faithful. Look with me at **2 Tim. 2:13**. To be unfaithful He'd have to act in a way that He's incapable of acting! He would deny Himself! And Hebrews tells us that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever!* James says that *with Him there is no variableness or shadow of turning.* He's consistent. You can count on Him. If He says it, He'll do it! He is true and trustworthy, even though every man is a liar!

2. He consistently cares for us He demonstrated it once for all in the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. He cannot love us one moment and not love us the next. He can't be touched by our infirmities one time and not feel them the next. His attitude toward us as His children is always one of consistent care and love and look what it says in verse 20:

3. ALL His promises are true, no matter how many of them there are! And there are thousands of them in His Word. He will do what He says; He's trustworthy. We can count on Him, that He will carry out His plans and fulfill His pledges toward us. And here's what we should do:

4. our response is to affirm Him through our "Amen" "So be it!" "Lord, you said it; you're faithful; it is true and so be it; Amen, You will do it! hether I see it or not, whether I understand it or not, whether it's the way I'd like it or not, Hallelujah!" His promises are bound up in His person. In Jesus He has given us His person to indwell us for all time. And in Him we already have the fulfillment of it all. But Paul did not say only that:

IV. The Explanation Paul Gave for what appeared to be his inconsistency (**1:12-14**) He says, "You only understand part of the story, the part you can see. I hope you'll come to understand the whole thing." Why did Paul change his plans so often? Well, notice something important:

1. his motives were consistent They never changed for one moment. First of all:

a. they were holy: pure and not to harm them He never intended to hurt them, to disappoint them, to distress them or to deny them anything. His heart never held any evil intention toward them. And:

b. they were sincere: honest and not to deceive them They would stand the examination of the sunlight of God's presence. In verse 23 he calls God as the witness to his motives. He never had any intent to deceive them, to say one thing and do another in a deceptive way. He never thought of what he was telling them as anything but truth. He was consistent in loving them, caring for them and wanting the best for them and:

2. his consistent motives produced his change in plans (1:23-2:4) Here is a rough translation of what he said, "Here's why I changed my plans. When I had the opportunity to come to you and I came and found it so painful instead of joyous as I had expected, I went home and prayed and made a decision in my heart. I wouldn't go back again as I had said and make another painful visit, but would write you a letter instead. I didn't want to Lord it over you by my presence and grieve you. I wrote you and put off coming so that there would be time for God to work and so that things would be cleared up and that when I did arrive it would be a time of joy and not reprimand. So, I wrote you with a broken heart and in tears so that you would understand the depth of my love for you instead of coming to you. And then (in verse 12) I set out to find Titus because I was worried about him, and then God opened a door of ministry at Troas, but I still needed to find him and moved on to Macedonia to head down to you eventually. But the point is that I never once stopped loving you and caring for you, even though I didn't carry out my promise in the exact manner I had intended. I did what was best for you!" Oh, can you put God's name on that paragraph? "My child, I didn't do what you expected me to do, but I did what in my wisdom I knew was best for you at that moment! I wasn't inconsistent; I was faithful; I never stopped loving you!" You see:

3. God's motives never change; His methods and circumstances vary One time He let Moses fail, but in the end, He made him succeed after a long and bone-weary process of plagues and confrontations. At times He led Israel to victory, but at others He routed her before her enemies when that was what she needed to turn her from her idolatry. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, as well as to the mountaintop to hear the voice of the Father. And at the bottom line, God's will sent Him to a cross before He could wear the crown. His methods and the circumstances which He sends may vary, but He is faithful. His love for us never changes and His promises are always ful-

filled in the end in His way. Listen to the writer of Hebrews in the Living Bible, *Well, how much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel and all the other prophets. These people all trusted God and as a result won battles, overthrew kingdoms, ruled their people well, and received what God had promised them; they were kept from harm in a den of lions and in a fiery furnace. Some, through their faith, escaped death by the sword. Some were made strong again after they had been weak or sick. Others were given great power in battle; they made whole armies turn and run away. And some women, through faith, received their loved ones back again from death. But others trusted God and were beaten to death, preferring to die rather than turn from God and be free--trusting that they would rise to a better life afterwards. Some were laughed at and their backs cut open with whips, and others were chained in dungeons. Some died by stoning and some by being sawed in two; others were promised freedom if they would renounce their faith, then were killed with the sword. Some went about in skins of sheep and goats, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in dens and caves. They were hungry and sick and ill-treated--too good for this world. And these men of faith, though they trusted God and won his approval, none of them received all that God had promised them; for God wanted them to wait and share the even better rewards that were prepared for us.* - Heb. 11:32 (TLB).

You cry out, "But I want to at least understand the process!" And He says, "You can't and you don't have to. I've given you My nature and My promise! I am faithful; I will do what I've said. Leave the process to Me and trust My faithfulness!" "At a young people's meeting a fresh-out-of-seminary youth pastor attempted to impress his group with the wonder of the divine inspiration of Scripture. He gathered the teens in a circle, put a chair in the middle, and handed out Bible verses to everyone in the circle. The idea was to blindfold someone sitting in the middle chair, have them tell the group some problem they were experiencing, and then have someone in the group read an applicable Bible verse as though God Himself were answering through the words of Scripture. The whole thing went miserably. The kids thought the whole idea was dumb. No one would talk about a problem more significant than how to get an A on Mrs. Bailey's math quizzes. Giggles rather than the voice of God predominated. Then a new girl who had been sitting on the periphery volunteered to sit in the middle chair. The giggling subsided a bit as they blindfolded her because no one knew her well enough to know how she would take it. Then she spoke: 'I don't know if I want to keep on with my life. I just can't stand it anymore.' Everything dropped to a dead silence. No one knew what to say or do and most just looked down in embarrassment of confusion. Then one boy read his verse, 'I am faithful; I will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, I will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.' 'No one cares about me,' said the girl. Then another girl in the circle read, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love and drawn you with lovingkindness.' 'You don't understand,' said the girl in the blindfold with a voice now desperate. 'My mother kicked me out of the house today!' Someone said, 'But Jesus says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."'"That was all. They took the blindfold off the girl, and through her tears she asked, 'Why doesn't God really talk to me just that way?' The youth pastor placed a Bible in her hands, put his arm around her shoulder, and tenderly said to her and to the whole group: 'The great thing about God's Word being inspired is knowing that He is talking to you just that way. God doesn't write in the clouds of the sky that blow away or speak in the night where only prophets can hear. He put His words right here in your hands where you can always read them and know that He is talking to you just that way.' [Using Illustrations to Preach with Power by Bryan Chapell. Zondervan, 1992. Pages 123-124.] Friends, this book is God talking to you when you're suffering. The words it is saying are true. They are not "yes and no" but always "Yes!" He loves you and He is faithful. He will do what He says. Trust Him and walk through it together with Him.

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

The Guarantee Of What Is To Come • 1:21-22 • The Issue Of Assurance

How many times in life have you heard it repeated that "there are no guarantees!"? Nothing in life is guaranteed, the old cliché says, except death and taxes. And suffering is the thing that pounds that lesson home painfully. The doctor comes with the bad news that there is cancer and an operation is needed. You ask whether you will be cured. And he says, "The chances are good, but you know, of course, that we can't make any guarantees." Your plant closes down and you lose your job and you have to begin looking again for the first time after many years. You become worried about how you're going to pay your bills. You figure there has to be something out there, but you're bothered by the fact that there is no guarantee. And we, for the most part, have it easy! For billions of people in this world, there is no guarantee that they will have food to eat tomorrow. When they get sick, even with things we consider routine, they have no guarantee that they will get well because there are no doctors and no medicines. And when they consider becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, they may face opposition and persecution; they may be thrown out of their home, rejected by their family, fired from their job or even jailed by the authorities! They have no guarantee that they will even survive! Even Paul talked about:

I. The Fears That Come Our Way When We Suffer - 7:5 Remember his travel plans from our last message? He had left Ephesus, gone through Asia Minor and swung up and over into Macedonia (northern Greece), which is where he wrote this letter from. He said, "I have had no rest, no peace, no calm. I was pressured, pressed, squeezed by the circumstances at every turn. All around me there are troubles that push at me." Life is like that. There are very few stretches of relaxation and rest. Suffering often comes relentlessly. But note what happens. There were conflicts on the outside, battles,

quarrels, struggles that he faced, with people, with false teachers, with wrong beliefs and responses. But these outside sufferings produced what? Fears on the inside! Now, Paul didn't elaborate on specifically what those fears were, but if you look closely at the sufferings you and others you love have endured, it doesn't take long to figure out that the bottom line is:

1. the fear of our own destiny: *what is ultimately going to happen to me?* Suffering breeds doubts that threaten us at the point of our deepest need, the need for security. At the core of my being, I need to know that I am safe. Name all the sufferings you like, from disease to financial crisis to divorce to crippling handicap to old age to persecution; they all create fears inside that boil down to this, "What is going to happen to me? Am I safe? Will I survive and be all right? And even if I don't survive physically, will I ultimately be OK? Will I be safe? Will I be secure?" And wrapped up with that is:

2. the fear of our own apostasy: OK, so I settle the issue of God's presence; I'm convinced that He's there, that He's with me and I believe that He's faithful, He won't fail to keep his promises, but what about me? ***What if I fail to remain true to Him?*** "I don't know how much I can take. What if the pressure gets to me and I do like Job's wife said to do and I blame and curse God or give in and do things He doesn't approve of? What if I fall into sin; what if the temptation is too great and I fall? Will I still be OK?" You see:

The Issue: Assurance and Security; I need to be sure I'm secure Security means I am safe and assurance means I know I'm safe. I need a continual assurance that I'm secure in order to function, and if I don't have it, I spend a whole lot of time and effort being afraid, worrying about it. It gnaws at me on the inside, so instead of having the peace of God which passes understanding like I'm supposed to have, I am frantic with worry and anxiety, doing everything I can to protect myself, or else I'm in depression and despair because I've given up. Maybe some of what I've described hits home. Maybe you know what it feels like to doubt and to fear, to lack assurance, but I have good news for you: WE DO HAVE a guarantee which Paul spelled out back in chapter 1:

II. God Has Guaranteed That We Will Stand Firm - 1:21-22 Did you hear that? There is a guarantee in life for the believer, one that supersedes any circumstance, one that is greater than any pressure, any suffering we face. We will stand firm in Christ! We will be safe in Him. We have a sure foundation that is rock solid and secure that cannot be shaken by wind or waves or people or circumstances or even by death itself. The moment we were saved we were placed IN Christ. Our destiny was fixed forever. We're in Him and what happens to Him happens to us; where He is, we are! We are secure in Him. Now, notice two facts:

1. our security depends on God not on ourselves We don't guarantee anything. We don't make ourselves secure. We don't make ourselves stand firm. Our security depends on God, not on us, not on our behavior, not on our performance, not on our endurance, not on our toughing it out, but on Him! Look at **Phil. 1:6**. Now, I know that specifically the "you" in this promise is the whole Philippian Church, but the same principle and promise is true of each of us individually as believers. God began the good work in you. God saved you. God called you to Himself. And He will be faithful to carry it on to its completion on that day when Jesus Christ returns. You say, "But what if I mess up; what if I foul up; what if I fall; what if I fail; what if I crack under the pressure?!" It doesn't depend on you. You are God's work. He started you and He's going to finish you. That's where your security lies: God always finishes what He starts. You're His project and He's going to finish you! Now, notice a second thing; the word order in the original of this verse is backwards from the NIV. Instead of saying, "It is God who makes you stand", it says, "He who makes you stand is God!" It emphasizes that:

2. the One who has given us that security is God If I promise you security and your security depends on me, you're in big trouble! But the One who's made you this promise that you are secure is Almighty God. He's the God who hung the stars in space, who set the world in place, who created all things by the word of His power. He's the God who brought the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, who parted the Red Sea and rolled the waters of Jordan back in a heap so that His children crossed on dry ground. He's the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who healed the sick, made the lame to walk, the blind to see and who raised Him from the dead and set Him at His right hand and who one day will send Him back to reign over this world forever and ever. A guarantee means nothing unless the guarantor has the power and the resources to back it up. We have a broken computer part and I've been trying to call for service under the guarantee for a week and can't get through. They don't have enough people and phone lines to support their guarantee. But the One who gave you your personal guarantee has the wherewithal to back it up; He is Almighty God! Hallelujah! But Paul doesn't stop there. He explains to us in these two verses exactly:

III. How God Has Assured Our Security When I buy something, it usually comes with a guarantee in writing. The guarantee is a piece of paper. God's written promise in His Word would be wonderful enough, but He has gone far beyond that. He has done it by a concrete irrevocable action that secured my destiny forever. The moment I believe, God places the Holy Spirit inside my body. He who is Almighty God enters my Spirit and is joined to it, so that He and I become one in the same fashion that the Father and the Son are one, the Scripture says. Now here Paul describes the effect of that glorious act using three metaphors, three meaning-filled words that spell out the assurance that gives us.

1. He anointed us: We don't use the word *anoint* much. It's a bit of a foreign concept to us. Very simply:

a. to anoint is to apply a substance: to dab or smear a substance on the body. In that culture usually it was oil of some sort. This was common for cosmetic, medicinal and special purposes. It was to put a lotion, a substance, on the body. God did that very thing; when I was saved, He anointed me. He put something on me: **He placed the Holy Spirit in me, so the Holy Spirit is our anointing.** Look with me at **1 John 2:20, 27**. We received the very Spirit of God to indwell us, to teach us all things, to verify all things for us. His presence in us is real and not counterfeit. It is permanent and it abides. He is given to us when we believe and He stays in us all the way to glory! God guarantees our security by actually uniting His Person with us. Now, there's more meaning here:

b. to anoint signifies consecration: In the Old Testament people were anointed with oil as a special sign that they were consecrated and set apart to God. Saul was anointed as king and so was David. It was a sign that they were God's chosen for that office. Aaron and all who succeeded him were anointed as priests. It was a sign that God had chosen them and set them apart for that special work. So, God has also anointed me with His Spirit. Why? As a sign that **I am chosen and set apart** from all the people on earth to belong to Him. Jesus Himself quoted **Is. 61:1**, *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...* The Spirit came upon Jesus and dwelt in Him as the sign that He was the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Chosen One. And the Spirit of God is in you for the very same reason. You are His chosen one. It means He has set you apart for Himself by placing the Spirit in you. But there is a second thing Paul mentions:

2. He sealed us: Now, using a seal is another thing that we're not very familiar with. A seal is a die that can be inked or pressed to leave a special identifying mark. Every corporation has a corporate seal. Glenside Bible Church has one to seal its official documents. I'll show you one. I want everyone who has a dollar bill in their wallet to take it out right now. A \$5 or \$10 won't work; you can just put them in the offering! Get a \$1 bill and look on the back right now. There is a picture of both sides of the Great Seal of the United States. It was adopted in 1776. On the front of the seal is an American eagle, shown with wings spread. On its breast the eagle bears a shield having 13 narrow vertical stripes, 7 white alternating with 6 red, which are surmounted by a broad horizontal stripe of blue. The eagle holds an olive branch in its right talon, a cluster of 13 arrows in its left, and in its beak a scroll on which appears the Latin motto *E pluribus unum* ("From many, one"). A cluster of 13 five-pointed stars, surrounded by a glory, appears above the eagle. A pyramid, truncated near the top, is the central figure of the reverse side. The base of the pyramid is inscribed with the date 1776 in Roman numerals: MDCCLXXVI. At the zenith of the pyramid, within a triangle surrounded by a glory, appears the all-seeing eye of Divine Providence. Above the eye is inscribed the motto *Annuit coeptis* ("He has smiled on our undertakings"). Below the pyramid is a scroll bearing the motto *Novus ordo seclorum* ("New order of the ages"). Any document bearing that seal is guaranteed by the full promise of the government of the United States. In like manner, Paul says Almighty God put His seal on us! **Eph. 1:13 says the Holy Spirit is our seal** Now, what does a seal do?

a. a seal declares ownership: It confirms identity. Whatever my seal is on belongs to me. It's mine. God sealed us by putting His Spirit in us and what's He saying? **This one belongs to Me.** This one is Mine! But it does more:

b. a seal certifies authenticity: Any document with a seal is considered genuine and authentic. If you want to prove the genuineness of your plain signature, you take it to a notary public who puts their seal on it and the seal certifies that it is authentic and genuine. The Spirit's presence inside me certifies that I am the real deal, that I am the genuine article. It is God saying, **This one is genuinely Mine** and:

c. a seal binds commitment: We put our seal on contracts and agreements to bind our commitment, to obligate ourselves to keep the promise we make. When something has been sealed, it must be kept. And by placing His Spirit in us, God is saying **I will keep My Promise concerning this one - Eph. 4:30.** Your sealing was done for the purpose of certifying and guaranteeing your future. It doesn't say *until* but *unto*. God put His Spirit in you to guarantee your safe arrival all the way through to the Day of Redemption when Jesus comes! It's a binding commitment that says, "When the Day of Redemption comes, you'll be a part of it. I guarantee it by the presence of my own Person in you!"

Now in case you're not already assured enough, Paul uses one last metaphor. He says God:

3. He guaranteed us: using a means we can all understand. He gave us a deposit or a down payment. You understand that, don't you?

a. a deposit or down payment is a guarantee When you buy something large, you certify your intention to fully purchase it by placing a deposit, a down payment, on it. Every year we rent a place for a week of vacation outside of Ocean City MD. I have to guarantee to the owner that I will keep my word and pay the bill by sending them a hefty deposit. And the first rule of a deposit is that it has to be significant, large enough to matter to the buyer, an amount he would truly value losing, in order for it to work. A large deposit is a sure guarantee of intent. So, look at **Eph. 1:14. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee.** He is our deposit, our down payment. God has promised us an eternal inheritance of safety, security and life in His presence, and He has placed the Spirit in us right now as the guarantee that He will complete the transaction:

b. His presence now guarantees we will receive all He has promised He is the guarantee of everything that is to come. He is the guarantee of our safety, our security. He is our assurance that all will be well in the end, that we don't need to be afraid of those who kill the body, that nothing can take us out of the Father's hand, that nothing in all creation can get between us. He is what makes us SURE that we are SECURE.

And when we get hold of that, when we understand and have that assurance, it sets us free! Free from the fears that suffering drives into our minds! We end up where Paul was. Look with me at Rom. 8:28-39. Nothing can separate us. We are predestined to glory; it's already done. The Holy Spirit in us guarantees what is to come. Whether we fail or falter or perform correctly doesn't change it. It's only our feelings that get in the way. *Irma Levesque tells this story: "I grew up in rural New Hampshire, the eldest daughter in a family of six children. In our chaotic household I found refuge in make-believe, often pretending that I was a beautiful girl named 'Joan Bishop' (Joan from Joan of Arc and Bishop from the English translation of my French last name). I never told anyone else about Joan Bishop. It was a secret between God and me. Little girls grow up, though, and the day came when I bade good-bye to Joan Bishop...and to God. I moved to New York, got caught up in a fiercely competitive line of work, and gradually found my personal life getting lonelier and lonelier. In time I knew I wanted to return to God, but I hesitated. Would He welcome me back? One Sunday morning I could not stay away any longer. I went to a nearby church. I walked down the north aisle, past the old pews, each with its own waist-high door and tiny brass nameplates, relics from the 19th century when parishioners purchased their seats. I chose an empty pew and closed the door behind me. 'Please, God,' I began to pray, 'I'm lonely and afraid. Are You here? Is this the place for me? Will these people all around take me in?' I wanted God's assurance that I should stay in that church, but no assurance seemed to come. Suddenly I felt an overpowering urge to leave. Hastily gathering up my coat and scarf, I opened the pew door and stepped into the aisle. As I turned to shut the old door, my eyes were drawn to its tiny brass nameplate. The plate read: J. BISHOP. I returned to my seat. I was home again."* [His Mysterious Ways. Fleming H. Revell, 1988. Pages 72-74.] Oh, my believing friend, you need never fear that He won't want you, that He'll reject you, that somehow some circumstance of life will get between you. His promise to you never changes. His Spirit is in you and will accomplish your arrival at the day of redemption. It's guaranteed.

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

The Aroma Of Christ • 2:12-17 • The Issue Of Observation

Don't you wish that life was smooth? Have you noticed how in life today can be wonderful and you feel like you're on top of the world, but tomorrow at the drop of a hat something happens and you're suffering and in pain? Wouldn't it be nice if once you know the Lord, that because you're praying about everything and being obedient, the majority of your problems would get ironed out so that you go smoothly around with gentle ups and downs like riding a merry-go-round at the amusement park? But the truth is that life is often much more like a roller-coaster, particularly the way they build them now days with twists and turns and upside down loops. Sometimes it's even like the "Tower of Terror" where the whole bottom drops out and you're free-falling and think you're going to die! The reality is that:

I. We Experience Many Ups And Downs In The Path Of Our Life You can even see it in the life of Paul, though we tend to view him as living on this high constant plane. He was constantly plummeted to the depths of suffering that were very, very difficult to endure and then lifted to moments of great joy. For instance:

1. Paul was downcast by Titus' absence and other problems (12-13) He left Ephesus after the danger of a riot. He went to Troas and had some opportunity to share the Gospel, but he was anxious and worried about Titus whom he'd sent to Corinth and hadn't come back. He went on into Macedonia and when he got there, look at **(7:5)**. He had all kinds of problems. There were arguments and disputes and conflicts. It was not smooth and Titus still didn't show up right away. Paul was downcast or depressed by it. He was really low. But then later:

2. Paul was uplifted by Titus' coming and the news he brought (7:6-7) God let Titus show up just at his lowest point and he was filled with joy and encouragement, not just that Titus was alright but that the Corinthians were doing well and that they loved Paul and longed to see him and that they were sorry for the sin they'd allowed to creep into their fellowship. How he rejoiced! God graciously gives us ups! But I want you to notice in **2:13** that he hasn't gotten to the up yet. He's still describing the downs, his concerns, his lack of peace of mind, his low. Then, all of a sudden, he bursts out in **2:14** *But thanks be to God!* Why? Not that there's always a high coming, but that even in the lows, like he was in in Macedonia, God is always leading us in a triumphal procession!

Now what's the issue here? Paul is thinking about the people reading his letter and listening to him and watching him. He doesn't want to give a false impression, that the highs are wins and the lows are losses, that the highs are God at work and the lows are Satan at work, that the highs are victories and the lows are defeats. Think for a minute about:

The Issue: Observation Yes, you may know that the *God of all comfort* is with you in your suffering; you may know that His promises are *not yes and no, but always yes* in Christ Jesus and He does not fail to keep them in His time; you may have full assurance that no matter what happens on the outside, you have a *guarantee of what is to come* that cannot be shaken. But others don't! The people out there watching your life don't have any of that. What will they think as they see us go through our highs and lows, rejoicing and being depressed? Will they blame God for failing us when we're down? Or

will they blame us for not being faithful to Him? Will our suffering undermine the very message we share? ***Will others be repulsed as they see us in suffering?*** And worse yet, there is a danger that I may somehow begin to see my life in the same way. It is so easy for my mind to begin to say that the downs are either God's failures or my fault; at any rate they are the times when the enemy is winning! They are losses, times that shouldn't be there if I'm faithful and obedient. But I want you to look at what God says!

II. God Says Our Life Is A Continual Victory Parade (14) There are two cultural terms that Paul uses in this verse and the next that are key to understanding but are not familiar to us. First, he says that:

1. the path of our life is a triumphal procession led by God The word *triumph* doesn't just mean to win. A *triumph* is an actual event. When a Roman general had been victorious in battle and defeated his enemies, he would go to the city of Rome and stage there a great parade called a *triumph*. He would parade his victorious army through the streets in front of the whole population. The general would be at the head of the parade and then would come the soldiers dressed in their finest array. And behind them would come a long train of captives, prisoners taken in the war and the spoils he had claimed. And by the time the parade passed by, everybody knew who had been victorious. Now, what Paul's saying is that our entire life is like one long victory parade that He has designed to be observed by a watching world. In what sense? Well, Paul uses parts of this same analogy three other times. First:

a. it is a public display of God's victorious power - Col. 2:15 A triumph is a public display; it is meant to be seen openly. The cross was like a triumph in that Jesus openly and publicly made a spectacle of the fact that He had far greater power and authority than the Jews, the Romans, the demons and Satan himself by rising from the dead! Our entire life is one continuous display of God's victorious power in our ups and in our downs. In us He displays marvelous answers to prayer as well as incredible patience in suffering. In us He displays His power to move the mountains of life and His grace to endure the deserts. Wherever He leads us in the parade, He is always displaying His power and life through us in any and every situation. Now this triumph:

b. it is actually a parade headed up to glory - Eph. 4:8 When the general returned home, the captives in his train were swept along behind him and the image is that they became his slaves, his servants, destined to be taken from their native land and to follow him to his. In this verse it's a positive thing. We're in a parade that our victorious Lord Jesus is leading up to glory. He's already arrived and we're still being swept along in His train. But:

c. sometimes it seems like a parade headed for the arena - 1 Cor. 4:9 The prisoners at the end of the parade, were often taken by the conqueror to be made a spectacle of for public enjoyment in the Colosseum where they would be forced to fight one another to death or be devoured by wild beasts. At any rate, the last were condemned to suffer and die. And Paul said, "Sometimes it seems like I'm at the end of the parade, like I'm one of those that's doomed to suffer and die. The difficulties and persecutions and losses I face overwhelm me and my fate seems sealed, but I'm still in the procession that He's leading up to glory."

Then there's a second analogy that Paul uses here in verse 15. He says:

2. our life is the sweet aroma of Christ (15) There's part of the triumphal procession I didn't tell you about. Along the sides of the parade would come bearers with sweet-smelling garlands of flowers and fragrant incense burning. The whole crowd could literally smell the parade as the aroma drifted through it. *An atheist once said to a Quaker, "Have you ever seen God? Have you ever touched God? Have you ever smelled God? And you say you have a God!" After a long pause, the Quaker replied, "Hast thou ever seen thy brains? Hast thou ever touched thy brains? Hast thou ever smelled thy brains? And thou sayest thou hast brains!"* You can't see God; you can't touch God, not yet anyway. But you CAN SMELL God! You can see the effect of His presence visibly at work in the lives of His people!

a. to people our life is attractive evidence of His presence without seeing They smell Him in the way we endure suffering, in the way we handle problems, in the way we forgive instead of retaliating, in the way we love our enemies instead of hating them, in the way we patiently endure instead of complaining and blaming, in the way we choose others instead of ourselves. They sense His presence at work in us and it smells good. It is a sweet aroma and it is attractive and pleasant to them. But not only to them. The incense the bearers were offering was not simply a sweet smell to the public, but also an act of worship. It was the presentation of a sweet smell to their pagan god Bacchus, the god who had given them victory. Similarly, Paul says that our life is an aroma of Christ to God.

b. to God our life is a pleasant and satisfying surrender of self. Rom. 12:1 encourages us to present our bodies to Him for His use as we pass through this world as our spiritual act of worship. We read that:

(1) Christ's sacrifice was a sweet-smelling offering - Eph. 5:2, ...Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Christ's act of offering Himself on the cross was pleasing and satisfying to God as an act of worship and complete devotion to Him, because it accomplished His will. Likewise, we read that:

(2) the Philippians' gift was a sweet-smelling sacrifice - Phil. 4:18, I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. When we give, it is evidence of Christ's presence at work in us and He is pleased with it as an act of our devotion and worship.

As we present our bodies to Him in times when we suffer and yield to His will and live out of His strength, it is an act of worship, pleasing and acceptable to Him at the same time that it is a sweet smell to the world around us. Now, just to make sure you get the picture, here's:

3. how the process works

a. God parades us on display before a watching world Everybody we pass by, the people at work, at school, on our street, at church, at the store, wherever they are. The people we play sports or coach with, the kids on our team, the neighborhood kids that play on the lot. God is parading us in front of them all in situation after situation as a display of Himself and:

b. the display is continual: Note the two universal words, **always and everywhere**. He leads us through the ups and the downs, the suffering and the rejoicing times of life, everywhere we go, through all kinds of experiences. The song says, *Through shady green pastures so rich and so clean, some through the water, some through the flood, some through the fire, but all through the blood. Some through great trial but God gives a song, in the night season and all the day long.* Continually, everywhere we go:

c. God spreads through our words and deeds the aroma of Himself They smell His presence in the way we live, the words we say and the way we react. Here's a simple illustration. *Pastor Billy Strayhorn tells about an experience he had several years ago: "I was standing in line at the grocery store. In front of me was a boy about eight or nine years old. He was looking over the display of candy bars. I remember thinking 'Good choice!' when he picked a big old Baby Ruth and laid it on the counter. The cashier rang it up and told him how much it was. The boy reached in his pocket and pulled out a bunch of pennies, nickels, and a single dime and plopped them on the counter. The cashier gave him one of those looks and started counting. Then he looked up and said, 'You're 12 cents short. You need another 12 cents.' The boy's shoulders drooped, his face dropped, and he went from grin to groan in less than a second. Just as the cashier started to tell the boy to put the candy bar back, I reached in my pocket and put 12 cents on the counter. The boy's face lit up like Christmas. He said, 'Thanks, mister.' And he took off, but then he turned around and came back. He held up the candy bar and asked, 'Hey, mister, you wanna bite?' I said, 'No thanks, you eat it.' Then he looked at me real careful, like he was studying me, and asked, 'How come? How come you did that?' Before I could answer, he got a look of recognition on his face. 'Oh, I know you, you're that preacher. Jesus made you do it, didn't He?' What could I say but, 'Yes, He did.' Then he said, 'I sure like Jesus, and I'm glad Jesus makes nice people like you. Bye.' Then he was gone. I don't know who touched whom more. I DO know that I've never gotten that much pleasure out 12 cents before or since. I didn't do anything special, but with God's love and 12 cents I was able to touch a little boy's life and bring glory to God simply by obeying Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves." [Parables, Etc. Dec 1995. Page 1.]* Sooner or later people figure it out, even kids, "Jesus made you do it, didn't He?" Jesus is what makes you act like that. Jesus is what makes you live that way! We are the aroma of Christ to them. He spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Himself through us! But:

d. He spreads it to two different kinds of people (15b) Some of those watching the parade are in the process of being saved. God is in the process of drawing them to Christ and your passing by and exuding His aroma to them is part of that process. But others are in the process of perishing. They are rejecters who are busy swishing away the smell every time it comes near. Now, that brings us to talk about:

III. The Seriousness Of Our Responsibility (16-17) You see, as we've said:

1. God produces through us a reaction to Himself by others When they see us and sense Him, they react:

a. to some it is a sweet smell which leads to life They smell the life that is in Jesus Christ and they want it. They want to know the God we know, to find the peace we've found, to experience the comfort we've experienced in Him. The knowledge of Him through us in all our ups and downs is leading them to life. But at the same time:

b. to others it is the repugnant odor of impending death The captive prisoners at the end of the parade smelled the same sweet smell but to them it was a reminder that they were headed for death in the arena, that their doom was sealed. Men hate the light because their deeds are evil and they want to hang on to them; men hate the smell, the aroma of Christ, because their deeds are evil and they like it and they don't want to know Him. The same smell; two vastly different reactions. But the point is that:

2. God carries the responsibility, not us You see, we're in a procession:

a. we are people sent and led by God He leads the parade. He chooses the circumstances, the ups and downs, sufferings and glory, so that He can parade us before others in all kinds of situations and spread the aroma of Himself through us in all kinds of ways. The responsibility seems enormous; it is life and death. But we are not responsible for the way people react to it. Rather:

b. our chief responsibility is sincerity The New Testament in Modern English translates: *For such service as this, who is sufficient? I am, for I am not like most, trafficking in the Word of God, but rather from a sincere heart, like a man of God, I speak in Christ, in the very presence of God.* God does not ask you to change people. He doesn't hold you responsible for creating in them the right reaction. All He asks of you is sincerity, that you surrender to Him and be a genuine display, that you show them what He is really like, not some false fake impression.

Lou Soiles writes: *"Jesus was sent to express the Father's love. Our Father loves the world with a wild, flaming passion, a passion full of tears and full of tenderness. God holds that passion for you--and also for the people around you. You are sent to display that passion, to express the Father's love to people you meet. Recently I was leading a Bible study with several students on the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. We were talking about the unquenchable love the father in the story had for his children when I noticed out of the corner of my eye that one of the students was beginning to cry. 'What's wrong, Chris?' I asked. She began to tell her story. When she was five her parents got divorced. Her father was there one day and gone the next--and until recently she didn't know where. For the last 15 years she had been trying to find her father and get to know him. She had written to him and called him, trying desperately to be his daughter. No response. He doesn't want to be her father. By the time Chris finished her story everyone was crying. Then Tom began to tell his story. He grew up in a high-achieving, workaholic family, and every day, even as a child, he would come home to an empty house. 'Sometimes,' he said, 'I would feel so lonely that I would put on my father's robe just so I could smell him.' One after another, each student told his or her story. A 90-minute Bible study stretched into several hours--hours of tears and pain, of comfort and support, of friendship and fellowship, and finally of relief and hope. That night we saw the Father's love."* [Student Leadership Journal, Fall 1995. Page 32.] Out there are people longing with tears to find the Father. Out there are people longing to quench the empty void inside them by simply smelling the aroma of His presence. They can smell Him in you. They can find Him through watching your life. Don't worry about the reaction of the rest. You are the aroma of Christ. Be sincere and real, genuine, no matter what you go through and they'll smell Him.

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

Tablets Of Human Hearts • 3:1-6 • The Issue Of Confidence

Today we continue our series about suffering in 2 Corinthians, but before we can move forward to our text in chapter 3, we have to take a few moments to review what we studied at the end of chapter 2. There we learned that:

I. We Are The Aroma Of Christ To Others As We Pass By (2:14) Remember? God is parading us in and out of peoples' lives in all our ups and downs so that as we pass by, they can catch His aroma, they can smell Him, they can sense Him without seeing Him, in us. Some respond and find life; others don't. But that's how God wants to use us during our lifetime; our passing by them is a matter of life and death. Now, at the end of that message we briefly touched on:

1. the questioning that arises about God using us in this way

a. we may question it in ourselves as Paul did (2:16b) We may look seriously at God's desire to use us to impact the lives of others and be struck by the immensity of that responsibility and say, "Who is enough for that? Who could do it?" We are called to represent God to men by our lives. God wants to use us to make an eternal difference as we pass by. What human being could be equal to that kind of task; it's impossible! It is so very easy for us to doubt and question that God can and does use us. And it is made even worse because:

b. we may face the accusations of others (1) There were some at Corinth who had questioned not only Paul's authority and integrity as an apostle, but Paul's ability. Compare 10:10. Paul's not the only preacher that has ever been said about! But it's not only preachers that get it. Does the phrase, "Some Christian you are!" ring any bells? All you need is some put-downs in life and it's usually not from unbelievers but from fellow believers. We get some criticism, some discouragement, we get told what a good job we didn't do or what we should be doing better or how they could do it better and the feelings of inadequacy can quickly begin to build.

2. the feelings this may generate in us The Greek word translated "to be equal to" in 2:16 is the same word translated *competent* three times in 3:5-6. It is used in two different senses throughout the New Testament. In some places it simply means "a lot" or "a large number" or "great quantity" or simply "enough"; it's found in phrases like "a large crowd was with Him" or "a large herd of pigs was feeding" or, when Jesus told Peter about the two swords, "it is enough". You see:

a. we feel unable to represent Christ to others We're not "enough" for it. We don't have the patience, the strength, the will, the wisdom to be Jesus to people. With the resources I have, I could never do it! It's like handing me the job of being President of the United States. It's so far above and beyond me that I wouldn't even know where to start. God talked to Moses out of the burning bush and told him, "You've been elected to be the Messiah, the Deliverer for Israel. Now march back down to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let them go. You'll be like God to them and bring them out!" And part of Moses' response was this, "Lord, how am I ever gonna make them believe me? I'm just an ignorant shepherd, not a miracle worker! I can't make them listen! Besides, I stutter. I've never been eloquent. You need a good talker to talk for you!" So many times we are swamped by the feeling of our own inabilities, our own lack of power to do what God wants to do with us. And the more we suffer, the more we hurt, the more

painfully our inabilities are pointed out to us! But it's more than that. The same word when used of people, carries the concept of worth. John the Baptist said about Jesus, "I am not worthy to untie His sandals" Literally "I am not enough; I don't deserve it." The centurion said to Jesus, "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof...I don't deserve it." So:

b. we feel unworthy to represent Christ to others Moses' first response to God was, "Who am I, Lord, that I should go... Who am I? I don't deserve to go. I don't deserve to represent you. I'm sinful. I fail. I blow it. I lose my temper. I say things I shouldn't. I lose my patience and grasp at straws." Paul said, "I don't deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. I have a track record, a past and it isn't very good. I'm unworthy of this high calling!" And so:

The Issue: Confidence - How Do I Know That God Can Use Me? "How can I believe and be confident that God can use me like this, that He can work through me and touch others? I go up and I go down, the winds and the waves of life take me through all these highs and lows and I need to KNOW that it matters, that through it all Jesus is actually revealing Himself through me to others. But how can I know it?" Well, one author says: *Let's try to imagine the captain of a ship, being driven about by rough winds who wants to drop anchor, but he's determined to try to find a suitable place to do so right on board his own ship? I know that's ridiculous, but for a minute think about it anyway. Picture the captain trying to anchor the boat. He hangs the anchor on the bow (that's the front for you landlubbers), but still the boat drives before the wind. He sets it on the deck, but this too fails to hold it steady. At last, he puts it down into the hold but has no better success. Why not? An anchor resting on the storm-driven craft will never do the job. Only if it is thrown into the deep can it be effective against the wind and current. The ship must be anchored in something outside itself and much bigger than itself. In the same way, the person whose confidence is in himself will never experience true peace and safety. His actions are as futile as one who keeps the anchor aboard his own ship. Cast your faith in the great depths of God's eternal love and power.* Friend, as long as you think that the job depends on you, your anchor's lying on the deck and the circumstances will sink you every time. Here's the solid biblical:

II. The Fact: God Has Made Us Competent (5-6) He made us equal to this task. He made us sufficient for these things. He makes us both able and worthy to be used by Him! Now, let's take these verses apart and notice first:

1. our competence is not in any measure based on ourselves (5a) Jesus didn't mince any words with us. He said, *Without Me or apart from Me you can do NOTHING!* - Jn. 15:5. "Not a little bit. Not part of the job. Not half you and half me. NOTHING. IT's ALL ME! Without Me, nothing! Unless I do it, nobody smells Me in you!" I have no competence. Rather, Paul says:

2. our competence comes from God (5b) That's true first of all in the area of salvation. Look what He has done:

a. He has qualified us for salvation - Col. 1:12 We were sinners, lost and undone. We were strangers, enemies, without hope and without God in the world, blinded in darkness, bound for hell and unable to do anything about it. But He did something marvelous in us. He qualified us (same word) to partake in the inheritance of the saints in light. He took us sinners and made us saints, pure and holy and clothed with righteousness. And how? We didn't have any so He gave us His righteousness. We are made the righteousness of God in Him, saints, holy ones, worthy of His presence, joint heirs with Jesus Christ of all things. He MADE US WORTHY AND ABLE to enter and enjoy a relationship with Him! It doesn't depend on us. And the same thing is true in the area of our service:

b. He has made us competent for His use (6a) as ministers or servants, those who carry out the desire of another. He wants others to see Christ in our lives and He not only makes us worthy to do it but He makes us able to do it. He gives us the power and the ability to do what He wants to do through us. And how does He do it? Not simply as it was in the Old Covenant or the Old Testament, by the letter. Not simply by telling us what to do, by saying, "Live this way!" No, "Better news the Gospel brings; it bids us fly and gives us wings!" God gives us the power to be what He wants us to be and:

3. His means is the Holy Spirit (6b) He puts His own life, His own power, Himself, inside us, so that He is our "wings!" God IN US! Jesus promised, *You will receive POWER when the Holy Spirit is come upon you and then you shall be witnesses unto me to the ends of the earth!* The Spirit is the power of God at work in us supernaturally so that He can reveal Christ to others through us! Steve Lawson tells the story of the time he flew from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Little Rock, Arkansas, via Atlanta. He was going to preach early the next morning in Little Rock (on the subject of God's providence). He writes: *"Unfortunately, my flight was very late leaving Charlotte, which caused us to circle Atlanta for the longest time. When we finally landed in Atlanta, it was exactly one minute after my flight to Little Rock was to leave. I made a mad dash through the terminal, down the escalator, to the underground tram and got there just in time to miss the departing train. Great! I had no time to wait for the next one. My only hope was to run to the next terminal, hundreds of yards away. So I took off. As I ran, dodging unsuspecting travelers, I noticed a moving sidewalk before me. It went all the way to the next terminal. I leaped onto this 'skywalker.' It began moving me to the next terminal, but still not fast enough. So, I did something only a desperate man would do. I began running on the moving sidewalk. You can't believe how fast I was going on that contraption. I was flying! Passing everybody. Even the tram! I was at the*

next terminal in no time. I then bounded up the escalator and sprinted to my gate--just as they were about to close the plane door. I made it! The smiling stewardess said, 'I guess you were just supposed to make this flight.' The moving sidewalk made the difference. It enabled me to run faster and longer than I ever could have in my own strength. The combination of my running and the skywalker moving me forward propelled me like I had been shot out of a cannon. I ran, but with a great power enabling me. That is precisely how the resurrection power of Christ works in my life--and your life. God has a race for us to run, and we are responsible to run it. We must make the effort to put one foot in front of the other. As we do, the power of God energizes us and propels us forward. We are divinely enabled to run faster, longer, and straighter than we ever dreamed. [Men Who Win by Steven Lawson, 1992. Pages 62-63.] Now, no analogy is perfect, but you get the point. I choose to obey. I choose to follow, to do His will in any situation and the resurrection power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ energizes my life and propels me through it and exudes the sweet fragrance of Him to the bystanders! Now, how can I know that that process is indeed going on, that Christ is indeed at work through me spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Himself? Where's:

III. The Evidence: Paul says, it's not only written in the Book; **It Is Written On Tablets Of Human Hearts (2-3)** Paul said, "I don't need some letter of recommendation to prove that I'm an apostle and God's at work through me. All people have to do is look at you! You were pagans. You were idolaters. You bowed down to statues and engaged in every kind of sexual immorality, drunkenness and orgies. And now you're in love with Jesus and worship Him alone. And you have given up all those horrible practices and you live holy! You are our letter! God wrote it by using the power of His spirit on the tablets of your human hearts! And everybody can read it because they can see it!" But that wasn't only true of the Apostle Paul. If you stop and think about it, it's true of you:

1. change was produced in your life through God's use of others You're a brand-new person. You're different from the way you were when you got saved, even if it was not outwardly drastic in appearance. You were translated out of the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of His dear Son. Your eternal destiny was changed from hell to heaven and your sins which were scarlet were made white as snow. Now you love Jesus and He's growing you into His image. You are somebody's letter of recommendation, your parents, a Sunday School teacher, a Christian friend who witnessed to you. You are the living evidence of the Spirit of God at work in their life revealing the presence of Christ because you saw Him in them and took Him as your own. Their letter written by the Spirit of God on the tablet of a human heart is the change God produced in you! And in like manner:

2. change is produced in the lives of others through God's use of you Friend, the evidence that God is at work in your life is written on the tablets of the human hearts around you and you can see it by the change it produces! It's written on the tablets of your children as they indicate their desire to love and to follow Him. It's written on the tablet of the neighbor who says, "Yes, I'll go with you to Bible study; I have some questions I've been meaning to ask." It's written on the tablet of the coworker who says, "I haven't been to church in years but because I know you, I'll go to see your play." It's written on the tablet of the friend who says, "Would you please pray for me; I've had a terrible thing happen." It's written on the tablet of the shut-in at the nursing home who says, "I don't have anybody to visit me; not even my children come; I'm so glad to see you!" It's written on the tablet of the student in your class who says, "I never knew that before; thanks, I've decided to change that in my life." I've looked out over you as a congregation for years and I can look at so many of you and in some small way say, "You are my letter; the changes, the maturing in you, are in some small measure the evidence that Jesus is at work through me showing Himself." And you can do the same as you look out over the congregation of people that God has paraded you before in life. You can see the evidence written on the tablets of human hearts and be thankful. And so, the conclusion is:

IV. The Conclusion: We Can Live With Confidence (4), not in ourselves, but through Christ and in God. We can live boldly with the assurance that as we surrender ourselves obediently, that God will use us to spread the fragrance of Himself. I don't think so or hope so or wonder whether I'm qualified. I know so because of what He's said He would do and the evidence of what He's already done in others. The only thing that stands in the way is that Sometimes, like Moses, we refuse to believe that God can use us. We are so hesitant, so afraid, that our will gets in the way and we say, "Lord, send somebody else."

Jack Kuhatschek told this story: "A few years ago my pastor asked me to team teach with him a class on spiritual gifts. Once again, I felt the old familiar fear [of public speaking]. But instead of turning to God in faith, asking Him for the grace and strength to say yes, I started searching for crutches. 'You'll be teaching the class with me?' I asked. I wanted the assurance that if anything went wrong, I could simply turn the podium over to him. 'Yes,' he replied. 'We'll do this together.' Then I asked an even more important question: 'How large is the class?' 'I think it will be quite small,' he said. 'About 20 people. Most of the congregation will be attending another class that will be held at the same time as ours.' 'Twenty people,' I thought to myself. 'I can handle that.' So I reluctantly said yes. When the morning of the first class arrived, I walked into the sanctuary where the class was being held, expecting to see a handful of people. But to my great surprise and horror, the place was packed! As I sat down beside the pastor, he leaned over to me and said softly, 'The other class was canceled, so everyone will be in here with us.' At that moment, I remember looking up to heaven and saying to God, 'You tricked me!' But then I also had an overwhelming sense that if God had maneuvered me into this situation, He must know what He is doing. He did. That class opened up a teaching ministry for me at our church, a ministry that has continued to

this day. In the process, I have been stretched and have experienced great joy and affirmation as I use one of the gifts God has given me. And thankfully, a number of people in my classes have told me that they have been helped as well, but none of this would have happened if I had said, 'Lord, please use someone else!' and walked away from God's gentle nudges." [The Superman Syndrome by Jack Kuhatschek. Zondervan, 1995. Pages 140-141.] Where is it in your life that God is nudging you? How is He wanting to use you? Who is it He wants to speak to? Where does He want you to serve, with the young people, pioneer clubs, visiting shut-ins, with the children, in missions activity right here or maybe even on the mission field? He has qualified you, made you worthy, made you able, and He stands ready to pour His spirit through you and write on the tablets of the hearts of the people around you. The only thing He needs is your willing cooperation. Moses said, "Lord, send somebody else." Isaiah too, sensed the call of God in his life. He knew that in himself he was unable and cried, *Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips*. But when the angel touched his lips, he accepted that God had qualified him and when the Lord said, *Whom shall I send and who will go for us?*, Isaiah said, *Lord, here am I, send me!* That's what God wants. You're qualified; just be willing. Be an Isaiah.

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7 Transformed Into His Likeness • 3:7-17 • The Issue Of Growth

If I were to ask you to sum up in one phrase the purpose of the entire universe, what would you say? God's glory, that He might receive the reverence, respect and worship He deserves. What's the purpose of the whole world, of the human race, of all of history? God's glory, to give Him the reverence, respect and worship He deserves. Bring it closer to home. What is the purpose of your life? Paul said, *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* – 1 Cor. 10:31. Now, I know that a lot of selfish and other impure motives often drive us, but if we really know Jesus, we do in our hearts sincerely want our lives to glorify Him, to bring Him the glory He deserves in the eyes of other people. We do want them to see us and what we do and say and glorify the Father. But we're often a little confused about exactly how that process works. I want to begin by talking, as Paul does, about:

I. The Way God Once Displayed His Glory in Old Testament times before the coming of Jesus. And the reason we need to talk about it is because it is often very much like:

1. the wrong view we have (7) Oh, the ministry God had back then was glorious! It was marked by tremendous outward displays. Compare **Heb. 12:18-21**. Man, that was glorious and no one could miss it. We're sorry we didn't get to be around for stuff like that. But somehow, we often still think His glory is best displayed by those same sorts of things. For instance we think it is shown:

a. by condemnation and fearsome judgment I mean, you touch the ark, you fall over dead! You lead a rebellion and the ground opens up and swallows you. That's glorious! You can see it! You tell a lie and they carry you out and bury you or you call down fire from heaven when someone stands in the way of the Gospel. That was glorious! How on earth does God get glory now when everybody gets away with everything and there is no justice and nobody's afraid anymore? Or we think it is shown:

b. by awe-inspiring standards of righteousness, by stone tablets that were engraved by God's own finger and so holy they were stored in the holy ark; now there's glory! All I've got is a worn Bible on the desk that's seen better days! Or we think it is shown:

c. by frequent marvelous displays of power, by Red Seas and Jordan Rivers being parted, by being given bread from heaven to eat and water out of a rock, or through our enemies being devastated by plagues or teenagers defeating giants in combat. Now there's glory! Moses used to go out to a tent to meet God and every time he came back, his face would glow with the radiance of God's glory. People didn't have to guess that he'd been with God! They could see it. It was a repeated miracle, displayed every time he went. Now there's glory! But we haven't come to any of that! That's not for us.

Why isn't my life full of that kind of stuff? Where's the outward glory? From time to time, portions of the Christian Church try to go back and seek it that way still. In our own day there is a whole "signs and wonders" movement that is growing and popular. There is talk of "power evangelism" where God does something miraculous and people are converted through seeing Him at work directly. Christians are desperately looking for direct outward manifestations of God's glory. But if we seek God's glory that way, here's:

2. the disappointment we soon discover: I call it **fading glory** You see:

a. glorious displays fade away in between Just check out Moses, for example, **Ex. 34:33-35**. When he was little, my son had a whole bunch of glow-in-the-dark dinosaurs on the wall of his room and when the light was on, they charged up and then they glowed in the dark! But only for a while and then they faded. Moses was like that. When he would talk with God, he would come out and his face was brighter than daylight. I used to think it was like this: Moses would come out and shine and the glory was so bright he used to have to cover his face to speak to the people so they could stand it. But look carefully at what it actually says. He would come out and speak to them and they would see his face and listen and when it was all done, he would put on the veil until he went back for a re-charge. Verse 7 says the glory was fading. It didn't last 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The effect of it faded away

and had to be renewed time after time. That's exactly what you discover if you look for God's glory outwardly. The effect of a miracle or any kind of spiritual high is wonderful, but it only lasts awhile and then life fades back to the level of the mundane, the everyday, the plodding and even the suffering. And those who are always shouting the glories of behavior by law discover that:

b. glorious standards don't produce righteousness Holiness preachers whose mouth thunders judgment and whose hands claim to cure cancer on Sunday can fall into immorality on Monday, just like the rest of the human race as we've seen. **Gal. 2:21** *...if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!* The law can only TELL you what to do; it can't HELP you do it! It requires what is impossible for man and every time I think I get close to keeping it, I sin again and find I can't! For all the glory they saw, Israel was no holier! Its effect faded between doses. And the harder you try, the more you discover that:

c. glorious judgment doesn't impart life - Gal. 3:21 *...For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.* Law and judgment can only condemn sin; they can't impart life. They can only change your behavior temporarily, not your heart. Judgment makes us afraid and it changes our behavior for a while but afterwhile the effect fades away and we're back to normal. It doesn't change our life into the kind of life that God has. That kind of glory fades in its effect and so there's:

3. the game that Moses played and that we play too. I call it: **"hide the fading glory" (13)** Moses didn't put the veil on to keep people from seeing the glory:

a. Moses veiled his face to hide the fading from others, so they wouldn't see it fade away. He didn't want them to see that he wasn't shining and glowing all the time, but that in between he was just plain old frail human Moses with all of his faults and shortcomings like the rest of them. And you know what?

b. we veil our lives for the same purpose We put on smiling faces and learn to say, "Just fine," when somebody asks. We carry our Bibles, go to our services and sing our songs. But we don't want anybody to know that we had an argument with our spouse or lost our temper and screamed at the kids the other day. We don't want anybody to see that we're worried to death about how we're going to pay our bills or that we prayed and God didn't answer. And we wouldn't dare breathe that we're struggling in our marriage or, heaven forbid, that we were tempted to sin. Ask for help; admit that we can't do something? Never! Why not? Part of it is that we all like to hide sin; it's a human trait. But if we're sincere, if we really and truly in our hearts want to glorify God in all we do, then it might be because at the bottom line we still believe God's glory is only displayed through outward perfection. We have to make sure all they ever see is our shining face; God is not glorified in us unless other people see that everything is wonderful and perfect and great. In other words:

The Issue: How Can God Be Glorified In Me When I'm Imperfect? How can He use sickness, death, failure, sin, suffering and all the other downsides of my life to get glory to Himself? What good do I do him in all that? People need to SEE the glory. They need to see power and supernatural stuff! But I'm no Moses or Joshua or Elijah! I lose faith and falter and fail. I'm growing, but I still have such a long way to go. How can He be glorified in my life?! Well, the good news is that He can be and is! Because on this side of the cross there is:

II. The Better Way God Chooses To Display His Glory Now Smoking mountains and glory clouds don't do the trick. That's one of the major points the whole Old Testament makes! Isaiah prayed, *Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!* - *Isai 64:1*. That's how we feel! Just come down and show up; let the world see! That's what it takes! Well, He did come down and show up. He walked on water, stilled storms, healed the sick and even raised the dead. He did all the things you wish He'd do in your life. And instead of falling on their faces in awe of Him, men crucified the Lord of glory! That way doesn't work! The true glory of God is not simply His power but His entire person. So, God instituted a new way to declare His glory. He chose to reflect His person through us by transforming us into His likeness **(17-18)**! Now let's take that apart:

1. we live in a glorious freedom as children of God - Rom. 8:21 says the whole of creation is groaning and waiting to be *liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God*. We have a whole new way of living. We're not afraid of God. We don't serve Him and obey because we're afraid of Him. Through Jesus Christ we have been accepted by Him and become beloved by Him as His children and perfect love casts out all fear! We're free! And it's glorious! The rest of the world wishes they had it! They live in fear, fear of their gods, fear of evil spirits, fear of death, fear, fear, fear! But we just simply do what now comes natural to us, obeying and loving God in complete confidence and peace, in glorious freedom, and as we do that:

2. He reflects the glory of His person through us to the world Think about that word *reflect*. For instance, the moon has no light of its own. But the sun shines its light on the moon and the moon reflects it back to us on earth. We actually see the light of the sun reflected off the moon! The rear-view mirror in your car takes the image of the car behind you and reflects it back to your eyes. The world can't see His glory directly. But it can see us. So, He takes the glorious image of His person and shines it into us. We reflect it back to the world of people around us. *Once there was a little boy*

who listened very carefully to the pastor's sermon, but one thing didn't make sense to him. After the service he went to the pastor and told him he had a question about the sermon. "You said Jesus is a Man," he began. The pastor said, "That's right." "But I'm just a little boy." The pastor smiled and said, "You're right about that." The boy concluded earnestly, "But you said that if I asked Him to, Jesus would come live inside of me." Nodding affirmatively, the pastor replied, "Yes, I certainly did say that." "But, Pastor," the lad said in exasperation, "If Jesus comes to live inside of me, He'll be sticking out all over!" The pastor laughed and said emphatically, "Son, that's exactly right!" When Jesus is the Lord of our lives, He should be "sticking out all over" you and me. [The Vision of His Glory by Anne Graham Lotz. Word Publishing, 1996. Page 114.] Because He is inside me, His glory will be beaming out in every direction of my life! I reflect Him to the world. Now, how does that work?

3. He reflects it through actually transforming us into His likeness The Greek word is *metamorphosis*, to transform an object from one thing into another permanently. He didn't just hand us a picture of Him and say, "There, make yourself over to look like Me!" He didn't just hand us a list of what He is like and say, "There, go be like that!" He changed what we are into what He is! His light came inside of us. He performed a circumcision on our hearts! He took the old dead sinful nature that was inside me that looked like Adam and killed it, threw it away and buried it! And in its place, He created a new nature, a new self, a new man that Paul says is created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness. He transformed the core of my being from a sinner like Adam was into a saint, holy like Jesus is! And it's that saint-nature, that Jesus nature, that reflection of His glorious person that comes back out in my words and deeds! Now notice this:

4. the transformation is gradual but ever-increasing The transformation at the core of my being was instantaneous, but my mind and my body have years of history of wrong patterns of wanting, thinking and behaving. Scripture calls it the flesh. Plus, the force of sin still lives in my mind and body; it hasn't been removed yet. So, Romans says, my mind has to be renewed so that it thinks like the One who created it and my body has to be continually presented to Him for His use. It's gradual. The more I yield to Him, the more my thoughts and actions are transformed to be His thoughts and actions, the more they reflect His glory. We have a name for it; we call it **Growth** And it is ever-increasing. Literally, the Greek says we are being permanently transformed *from glory to glory*, from one level of glory to another, more and more closely reflecting to the world exactly what He is! And what's driving this process, assuring that it continues?

5. it is being accomplished through the Spirit's presence and power It doesn't come from me. I don't just get better and better at imitating Jesus. The Spirit of God who dwells in me uses His divine power, the same power that made the mountain smoke and the face of Moses shine, to gradually transform my life into His life, so that when the world looks at what I say and what I do and how I react and how I live, they see Him!
But you might be thinking, how is this process better than the old one?

III. Why This Process Is More Glorious It seems so mundane and dull and every-day, but Paul says the ministry of the Spirit in and through us is not only MORE glorious, but it is *surpassingly* glorious, exceedingly more glorious, so much so that in comparison the old way would appear to have no glory at all! Look at **(8-11)**. Why is it glorious? Through us the Spirit does three things He couldn't do the old way:

1. we are given His life and impart it to others The law couldn't give life, but the Spirit can. It could sentence men to death, but not give them life. The Spirit of God imparted the very life of God to us and is shining that very life at others so He can impart it to them as well. Then:

2. we are given His righteousness and bring it to others The law couldn't make anybody righteous, but the Spirit can. It could tell you what not to do, but not how not to do it. The Spirit of God imparted the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our spirit and made us absolutely righteous and then He shines it through us so that He can impart that righteousness to others as well.

3. we are permanently changed and impact others eternally The law couldn't produce permanent change, but the Spirit can. It couldn't transform anybody for time and eternity, but the Spirit of God changed me forever and as He shines through me to impact others, He changes the core of their being and their eternal destiny!

Now, I don't know about you but I'd rather be alive in Jesus Christ, be made absolutely righteous and be changed forever in my person and destiny, than stand trembling in fear before some smoking mountain or shining glory cloud! We need to read the rest of that Hebrews passage, **Heb. 12:22-24**. What a privilege! What God does in and through you speaks a better word of His glory than anything there was before! And once you understand that and quit wishing for "the good old days" and start living out the glorious freedom you have in Jesus, it has a wonderful result:

IV. The Result Of That Process: It results in **Boldness**; It results in **Open Transparent Living (12-13a, 18a)** We're not like Moses! We don't hide our faces so nobody will see the glory fade! We're confident of the fact that the Spirit is transforming us, that Jesus is reflecting Himself through us, so we live openly and boldly. We intentionally invite people into our lives so they can watch "The Jesus Channel" in us, trusting Him to draw them to Himself through us!

Pastor and evangelist Sam Kamaleson gives this testimony: "I come from a long line of Christians in India--six generations. But over those six generations, the vitality of my family's faith wore off. Only the form of Christianity remained. By the time I entered the University of Madras as a student, my faith was a burden. I practiced the form of Christianity, but the form had no vitality. My roommate at the university was a Hindu. One day, however, he came back to our room totally transformed. I watched him for the next 10 days. He never announced, 'I'm a Christian.' He just kept quiet, but I saw a difference, so I asked him: 'You've changed. What's the reason?' He grinned from ear to ear and said, 'It must be Jesus.' That's the first time someone showed me that life can change. He showed me that the Jesus of history is a present-day reality, and I could have an encounter with Him--with measurable results. So he led me to the Lord, and suddenly the form of my Christianity came to life. After my conversion, my roommate said our new faith would be contagious. Indeed, our living faith began to spread on the campus. I was a student body leader and chairman of the student council. When I began to say, because of my faith that there were things I would not do any more, it caused a chain reaction. Without knowing it, I was evangelizing. We started small prayer groups, and soon we couldn't find rooms large enough to hold them." [World Vision, Oct/Nov 1996. Page 21.] It really does work! How about you, my friend? Are you busy keeping people out of your life so they won't see the flaws, so they won't see how imperfect you are? Or are you living boldly and openly and transparently, hoping people will come into your life and look at you to see Jesus! Don't look for miracles and signs. Just love Him with all your heart, trust Him to be at work in you and let people in, so the glory can shine no matter what your situation is. That's how He gets glory! And what a joy to know that even in your eating and drinking and whatever else you do, all of it brings glory to God.

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

The Light That Shines In Hearts • 4:1-6 • The Issue Of Revelation

We are born into a life that is separated from God. Most people are content living in that separation their whole lives, very busy, very full and complete (so they think), growing up, graduating, getting married, having children, working jobs, growing old and dying, all in a state of separation from God. And when somebody who's become a Christian tries to reach into their lives and tell them about God and the wonderful freedom they can have through a relationship with Him, usually, instead of taking the Book and searching for truth, there is often the opposite response. No interest! They don't care! Or they push you away and say, "Let me alone, I like it this way!" And as we turn to 2 Cor. 4 to begin our study today, I'd like to talk to you about:

I. The Impact Of Nonresponsiveness As we've studied 2 Corinthians, we learned that God parades us in and out of people's lives reflecting His glory through us, transforming us into His likeness and letting them see it. And we reach out to them, but they don't want it! We pray, we share, we witness, we invite, but nothing, no response. Or worse than nothing, a negative response. They reject us. And over time that can have a dramatic impact on us. Paul warns:

1. we are often tempted to give up through exhaustion (1) Oh, but we easily could! Those words *lose heart* mean to give up, to quit, to faint, to grow weary and exhausted and lose the resolve to continue.

The Issue is Discouragement: People don't respond to God despite all my efforts! Listen to the string of cautions about this in the New Testament:

- *Luke 18:1* Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. I get discouraged because I pray and pray for someone and they don't respond.
- *2 Cor. 4:16* Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away... I get discouraged by the difficult circumstances I endure, the illnesses, the hardships I go through in the process. Nobody cares.
- *Gal. 6:9* Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. I get discouraged because I do good, I express love and caring, and there's no harvest, nobody responds; they don't care.
- *Eph. 3:13* I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. I get discouraged because I suffer for my faith or I watch others just like me suffer in the cause and yet it doesn't seem to make a difference to people.
- *2 Thes. 3:13* And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. I get discouraged because I do what's right and it costs me dearly; it costs me friendships, it costs me money and it wouldn't be so bad if it would have an impact on somebody, but I get tired because nobody cares!

I get tired. I get worn out. I get weary. I feel like quitting and throwing in the towel. The glory of God may be shining out of my life, but if it is, nothing's happening, nobody's responding. Oh, it would be so easy to quit worrying about other people, to just focus on our own family and a few close friends and to stop caring whether anybody catches the vision of Jesus Christ or not! And more than one missionary, more than one pastor, more than one believer, has done just that. I know you've had these feelings. I've had them, more than once. Now sometimes, before we get that far, we're tempted to try another avenue. Sometimes we stoop to trying to MAKE people respond. Some enemies were accusing Paul of that and he warns that:

2. we must guard against the temptation to coerce results (2a) Sometimes you can force a response:

a. by manipulating people You can play on their fears by scaring them with threats of hell when they're little or when they're sick or you can play on their grief by telling them they could see their dear mother once more in heaven and how disappointed she'd be if they don't make it. If they're needy you can get them to respond spiritually as you want in return for your help. Such "Rice Christians" are common in the world, who come for the rice and not for the Savior! The response won't be genuine; it won't last, but you can make it happen and some do. The method is secret and deceptive and shameful. And often it is done by:

b. by distorting the Word Just promise people they'll be healed when they're sick. Tell them that healing is in the atonement and it's theirs for the claiming and they'll line up - for a while. Tell them God wants them to be wealthy and prosperous, that all His kids deserve the best and that they can claim the blessing they want and they'll line up - for a while. Tell them that Jesus is only one of many ways to God and encourage them to simply be religious and they'll fall all over you!

But if you're faithful and tell them the truth and refuse to manipulate and coerce them and take advantage of their weaknesses, you'll have no choice but to deal with discouragement! Paul certainly did! No matter how many good responses there are, the MAJORITY of people will NOT respond. So, how do you deal with this discouragement without giving up! Well, the first step is to understand:

II. The Real Cause: Unbelievers Are Unable To See The Light (3) People who are separated from God living in darkness are simply not capable of seeing. The Gospel is veiled to them. It's hidden. It's not that they can hear the words but there is simply no natural ability to comprehend them. It's not your fault. It's not their fault. Human beings are born that way and it's made worse by Satan's control of the world system or the culture around them. Take, for instance, what Paul said in the last chapter about:

1. the special hardening of the Jew (3:14-16) Jewish people even to this day, 2000 years later, can read and read and reread the Old Testament and never see all the promises of the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus. They can read Is. 53 or Ps. 22 and never see Jesus' agony on the cross or His resurrection. Why? Their minds are "made dull". The Greek literally means "to grow a callus on the skin". You know when your skin is hardened or callused, you can touch something and not feel it. It's hidden or veiled from your senses. When your mind is callused, it can hear something and not understand it; it can hear and hear and not perceive. That is something that God has specifically caused to happen to the Jewish race through their rejection of Christ as their Messiah and it's why so few Jews come to Jesus, even though they should be the most prepared and easiest to reach! Praise His Name, God does break through that and into the hearts of a remnant who become saved and Rom. 11 promises that it is partial and temporary and in the end time there will be a widespread turning of Israel to Jesus. But for now, that veil is still in place and they can't humanly break through it. But it's not only the Jews. We Gentiles are just like them; we are just as incapable of understanding the Gospel because of:

2. the universal blinding work of Satan (4) The minds of unbelievers are now, not just dim, but blinded. Now let me ask this, "Does it matter how much light you shine on a blind man? Can you make him see by shining a brighter light?" Why not? The problem is not on the outside but on the inside. He's incapable of seeing, no matter how much light shines on him! The Pharisees heard Jesus directly; they saw the blind man whose eyes were opened and heard his testimony and that of others. They saw Lazarus walking around alive and knew he was resurrected. How could they not fall at Jesus' feet? Jesus told them, "You are blind and what's worse is that you think you see!" You're blind but you don't know it! That's the state you're born in because of the fall and Satan does a tremendous job of keeping you that way. He does everything he can to keep you from ever having an opportunity to hear the Gospel in the first place. And he orchestrates human culture to make sure you're raised in such a way that if you do hear it, you'll be sure to reject it. Whole cultures of people live in absolute bondage to false systems of worship and false understandings of the universe which are like a veritable wall. But I'm not just talking about the Yanomami Indians out in the jungle of Brazil or the Fulani Muslims in Guinea or the crowds in Moscow. Your neighbor, your aunt, your uncle, your cousin, and maybe your husband or wife, is just as blind and just as incapable of responding! That's why they don't! They can't! We couldn't either. We were DEAD in trespasses and sins. Unless the thing that happened to us happens to them, they can't respond. There is only one:

III. The True Remedy: God Must Reveal Himself To Them (6) One day God revealed Himself to you and suddenly you could see that which you could never see before, no matter how many times you'd heard it. You saw that you sinful and separated from God and that the way to freedom was Jesus. Paul says it was just like:

1. the act of God in giving light to a dark world Remember **Gen. 1:3**. The whole universe was dark. And God gave a command, "Let there be light!", literally "Light, BE!" and light, which didn't exist, obeyed and came into being and in that instant there was light. And had there been any human eyes around to see, in that instant they could have seen everything that before was hidden in the darkness. And that is exactly like:

2. the act of God in giving light to a darkened heart God speaks that same word to every soul that comes to Him. He says, "Let there be light!" He shines into our very soul the light of the understanding of who Jesus was and what He

did. Now, you know why Paul put it this way, don't you? You remember how he came to respond. Compare **Acts 26:9-18**. God caused the outside to be a visual illustration of what was going on inside. He lived in darkness, totally blind, a persecutor and a murderer of Christians, but God shined into his heart and he believed in Jesus. Suddenly he could see what he could never see before and he grabbed hold of it! And God told him, "This is exactly what I'm sending you to do. Your own people and all the nations, they're all in darkness. I'm sending you so that I can shine my light into their hearts and save them. They won't respond unless I reveal Myself to them but I need you in the process." It's like this: *Liz Curtis Higgs tells about vacationing one summer with her family in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado: "We picked the foggiest day ever recorded, I think, to drive the scenic Trail Ridge Road, the highest completely paved road in the United States. We just knew there were mountains out there somewhere, but we sure couldn't see them. We'd drive past signs for scenic overlooks, and the only thing to look over was more fog. We were quite certain we were heading up the mountain, though, because there was snow piled along the side of the road six to eight feet high...in June! That night we crawled into bed in our cabin at Longs Peak Conference Center, still surrounded by the damp, chilly fog, never dreaming what we'd find when we woke up the next morning. The sun was peeking around the window shade, so I reached out a sleepy hand to raise the shade...and almost fainted. We had a mountain in our backyard--a big mountain! Longs Peak is 14,255 feet high, and the sun made every snow-covered inch of it look like it might fall on us at any moment. What a humbling experience. Although I knew intellectually that the mountain was there--after all, it was on the map and probably hadn't moved lately--because I couldn't see it with my own eyes, it was not a reality to me. During those 27 years I spent apart from Christ, He was just like that mountain. Enormous, immovable, right there, right next to me, but I was in a fog and saw Him not. Then one day the fog cleared and BOOM! Look up, Liz! In truth, He was there all along, but now I had eyes to see Him."* [Reflecting His Image by Liz Curtis Higgs. Thomas Nelson, 1996. Pages 101-102.] "I once was lost but now am found, was BLIND but now I SEE!," says the hymn. He does the miracle; nobody else can. He makes blind eyes to see. Now, in that very fact lies:

IV. Our Encouragement: because **We Have Experienced God's Mercy (1)** God doesn't just sit up in heaven and look down at a world of poor blind people who can't see His truth and let them go. At least in my case, in our case, God did something:

1. God has revealed Himself to us (6) We're living proof, every one of us. God does do that miracle in some people. He does give that gift of light and understanding and response to some. And if He can give it to Paul, if He can give it to me, then He can give it to the worst of us, the lowest of us, the farthest of us and even the closest of us. There is tremendous hope because making people see does not depend on us. I don't have to produce it. And it relieves me of the responsibility. I can't produce it! I can't MAKE it happen. God has to turn the light on. So, as Paul said:

2. we do not proclaim our own ability, but Jesus' lordship (5a) The central Christian confession is this: Jesus is Lord. He's Boss. He's in charge. He's in control. We don't have to produce results! We don't have to make people see:

3. we simply serve others for Jesus' sake (5b) We just serve them, that's all. We just let God parade us into their lives and act toward them as servants in love and let Him do the rest. But I don't want you to underestimate your role in the process:

4. we play a major role in God's process of revelation (2b) I never took the time to see the depth of the meaning that's in this little piece of a verse before, partly because the NIV simplifies it and almost changes the meaning in English. We don't just *set forth* the truth; we literally *manifest* or *reveal* the truth. WE are the instruments through whom God turns the light on. Through our words in sharing the Gospel, through our actions of love and truth, we are God's match to light the lamp. He doesn't just pick this one and that one and suddenly one day they're walking along and light comes into their soul and they believe in Jesus. Instead, he parades you and me into their lives blazing the light of His glory and then turns on the ability to comprehend and bingo, there is light and there is response! Paul says:

5. we reveal His truth and display it to the consciousness of men It's not saying that we have a clean reputation before all men. It's saying that we manifest in ourselves His truth and we display it, we exhibit it, we prove it, not to the conscience, but to the consciousness, to the awareness, to the soul of everyone before whom God parades us. Through us God hands the Book to the next lost person and in the beginning of the process WE ARE The BOOK! And He turns the light on in their understanding and they begin to see what they could never see before. It's all of Him. He shines and reflects it through us into their lives and He opens their eyes to see it! We serve, pray and wait for Him to do His thing in those He chooses!

Anand Chaudhari was raised in a Brahmin family in India, and at a young age began training to follow his father into the Hindu priesthood. In 1942, at the age of 12, he moved to Bombay for secular schooling, and in 1950, he enrolled at the University of Bombay. Although he continued to perform the ritual priesthood duties, his interests shifted, first to the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and later to communism. Then he met a young man studying at the university who introduced him to Christianity. Through his influence, Anand began reading the Gospel of Matthew. He was gripped by the story of Jesus. One night while he was meditating along the sea shore, he began praying for Jesus to reveal Himself to him. He later described the moments that followed: "Somehow, I felt the real presence of Christ there. Someone holy just touched me and

surrounded me. I was really committed to Christ.” After hearing a Christian radio program, he enrolled in Bible college, and in later years became the president of Rajasthan Bible Institute. [Stories of Faith: Inspirational Episodes from the Lives of Christians by Ruth Tucker. Zondervan, 1989.] There you have a sketch of the process. Nobody could be more lost, a Hindu turned communist, blind and unable to see. So God parades a fellow student into his life and through his life begins to shine light into the darkness, attracts him to the Word of God which grips his heart and at the right moment God says, “Let there be light” and all of a sudden, he sees Jesus. What a process! It happened in me and it can happen in those around me! And what a partnership! What a privilege to be a vessel that the King of Kings can use to shine glory into the heart of a blind man to make him see. But do you see the freedom that’s in it! The work is all Jesus’ and the responsibility is all His! I don’t have to make people respond. It is not my effort. I am not responsible. In fact, I cannot fail in my part unless I fail to yield myself to Him. I need not be discouraged that people don’t respond; they can’t! I need not be discouraged that my life is not enough of a display to change them; I can’t change them anyway! But in this one and that one, here and there, as God is ready, He will use me to reach into another person’s life and in some measure reveal His light and His life through me.

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

Treasure In Jars Of Clay • 4:7-12, 16-18 • The Issue Of Power

Have you ever thought how nice it would be if God, when He saved us, along with changing our hearts, also changed all of us completely right away as He’s going to do one day? I mean, wouldn’t it be nice if from the moment we came to Christ our mind was completely renewed and would only think His thoughts and be holy and pure always? Wouldn’t it be nice if sin was totally removed from us? Wouldn’t it be nice if our bodies were glorified all at once and stopped aging and dying and became like His with all its wonderful powers and abilities? And wouldn’t it be nice if in that moment He had taken us out of this world to heaven where we’d never feel pain or suffering again? Haven’t you ever wished that was so? I have! But instead, He transformed our spirits and left the rest of us the rest of us pretty much just the way we were to be gradually impacted by the new nature inside us. What I’m talking about is:

I. The Enigma Of Our Present State Paul uses a beautiful word picture to describe it. He says we have this **Treasure In Jars Of Clay (7)** There is this:

1. the priceless treasure we possess: And what is it? Verse 7 tells us it’s **the all-surpassing power of God**, that power of God that spoke light into the darkness when there was none (verse 6). It’s that power of God that can speak light into a blinded human heart and make it see when nothing else can. That measureless, limitless, unbounded power of God is in and with our spirit through the Holy Spirit who is right there inside us! What a treasure! And we have it! We possess it; it is ours; it belongs to us! How priceless! How precious! Simon the magician offered money and tried to buy it, but in Acts 8:20 Peter answered, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! God has given us this precious gift of Himself and His power, which is better than all the gold in the world, right inside us, a limitless resource through which we can endure all things through Christ who literally puts the power in us! We’ve got it, but look what we keep it in!

2. the fragile clay jars in which we possess it, earthen vessels. The clay jar was the most common and cheapest household vessel of the day. It was literally a hardened hunk of dirt, shaped and used for a purpose and later broken and discarded. And so, we have **human minds and bodies** made of dust, indwelt by sin and subject to all kinds of frailty and mistake and disease and weakness and even death. The image is sort of like keeping your diamond ring in a plastic sandwich bag. In spite of the treasure that’s in us, in our state of human frailty we experience all the things which that power could solve. Paul illustrates four of them in (8-9):

a. we experience pressure because we have **limited ability**. Circumstances come upon us that squeeze us hard. Often from every side. Things that are too much for us. Things that are beyond our ability to endure. We get sick. Loved ones die. We have accidents. Financial burdens fall on us. Relationships fall apart. Wouldn’t it be nice if the power of God would just fix everything in our lives so we’d always be healthy and never have an accident and everything would just be so peachy and wonderful? But it doesn’t. Our jars of clay still go through the pain of all these things.

b. we experience perplexity because we have **limited comprehension**. We don’t understand things; we get confused and have no idea why things happen and what will happen next. There are so many times when we just don’t know what to do or have no idea what the right choice of action is. Wouldn’t it be nice if the power of God would just reveal all things to us so we could see and know and understand and have a reason for everything? But it doesn’t. In our jars of clay, so many times we just have to shrug our shoulders and say, “I have no idea.”

c. we experience persecution because we have **limited effectiveness**. We are disliked and discriminated against because of our faith. People hate us and rail against us. It’s not so bad here in the US where we have freedom of religion, but it’s obvious in large areas of the world where Christians are a despised, small minority. In some countries to become one of us is a crime punishable by death. Wouldn’t it be nice if the power of God would just cause us to win all our enemies? If it would silence all their questions and bring them to Him in mighty conversions, the

world would be a better place. But it doesn't. In this world, our jars of clay are often pursued and beaten and jailed at the will of our persecutors.

d. we experience defeat We're struck down and have only **limited success**. We have a heart to win the world, but have dozens and hundreds of missionaries sit in defeat who can't go because there's no money. Oh, there are so many projects that would reach millions but lack funding. We start this or that work that by all rights should succeed and people lose interest or quit or give up and go home. We get our hopes all up about something we think God's really in and it falls through. Wouldn't it be nice if the power of God would bring us unlimited success, if everything we did was successful, if every work for the kingdom was phenomenally blessed so all could see? But it isn't that way. For every three steps forward there are often two steps backward. You see:

The Issue: Weakness - How can God be glorified when I am so limited? I am only a jar of clay subject to all the limitations and weaknesses and frailties of being human. The power of God hasn't changed any of that in my life. A young lady who's struggling with the issue of singleness wrote me from halfway around the world and said, *Yes, there are still the times of struggling, feeling like the third wheel, etc. It's still extremely painful, and I wonder why God has allowed it to be so in my life. Certainly, we all have our struggles -- and don't we always want them to be different! I can rant and rave about, "Why this?" or "Why me?", but it still doesn't change the fact that I need to settle my heart with God -- whatever the issue. But, oh, doesn't it get exhausting sometimes?! Yes, it does! These awful jars of clay! If only we could be now all that we'll be one day and all this weakness would go away. How much less I'd suffer and how much more glory God could get!*

But that's not:

II. How God Chooses To Display His Power He does it in an entirely different way than we would choose to **(8-9)**. Instead of delivering us from our problems, He makes sure that:

1. when we are pressured, we are not crushed by it, that we endure it by His grace. The most awful things come, sickness and pain and even death and yet the testimony of our faith remains firm and clear. *Lawrence Tucker writes, "One stifling, humid August morning we stood with our family and friends as a kindly pastor spoke words of comfort and committed the body of our young son to the ground. We lingered a while looking at the floral pieces covering the small grave. Heavy of heart, lonely in spirit, we returned home. In unrelenting heat, the day passed. As evening's shadows began to creep across the grave, we returned to sit a few minutes by the resting place of our son. The floral tributes, so proud and erect in the morning, were now all wilted--ruined by the heat. Their drooping leaves and shattered blooms were matched by the brokenness of our hearts. With such little warning our son was gone, our arms were empty. As we sat quietly, our eyes were drawn to the central floral piece. Parts of it had paid the price demanded by the heat, but not all. Out of the center of a wilted background, twelve white calla lilies stood straight and erect, undaunted by the circumstances of the day. They had not been overwhelmed by scorching heat. In the midst of the dead and dying they had lived. Why? Probing the structure of the piece, I freed a bloom. The secret became known. The stem of the bloom was fastened in a small vial of water. When all elements combined to destroy their beauty, the lilies had a source of inner strength. By that strength they had continued to live in beauty, with a promise of hope. Joining hands, we drew comfort from a source almost pushed aside by our grief. Had the Master not said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die"? In that moment we received inner strength from our living Lord."* [Time Out: A Men's Devotional compiled by Clint and Mary Beckwith. Evergreen Communications, Inc., 1989. Pages 56-57.] My friends, we're the lilies rooted in the living water that stand erect in the heat of the circumstances and testify continually to His goodness. We endure awful pressures through His power and stand firm! And even:

2. when we are perplexed, we do not despair When we don't understand and don't know what to do, we don't give up. We don't lose all hope and curl up in a ball and wait to die. We trust Him. When our life falls apart so that we're sitting numb with shock and all the world is telling us to throw in the towel and just curse God and die, we say like Job, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!* Even:

3. when we are persecuted, we are not abandoned There's no horror that our enemies can inflict so bad as to convince us that He is not with us. Betsie Ten Boom was lying on a stretcher in the concentration camp Ravensbruck being carried to the hospital to die, having suffered unbelievable tortures and she whispered to her sister Corrie, *We must tell people what we have learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still. They will listen to us, Corrie, because we have been here.* God never abandons His children and in all our suffering, we testify to it! And:

4. when we are defeated, we are not destroyed We may lose, but we don't give up because the war's not over yet and we've already read who wins. We may have to take those two steps backward, but we still keep walking forward. Numbers of us may be slain or laid aside or struck down in some other way, but more of us always rise up from the ranks to take their place and push on.

No, God has not chosen to take away all the limitations of human weakness from us by His power; rather He has chosen to display His power to all the world by carrying us through them instead! Now, why does He do that? Why does He leave the treasure in jars of clay instead of putting it in golden treasure chests, perfectly suited to it!

III. Why God Has Chosen Our Weakness (10-12) There is a phrase that I want you to look at with me for just a moment: **Compare 12:9**, *My power is made perfect in weakness!* That's His principle. The display of His power all by itself is not complete. It is brought to its most full and complete and perfect display in the context of weakness, in frailty and sickness and lack of any strength at all! How does it work?

1. weakness shows that the power is from God and not ourselves (7b) If God just made us "super-people", it would be hard for folks to see Him. If we just conquered every difficulty, were healed of every sickness, never had a setback or made a mistake, they might just give us the credit for it! When Paul and Barnabas healed a crippled man at Lystra, the people called them "gods come down in human form" and tried to offer sacrifices to them. But they tore their clothes and told the people, *"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God..." - Acts 14:15.* If God always did the power thing with us, the world might attribute it to us instead of Him. But when He does the weakness thing with us, they see that the reason we're not crushed and in despair and abandoned and destroyed is because of HIM, not us! It enables us to say, "We're only human like you, but there is a Living God who has kept us!" Yet it's even deeper than that:

2. our continual sufferings express the death of Jesus (10) There were a few occasions when Jesus revealed His glorious power and the crowds flocked to Him, but that display of power did not convert them. Overall, Jesus took the human path of weakness. He became a man. He left glory. He was tempted and opposed. He mourned over loved ones. He knew pain and hunger and thirst and tears. He was pressured, perplexed, persecuted and defeated. He suffered and bled and died on a Roman cross in human weakness. In one sense His whole life was the process of dying. And when we go through those things in our human body, we are a visible reminder of what He endured. Wherever we go, our sufferings, the things we endure in this body, repeat and thereby express visibly His dying. But:

3. they are necessary to reveal the life of Jesus How is he going to show Himself to the world? In the midst of the suffering and dying, He saves us from crushing, despairing, abandonment and destruction. What would otherwise happen to us doesn't, because of the living Jesus who is in us! His supernatural power to endure, His power to withstand, His power to deliver through suffering rather than out of it, fairly shouts, "He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today. He lives within my heart!" They see that Jesus lives because they see Him live in us in the midst of our sufferings! The Expositor's Commentary says, "It is not a matter of life *after* death or even of life *through* death but of life *in the midst of* death!" At the same time, they can see His death in our human sufferings, they can see His life in our deliverance in the midst of them! Therefore, the truth is that:

4. we constantly experience "dying" so the power of His life can be revealed through our "mortality" (11) We go through this stuff for His sake. We experience the "dying" human life that He did for the sake of His glory. So that He can use our very mortality, our very vulnerability to the process of dying, to reveal to the world His life which lives in us. So:

5. the "death" that is always at work in us brings life to others (12) The sufferings of Paul brought life to the Corinthians as they saw the life of Jesus revealed in him. And our sufferings, our daily "death" that is part of our constant human experience, works to bring life to others. They see Him in us and respond.

The story is told of a group of 100 Roman soldiers who had been drawn together in a special bond of closeness through the experiences they shared in battle. Among them were 40 Christians. One day the emperor called for a test of loyalty, demanding that every member of the army bow down before his statue. As each of the 40 believers passed before the image, they refused to worship it. One by one they declared, "I'm a Christian!" And every one received the sentence of death. It was winter and because of his high regard for these men, the legion commander was heartsick as he marched them onto the river's ice, where they would be left to die from exposure to the bitter cold. As they went out into the darkness, this chant rang in his ears: "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, claim for Thee the victory and from Thee the crown." The commander waited throughout the night on shore near a roaring fire, hoping some would change their minds and obey the imperial decree. Finally, he saw a solitary figure groping his way toward the fire. Approaching the emperor's statue, the half-frozen man fell down before it. But no one else appeared! The centurion was so moved by the steadfastness of the 39 remaining men that he dropped his armor and rushed to join that dying band. In a few moments the cry again was heard echoing across the frigid wastes: "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, claim for Thee the victory and from Thee the crown." They were given over to dying and the power of His life was revealed through them. God's strength was made perfect in weakness. It always is, even in your life and mine. But before we close, let's look quickly at:

IV. The Effect Of This Process On Us (16-18) We don't quit; we don't give up in discouragement as we suffer in weakness because we know three things:

1. outward deterioration cannot stop our inward renewal - Col. 3:10, *We have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* We're being transformed into His likeness spiritually from glory to glory and all the outward falling apart of our body and our circumstances, all the suffering we endure in our weakness can never stop that process. His life is always being more and more clearly revealed in us. And so:

2. our limited and temporary sufferings produce an infinite and eternal glory (17) They do for us a favor. They are producing something infinitely better that lasts infinitely longer than themselves. They are producing a tremendous quantity of glory being given, not to us, but to God. Look at **verse 15**. He is glorified, and the more we suffer, the more His life is revealed and the more glory He receives. Hallelujah! So, what must we do? How do we get through this? After all, it hurts!

3. we focus on the unseen eternal result rather than the temporary suffering (18) Instead of burying our noses in the problems and wallowing in the misery, we... *fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* - Heb. 12:2. Or as Col. 3:1-4 says, *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

The power is His, not yours, and the glory belongs to Him. Don't look down; look up!

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

A House Not Made With Hands • 5:1-10 • The Issue Of Eternity

At the close of chapter 4 last time, we talked about the need to keep our eyes fixed on the eternal things that are real, rather than on the troubles of earth. Probably the key thing that keeps us from doing that is our human body. It's this body that keeps us tied to earth. It's this body that runs short of breath and can't keep up and get done the things we need to get done. It's this body that gets sick and feels ill and suffers pain. It's this body that ages and loses all its beauty and grows frail and feeble and requires so much time and energy to care for. It's this body that threatens us with the thing that we instinctively fear the most, death. Everything about this body shouts "Temporary! It's not going to last!" One of these days I'm going to come face to face with the end of this body and, like it or not, I have a hard time thinking about separating myself from it. Now, Paul reminds us that there are two very basic:

I. The Facts That We Know About This Body (1) His image here is a very graphic one in the Greek, particularly coming from a tentmaker. He says:

1. we live now in the temporary dwelling (tent) of an earthly body The real "you" is your spirit, your person, and you live in the tent of an earthly body. Now, you live in a tent for a few days or a few weeks while you're on vacation. You live in a tent for the warm part of the year while you follow the flocks to the higher pastures as the Kyrgyz did for centuries in their yurts. You live in a tent while you're traveling on a journey to get to a more permanent place like Abraham did in the promised land and like the Israelites did during their years in the wilderness. But it's not permanent; it's only a place to live for now. And what makes that so evident about our "tent" is that:

a. it is in the process of being taken down That word "destroyed" in the NIV is also the normal word for taking down a tent. Every sign we have from our body tells us that it's in the process of being taken down. *Charles L. Allen recounts the time John Quincy Adams, who was then 80 years old, met a friend on the street in Boston. "Good morning," said the friend, "and how is John Quincy Adams today?" "Thank you," the ex-President replied. "John Quincy Adams himself is well, quite well, thank you. But the house in which he lives at present is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering upon its foundation. Time and the seasons have nearly destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn out. The walls are much shattered, and it trembles with every wind. The old tenement is becoming almost uninhabitable, and I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it soon. But he himself is quite well, quite well."* [The Seniors' Devotional Bible (NIV), Zondervan, 1995.] The tent is falling down and with each passing year that becomes more evident. But what we also begin to realize is that:

b. it is earthly and unfit for God's eternal purposes - 1 Cor. 15:50, *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* It's made of earth and it's only good for this earth. You can't take it to heaven with you and who'd want to? Who'd want to spend eternity in a falling apart body of flesh and blood? It has to end. It's mortal. We have to get out of it at some point. So, what we're doing here on earth is really this:

2. we are awaiting the permanent dwelling (house) of a resurrection body We don't want to live in a tent; we want a house, an *oikodome*, a permanent dwelling place. And we know from the Scriptures that we have one. Now, please understand that he is not talking here about heaven itself, about the many mansions and the streets of gold. He's not saying that when your spirit gets out of this tent it can go to float around in a gold-lined apartment in the palace of the King with a view of the river of life. A soul doesn't need a literal house to live in; it needs a what? A body! The Creed

says we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. If we get to be in heaven without a body, that's only temporary. The eternal state is that we receive a resurrection body from, a house no human hand can make, a body that is eternal and it is heavenly or spiritual. Elsewhere we're told that:

a. our body will be completely changed to be like His - Phil. 3:20-21 The place we're going forever is heaven. But we're waiting for more than that. We're waiting for a Savior who's going to change our humble lowly bodies, made of the dust of the earth and fit only for the earth, and make them like His glorious resurrection body, spiritual bodies fit for eternal life in a spiritual kingdom. Jesus' resurrection body WAS His earthly body, but transformed and glorified to lose all its earthiness. It was real and touchable and seeable, yet it appeared and moved purely at will and without effort. We will receive from God a body just like that one, whether or not our ashes have been lost to the earth forever, a glorious spiritual resurrection body based on our earthly one. However:

b. it will lose all its earthly limitations - 1 Cor. 15:42-44 Everything this body isn't, that one will be. This one's dying; that one will be eternal. This one's blemished and flawed; that one's beaming with the glory of God. This one's weak and powerless; that one's filled with the limitless ability of the power of God. This one's natural, based on the things of earth, indwelt by sin and affected by its consequences; that one's spiritual, made to reflect the character of the perfect, pure spirit that dwells in it and fit for the Kingdom. That's what we're waiting for. But it's not an easy wait. Paul talks about:

II. The Feelings That We Endure In This Body Meanwhile, **We Groan (2-4)** The Greek language has a lot of specific words for expressing grief and sadness. It has one that means to wail out loud like the Jews did at funerals. It has one that means to shed tears and weep silently, another that means to weep audibly and cry like a child, another that means to sing a dirge and still another that means to cry out in a lament like, "Woe is me!" But Paul says in this body we *groan*, which means to express grief by inarticulate or semi-articulate syllables. You know what it is to groan, don't you? You've been in the kind of emotional or physical pain where you need to express that it hurts but you can't really say any words. You just groan, you moan, you make sounds that somehow say you're hurting and you want it to stop. And that's the way we feel all the time in this body, when we really think about it:

1. we are burdened with the effects of our own mortality Afterwhile we get tired of being tired. We get sick of feeling sick. We get frustrated with all the stuff that happens in this crazy world that we can't do anything about. The more suffering we know in life, the more pain that comes our way, the more tears of grief we shed, the more aware we become of just how mortal and frail and powerless and dying we are and the more we groan in our hearts because:

2. we have an intense longing to be free of it We want out. We want to be free. We want to leave this old body and this old world behind us. That's why today so many are boldly taking the path of suicide. The burdens and the problems and the pain of life become too much for them and since so few believe in a holy God anymore and almost nobody believes in hell and everyone thinks you just dissolve into nothingness, there's no fear to hold them back and they plunge out into eternity just to escape this body and all that goes with it. That longing to get out is in all of us, but let's clarify a bit. It is:

a. not simply to be a spirit free of the body We don't want to just get rid of our body because it's bad. We don't long to be a ghost, a shadowy spirit being with no material reality. I may not like a lot of things about my body but it's still part of ME, of who I am, of my identity, and I'm afraid to lose that. So, our real longing is not to escape our body:

b. but that our mortality might be swallowed up by life It is to lose all the effects of sin and death which show up in and through our body. We long not to be "unclothed" with our old body but to be "clothed" with a new one, to be transformed so that all of us, spirit, soul and body are made like Jesus! In short, our deepest longing is to receive what we already know He's promised, that new resurrection body that's free from all this. But the catch is that life drags on and the downward pull on this body gets worse and:

3. we have no "visible" proof to hold on to We have no "sight" to rely on to demonstrate that this is coming, only our faith. So, in short:

The Issue: Endurance - How do I persevere in this failing body? Listen to Solomon, *Don't let the excitement of being young cause you to forget about your Creator. Honor him in your youth before the evil years come--when you'll no longer enjoy living. It will be too late then to try to remember him when the sun and light and moon and stars are dim to your old eyes, and there is no silver lining left among your clouds. For there will come a time when your limbs will tremble with age, your strong legs will become weak, and your teeth will be too few to do their work, and there will be blindness too. Then let your lips be tightly closed while eating when your teeth are gone! And you will waken at dawn with the first note of the birds; but you yourself will be deaf and tuneless, with quavering voice. You will be afraid of heights and of falling--a white-haired, withered old man, dragging himself along; without sexual desire, standing at death's door, and nearing his everlasting home as the mourners go along the streets. Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young--before the silver cord of life snaps and the gold bowl is broken; before the pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel is broken at the cistern; then the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns*

to God who gave it. All is futile, says the Preacher; utterly futile. – Ecc. 12:1-8 (TLB). Oh, it would be so easy to end up there! It's all vanity. Life goes downhill and in the end my body returns to dust and my spirit floats off to God. Useless. What's the point of it all? But that's not where Paul goes. He reminds us instead of:

III. The Assurances That God Has Given Us and the first one is this:

1. He has intentionally made us this way (5a) This old body didn't take God by surprise. He made it this way. He deliberately put us in mortal, dying bodies. But He also made it so we wouldn't be stuck in them forever but would leave them behind and get brand new ones from His hand one day. He made it so we'd have to live in hope, so we'd have to look forward to the future, so that we wouldn't become so in love with this world and the way it is that we'd want to stay like this forever. He made us so we'd long to go home! So, trust His judgment and wisdom as Creator! And then, in case we begin to doubt whether that future will ever be realized, whether we'll ever get that new body after all, He has given us two very concrete proofs on which to hang our hope. First:

2. He has given us the undeniable proof of Jesus' resurrection (4:13-14) There it is, the proof you can't get away from, the proof that stands once for all time: Jesus rose from the dead. He was resurrected. He laid down the old body and it was transformed into a brand-new resurrection body. Paul put it like this, *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.* – 1 Cor 15:20-23. Anytime you doubt it, anytime you begin to despair and lose hope that it will be so, that you will ever be freed from this body and receive the longing of your heart, just look at Him. He's the firstfruits, the guarantee of the harvest. You're just waiting your turn! But He's given us yet another thing to hang on to:

3. He has given us the individual "deposit" of the Spirit (5b) He put Himself, the Holy Spirit of God, inside MY BODY when I was saved. He chose to dwell inside ME. And that personal indwelling is the "deposit", it's the down payment on the balance. I've got that and I'll get the rest. Because He lives in me now, He has guaranteed that He will transform me then. He is joined permanently to my spirit. We are one, just as He and the Father are One, inseparable forever. So, what happens to Him happens to me and since He received a glorious resurrection body, so will I. He became like Me and I'll become like Him and He has guaranteed it by His personal presence inside Me right now!

Now, when I get hold of that, does that ever change things! It changes my whole outlook and attitude on living. And that's what Paul talks about next:

IV. The Continual Confidence We Have For Living

Instead of the despair that Solomon described and that the world knows, we have a tremendous confidence as we live, a tremendous boldness to press on through life all the way through to the end because:

1. we live out of the eternal perspective of faith (6-8) He's repeating what he said in 4:18. We fix our eyes on the eternal things.

a. we recognize that in this body we will not have "sight" We don't visibly see Jesus. We don't visibly see heaven. We don't visibly see the resurrection that lies ahead for us. We can't. It's not part of the plan. God did not make us to walk by sight in this body. It can only see the physical and the temporary things of this world. But we see with spiritual eyes. We see it all by faith, by trusting in what God has told us. And because of that:

b. we stand confidently ready to leave it and be with the Lord In fact, we'd prefer it! We'd like to be out, to be free, to have the sight right now, to have the eternal. But that's not the plan. We stay right here and persevere because that's where He put us, but we're always ready to leave, to take down the tent of this body and move on to the eternal home that God has prepared. Yet in the meantime:

2. we passionately pursue the eternal goal of pleasing Him (9) That's what really counts, not pleasing ourselves, not escaping our problems and our pains, not our getting relief or getting what we want. That's backward. He's with and in us now and we're going to be with Him forever. So, the important thing both here and there boils down to just one thing, pleasing Him! And when we live by faith, that becomes our passion in life. It's all we care about. What does He want? What is His will? What is His desire? What matters to Him? How can I glorify Him? And when that becomes our passion, our focus changes:

3. we focus on the quality of things accomplished through this body (10) Somehow, we always see this verse in our minds almost like it's the Great White Throne in Rev. 10. We get to heaven as believers and Jesus is sitting on this judgment seat and there's a kind of formal trial based on our deeds and rewards, or else reprimands are handed out. However, if you read it in the original it's more like this, (Kless translation) *"For all of us can't escape being shown for what we really are at His winners' platform at the end of the race. Every one of us will carry away (like the athlete) only the results of the things he did through his body, whether they were good (valuable in achieving the goal) or [literally] worthless, useless."* The point is that this body is our vehicle for pleasing Him; through this body we can choose to glorify Him by pleasing Him. And when we're with Him by sight one day, all that's going to matter is the quality of what we

did through it. Was our life pleasing and useful to Him? Did we present Him our body as a living sacrifice and let Him live through us or not? Let me share the words from a sermon by Pastor Lasarus to his congregation of the Sougb tribe in Irian Jaya: *"Ibrani (Heb.) 13:14 tells us this earth is not our Birth Land. We are only like strangers and wanderers here. This land is just like a bivouac (a ramshackle leaf shelter, we'd call it a lean-to) on the path that leads to the Big City. There is no eternal life here. Our bones are just going to rot and then dry up to powder of the earth. Rather, God puts us here to plant and harvest His garden, telling others what His Voice says about Jesus."* That's what counts! We live always focused on the fact that in this body we're here to plant and harvest God's garden of earth, to sow the precious seed of the Gospel and to harvest precious souls to belong to Him by telling others the Good news of Jesus. That's what He cares about; that's what will matter to us when we see Him, and that's what we should be about in this body.

But all the while living confidently and ready to step out of it and be with Him, knowing that to be absent from this body is to be immediately present with Him, always looking upward in anticipation instead of downward in depression. Let me tell you this story: *The sound of Martha's voice on the other end of the telephone always brought a smile to Pastor Jim's face. This time, however, there seemed to be an unusual tone to her words. "Preacher, could you stop by this afternoon? I need to talk with you." "Of course, I'll be there around three. Is that ok?" It didn't take long for Jim to discover the reason for what he had only sensed in her voice before. Martha shared the news that her doctor had just discovered a previously undetected tumor. "He says I probably have six months to live". Martha's words were naturally serious, yet there was a definite calm about her. "I'm so sorry to..." but before Jim could finish, Martha interrupted. "Don't be. The Lord has been good. I have lived a long life. I'm ready to go." "I know," Jim whispered with a reassuring nod. "But I do want to talk with you about my funeral. I have been thinking about it, and there are things that I know I want." The two talked quietly for a long time. When it seemed that they had covered just about everything, Aunt Martie paused, looked up at Jim with a twinkle in her eye, and then added, "One more thing, preacher. When they bury me, I want my old Bible in one hand and a fork in the other". "A fork?" Jim was sure he had heard everything, but this caught him by surprise. "Why do you want to be buried with a fork?" "I have been thinking about all of the church dinners and banquets that I attended through the years," she explained, "Sometimes, at the best ones, somebody would lean over my shoulder and whisper, 'You can keep your fork.' "And do you know what that meant? Dessert was coming! And not a cup of Jell-O or pudding or even a dish of ice cream. You don't need a fork for that. It meant the good stuff, like chocolate cake or cherry pie! When they told me I could keep my fork, I knew the best was yet to come! That's exactly what I want people to talk about at my funeral. Sure, they can talk about all the good times we had together. That would be nice. But when they walk by my casket and look at my pretty blue dress, I want them to turn to one another and say, 'Why the fork?' "That's when I want you to tell them, that I kept my fork because 'the best is yet to come!'" My friends, our Lord has already leaned over our shoulder and whispered, "Live with the fork in your hand; the good stuff, the best, better than anything you can imagine, is coming! I promise!"*

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

The Ministry Of Reconciliation • 5:11-21 • The Issue Of Purpose

The one thing that probably prevents us from letting God shine out His glory through us more than anything else or at least creates the most difficulty for us is people. The majority of the suffering we experience and the problems we have in life are caused by people. I read a story about a guy named Robert Henry. *One evening he went shopping in a large discount store, hoping to purchase a pair of binoculars. As he walked up to the appropriate counter, he noticed that he was the only customer in the store. Behind the counter were two salespersons. One was so preoccupied talking to 'Mama' on the telephone that she refused to acknowledge that Robert was there. At the other end of the counter a second sales person was unloading inventory from a box onto the shelves. Growing impatient, Robert walked down to her end of the counter and just stood there. Finally, she looked up at him and said, "You got a number?" "I got a what?" asked Robert, trying to control his astonishment at such an absurdity. "You got a number? You gotta have a number." Robert replied, "Lady, I'm the only customer in the store! I don't need a number. Can't you see how ridiculous this is?" But she failed to see the absurdity and insisted that Robert take a number before agreeing to wait on him. By now, it was obvious to Robert that she was more interested in following procedures than helping customers. So, he went to the take-a-number machine, pulled number 37, and walked back to the salesperson. With that, she promptly went to her number counter, which revealed that the last customer waited on had been holding number 34. So she screamed out, "35!...35!...36!...36!...37!" "I'm number 37," said Robert. "May I help you? she asked without cracking a smile. "No," replied Robert, and he turned around and walked out. [Pursuit, Vol 111, No 2 (no date). Page 16.] Have you been in that store? I have! Have you been in that line of traffic when the "idiot" passes you over the double yellow line, nearly running you off the road? And these are just the little things. People often cheat you, hurt you, violate your trust, insult you and ignore your pleas for help. That comes with being part of the human race. Now, everything we've studied so far indicates to us that our very purpose on this earth is people! God is parading us in and out of peoples' lives exuding through us the aroma of Himself to attract them to Him, but what makes it tough is that they're not interested bystanders watching the parade. Lots of them are throwing tomatoes and buckets of water and sometimes shooting at our parade going by. Now, in our text, Paul points out to us:*

I. Our Natural Way Of Seeing People: (16) A worldly point of view is literally, **According To The Flesh**, both their flesh and our flesh. We don't come into the world seeing people from God's point of view.

1. we see them based on their external appearances and qualities First, we look at their appearance and listen to their speech. If they look ugly to us or even different from what we like, we steer away. If they're in a wheelchair or are missing an arm or leg or have an obvious handicap, we hang back and shy away because we're uncomfortable. If they don't speak our language well, we unconsciously think of them as less intelligent than we are and if their skin color or their facial features indicate a different race, we may have no desire to know them or be around them whatsoever. Then there's their behavior. If they're loud and boisterous or self-absorbed, we instantly don't like them; if they're shy and quiet there must be something wrong with them, and the list goes on and on. And not only do we see people based on their flesh:

2. we see them through the filter of our own self-interest If they can help me or are nice and kind, I like them and care about them. If they do or say anything at all negative toward me, they're an instant enemy. If they cut into line in front of me or won't help me at the counter, they're off my list and I can be just as rude in return. And if they do anything to really hurt me, if they criticize me or try to cheat me or to sue me or to arrest me or push or shove me, I can naturally hate them in a hurry. If they disagree with me or don't do things my way or get their way over mine, I can get angry and dismiss them so quickly! You see, in the natural, ME is the center of all things and every person I run into has to pass the ME test for me to care about them. Of course, now that I'm saved, I can recognize some of that and I surely don't WANT to be like that, but the old way of seeing people is still very much a part of my life. I definitely don't want to serve and love and reach people who don't fit my filter. So, the issue becomes:

The Issue: Ministry - How do I relate to the world of difficult people around me? How am I going to minister to and serve and reach the world when it is so full of all these difficult people? I'm surrounded by them! *Charles Wise tells the following fable: "Once there was a little boy who had a puppy. He was in love with that puppy. And that puppy loved him. They played together and slept together. They really enjoyed each other's company. One day the little boy was playing out in the front yard with his puppy. They were chasing each other, having a good time. During their play, the little dog ran out into the street and was hit by a car. Fortunately, he wasn't killed, but he was hurt really bad. As the little boy approached the puppy to help him, what do you think the puppy did? He did just what most hurting animals would do--he tried to bite the boy. He snapped at the little boy, not because he didn't love the little boy any more or because he was a bad puppy, but because he was in pain. Sometimes people who are in pain hurt other people. It's a kind of protection more than it is an attack. It's not that they're bad people, it's that they are reaching out in their pain the only way they know how. That's one principle we learn in ministry--that hurting people can hurt others. But we need to look at the little boy and his response. He has three choices. First, he can step back and angrily drop kick that puppy into the next block. He can choose to hurt the puppy because the puppy tried to bite him. We do that in our ministries. When people hurt us, sometimes we want to hurt them back. The little boy has a second choice. He can look at the puppy and say, 'I don't deserve that kind of behavior, and I sure don't need it,' and then just walk away and leave the puppy in the street. And we do that. Sometimes when we meet difficult people or hurting people, we tend to avoid them or ignore them because we don't need the trouble and the grief. But the boy has one other choice. The mature thing to do is to lovingly, carefully help the puppy. Now, doing that may mean going around and coming up on the blind side of the puppy where he can't see you coming. To pick him up and take him to the vet may even cause some pain for the puppy, even though it's for his own good. This may even involve being bitten by the puppy again. But we've got to have the maturity, the patience, and the love to give this sort of response--to reach out, knowing we may be hurt, knowing we may have to go to extraordinary lengths to minister and help that hurting puppy [or person!]. That's our job."* [Single Adult Ministries Journal, Mar/Apr 1996. Page 14.]

Now, to do that we need a new way of seeing people. Paul says he gave that old way up:

II. Our New Way Of Seeing People, not according to the flesh but **According To Their Spirit (16-17)** People are in one of two spiritual conditions:

1. they are either IN Christ or NOT IN Christ Any human being you meet, no matter what his flesh looks like or how your flesh reacts to him, is either IN Christ or not. Fat or skinny, fast or slow, smart or dumb, black or white, doesn't matter. Either he has come to Christ in faith and been placed into the Body of Christ and regenerated by the Spirit of Christ or he is outside of and apart from Christ. There IS NO MIDDLE GROUND and ultimately nothing else matters! Next time you're out at the store or a soccer game, look around you. Think how God must see the people you see, "That one knows Me; this one and that one and the other one don't." How can you tell?

2. IN Christ they become brand new creations There is a tremendous change that occurs inside them, a tremendous miracle just as great as any that God did on the day of creation. God creates inside of the believer a new heart, a new spirit, a new nature, a new man that is righteous and pure and holy just like He is. You become a new YOU at the very core and as a consequence the OLD YOU, the old man, is not just on the way out; it's gone! And the new isn't just on the way in; it's already here! And spiritual change inside changes your life on the outside.

So, when you see people, they're either what you are, a NEW Creation, restored and made whole or they're still that wounded puppy in the middle of the road who can't move himself and is going to get hit by a car pretty soon! Now, what

God is about is this: getting wounded puppies out of the street before they get killed and making them new creations! And He has a fancy name for that process:

III. The Process That God Is About: Reconciliation (18-19) To reconcile means to restore a relationship between two estranged parties. God is estranged from all old-creation type people from the moment they come into the world by sin. Here's how it came to be. God and man started out in relationship with one another in innocence and holiness enjoying true fellowship. But Adam as the head of the race turned his back on God and sinned. He said, "I don't want you" and allowed sin into his life. Because God is holy and cannot fellowship with sin, God would have been forced by His holiness to turn His back on man and allow him to die eternally. But God's love for us human beings was so strong that He did something radical about it:

1. God reconciled the world to Himself in Christ He sent His own beloved Son to die for the sins of the world, to take our place and the penalty of eternal death that we deserved, so that He would not have to count our sins against us. It left Him in the position of facing mankind once again. God reaches out in love, saying "We are estranged by sin, but I've made a way for you to come to Me; I have provided reconciliation for the whole world through My Son." But:

2. each person must now be personally reconciled by responding to Him through faith. I must choose to turn back to God, to repent, to have that relationship with My Creator that He provided through the cross. So, that's the business God's in. He's reconciled the world to Himself at the cross and He is now seeking and urging human beings one at a time to turn to Him and become new creatures. So, all men are either facing away from God in sin and lostness or toward Him in faith. And God has His arms stretched out, calling men to turn toward Him and be made new. Now notice two things:

a. note the global scope of the process We read this too fast and in our modern American mindset when we read *world*, we see *me*. But that isn't what it says. It includes me but the scope is bigger. It is true that God so loved ME that He sent His only Son but it says God so loved the WORLD. God's scope is the globe. He's not content with me and you and a few like us. He's not content with white North Americans. He provided reconciliation for the whole world, for every people, every language group, for those in every geographical location and that's why you must:

b. note the great commission given to the Church What does it say? *Make disciples of ALL NATIONS... Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature...Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth!* This is a big process and we're not the only ones in it. That's why the task of missions is so vital and we spend so much effort in praying and giving and going and sending. God is commanding all men everywhere to repent, to turn to Him! It's a worldwide process. It's going on in Irian Jaya and Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan and Kenya and in Philadelphia and Glenside too. God is about calling those outside of Him to be reconciled to Him wherever they are.

Now, that brings us to consider:

IV. The Purpose That God Has For Us: (18b) He has given that ministry of reconciliation to us. He's doing it, He's calling men to Himself, not by writing in the sky, not by using angels, but through us. Verse (11) says **We Persuade Men**. We convince men to turn around and be reconciled and become new creatures. That's our purpose in God's process. That's why we're here, so that the wounded puppies of the world might be rescued from the street and made new in Him. Now notice five important facts about this:

1. we are entrusted with the responsibility of messengers (19b) He left the message that He's reconciled and ready to save them, with us. In those days when you wanted to send someone a message there was no phone or fax or even a postal service. You gave your message to a messenger and sent him to deliver it. And what's the responsibility of a messenger? To see that the message gets delivered and to see that it gets delivered accurately. The message is only as good as the messenger entrusted to deliver it. God entrusted the news of the Gospel, of His willingness to save men by faith to us. If we don't deliver it and if we don't deliver it to the whole world, to every tribe and tongue and place, then it won't get delivered! We're messengers; the fate of the world hangs on our faithfulness. Secondly:

2. we are invested with the authority of ambassadors (20a) An ambassador doesn't simply carry a message for the one he represents; he acts with the authority of that one. In those days the emperor could designate a legate and that legate or ambassador would act would not only carry his message but act with his full authority and power. That's why Jesus said, *All authority in heaven and earth is given unto Me, now go and make disciples...* The offer we make to men, we make on the very authority of Jesus Christ Himself! And in fact:

3. we are placed in the position of substitutes (20b) We are not making an appeal *for* Him; He is making His appeal *through* us! We stand in the very place of God. We're His stand-in. He doesn't come to people to offer salvation. He comes IN US, literally, to people to make His appeal to them and here's:

4. the appeal that we make: "Be reconciled to God!" (20c) This is not Paul appealing to the Corinthians. There is no *you* in the Greek. This is the appeal of God to all mankind, "Be reconciled, turn to God; He's made provision for you

to be saved. His arms are open wide. He loves you. He wants you. Come to Him!" God is shouting that message out through our lives to all the outside-of-Christ wounded puppies in the street of the world. And the message continues. Here's:

5. the gift we offer: the righteousness of God (21) God put your sin on Jesus. He was perfect and sinless. But God treated Him as sin so that He can take the free gift of the righteousness of Jesus Christ and give it to you, so He can come into you and make you a brand-new creation, holy and pure!

Hey, that's your purpose in life! God didn't put you here to soak up the rays and enjoy the atmosphere. If you get some of that along that way, that's all right, but that's not why you're here. You're here because there are a few billion puppies out there lying wounded in the street. They'll bite you if you try to help them half the time, but you've got to decide what you're about. You can either kick them back or stomp off and forget them. Or you can get with God in His purpose and rescue them! But why would you want to do that? When they hurt you and they reject you and they criticize and make fun of you and don't want to listen to you? What are:

V. Our Motives For Pursuing This Purpose There are two:

1. we are moved by reverence for Christ: what we are is plain to Him (11) That doesn't mean we're afraid of Christ, that we're scared of Him and we care about others out of fear. This is connected with what we learned last week. The only motive worth having in this world, live or die, is to please Him (9) and one day we'll stand before Him face to face and take away from that encounter only the results of things done through this body (10). And we know that what we are and what we're about is already plain and clear to Him. We can't hide it. We can't fool Him. He knows what we're living for and whether we're living for His purpose or not. We respect Him; He's our Lord; His purpose and will mean something to us. That's one reason and the other is this:

2. we are compelled by the love of Christ: we died with Him to our own purposes and live for His (14-15) Let me put it really simply: He loved us so much that He died for us to get us out of the street! And He sent somebody with the message to share it with us. And when we receive that, it's time to die to our own purposes and wants and desires and to live for what He wants. His love for us compels us, it drives us to love others, to get out there and find that hurting puppy and pray and share and love him until his heart turns and he becomes a new creation in Jesus.

And when that love of God rules our hearts, we don't look at people and see enemies and critics and persecutors and people who are different and annoying and stupid. No matter what they look like or how repulsive and painful their behavior, we see hurting puppies that we love who need us to get them out of the street. *Morris Chapman writes: "There is a chilling moment in the novel Hawaii by James Michener when a group of savages are dancing before their gods. One of the savages holds his baby high in the air, and as an act of worship to a pagan god, throws it onto a stone altar, cracking the child's skull and instantly killing it. Looking on, the savage's wife turns to another woman and says, 'My husband is not bad. With a different god, he would be a different man.'"* [SBC Life, Oct 1995. Page 7.] People do an awful lot of things to bite us, to hurt us. But when you see them with the eyes of God's purpose, you know that if they had a different God, if they had Jesus Christ, they'd be different people. And His dying love, for you and for them, for the world, constrains you to do something about it, to hold out to them in their dying, the Word of Life.

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

Having Nothing Yet Possessing Everything • 6:1-10 • The Issue of Servanthood

There was one issue about which Jesus' disciples argued repeatedly. They argued about it on the way to Capernaum. They argued about it again on the way up to Jerusalem. They even argued about it at the table while they were eating for the last time with Him. Who knows how many other times it came up? They argued about which one of them was going to be the greatest. Who was the best? Who should be the leader? Who deserved the privileges? But Jesus had one standard answer for them. *Mark 9:35, "...If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all. Mark 10:43-44, "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. Luke 22:26, "...the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.* Servanthood. We still struggle with it today. Everything in our flesh demands to be served and recoils against serving. Nobody wants to be a servant. Why not? Because a servant, by definition, is somebody who doesn't get to do what he wants; his lot in life is to do the will of another, to carry out his master's instructions. It is not to go about meeting his own needs, but seeing that his master's needs and desires are met. Now as we enter the sixth chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds us of:

I. Our Position Before God While there are many wonderful aspects of our relationship with God that we enjoy, there are two key positions we hold which impact what we are about in this world. First:

1. we are His co-workers (1a), workers together with Him in the same task. This looks back to **5:19-20**. His purpose is reconciliation. He reconciled the world to Himself in Christ and now He's at work calling all men to turn and be reconciled to Him. That's His purpose for this age. And we are more than just persons working with Him. We are an integral part of the process; He does it *through* us! WE, God and us, appeal to people. So, to be coworkers means that we

are **the ones who live to accomplish His purpose**. His task is our task; His purpose is our purpose. We are interdependent partners bound together in the task inseparably as one. But at the same time, we have another position:

2. we are His servants, diakonoi, the ones who live to carry out His will (4a) In other words, this partnership is not a 50-50 deal on the decision-making end. It's not 60-40 or even 90-10, it's 100-0. We may be partners together in the process, but His will is the absolute determining factor in the direction the process goes. He is the Master; we are His servants. What He wants to do with us and through us and how He wants to do it are His choice, His prerogative as the Sovereign Lord. Now, realizing that we are both co-workers and servants, it is easy to see:

II. The Danger Of Our Position (1-2) First of all:

1. we may receive God's grace in vain, literally *unto nothing, unto emptiness*, that is, **without accomplishing His purpose**. He redeems us and reconciles us and saves us and commits to us the ministry of reconciliation, but we give our life to some other purpose instead of coworking with Him in His. We chase after a career and money in the bank. We work hard for a fine house and a luxury car. We struggle to the top of the corporate ladder or perfect our golf game to a T. But we fail to allow Him to make His appeal to others through our lives. And what happens? His purpose doesn't get accomplished and His investment in us is empty, vain. It saves us, but it impacts nobody else! *In the courtyard of a quaint little church in a French village stood a beautiful marble statue of Jesus with His hands outstretched. One day during the war, a bomb struck near the statue and mutilated it. After the battle was over and the enemy had passed through, the citizens of the village decided to find the pieces of their beloved statue and reconstruct it. Patiently they gathered the broken pieces and reassembled it. Even the scars on the body added to its beauty, but there was one problem. They were not able to find the hands of the statue. "A Christ without hands is no Christ at all," someone said sadly. "What's a Lord without hands. We need a new statue." Then someone else came along with another idea, and it prevailed. A brass plaque was attached to the base of the statue, saying, "I have no hands but your hands." Years later someone saw that inscription and wrote the following lines:*

I have no hands but your hands to do my work today.

I have no feet but your feet to lead men on the way.

I have no tongue but your tongue to tell men how I died.

I have no help but your help to bring men to God's side.' [Church Growth Institute Newsletter, 1983.]

That's why Paul says, "I urge you, I beseech you, I beg you, don't let the grace of God which saved you be fruitless and empty. You're a coworker with God in His purpose of reaching all men!" Then he mentions another danger:

2. we may waste our precious opportunity We may be servants who live their lives **without doing His will** "Now is the time; today is the day of salvation." We always want to relate this verse to unbelievers to tell them that their opportunity to be saved is short. But Paul wasn't talking to unbelievers about being saved; he was exhorting Christians that their opportunity to save others is precious and fleeting. It is so easy for servants of God to spend their lives pursuing other goals and wasting the precious opportunity they have to carry out His instructions! Jesus said, *It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so [that is, doing what he was instructed to do] when he returns.* – Mat. 24:46. Now what opportunity are we talking about? What does *today* mean? It can literally mean:

a. the opportunity of this present moment Every day, every moment is important. Once it's gone you can never get it back; it's gone forever. You only get so many years to have your kids, to love them into loving Jesus with all their hearts and when it's gone, it's gone. All opportunities are windows; they open and then they close. Some of them are just one conversation long. Some are a few days, a few months. Some are years. But none last forever and none of us knows how long the window will stay open. That's why we have to be about the Master's business now, today. It counts. One of our retired missionary couples went to Russia in a strategic window of opportunity. The window opened and they and hundreds of others rushed in to evangelize and to train believers in Russia to do the evangelizing before the window closed. But it's just as true of me; if I don't do His will today, if I don't let Him make His appeal through my life today, I can't get today back; it's gone. And if you add enough "todays" together, you're talking about:

b. the opportunity of this present life Today is the last opportunity that thousands of people will have to receive salvation. Tomorrow will be too late for them; death will claim them. Plus, on my end, I've only got one lifetime to serve Him and I don't know when that will end; it could be tomorrow. The Bible says life is short, life is fleeting, life is a vapor that is here today and gone tomorrow. The opportunity to be about the Father's will, to be involved in the salvation of others, is precious and not to be wasted. And when you put all our lives together, you're talking about:

c. the opportunity of this present age It doesn't last forever. The cross opened the window and we live in the day when whosoever will may come. But one day, and we don't know when, the window of opportunity will close. The Lord will return. His church will be caught out and the Great Tribulation will begin. God has only given this age to accomplish His purpose of claiming some from every people and tribe and tongue for Himself. He's only sent His church into the world to get the job done until He comes and we need to do our part and work for the night is coming when man's work is done! And thank God that in our day the church is waking up to its purpose as never before and the job IS getting done.

But no matter how you look at it, this moment, this life, this age, NOW is the time; TODAY is the day to be about the Father's business of saving people. So, what is it that gets in the way? What is it that tempts me to hold back from being the coworker and the servant that I am, from accomplishing His purpose and carrying out His will? It's the worst four-letter word in the English language:

The Issue: Self - I want to live life for my purposes and do my own will! I've got my own agenda. I've got things I want to do. I...I...I. Leonard LeSourd was a pilot during World War II. The training planes he flew had a set of controls that were called "trim tabs." Once the aircraft had reached the desired altitude, the pilot would set the trim tabs so that the plane would fly straight ahead even when he didn't have his hands on the controls. LeSourd comments: "In the same way, a young man, almost without knowing it, can put the direction of his life on automatic. The set of his **will**, like the trim tabs, can steer him to church on a Sunday morning, or to the golf course, or to sleep the morning away. It determines whom he seeks out as friends, what they do... [Strong Men Weak Men by Leonard LeSourd. Chosen Books, 1990. Page 42.] The problem we have is a **will** problem. Our will is naturally set on the direction of "I"; we have a choice to make. We need to set the direction of our will on "Him" and fly His direction. After the big confession that Peter made when he said, *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*, Jesus called the entire crowd of his disciples together and laid this choice on them all, *...If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily [literally, according to the day] and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life [that is, control of it] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.* - Luke 9:23-24. If you want to keep the direction and control of your life, you can, but you'll lose it and waste it! He's calling you in the choices you make every day to die to self, to choose His purpose in the events of that day, to be obedient in what you're called to that day, to become a servant and lose control of your life, only to find it's real meaning and purpose. So, what does that look like? How do we live that way? What is:

III. The Goal Of Our Servanthood (3-4a) You can look at it both positively and negatively. Stated negatively our goal is: **1. to remove all things from our lives which would discredit God** A servant's behavior reflects on his Master. I read about a dedicated Muslim leader, a servant of Allah, one devoted to him to the max, and he has his own son publicly beheaded, simply for believing in Jesus. Does that tell you something about the god he serves? Do you want to follow that god? A servant's actions reflect his Master's orders. You're a servant of the true God; would people who see your actions want to follow Him or would your actions prove to be an obstacle, a stumbling block, to keep them from Him? Our goal through His strength is to remove all those things that are contrary to His character and nature and will, such as anger, bitterness, greed, lust, and so on, so that our sin won't cloud their vision of Him. Or, stated positively, our goal as servants is:

2. to continually demonstrate that we are serving God, to let the presence and glory of God shine through us in every way, in every circumstance, in every opportunity we have. What does that look like? Well, one key area Paul mentions from his own life is this:

a. we demonstrate His patience in enduring:

- **pressure: troubles, hardships, distresses (4b)**
- **persecution: beatings, imprisonments, riots (5a)**
- **difficult conditions: hard work, sleepless nights, hunger (5b)**

It is as believers endure these things willingly, unchangingly devoted to Him by His power, that our message of reconciliation is broadcast the loudest. When they see that we have a God who is faithful to His servants in the pressures and troubles of life, that we don't give up and curse His name when tragedy strikes, but instead thank Him for our trials and worship Him, that speaks to them. When they see believers whose love for God is so great that they are willing to endure persecution and torture and imprisonment rather than deny Him, that speaks to them. When they see that they can close the churches and imprison the leaders but the church only grows, that speaks to them. And when they see believers who are willing to endure all kinds of difficult conditions and sacrifice their own comforts and privileges and give their all to share His love, that kind of servanthood speaks volumes! A God who can create that kind of endurance in His servants is worth serving! A second key area is this:

b. we demonstrate His character by displaying:

- **purity, understanding, patience, kindness (6a)**
- **the Holy Spirit, sincere love, truthful speech (6b-7a)**

Do any of these things sound familiar? Several of them are listed as fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5. They are the character of our Master. We choose purity even when we're tempted greatly. We're patient and longsuffering when we're wronged. We're always kind and caring about the needs of others. We love even the ones who hate us and we always tell the truth, even when lying would seem more advantageous. We live in an un-natural, indeed, a SUPERnatural way. We flesh out in our daily lives as servants the very character of the God we serve. Gods always make their worshippers into their own image; they command them to do the things that reveal their own character. So, you become like what you worship. A God who produces that kind of character in His servants is worth worshipping! As we are obedient servants, we are revealing His character all the time! Then thirdly:

c. we display His power by wielding weapons of righteousness (7b-8a) There are lots of weapons in the world that people use to accomplish their goals. The terrorists use their bombs and the dictators use their armies. The powerful use their lying and extortion and money and whatever else they can get their hands on to advance their cause. But here stand us believers, not willing to use any of those, but instead holding out our simple weapons of righteousness, like always being honest and telling the truth and keeping promises and speaking out against injustice and oppression and praying for our enemies and loving them. And we keep on sticking to those weapons:

- **whether they are used for attack or defense** That phrase “in the right hand and in the left” can also be translated “for or attack or for defense”. We advance our cause in righteousness and we defend ourselves the same way. And we stick with them:

- **whether they bring us glory or dishonor** Whether they appear to triumph outwardly or not, whether we win or lose. We stick by them because they’re right and we do it:

- **whether others give us a good report or bad report** No matter what they say about us, no matter what they call us, no matter whether they call us names and accuse us of things untrue, we still cling to our weapons of righteousness.

And through those weapons of righteousness God displays His power which is mightier than that of the sword! And you can watch it happening all over the world. Time after time God’s enemies fall at His feet in worship, overwhelmed by weapons of love and righteousness, and His power is made clearly known through our very weakness! Do you get it? Simply by being obedient servants, by doing His will every day, we demonstrate and display Him in the way we speak and act; we reveal Him, His amazing endurance, His beautiful character, His awesome power, and it is through that process of daily servanthood that He carries out the ministry of reconciliation! And it’s a glorious process! When we think of a servant’s life, we think of a life that is menial, low, dull, unexciting, filled with laborious unrewarding, unfulfilling acts that nobody would want. But nothing could be further from the truth. Servanthood to Jesus Christ is to be involved in the most exciting, fulfilling adventure you can embark on. It is to directly involve yourself smack in the middle of a spiritual war that is the conflict of the ages. It is to throw yourself into the front lines of battle and be used of God to tear down Satanic strongholds next door and all over the world by simple daily obedience! Paul talks about:

IV. The Glory Of Our Servanthood (8b-10)

1. when we’re seen as imposters, we’re genuine When people say we’re not real, that our motives are wrong, that we only want something, that we’re deluded religious fanatics, deceivers who lead people astray, that our God is not real, we’re genuine! In fact, we’re the only ones who are genuine and real; truly what we say we are. The rest of the world are the impostors, having a form of religion, but knowing nothing of the real power of God!

2. when we’re seen as unknown, we’re well known When they say, “You’re just a bunch of nobodies, a little minority, preaching something nobody ever heard of.”, we’re well-known, fully known to God. In fact, we’re the only ones He knows and all the rest will hear, “Away from Me, I never knew you!” one day.

3. when we’re seen as dying, behold we’re living on How many a ruler and a conqueror has slain us by the hundreds, has persecuted and crushed us and yet behold, we’re living on! How many have thought they could kill the body, but after that had no more that they could do; we live on. We’re eternal and we’re the only ones with eternal life.

4. when we’re seen as punished, we’re not destroyed When they see us as beaten, chastised, punished, put down, no matter what they do to us, we’re not killed off, not destroyed. We survive!

5. when we’re seen as sorrowing, we’re always rejoicing When they make our lot so miserable and make us suffer so that we know sorrow after sorrow and they look at us and say, who would want to be one of them and live that life of suffering, when they look closer, they find that in the midst of our sorrow we are always rejoicing in the Lord, always praising Him and nothing can crush and take away our joy.

6. when we’re seen as poor, we’re making many rich We Christians of the earth are often the poor who have nothing; often we live in very simple and humble circumstances. And yet by our very servanthood, we’re making many rich with the glorious spiritual riches that are found in Jesus Christ.

7. when we’re seen as having nothing, we possess everything We’re servants. We have nothing to call our own here. It all belongs to the Master. The world looks at us and says we have nothing. We don’t have fame, we don’t have power, we don’t have wealth, we don’t have money and pleasure and all the things that the world says really matter. But the truth is that we possess everything! We are God’s heirs; we are receiving a Kingdom which cannot be shaken. And if you don’t think servanthood pays in the end, I leave you with Jesus’ words:

And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. - Luke 12:29-37.

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7

Perfecting Holiness Out Of Reverence • 6:11-7:1 • The Issue of Purity

I want to talk to you today about a passage that has either been ignored or very much misunderstood and misused. There is a portion of the Christian church that places a great deal of emphasis on this chapter and has developed out of it a complete doctrine of separation that has caused them to wall themselves off from everybody and everything, even from a great many who are their true brothers and sisters in Christ. On the other hand, this passage addresses an issue, the ignoring of which has been the downfall of virtually every major denomination you can name. To understand it, we begin by examining carefully:

I. The Problem Paul Faced (11-13)

1. the Corinthians were withdrawing from Paul and his teaching They were withholding their affections from him. He was the one who had brought the Gospel to Corinth and started the church. They loved him and were grateful to him for bringing them the truth. But now they were backing away from that free and open affirmation of him and his message and their association with him. So much so that he made this heartfelt appeal. Now, why were they doing it? It should obviously have something to do with the next verse (14), with their association with "unbelievers". But what is he specifically talking about?

2. they were doing it because of the influence of false teachers All through the letter you can find him defending himself, talking about other teachers who had come among them recently and were teaching them some things that were different. Look at what Paul is worried about in **(11:2-3)**. He's afraid that they might be deceived by false teachers:

a. they were preaching a different message (11:4) It wasn't that the Buddhists had showed up or the Hindus or the Zoroastrians. These were teachers who claimed to be followers of Christ but were teaching differently about Him and about the Spirit and about the gospel, the way to be saved. They were saying things like, for instance, "Jesus was not fully human; he was a created being that God sent down, above the angels, below God, but certainly not a man like us." Or they were saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law if you want to follow Jesus." And these people were being listened to and tolerated in the church there. At the same time:

b. they were claiming superiority for themselves (11:5-6) They said, "We are the true apostles; we are superior. Paul was of the old school. He didn't understand correctly. We have the true message." And there were lots of other charges you can find implied through the book, "He doesn't have the background, he's not a trained speaker, he's not...." And as they put down Paul and his message, it impacted the Corinthians to back away. But here's the truth:

c. they were in reality Satan's workers (11:13-15) Instead of attacking the church through persecution, Satan was infiltrating the church with false teachers who were masquerading as messengers of light, when in reality they were Satan's agents to corrupt the church!

Do you know that just over 100 years ago or so, practically every Protestant church in America preached the Gospel? They believed the Bible was inerrant, that Christ was God, that He died for our sins and rose again and was the only way of salvation. People were hearing the truth and being saved in the Methodist Church and the Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church. The many Baptist churches were winning converts and even the Episcopalians for all their high church trappings were holding much more closely to the truth. However, a whole movement rose up in our colleges and seminaries around the turn of the century which declared that the Bible wasn't really inspired by God but was the opinions of good men, that Christ was a great teacher and a moral example but not the Son of God, that He rose from the dead in spirit but not in body and He certainly couldn't have been born of a virgin. Salvation is by being good and imitating His love and caring. And that movement of "Higher Criticism" or "liberalism" as we call it, was tolerated. It was left to grow and to prosper and do you know that within 30-40 years it infected virtually every major denomination in the land to the very core. Now please don't misunderstand; I am not saying there are no evangelical churches within the major denominations. There are. I am saying that today (in the Western world) we "evangelicals" who believe what Paul believed have gone from being the majority to being a small minority and millions have drifted away from the truth that gives life! What happened at Corinth has happened here! And we're not immune; it could happen to us or to our children!

The Issue: Spiritual Purity - How can we keep from drifting away? - Heb. 2:1, *We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.* That is, from the truth, from the pure and true Gospel. Paul's answer is in verse 14 where he lays down a key:

II. The Principle: Literally, **Stop becoming different-yoked with unbelievers! (14)** Christ said, *Take my yoke upon you.* A yoke is the wooden bar that you put across the shoulders of two animals so they can pull a plow or a wagon. The Greek word means to yoke together two different kinds of animals, like the Old Testament law that says not to yoke an ox and a donkey together. So, the basic point is that you've got to stop getting into the yoke of Christ with people who are of an entirely different species. Now, first of all, let's look at:

1. what this does NOT mean It does not mean:

a. don't associate with any unbeliever There are those who take this to mean that we should have just as little as possible to do with unbelievers. Work for a Christian, hire a Christian carpenter, go to a Christian dentist and doctor, and spend all your time with Christians. Especially avoid the unbeliever if he happens to practice obvious sin, like he smokes or drinks or is living with someone or practices a false religion. Live as much as possible in a sheltered little Christian enclave. But that's not what Paul meant at all. In fact, **we should associate with unbelievers!** If he meant that, he'd never have written **1 Cor. 5:9-10**. So, that's not what he means. But some have taken it to mean:

b. don't be friends with any unbeliever Drop all your unsaved friends. Get rid of them. You can know unbelievers, but don't let them into your life. Don't build friendships; don't build relationships. Do you know that statistics tell us that within 2 years the average person who comes to Christ has no non-Christian friends left? That's sad because it is so very unlike the example of Jesus which says **we should!** - **Mk. 2:15-17**. Jesus deliberately associated with sinners all the time; that's how they came to believe! He was their friend and yet He was the pure, spotless lamb of God. We need to cultivate associations with unbelievers; that's the only way to reach them! So, it doesn't mean that, and then some have taken it to mean:

c. don't cooperate with any unbeliever A yoke joins two animals to work together, so don't do anything together with non-Christians. Don't join the Lions Club or the Rotary or the fire house. Don't become their business partner; don't let them contribute money or help with the projects you're involved in. Don't become dependent on them or accept their aid in any way. Yet the very example of Paul seems to say that **we should!** In **Acts 28:1-10** he was shipwrecked on the island of Malta and it was the pagan idolaters who took him and his crew in and fed them and housed them all winter and Paul didn't hesitate about it one bit. There are lots of things in which we should cooperate with unbelievers for their good and ours. So, what does it mean? Remember the context:

2. it means: avoid equal-status relationship with false teachers He's not talking about the average non-Christian next door or at the office. It's false teachers he's got in view. Paul's saying, "You're separating yourself from ME through their influence; rather you should be separating yourself from THEM, because they're polluting and defiling your faith and causing you to drift away!" When we consider those who deliberately preach and teach a different gospel our brethren and call them part of the church and let them teach and listen to them as though they were one of us, we are exposing ourselves to grave spiritual danger. We should cut off those kinds of yokes. Look at what John said in **2 John 7-11**. In those days many Christian workers like Paul were "circuit riders". They would come to a town and stay with the believers there and be fed and cared for by them while they preached and taught and did evangelistic work. John says, "If the guy doesn't stand for the truth, don't support him; don't help him do his deceptive work!" He's not saying if a Jehovah's Witness knocks on your door, slam it in his face. All that does is teach him that "born-again" Christians are rude and ignorant and don't love anybody, which reinforces what he's been taught to begin with. He's saying that when you find a person who claims to be Christian but is teaching false doctrines, don't count him as being like you; you certainly don't let him teach you and you don't aid or encourage him in teaching others. Maintain spiritual purity, the pure truth, the pure Gospel at all costs!

What makes this so hard is that false teachers don't have the appearance of evil. They appear as angels of light. They are probably kind and caring, sincere, dedicated, committed to what they believe and teach. They probably do lots of good things. They talk about Jesus, about loving others, about praying, and it is hard to recognize them for what they really are! I know! Before I knew any better, I spent four years in a college and three years in a denominational seminary where the professors were just such people! Here were religious people, kind people, educated and dedicated people who claimed Christianity, but when you thought carefully, they denied everything we hold dear about Jesus and the Bible. Because I was pretty well grounded, I wrestled hard and was able to make that distinction, to see the truth of who they were and what they taught. But not everyone did. Their impact on students was profound and, of course, those students went out to fill pulpits all over the land, now having become like their teachers, having drifted away from the simple truth! I saw many classmates who started out with true faith drift away in that fashion. Perhaps the closest to my heart was a young man named Dennis who when I knew him was on fire for Jesus Christ. He sang in the choir and solos; he led in worship and even preached on occasion. He witnessed at work and went out visiting with me to share the Gospel. He felt called of God into full-time ministry, but had no Bible training. When we moved here, I en-

couraged him to come east and go to a solid Bible School, not to do it like I did. But he and his wife chose the security of staying on and going to the denominational college. He was given a student church and when I visited a few years later, I asked him how he was doing spiritually, whether he was still holding to the truth of the Bible and whether he was still encouraging people to be saved by trusting in Jesus. It broke my heart to hear him say, "I guess I just don't believe like that anymore." It was not long after that he was divorced from his wife and their 4 children. And from there I lost track. He just drifted away from the truth and shipwrecked. Why? Because he failed to heed this principle; he failed to unyoke himself from false teachers. Now here's:

3. what you must understand about them (14b-16a) No matter how wonderful they may look on the surface the real truth is that:

a. you are about opposing purposes: *righteousness vs. lawlessness* You're about pursuing and partaking of the righteousness of God. What they're about, no matter how upright and moral it may seem, is really *anomia*, lawlessness, leading people to live without law, to ignore the law that God has laid down in His word concerning His son. And:

b. you have opposing natures: *light (truth) vs. darkness* Light and darkness are mutually exclusive. The very nature of one is the opposite of the other. When light comes, darkness can't be there, by definition. And light is always in the Bible a figure of truth and of good. While darkness is a figure of evil and deceit. When a Muslim says, "Jesus is not God, nor is he the Son of God, but merely a good man and a prophet", we immediately call that blasphemy. But when a so-called "Christian" theologian writes that same thing, we publish it in a textbook and make students read it! It is the same thing. You are about light, about the truth once for all revealed to the saints. The work of false teachers is an evil work, a work of darkness. Moreover:

c. you serve opposing masters: *Christ vs. Satan* You are serving Christ who is about the redemption of the world; they are serving Satan's purpose (even if they don't realize it), who is about the destruction of the world! You'll never see Christ and Satan doing a duet in harmony, will you? So, you can't do one with them either. Your direction of service is entirely opposite from theirs. And:

d. you have opposing status: *believing vs. disbelieving* You believe. Yet, it is not that they are simply unbelievers, in that they've not had opportunity to believe. They've heard the truth and rejected it. They have chosen to disbelieve, to reject what God has revealed about His Son and to lead others into that rejection. And finally:

e. you worship opposing deities: *God vs. idols* You're worshipping the true and living God in relationship with Him. The God and the Jesus they've set up are man-made idols, false imitations of the real. You're NOT worshipping and serving the same God. The god of the Jehovah's witnesses, the god of the Mormons, the god set up by liberal theology in the mainline church is not the God of the Bible, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Jesus, but only a man-made caricature which they have set up and bow down to.

For all the similarities and the language you may use that seems the same, you are as different as day and night, as far apart as east and west, and as divided as heaven and hell. To enter into any kind of an equal-status relationship with someone who professes Christianity but is in reality a false teacher, an enemy agent, is deadly! But listen to **Jude 1:3-4, 19-21**. Now, that posture is not going to be popular. People are not going to understand it. They're going to call you narrow-minded and prejudiced and divisive or maybe, like they called Peter and the Apostles, they'll call you unlearned and ignorant men who are living in the past! You can suffer for this; it can get tough. So, Paul reminds us of:

III. Our Reason For Spiritual and Moral Purity: We Are His Temple (16b-18) I'll take that any day. We who trust in Jesus as our personal Savior are the sons and daughters of God Almighty. He has received us. He is a Father to us! We're His people; we belong to Him! That's what really counts. But it says we're even more. We're His temple. Individually, our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit; He lives in us. And because of that, corporately, we who believe are the Temple of God, His dwelling place. Now look what Paul says:

1. God lives in us Literally, *I will dwell in them*. Just as God's presence once literally dwelt inside an earthly temple, so now He literally dwells inside us, inside our body and is joined to our spirit and so:

2. God walks about in us *I will walk about in them*. Where we go, He goes. What we see, He sees. What we listen to, He listens to. What we do, we engage Him in. We drag Him into everything we do and say and experience with us. In 1 Cor. 6, Paul says, "How can you get involved in sexual immorality? Don't you realize that you're His temple and you're dragging Him into it with you! You're defiling His temple!" We strive for moral purity because a holy God lives in us. And when we listen to someone teach that Jesus didn't rise bodily from the dead, that His death is not enough in itself to save us, that we must earn our salvation, and we give assent to that stuff or call that person a brother and treat him that way, think about God who's walking about in us. This is His Son who died, His Word revealed in truth, His message that's being falsely represented and blasphemed. We can't make Him party to that!! Not after all He's done for and in us! So, since we have all these great and precious promises, Paul admonishes us about:

IV. Our Responsibility For Spiritual and Moral Purity (7:1) We are:

1. to purify ourselves from (remove) ANYthing that defiles us Whether we're talking about a sinful habit that contaminates our body, a moral problem, a terrible temper, evil thought patterns or whether we're talking about tolerating and listening to false teachers which contaminates our mind and spirit, ANYTHING that defiles or contaminates us, that offends the Holy God who lives in us, has to go, has to be removed. That's expressing it negatively. Positively, what we're to do is:

2. to perfect (grow in) our holiness out of reverence for God Because we're in awe of His holiness in us, because we're aware of what it means to be forgiven and cleansed and made holy before Him, we're constantly striving to make our holiness complete in our daily behavior, to make it like His, to lay aside anything moral or spiritual that hinders our purity.

David Branon writes: "Along the country road that our family takes to a favorite recreational spot is a house that we always notice. Every time we pass it, someone calls out, 'Perfect house!' We call this ranch-style home by this name because from our vantage point, as we whiz by, it looks flawless. The lawn looks like carpet. The shrubs are perfectly clipped. The windows shine. Nothing looks shabby or out of place. As we drive past, we usually get a clear indication why the house looks so neat. The owners are almost always outside working to keep things looking nice. With bucket or rake in hand, they seem determined to fight off dirt and decay and unwanted growth to keep their home looking good. As a homeowner who understands how tough it is to keep everything just right, I can appreciate the efforts of this couple. But for me they also symbolize something else. In Scripture, God says, 'Be holy, for I am holy.' That means we are to strive for perfection. Like those homeowners, we can never reach perfection. Yet we must keep at it--cleaning out bad habits here, clipping troublesome thoughts there. It takes constant effort, but with the Spirit's help we are to continue in our drive for perfection. Perfecting holiness out of reverence for God!"

The Suffering And The Glory - 2 Corinthians 1-7 **Godly Sorrow That Brings Repentance • 7:2-16 • The Issue of Sin**

Suffering comes into our lives from a variety of sources. Sometimes it is purely from circumstances; we lose our job, we get sick, we fall and get hurt or what have you. Then sometimes it comes to us intentionally at the hand of outsiders; someone cheats us or yells at us or even persecutes us. But what often hurts the worst is the suffering we bring on one another in our families, our friendships and our personal relationships. *The German philosopher Schopenhauer said the human race is like a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter's night. He said, "The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills..."* Those quills, those hurts, are the result of the presence of sin in our lives. We frequently sin against one another and cause hurt. And in chapter 7 we can see a clear example of:

I. The Suffering That Occurs As The Result Of Sin (5-9a) Now let's review some things here. First of all:

1. the Corinthians' sin had hurt Paul When we studied chapter 2, I shared with you that Paul had evidently made a brief and difficult visit to Corinth during his three years at Ephesus. He was evidently not well-received. I mentioned to you last week the evidence that they had been tolerating false teachers among them and withdrawing from Paul. And as they chose to reject Paul's teaching and to reject Paul himself, it hurt him. 2:1 calls it a "painful visit", one which brought him sorrow and grief. So, Paul went back and wrote a letter, one which has not been preserved, and:

2. Paul's stern letter had hurt the Corinthians It was not malicious; it was not vengeful; it was not intended to hurt them intentionally. *2 Cor. 2:4, For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.* It was to tell them the truth about his own love and his distress at their choices and to urge them to turn away from their sin. And it worked. It impacted and grieved them in a positive way:

3. their pain produced deep sadness and change in them, but Paul didn't know it. He was worried at how it was received. He sent Titus there in person to find out, before he himself arrived. When he left Ephesus and headed across into Macedonia, he was full of apprehension about them on the inside, but then suddenly Titus showed up with a wonderful report in verse 7. God had worked! The letter had broken their hearts! They did love Paul. They did long to see him again. Their sorrow was true and genuine and it had led them to repentance from their sin. And:

4. this tremendous change greatly encouraged Paul (4) Notice also 7b and 9a. He was flying high, filled with joy, not because they had been hurt by his letter (he initially regretted that), but because the temporary pain it caused them had led them to profound change and restoration. So, the issue is:

The Issue: Sin In The Believer's Life - How God Intends Us To React The Corinthians are not the only believers who choose to sin and hurt people. It happens TO us all the time. Our friends and loved ones, fellow believers, do and say things that grieve us deeply. And Paul's example of communicating with them honestly out of a heart full of love

and then forgiving and receiving them and being overjoyed, is the process God wants us to use when it happens TO us. But that's not my point today. We DO it to others all the time. We are more often like the Corinthians who choose to sin and hurt others, than we are like Paul being hurt! I sin! YOU sin! I cause people pain by my words and by my actions and sometimes by my lack of words and actions! Steve Farrar writes, *"About six months ago I blew up at my daughter Rachel just before bedtime. Actually, I blew up at her about 45 minutes after she was supposed to be in bed. It had been a long day, and I was extremely tired. For some reason, it seemed she kept lingering and hovering around the house. I wanted peace and quiet. Finally, Mount St. Helens blew. I'm sure the neighbors wondered what had angered me so. I told Rachel that she had 15 seconds to be in bed. She went to bed crying as the hot lava of my wrath pursued her up the stairs. After I came back down, Mary told me there were several good reasons she had been up. Some special event was to take place at school the next morning, and Rachel was getting ready for it. She wasn't lingering, she was preparing. If I had bothered to ask Rachel what was going on, I could have discovered that for myself. But I didn't. I just vented on her."* Just change the names and that same drama plays at our house. And I'd wager that it or one like it plays at yours. It may be the opposite; sin can be very quiet and even unrealized, like breaking your wife's heart by disappointing her and putting down her best efforts and being insensitive to her feelings and needs. It can be a quiet jealousy toward a brother or sister for what they have and you don't. You and I are saved, but YOU and I sin, and we hurt people. Now, how does God intend for us to react once it dawns on us or someone points it out to us? It should produce sorrow. But Paul spells out for us here that there are:

II. The Two Types Of Sorrow (9b-10) First, there is:

1. sorrow as God intended, Godly sorrow. This type of sorrow is characterized by three things:

a. it produces a change of mind about the nature of the act which we call **repentance**. The Greek word is *metanoia* which means to change the mind, to change the way you think about something. But it's more than, "Gee, I wish I hadn't done that." *A man in a parking lot backed into another car. He simply didn't look to see if the way was clear, and he was obviously at fault. But he jumped out of his car, yelled furiously at the woman driving the car he hit, and told her it was her fault for getting in his way. He continued to blame her when he spoke to his insurance agent later. Eventually she was cleared, but only after going through tremendous anguish.* I'm sure he was sorry he backed out of the space, but he never changed his mind about what he'd done. We're all like that. We sin because we "have to", or we "couldn't help it". It was somebody else's fault, even God's, because he didn't rescue us. True sorrow means changing your mind about the nature of what you did, acknowledging it was wrong, that I was wrong! That's what God intended sorrow to produce! But it does more:

b. it produces a change of direction in the life For an unsaved person, it is this change of mind about his sin that brings him to Christ for forgiveness and eternal salvation. But the word *salvation* in this context, when we apply it to a believer who already has eternal salvation, should be taken in its primary meaning of deliverance. When you change your mind about a sin, it leads to deliverance from it, to stopping it. Repentance is often described as a change of direction, to be going one way and then stop and go the other. If I believe it is wrong, I will not do it any-more! And thirdly:

c. it produces a change that is permanent You don't regret your repentance. You don't go back on it and start to see your sin in a better light. You don't slide back into the old mindset; your mind and behavior are permanently changed. That's sorrow as God intended it to work. But Paul mentions another type of sorrow:

2. sorrow as the world practices it, worldly sorrow! What's that?

a. it is a self-oriented regret based on circumstances and consequences "I wish I hadn't done it; look at how it messed my life up; these consequences are painful." It's not about good and evil, right and wrong, or holiness before God. It's about me and what feels good and what I have to suffer or don't. It's sorrow about being caught, rather than about doing wrong. And this kind of sorrow:

b. it does not usually produce a permanent change in behavior If I don't do it again, it's because it's to my own advantage. But you can bet that if the circumstances are right and I can benefit by it, I will do it again, because my heart has not changed. And the result is that:

c. it leaves sin in control to work its deadly effect - Rom. 6:23 says sin always pays off in death. But death is not simply physical death or eternal punishment. It comes by degrees. When you yield to it, sin kills. It kills relationships. It kills opportunities. It kills your walk with God and your service for Him. It kills marriages and parent-child relationships. It kills the desire to do right and to change. It saps life of meaning and value. And the only way to break its deadly grip is a godly sorrow that produces true repentance!

The Corinthians had this godly sorrow and had genuinely repented of their sin. Paul was convinced of it by the report Titus had brought him. He heard about things in them that convinced him that they were not just filled with worldly sorrow but with the real thing. And he spells them out in verse 11 so we can use them as a measuring stick for ourselves. How do I know when I (or someone else) am genuinely repentant? There are six:

III. The Marks Of Genuine Repentance (11) Look at that last phrase. At every point they had proved themselves, not *innocent* of the original deed, but literally *holy*, that is, to have **a holy character on the inside**. These are the things that convince me that your life has changed to line up with the holy character of who you actually are in Christ. But let's apply them personally. If I am truly repentant, I will have:

1. an earnestness that demands the sin be dealt with and soon I won't be content to try to hide it or cover it over anymore. My goal won't be to try to get others to forget about it or to put off having to deal with it as long as possible. I will have a drive to deal with it. This thing must be set right and soon. It's important and I don't want it in my life. There is a haste, a drivenness, an inability to rest until the issue has been fully settled. There will also be:

2. an eagerness to give a full and complete explanation Not to clear myself in the sense of defending my behavior and proving myself innocent, though the Greek word can mean that. But it can also mean to give a long and reasoned explanation, a full and complete account, to tell the whole story. If I truly abhor what I've done, I don't want to hide any part of it any more. I want to confess to the whole thing, to get it out of the darkness and into the light and get it off of me. I'm eager to say, "I did it" and to tell all I did, not to hold back as much as possible. Then, there will be:

3. a deep grief over the commission of the sin *Indignation* means to be very displeased, to be grieved by something, but in this case it's not by the actions of others, it's by MY OWN sin! I'm displeased with myself. I'm grieved that I have done this thing, that I could stoop that low, that I could fall. I am truly sad that I did it. Yet it will be more than just grief; it will be:

4. an alarm over the spiritual danger involved A healthy reverent fear that is born out of the realization of the danger of my own actions, of what the choice to sin could do to me and to the other person and to my relationship with God! The Corinthians had very nearly thrown away the truth of the Gospel by yoking up with false teachers, had very nearly forfeited God's gracious gift of truth to follow a lie. I'm sure they shuddered when they thought about it! There was a new respect for holiness and a new fear of sin and what it can do! And then, when I'm truly repentant there is always:

5. a deep longing and concern for the one(s) injured I know I've hurt somebody and that breaks my heart. I long to reach out to them, to help them, to heal them, to reestablish a relationship with them. As a simple illustration, just think how you feel when you accidentally bump into or knock over a small child, how you know you've hurt them and instantly your heart just wants to reach out to hold them and make it better. When there's been intentional sin and you're repentant, you have the same longing, the same concern only even deeper. And finally, there is always:

6. a readiness to right the wrong: to accept punishment and make amends There are no excuses and no weaseling out of it. I did it and I deserve the consequences of what I did. I accept the responsibility. I'll do the time. I'll pay the fine. I'll accept that penalty. And that extends to doing whatever I can to repair the damage, to give back what I took away, to right the wrong, to pay the bill. I read a story about a farmer who, a few years before, had sold a combine at an auction. However, in order to increase the sale price, he first set the hour meter back so the combine didn't appear to be as used as it really was. During a revival crusade in his church, the farmer came under conviction for his dishonesty. He confessed his sin to God and determined to make restitution. Next, he talked with a farm implement dealer to determine how much less the combine would have been worth had he not tampered with the hour meter. Finally, he went to the new owner to confess what he had done and to offer \$1,500 in restitution. The buyer was taken aback and said, "This is unbelievable. My wife just underwent a series of cancer treatments which have put us under financial strain." He went on to explain that he and his wife had determined that the amount they needed to get out from under the financial burden was \$1,500. So, two households were blessed by the genuine repentance of one man." [Personal letter, Oct 17, 1995.] There's a realization of the damage and a determination to fix it.

Those are the marks that demonstrate my heart is pure, that my sorrow is godly, my repentance genuine and my life changed. But as he closes the subject Paul emphasizes:

IV. The Key: To See What Is Really True Of Yourself Before God (12-13a) Godly sorrow and repentance are not first of all for the one who did the wrong. They're not first of all for the injured party you've hurt. The primary concern is that God's truth is revealed and that you see what is really true of yourself in God's sight, the way He sees you. This whole thing proved something. Despite all their faults and their sin, the Corinthians were genuine in their hearts. At the core, they really did love God and want to please Him, even though for a time they chose to sin. At the core they really did love Paul even though they treated him badly for a time. God looks at the heart. Nothing is hidden from Him. He wants us to see what He sees about ourselves. When old Job, who had been mouthing off pretty loudly at God, was confronted with his sin and had his eyes opened, here's what he said, *I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer— twice, but I will say no more.* - Job 40:4-5. *My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.* - 42:5-6. Job said, "Now I see You for Who You are and me for who I am. I have no choice but to change." And he did. When you sin, do you sorrow as God intended? Do you exhibit the marks of genuine repentance? Or do you regularly justify, hide, and gloss over your sins? Be honest. Look at Him. He knows!

I never did tell you the end of the story of what happened with Steve and his daughter Rachel upon whom he'd vented his wrath wrongly at bedtime. Here's the rest: *I made my way back up the stairs and asked her forgiveness. I felt like a real jerk. We prayed together, and I tucked her in and decided the safest place for me was in bed as well. I told Mary I was turning in. But I couldn't drop off to sleep. My explosion had unsettled me, too. I kept thinking of the enormous damage I could inflict on my exquisite ten-year-old daughter without even realizing it. The last thing I wanted to do was to crush her delicate spirit. Although we had patched things up and she had forgiven me, I couldn't get her off my mind. After an hour or so, I got up, got in the car, and drove down to the 24-hour supermarket. I found a red rose in a nice little vase, and a card with a man peering out of a doghouse, and headed home. I wrote Rachel a note telling her that I really did love her and that I really was wrong. Then I placed the rose and the card on the kitchen table. It was the first thing she saw when she walked in the next morning. I figured after ruining her evening, the least I could do would be to make her day. It was worth the late-night trip. Instead of going off to school with memories of the red hot lava, she could think of her red serene rose...and a dad who was genuinely sorry.*" [Point Man by Steve Farrar. Multnomah, 1990. Pages 214-215.] The situation is not always that simple, but the sorrow can always be that genuine.

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The Grace Of Giving - 2 Corinthians 8-9

What Is Giving? - 8:1-8

Over the next six weeks I'm going to do a systematic study on the subject of Christian Giving. I am doing it, not simply because we are behind our expenses right now, but for a much deeper reason. You see, for many generations, a habit of significant giving was viewed as normal for a believer. Previous generations saw and understood significant giving as a normal part of the Christian life; it was as important a part of the Christian life as reading the Bible and praying and going to church; they committed to a principle of giving and held to it in prosperity or adversity, inflation or depression. But many people in the current generation have never learned to make the principle of giving a significant part of their life. The number of those who do so is growing less all the time. We, the church, have failed to teach the truth about giving; except for those who continually beg for money, we have been silent on the issue! We have openly said, "Give Jesus your heart!", but we have been reluctant to go further and say, "Give Jesus your wallet!" in any kind of a concrete way. Yet God has a great deal to say in His Word about giving, so we are going to thoroughly study 2 Cor. 8-9, the two chapters of the Bible which are completely devoted to this subject alone and consolidate many of the principles that God wants us to know about giving. Now let me begin by giving you some brief background information. As he writes to the Corinthians, Paul is appealing to them concerning a huge relief project.

1. Paul recognized a tremendous need Luke tells us in Acts 11 that a severe famine began during the time of Claudius, around 46 AD. That pretty much means that there were several years of drought when crops did not grow. In the land of Judea, it was especially severe and secular sources tell us that for a time some even starved and food prices quadrupled. The new Christians at Antioch in Syria quickly sent initial help in Acts 12 to the believers in Jerusalem, delivered by Paul and Barnabas, so he saw the devastation there personally. Then that church sent them off on a three year plus missionary journey planting churches throughout Asia Minor and when he returned, Paul went up to Jerusalem once again in the year 49 AD for a council with the apostles. He tells us in Galatians 2:10 that *...they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do*. Evidently between the long-term effects of the famine and the persecution that was ever present by the Jews, the believers in Jerusalem and Judea were still very poor and suffering. At the end of Paul's third missionary journey in the year 57 AD Paul wrote a letter to the Romans in which he said, *At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.* - **Rom. 15:25-26**. Paul had indeed not forgotten the suffering of the poor believers there. On his second journey he had planted churches throughout Macedonia and Achaia, northern and southern Greece, and on his third journey:

2. Paul organized an extensive collection, urging all the Greek churches he had planted in Asia Minor and Macedonia and Achaia to take a collection for the poor and to send it to Jerusalem with him and representatives from their own fellowships. It was a massive project, one that not only engaged churches over a thousand mile stretch of geography, but also spanned perhaps 5 years until it was completed. About the year 55 Paul wrote the Corinthians a set of instructions on how to go about preparing this collection in **1 Cor. 16:1-4**, *Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me*. For several years the various churches collected weekly and saved up for this huge gift of aid. But then, before he actually arrived in Corinth for the last time to gather this collection, he wrote his second letter and:

3. Paul used this opportunity of the extensive collection to teach the important principles of giving which we have recorded for us for all time in chapters 8-9. Now, the basic principle underlying all of it is this:

I. Christian Giving Is An Act Of Grace (1) That word *grace* occurs three more times in these verses, *the favor* or *privilege* in verse 4, and the words *act of grace* in verses 6, 7. The term *grace* refers to something that is God's action, God's doing. We are saved by grace; that is, He does the saving. It is done solely by His energy and power. We are also to live by grace; that is, He does the living by His power. And giving is likewise an act of grace; that is:

1. it is a desire that is imparted by God when we are saved, when He puts His nature inside us. You see the kind of giving I'm talking about:

a. it is not normal in human nature The nature we are born with can be characterized by one word, SELF. It is self-oriented, self-seeking and self-serving. Sure, we are willing to give to our own family, to our own spouse and children and parents. We may even be willing to sacrifice to keep food on the table or put a child through college. But our families are part of our collective SELF. And sure, we may possibly be willing to share a little bit of our excess (if we have one) to advance some good cause. But human nature is such that once I get outside that family circle, I see that my own needs get met first. What I have is mine. I earned it; I own it; I decide what to do with it and I keep most of it! That's the habit pattern of our flesh, of the people all around us. And unfortunately, that's the vicious lie we will continue to live out of, if nobody ever teaches us the truth! But when I was saved God planted HIS nature inside me and giving:

b. it is the reflection of God's nature What is God like? God is love and love GIVES! *God so loved the world that He GAVE His only Son...* or *Rom. 5:8, God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!* God gives to people who don't deserve it! God gives to His enemies; He gives to people that have no idea that He exists, let alone care that He exists. Yet He gives and gives and gives, and gives again. He is a giving God! And now that His nature is planted in us, we have within us an innate God-given, God-like desire to give! It is our nature to give! And as we yield our lives to His Spirit, we become givers, people whose love and whose habit and whose joy is to give! We go from being Scrooge on Christmas Eve to being Scrooge on Christmas morning (only not because we've been visited by three spirits of Christmas; we've been transformed by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ Himself!). We love to give. We WANT to give. Giving is part of who we are and because of that:

2. it is a desire that is undiminished by circumstances It doesn't change or evaporate when our circumstances change. It is not diminished:

a. by the measure of our own ability Some feel that giving is only for those who have a lot and by implication, it is only for me when I have a lot. But if the desire to give is inside me, then whether I have a lot or a little doesn't matter; I give whatever I have. I'll never forget when we were in Kyrgyzstan in 1999 some of us were in the home of a handicapped lady named Ludmila for a Bible study. A year earlier she had lost her only son at 16 but he had been a believer and through his death she had become a believer. Her pension at that time was around \$5 a month but she was being helped a little by Venture International's Family to Family program and she was so filled with joy. But she had some money she had been saving up to give to God and when we came, she pulled out 200 som and said to me, "I want to give this to the Lord as a gift to Glenside Bible Church." It was the equivalent of \$5, a whole month's pension to her, not much to us when our budget is some \$300,000 each year, but to her a tremendous sacrifice. Those two bills and her picture hung on my office wall as a reminder and I put \$5 in the plate on her behalf. She gave what she had out of joy because the desire was in her to give. In Indonesia they give pigs and chickens, in India they give handfuls of rice, but wherever they are and no matter how much they have, God's people love to give. Lack of income or even poverty doesn't diminish our desire! And neither is it diminished:

b. by the nature of our relationship with the recipient Of course it's easy to give to those you know and love, but Ludmila didn't know me from Adam and had never even heard of Glenside Bible Church, I'm sure! The Christians in Corinth or in Macedonia had never met the Christians in Jerusalem either, but they understood that God had a need in another part of His vineyard and that was enough! We give nearly \$100,000 every year to reach people all over the world that we've never met! Christians around the world give millions of dollars each year to bring the Gospel to people who are Muslims or atheists, to people who hate Christianity and try to stamp it out! In essence they give to those who proclaim themselves enemies! Why? Because giving is an act of grace, it is a desire that has been planted inside them by God; it is their very nature! And:

3. it is a desire that was evident in the Macedonian churches (2-4) Paul wrote this letter as he was passing through Macedonia (northern Greece) and sent it on ahead with Titus down to Corinth (in southern Greece) to encourage the Corinthians to be ready to give when he arrived. And he holds up the Macedonians as an example to the Corinthians. Look how they gave:

a. they gave to an unconnected cause They had never seen the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea and probably never would. They would probably never even get a thank-you note! They only knew that brethren were suffering and they wanted to give. But Paul says:

b. they gave out of extreme poverty These were not rich people. They themselves were suffering and knew the depths of poverty. They knew what it was to literally pray for enough bread to eat each day. Yet:

c. they gave out of joy in the midst of trial Paul had been attacked in every Macedonian city on his previous journey, in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. These believers were probably persecuted and certainly were constantly discriminated against and ridiculed, all this on top of being poor! Yet they were so full of joy in the Lord and their salvation that they gave! And not only that:

d. they gave beyond their ability They gave more than they were really able to give, much more than they could afford. They sacrificed. They did without things, maybe even without food for a time, so that others might have what they need. It amazed Paul when he saw what they gave; it floored him. But they wanted to give and they asked God for a way to do it and He gave it to them. But notice that:

e. they gave out of inner desire It was entirely on their own; nobody begged them to give. In fact, they pleaded with Paul; they begged him for the privilege, the grace, to be included and allowed to give! Such poor people; how can it be?

Because true Christian giving is born out of a burning desire of the heart that is planted there by God Himself! It is an act of grace that is totally unnatural and nothing can stop it! But if that's so, then why doesn't every Christian give like that? The answer is our second point, that:

II. Christian Giving Stems From Complete Consecration (5) Just like any of the other works of the Lord in our life, it is planted there already. But we must choose, we must give voluntary cooperation, to that desire to give and let it rule and reign in our lives. And here's where that begins. First:

1. I give myself to the Lord I was saved at age 15, but at 19 God finally convinced me of the truth that He wanted absolute control of everything in my life. He was not simply there to help me; He was my Lord and Master. He wanted control of the direction of my life, of my relationships, of my hobbies and, yes, even my checkbook! So, when I finally surrendered to Him and gave Him my whole self, everything I did or had was included in that. Nothing I have is my own; it's God's! He gave it to me; He tells me what to do with it and how to use it. Now, that's issue we all have to settle first! A rich young man came to Jesus one day and Jesus told him to go home and sell everything he had and give it to the poor. But he walked away sad; he couldn't do it! Could you? What if Jesus told you to sell your house, to give away all the money in your bank account, to empty your retirement nest egg, for His cause; would you do it? I'm not saying He'll ask you to do that; I'm asking whether you would if He did! Is Jesus really Lord, as He was to these Macedonians? Is everything you have really His and are you willing to let Him tell you what to do with it? Now, once that's settled, then naturally:

2. I give myself to His people The lives of the Macedonians were radically transformed by this realization. They became totally involved in meeting the needs of others, the needs in the work of God. The same thing happened in the very beginning at Jerusalem. As soon as there were converts, they began to meet together and immediately began giving to one another to meet the needs of others. Luke's comment was, *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.* - Acts 4:32. It came naturally. Once they figured out that everything they had was God's, not theirs, they shared it to meet needs and as the church grew and caught God's vision for the world, the vision for their giving grew also, until here were these Macedonians willing to sacrifice for people a thousand miles away whom they'd never met! And once I recognize that:

3. I give according to His will I pray and let God direct me and distribute whatever He gives me the way He wants. Brother Yun is a Chinese house church leader who now lives in the west and here's his commentary: *Multitudes of church members in the West are satisfied with giving their minimum to God, not their maximum. I've watched men and women during offering time in church. They open their fat wallets and search for the smallest amount they can give. This type of attitude will never do! Jesus gave his whole life for us and we give as little of our lives, time and money as we can back to God. What a disgrace! Repent! This may sound strange, but I even miss the offerings we used to give in China. On numerous occasions the leader of a meeting would announce, "We have a new worker who is leaving tomorrow to serve the Lord. Immediately every single person would completely empty their pockets of everything they had. With that money the worker would buy a train or bus ticket and leave the next day. Often this money was not just everything we had in our pockets at the time, but everything we owned in the whole world. [The Heavenly Man, p. 297-298]*

How about me? Do I give God what I want to give or do I go to God and listen and give what He directs? Christian giving is an act of consecration; it is the laying down of all rights to everything I have. I am only a steward, a manager, who has been entrusted with the Master's property. I must submit to Him and give according to His will! Then finally we read here that:

III. Christian Giving Is A Spiritual Gift (6-8) It is a gift just like faith, knowledge and love. It is even mentioned specifically as a spiritual gift in **Rom.12:6-8**. It is planted in us by the Holy Spirit and it flows out from us when He is in control. So:

1. it cannot be forced by external command Giving that is commanded is a misnomer. It is not giving; it is taxation. It would be like saying you give to the IRS every April 15th. Neither I nor anybody else can tell you what you must give. In the Old Testament God levied a tax on His people to support the sacrificial system in Israel. He commanded a tithe,

a tenth. That was not giving. But the people brought offerings over and above that out of love for God; those were acts of grace; those were giving. In our era God works differently. He does not stand outside and demand; He now lives inside and moves our hearts by His Spirit! He plants the gift of giving in us. However, like any spiritual gift:

2. it can be developed by practice Just like speaking or wisdom or knowledge, it can be improved upon by concentration and by use. I can improve my Christian giving by working at being responsive to the Spirit, by learning to listen to Him, by praying regularly about my finances and how He wants me to use all the material things I have. And further:

3. it can be encouraged by example Paul encouraged the Corinthians to develop their giving by lifting up the example of the Macedonians. Jesus did the same with His disciples. Look with me at **Mk. 12:41-44**. Now suppose you were sitting there that day. What would your reaction have been? Shock? Surprise? Would you have been awed by the huge amount put in by some rich person? Or would you have recognized the depth of the work of God in the life of that poor widow and stood in awe with tears in your eyes? Would you have gone away saying, "I want to be like her!" Jesus pointed her out as an example to us of the gift of giving. And finally, Paul says that giving:

4. it is a proof of the genuineness of our love for God and others It demonstrates it in a visible, tangible way; it is the evidence that we truly love God and because of that, we love others.

A businessman and a lawyer, both Christians were traveling in Korea. They saw in a field a young man pulling a plow while an old man held the handles. The lawyer was amused and took a picture, saying to the missionary who was guiding them, "I suppose they are very poor." He replied, "That is the family of Chi Boui. When the church was being built, they were eager to give so they sold their ox and gave the money. This spring they pull the plow themselves" The businessman said, "That must have been a real sacrifice." But the missionary replied, "They did not call it that. They thought it was fortunate that they had the ox to sell." Upon arriving home, the lawyer went to his pastor, showed the picture of the men plowing and told the story. He said, "I want to double my pledge. I have never yet given anything to my church that cost me anything." Christian giving is an act of the heart motivated by the Spirit of God. It is the Lord working through the hands of His surrendered servant to meet the needs of others. Is your giving true Christian giving? Is mine? Let's be encouraged by the example of the Macedonians, the example of Ludmila, the example of this widow in the Scripture and of these poor Koreans. Let's ask God to develop this grace of giving in us.

2 Cor. 8-9 The Grace Of Giving

Why Do We Give? - 8:8-15

We are in a series of six studies through 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 on the subject of Christian giving. You know, God always has a reason for the way He chooses to do things. He always has a purpose in mind. Last week we saw that by planting His nature inside of us, God made us to be GIVING people. We don't give because we're commanded to, nor because we're ashamed not to; we give because it is now our very nature to give. Roosters crow; cats chase mice; pigs wallow in mud. Why? They can't help it; it's their nature. Christians give! It's our nature. Jesus Christ planted it in us by His Spirit. But the question is, why did He do that? Why did God make us to be givers? Why is giving such a significant matter that these two full chapters are given to it? God made giving a part of our lives for two very important purposes and unless we understand them, it will probably never seem like a primary issue to us, like it is something important to develop in our lives. God says it's important, first of all, because:

I. Giving Is Our Means Of Demonstrating Love (8-12) Verse 8 makes it very clear that giving is an act that demonstrates the sincerity of love. Love and giving are almost like faith and works. Faith without any works to demonstrate its reality is dead, useless, ineffective. It's actually not real. Our faith is demonstrated by what we do. Yet works without faith are useless and vain; they don't save anybody. Similarly, love without giving is a dead, empty, useless, insincere concept and giving without love is just another dead, empty work. Paul said, *If I give all I possess to the poor ... but have not love, I gain nothing.* - 1Cor 13:3. The two go together hand in hand, love, the reality of the heart's commitment, and giving, the outworking and evidence of that love. And to demonstrate that, Paul turns naturally to:

1. our example: Christ (9) This is one of the most beautiful verses in all of the New Testament. It encompasses the entire work of Christ in one statement and characterizes it as giving. We know, that is, we have experienced the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. How? In:

a. His giving: He became poor What does that mean? Does it mean that the Creator of the world who owned the cattle on a thousand hills was born into a poor carpenter's family in a cattle stall with the animals? Does it mean that He never owned a place He could call home or carried more than the clothes on His back? Yes, it means all that, but it means so much more than that. Look with me at **Phil. 2:5-8**. His becoming poor was not primarily a material thing. He emptied Himself for us. He set aside all His glory, His privileges, His power. He became a man and ultimately, He GAVE His life! He literally gave everything He had. Why? Paul tells us:

b. His purpose: that we might be rich Does that mean materially? Of course not! Many, if not most, Christians in the world are still very poor. But spiritually we are all billionaires! Paul said to the Ephesians, *Praise be to the God*

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ... to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. - **Eph. 1:3,6-7**. We received every spiritual blessing He has. We have been given all the riches of His grace. We have sonship, heirship, authority. We are kings and priests unto our God with access to and communication with Him. We will one day be endowed with all of His glory and made like Him forever and ever. We are rich beyond measure! And the point is that He gave everything up in order to give all this to us. And that's how we know He loves us! Look at what John says about:

c. its effect - 1 John 3:16-18 You see:

(1) it demonstrated His love to us Christ didn't sit in heaven and send "I Love You" cards through the prophets and leave us here perishing in our sin. He loved us by giving His very life. That's how we know His love. And that:

(2) it illustrated His intent for us John's point is that if His love is in us, if we are really believers that have His nature inside us, then it will come out in the same fashion. We will give. We will lay down our lives in varying ways to meet the needs of others. And it is in that act of giving that they will know and experience the love of God toward them and through it, they will know that our faith is a real thing. So, Paul now goes on to apply this directly to the Corinthians. From our example in Jesus comes:

2. our action He says, **we must act on our desire (10-11)** This collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem was taking a long time. A year or more before this writing, the Corinthians had expressed their willingness to give and had even begun to collect money for that purpose. But somehow in the intervening time, Paul is implying that the actual giving part had slacked off. You see:

a. the desire to give is primary That's our nature. All true giving must begin with willingness, with the desire to give in the heart. But:

b. the act of giving proves the genuineness of the desire When we actually give, it proves that the desire is real and not just so much talk. *F. B. Proctor told the following story: A man was trying to get financial help for a widow who was in dire need, but his efforts were meeting with very little success. Yet most of the people he contacted did express their regret over the sad situation of the poverty-stricken woman. The concerned man, refusing to give up, had high hopes as he approached a wealthy acquaintance, but he too refused to offer help. In declining the request, the rich man said, "I do want you to know, however, that I really feel sorry for that poor woman." The one who was asking for the money responded, "I'm sure you do. But I'm afraid you don't feel it in the right place." "Oh, yes, I do," the man replied, "I feel it very deeply in my heart." The other responded, "That's the problem. You feel it in the wrong place. I just wish those feelings were also in your pocket."* That's what Paul is saying, "Let your giving complement and match your desire. Don't just say you want to give! Give! Let your actions match your words and prove your love is real, just like Jesus did." It is the God-given way we have of demonstrating that Jesus Christ is real in our lives. However, do notice that Paul is also careful to mention:

3. our limitation, which is the means God has provided (11b-12) You see:

a. God doesn't expect us to give what we don't have He is not talking about quantity here. Love is not measured in the amount of what you give. We saw that last week in Jesus' example of the widow who only gave two small coins. Yet they were all she had, so her gift was a tremendous act of love and devotion, even though it was materially next to nothing. God knows our means. He knows what we have because He gave it to us! He knows what is costly and sacrificial to us. Don't ever think that you can't really display God's love as you'd like because you don't have much to give. Don't ever imagine that if you only had more that then you could really give and make a difference! Simply give out of what you have as He directs. The two pennies that poor widow gave have been changing lives for 20 centuries! God will use whatever you have to make a difference! But on the other hand:

b. God does expect us to give what we do have Whatever He has given us, whether it is much or little, whether two million or two pennies, God does want us to give out of that, so that He can use that opportunity to demonstrate our love and through it, His love. We must start giving with whatever we do have.

However, if our desire to give is there, He will often honor that desire and provide in such a way that we can give more! *George Mueller wrote in his journal in 1863: "The end of the year was now at hand, and, in winding up the accounts, it was my earnest desire to do once more all I could in sending help to needy laborers in the gospel. I went therefore through the list, writing against the various names of those to whom I had not already recently sent, what amount it appeared desirable to send; and I found, when these sums were added together, the total was 476 pounds, but 280 pounds was all I had in hand. I wrote therefore a check for 280 pounds, though I would gladly have sent 476 pounds, yet felt thankful at the same time that I had this amount in hand for these brethren. Having written the check, as the last occupation of the day, then came my usual season of prayer, for the many things which I daily bring before Him; and then again, I brought also the case of these preachers of the gospel before the Lord and besought Him that He would even now be*

pleased to give me yet a goodly sum for them, though there remained but three days to the close of our year. This being done, I went home and found there had arrived from a great distance 100 pounds designated for missions, with 100 pounds left at my disposal, and five pounds for myself. I took the whole 200 for missions, and thus had 480 pounds in hand to meet the 476 pounds which I desired for this object. Those who know the blessedness of really trusting in God, and getting help from Him, as in this case, in answer to prayer, will be able to enter into the spiritual enjoyment I had in the reception of that donation, in which both the answer to prayer was granted, and with it the great enjoyment of gladdening the hearts of many devoted servants of Christ." [Intercessors for America Newsletter, Dec 1996. Page 3.] George Mueller went ahead and gave all he could but his desire to give was greater than his means, so he continued to ask God and God gave him the desire of his heart because his desire was to give more! And what did it prove overall? The greatness of his love for the workers and the greatness of God's love for them! That's what God did with the Macedonians in their extreme poverty in verses 2-3; He gave them more than He normally would because He knew how badly they wanted to give! And that's what God wants to do with us, to make us givers, so He can show His love through us! Now, there's a second purpose that God has for our giving:

II. Giving Is God's Means Of Meeting Needs (13-15) We read time and time again in the Bible of God's promises of meeting our needs. *He knows what we need before we ask for it.... If we seek first the Kingdom of God all of these things we need will be added to us... God will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory....* Of course, there are a lot of ways God can do that. He can literally make money grow on trees if He wants to! There will always be times when God meets our needs in extraordinary ways, but one of the most common means that God uses to meet the needs of His children in the body of Christ is the giving of other believers. The church at Jerusalem and in Judea had a great need at this particular moment in history. And God met that need by moving the hearts of all the Gentile churches, like the Corinthians, to give to them. And, of course, He is still doing the very same thing, using our giving to meet the needs of others and their giving to meet ours. Now here's:

1. God's goal in meeting needs: (13-14) The word there twice is *fairness*. The NIV and King James say *equality*, but the Greek word really doesn't literally mean *equal*; rather it means **equity**, that which is right and fair and just. You see, His goal:

a. it is not that His favorites might have more, that those whom God likes best or those who love Him the most get the most from Him. How much I have is never an indicator of how He feels about me, even though the world around me might think it is! Further, His goal:

b. it is not that everyone might have exactly the same amount. God is not a communist. He never intended that all His children should have exactly the same amount of material possessions. Rather, God's goal and promise:

c. it is that each might have what he needs Everybody, every individual believer, every family, has different needs which vary according to a multitude of factors. Each has an assigned place in God's program and if they are being obedient to God's will, then they are where God wants them to be and with that place comes a set of needs that God has created by them being there. A believer in Glenside cannot possibly live on what a believer in a village in India can. And by the same token, if a believer in rural India received a paycheck like yours, he would be wealthy beyond imagining in the eyes of all the villagers around him. We are all in different places, in different circumstances and situations, so what's fair is this: God supplies us with what we need to be wherever He's put us! Now, Paul demonstrates that by using an Old Testament:

2. God's example of meeting needs (15) This is a quote taken from the story of how God supplied manna to the Israelites in the wilderness and what would happen when each one would go out and gather. Listen to **Ex. 16:16-18**, *This is what the LORD has commanded: "Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent." And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat.* Did you understand that? God set a standard for gathering. Each was to go out and gather about an omer of manna for each person in their family, but they didn't all carry an omer measure out there with them. They gathered it in baskets and buckets and clay pots or the fold of their garment or whatever they had, and then brought it back and measured it out. And every time they did, a miraculous thing happened. He that had gathered much did not have too much and he that had gathered little did not have too little. In other words, God:

a. He made sure Israel's gathering was always enough When you've got a million people out there scraping up manna from the ground before it melts away when the sun gets hot, there are bound to be those who can't gather enough of it in time. And then there are those whose judgment isn't too good and don't gather enough. But somehow when they measured it out, God made sure that each one had enough, that their needs were met. Conversely:

b. He made sure their gathering was never too much There was always the guy who would rather be safe than sorry and so gathered more than his share, just to make sure he had enough. And lo and behold, no matter how much he gathered, when he went to weigh it out, God made sure it was reduced to just the right amount.

So, God saw that each one had what they needed by a miraculous adjustment so that none went hungry while another had waste. And God is still doing that very same thing with His people today, only today He is using a new method of adjusting:

3. God's method of meeting needs today is Christian giving Here's how it works:

a. when we have plenty, we fill up someone else's lack God was giving the Corinthian believers at that moment more than they needed. And that was so that they could give, and through their giving, He would see that the Judean believers had what they needed. God many times blesses us with more than enough so that we can give just what will meet the needs of someone else. But it also works in reverse:

b. when someone else has plenty, they fill up our lack There may come a day in our lives (and often does) when the shoe is on the other foot, when we're out of work or injured and we find ourselves in need and at that very time God will meet our need through the giving of others, to whom He has given more than they need.

John Wesley, the famous evangelist and founder of the Methodist movement, was traveling one day along a narrow road filled with ruts. His carriage soon became stuck in the mud. The delay especially disturbed him because he was eager to get to the next town where he was scheduled to preach. While some helpers were trying to get the vehicle moving, another Christian came by. Wesley talked with him a moment and perceived that the poor fellow was deeply troubled. Asking why he was so distressed, he learned that because of crop failure, the man was almost destitute. "I haven't been able to get the money together to pay the rent," he said despairingly. "The landlord is ready to turn us out, and I don't know where to go with my wife and children." "How much do you owe?" Wesley inquired. He was told that 20 shillings would clear the debt. "Well," said Wesley, "I believe we can handle that. The Lord evidently wanted me to meet you." Taking the money from his wallet, he handed it to the man and said, "Here, go and be happy!" Then turning to his companions, he exclaimed, "Now I see why our carriage had to get stuck in the mud. Our steps were halted so that we might help that needy family." You see, giving is God's means of seeing that all His children have their needs met fairly. He may give to you so that you can meet someone else's need and he may give to them so that they can meet yours.

Listen, God has needs that He wants to meet through you. Some of them are near at hand and some of them are far away. Some are people you meet firsthand like Wesley did and some you will only hear about like the need that Paul made the Corinthians aware of in Judea. We meet both kinds of needs right here through our giving at GBC every week. The firsthand needs of people all around us we meet through our giving to the Elders Fund. Faraway needs we meet through our giving to the budget, 20% of which goes to missions to meet the needs of people we'll never meet this side of heaven. And of course, there are many needs of both types that God puts before you outside of GBC. But wherever and whatever the needs are, God wants to meet them through you. And God has hearts He wants to touch through you. He wants to shower His love upon people through your giving and mine. Our giving is a direct means of God's working in the world. I trust that all of us will learn to see it for what it really is and let Him direct us to give.

2 Cor. 8-9 The Grace Of Giving

How Should We Handle Money? - 8:16-24

We're in a series of studies together examining 2 Corinthians 8-9 on the subject of Christian giving. So far, we've learned, first of all, that giving is an act of grace that stems from our transformed nature, and second, that we should give because giving is our means of demonstrating love and God's means of meeting the needs of others. In this third message we are going to look at the issue of handling money. It's an issue that affects every one of us because every one of us handles money personally, though some of us handle more than others, of course! But beyond that, some of us have the responsibility of handling not only the money God has given personally to us, but we have also been entrusted with responsibility of handling the money of others. Paul, as you remember, was in the process of collecting a very large offering from a number of Gentile churches in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Corinth and taking it back to Jerusalem to be given to the poor, suffering believers there during a time of urgent need. In the verses of our text today, we meet those who are going to handle that large gift and the manner in which Paul knew they would handle it. Let's read **8:16-24**. Now let's go back and look more closely at what Paul has said. First of all, in the end of verse 19 we can see:

I. The Concerns We Should Have As We Handle Money (19) Paul says there are two concerns he had constantly in mind in the handling of this large sum of money and they should also be ours. First of all:

1. we should seek to honor the Lord, to use and treat the money in such a way that it will bring Him glory, that it will enhance His reputation and cause people to praise Him. Three years before our church building burned in 1992 a Philadelphia Christian businessman named John G. Bennett started an organization called the Foundation for New Era Philanthropy. Claiming to have a team of wealthy philanthropists who wanted to bless Christian organizations, he was able to promise that those organizations who would invest a certain amount of money with New Era for three months would have their funds doubled. He was a very convincing person and got other very convincing people to help him find donors and the list ultimately grew to include 1100 investors who put in over \$500 million, including Biblical Seminary, Covenant College, Houghton College, Wheaton College and eventually the Boy Scouts, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania, and somewhere in the middle of it all, Glenside Bible Church. But two years later it was dis-

covered to be a Ponzi or pyramid scheme, where essentially you pay what you owe the first donor with the new money you take in from the next. Bennett embezzled \$135 million dollars and was sentenced to 12 years in jail and was only released in 2008. The courts got back for donors all the money that they could, but who really got the blame in the eyes of the watching world? Certainly, he did personally. But because it was done by an outspoken Christian, in the eyes of many, I'm sure that it reinforced the notion that "Christians are a bunch of hypocrites" and that our claims about Christ are not real. It discredited and dishonored Him. But now let me ask another question. When you have fallen on hard circumstances, maybe you're laid off or sick and can't work and there's a bill due and some fellow Christian comes along and stuffs a check in your pocket or a bill in your hand just when you need it most, who gets the credit? Who do you get on your knees and thank? Sure, you thank the person, but my point is that ultimately the Lord gets the credit or the blame for the way we handle money. So, our first concern in handling money should be the same as our first concern in every other area of our lives, to glorify God. Is that what I think about when I sit down to decide what to do with my paycheck? Here's a challenge: when you receive your next paycheck, stop and say, "Lord, thanks for this gift. It's from Your hand and it is all Yours. Show me how to use this to glorify you." Later on, we'll see more specifically some principles of how to do this, but right now let's mention our second concern in handling money. Paul said that as we administer our money:

2. we should seek to demonstrate our love In the end of verse 19 he says, "I'm collecting and carrying this offering in order to show our collective good will, our eagerness to help". But he puts it another way in verse 24. "This offering is the proof of our love to these brothers and sisters in Judea; they can see our love through our giving and through our handling this money for their benefit." Maybe you've never thought of it quite that way. We know we can demonstrate our love to people through our words. We can demonstrate it through our kind and helpful actions. But we can also love them through the way we handle our money and through our giving. As you pray about how to glorify the Lord with your paycheck, try adding this, "Lord, let me love somebody with this; let this be somehow a means of demonstrating love; let me love my family with this; let me love others with this; show me how." And again, we'll talk about how to do that more concretely in a moment. But right now, let's move from our concerns in handling money to:

II. The Character We Should Display In Handling Money Paul was sending a party of men ahead from Macedonia, where he was writing, to Corinth to get the collection prepared in advance, so it would be ready when he arrived. That "committee" was composed of three men, Titus and two other believers whose names Paul does not even mention. Now, let's try to picture this together. If we took an extended offering over a month to help our brothers and sisters in Nepal who are suffering after the terrible earthquake a few weeks ago and a second one this past week, how much do you think we could raise? Let's say, maybe \$5,000 or even more. Then, suppose we cooperated with 9 other churches who all were about the same sized and could give about the same amount. Now we would be talking about \$50,000 or more, wouldn't we? If we collected over a year's period, we'd be looking at \$100,000, maybe \$200,000 or more. Nowhere does the biblical record say how large Paul's "collection" turned out to be, but from the sheer number of churches involved and the year period over which it was collected, it must have been pretty sizable and they didn't print paper money in those days! Handling this huge amount of money and getting it safely to Jerusalem was a tremendous responsibility. So, what kind of people do you think Paul chose to handle this errand? Did he look for shrewd businessmen or careful bankers or people trained in economics at the Jerusalem Business Institute? Not at all. That might be what we would do, but look at how he describes the character qualities of the three men whom he chose to handle the money. For each man Paul lists one particular thing to explain to the Corinthians why he chose that man and to give them assurance that they could trust him. The first was Titus, whose example shows us that:

1. we should have a willing spirit (16-17) Titus genuinely wanted to go to Corinth. He didn't wait for Paul to ask him; rather he asked Paul to go. And it was not because he loved to run his fingers through piles of money, but because he had the same love and concern for the Corinthians that Paul had. The person who handles our money or our property ought to be somebody who wants to do it because they care deeply about us. The people who handle the church's money and the church's property ought not just to be people who were "shanghaied" into doing the job against their wishes. They ought to be people who are eager to do it because they love the church and because they love the work of God and because they love our missionaries and our ministries and therefore, they will handle our money in an attitude of love. The second man Paul sent with Titus was an unnamed brother whom we'll call Brother #1, and his example shows us that:

2. we should have a spiritual reputation (18-19) We have no idea who this brother was. Some have speculated and tried to name him, but it really doesn't matter. If God had wanted us to know, Paul would have written it down! What's important is that this guy was a man with a reputation. He was not simply known to one church but to a number of churches and he was praised by everyone for the way that he was serving the Lord and preaching the Gospel; in fact, his reputation was such that he was chosen by them to handle the offering. Handling money should be done by someone who is recognized, someone with a reputation, not for economics, but for the Gospel, for spiritual things. We always think that somehow money handling or caring for property is a less spiritual pursuit than teaching or being an elder and that we can allow people to handle money even if they haven't shown a lot of spiritual interest because they have "business background". Experience is great, but handling God's resources ought to be done by spiritual people,

people who have a reputation for spirituality within the church. And then with these two men came a third unnamed man, Brother #2, whose example shows us that:

3. we should have a trustworthy record (22) We don't know who this man was either. All we know is that this guy was proven. He had often faced testing and temptation and had proved that he was made of spiritual iron and would not bend. The last person we need handling money is a person who is prone to falling into sin. He's just liable to be tempted one day by the large amount of money in his hands and run off with the goods.

So, there are some key criteria for of us who serve as ushers and money counters and treasurers and properties committee people and custodians, and so on, criteria to test ourselves by, indeed, that we can all test ourselves by. Am I doing what I do out of love for the people and for the work of God? Am I a spiritual person; do I love the things of God? And am I the kind of person who readily falls into sin? If my answer to any of these questions is negative, I either need to get out of handling money and property or ask God to do a work in my life and change me! But on a positive note, Paul also gives here some very wonderful, encouraging and:

III. Essential Truths About People Who Handle Money Let me take a moment here to encourage all our faithful stewards who work so long and hard in the financial part of the ministry of our church and all you Properties Committee folks and others who give so much of your time in caring for the church's physical resources. Look what Paul says about people like us in verse (23):

1. we are partners in the work So many times we think like this: it's the pastors and the teachers and the elders, the verbal types, who do the REAL ministry of the church. The financial and property stuff is secondary, though necessary. But Paul says that is not so! Those who handle our finances are partners in the work of the Gospel, fellow-workers and their work is just as valuable as mine or anybody else's in the advancement of the kingdom of God. For years our late missionary Doris Funk was one of the bookkeepers and treasurers for a portion of the Wycliffe organization. She spent years of her life sitting at a desk juggling figures and balancing books. It may not seem like much, but without her faithful service an entire wing of the ministry of Wycliffe Bible Translators would have come to a dead standstill. Our retired missionary Ed Friedman faithfully served the whole France field of TEAM as treasurer for years and years. Those who handle our finances and property right here are vital; without them the ministry does not happen! In God's economy, the way He looks at things, those who "stay by the stuff" are just as much a part of the ministry as those who "go out to the battle"; they are full partners in the work and deserve an equal share of the reward, a principle that David put in place during his leadership of Israel! But we are even more than that. As we handle money:

2. we are representatives of the church You're going to love this; that word *messengers* or *representatives* is literally *apostles*! We are people who've been sent on a mission, in Latin, *missionaries*! We are people who have been commissioned, who have been given a trust to carry out, stewards who have been charged to care for that which belongs to others and we carry out our responsibility as a holy, God-given task, the same way we are sent to carry out the Great Commission! In fact, it is PART of carrying out that Commission! Our task is not mundane and ordinary but a truly high calling. And then look at this; Paul says:

3. we are glorifying to Christ By our work we bring Him honor and glory and praise, just as much as those who sacrifice their lives in missionary service. Dear friends, we need to begin thinking of material things in a new way. The ministry we have with money or with property brings honor and glory to Christ if we do it well! If we can get that picture in our minds while we are doing it, it'll transform our view of what may seem to be mundane; it will bring new life and meaning to it!

So special thanks to those of you who partner in our ministry in that way. We thank God for you. But now let's step back once again and look at some things that apply more generally to all of us. Paul gives us:

IV. The Principles We Should Follow In Handling Our Money (20-21) Whether we handle only the money and the material things the Lord gives us personally or whether we handle the money and property of others in our job or in the church, here are the principles that we need to put into practice. First, Paul says:

1. I must do what is right in the sight of God That's a concept that means a lot more if you try to visualize it. *John A. Broadus, a well-known Baptist pastor in the 1800's, left his pulpit one Sunday morning and stood beside one of the ushers as he began to take the collection. The pastor went with him up the aisle and observed every coin and bill that was given by his parishioners. Some of them seemed angry, some appeared confused, maybe ashamed, others were amazed, but all of them were very surprised. When that part of the service was over, Broadus went back to the platform and began to preach. He based his message on the incident where Jesus was sitting in the Temple and watching people put money into the treasury and He noticed that poor widow casting in her two mites. Then he concluded by saying, "My people, if you take it to heart that I have seen your offerings this day and know just what sacrifice you have made--and what sacrifice you have not made--remember that your Savior goes up the aisles with every usher and sees every cent contributed by His people."* Listen, God is literally watching everything I do, not only what I give, but what I do with all the money He has entrusted to my care! So I need to be careful to do what is right in His sight! And doing what is right in His sight means two things. Obviously, it means that:

a. I must be obedient to do what God wants done Spending my paycheck or buying a car or a house or making up our annual church budget or supporting certain missionaries, all of these things are really not our decisions. The resources come from Him and they belong to Him, so we must be obedient. We must do what He wants done with them. Therefore, we should not just pray to GET finances; we should be continually praying about what to do with them! Doing what's right in the sight of God means we must do all of our money-handling and make all our materially-oriented decisions through prayer, just the same way we do in praying about people relationships and decisions. But it also means that:

b. I must be honest to do it God's way It never ceases to amaze me how Christians are somehow willing to adopt the world's standards when it comes to material things. Christians do things like cheating and lying on their taxes, like making money and not reporting it, like suing to get money they don't honestly deserve, like spending company money on personal items, and a whole host of similar things. Paul reminds us that God is watching us, so if I'm going to handle God's money, I must do it HIS way and that means absolute and scrupulous honesty. That's the only way my money-handling can honor the Lord and bring glory to Him. I have to use my money and possessions for His purpose and in a scrupulously honest fashion. Then secondly, Paul says in verse 21 that:

2. I must do what is right in the sight of people Paul was taking pains to do not only what was directed by God and honest in His sight, but also to do what was right before people. And to do that:

a. I must be accountable by including others That's why Paul sent a team of three to handle this collection at Corinth. And when he was taking it on the long trip back to Jerusalem to deliver it, we read in Acts 20:4 that many were with him, *Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.* These were representatives of all the churches helping to deliver the huge offering. In the handling of material things, especially in the church, nothing should be done in secret by one person alone. Everyone should make themselves accountable and include others in the process, thereby safeguarding themselves and making sure it is obvious to all they truly are doing what is right in the sight of God. And it also means that:

b. I must be careful to avoid wrong appearances, to avoid not just DOING something wrong or questionable, but not even LOOKING like I'm doing it, not giving any possible room for question or criticism. Paul left no room for anyone to suggest that he was personally profiting by or getting anything from this offering, that it was purely an act of love. So, he surrounded himself with people who could obviously see that. I must be careful, not only to BE honest, but also to APPEAR honest to everyone!

So, what do I want you to get out of this message this morning? Let me answer that by telling a story. *There was a butcher who ran a little shop on the edge of London years ago. He decided one Sunday that he would go into town and hear the famous Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon. His wife chose not to go with him. So the butcher went to town, went to church, and returned home and that afternoon his wife began to question him about the service. "What songs did they sing?" He said, "I don't remember" "What was the preacher's subject?" He said, "I don't remember." "Well, what was his Bible text?" Again he said, "I don't remember" Finally, in exasperation, his wife said, "Well, then what good did it do for you to go to church this morning?!" The butcher was quiet for a moment and then he said, "I'll tell you what good it did. You know those scales in the shop that only weigh 14 oz. to the pound? Before we open for business tomorrow, I'm going to correct those scales so that they weigh a full 16 oz. to the pound!" I don't care if you remember what songs we sang today. I don't care if you remember what my text was today; you probably won't. But I'd love for you to do what this butcher did, to examine the way you're handling the money and the material things that God has entrusted to your care and to correct what needs correcting and to improve what needs improving and to quit what needs quitting and to continue doing better and better what's really worth continuing! I hope you'll let God speak to your heart!*

2 Cor. 8-9 The Grace Of Giving

How Much Should We Give? 9:1-7

In our series so far, we've learned that Christian giving is an act of grace that comes from a transformed heart, that we should give because it demonstrates our love and God uses it to meet needs, and, last week, that we should be careful to do what is right in God's sight as we handle money. But the bottom line for most of us when we talk about giving is simply this: *How much should I give?* And just in case you are thinking "Aha, here it comes. I knew it was all leading up to this. He's finally going to tell us what we have to give!", let me shock you by saying this: **THERE IS NO PERSON ON EARTH WHO CAN TELL YOU HOW MUCH YOU MUST GIVE!** You heard me correctly. Not one. Now of course, there ARE plenty of people who WILL tell you how much to give. But nobody has the RIGHT to tell you how much to give! If you want an answer to the question, "How much should I give?", the only thing I can do is to help you to understand and apply three principles that God has given us through Paul in the beginning of chapter 9 that should regulate and characterize our giving. The first principle is:

I. The Principle Of Eagerness (1-5) Let me summarize for you Paul's situation one more time. He was in Macedonia (northern Greece) and was on his way to Corinth in the south. He was gathering a collection from all the Gentile churches he had planted to give to the poor suffering saints at Jerusalem. He was sending a team of three men ahead of himself to Corinth to get their offering in order and ready. But here he adds another note to the story. In the beginning of chapter 8 he mentioned the generous way the Macedonians gave in order to encourage the Corinthians to give. But in chapter 9 he turns around and tells a little secret. He says, "I've been telling the Macedonians about how eager YOU were to give to this need last year already!" Paul commended their eagerness to give and used it as an example. And of course, that eagerness to give was not just something good about the Corinthians; I believe Paul is implying that God wants US to be eager to give. What does eager mean? To be eager to give means simply:

1. the meaning: I love to give The Greek word in verse 2 means to be pre-disposed, literally, to have a passion for something ahead of time. Let me illustrate it like this. Do you have to tell a lion that he HAS to eat a steak? No, you just put the opportunity in front of him and he does it. In fact, he jumps at it! Why? Because he loves to eat steak; it's his nature. He'll do it every chance he gets. Do you have to tell a golfer that he HAS to go play golf? No, the lion is predisposed to eat steak and the golfer is predisposed to play golf and we're to be pre-disposed to give. If giving is an act of grace as we learned at the beginning of this series, then that means that God has made my heart a giving heart. Therefore, I should love to give; I should be eager to give. All God has to do is put the means in my pocket and the need in front of me and instantly I say, "Oh boy, I get to give!" You see, we actually started with the wrong question this morning. It shouldn't be, "How much must I give", but "How much MAY I give!" If the Spirit of God is really controlling my life and I am yielding to Him, then I am pre-disposed to give, I'm eager to give, I love to give, I can't wait to give. Paul said back in 8:4 that the Macedonians pleaded with him to be able to give toward this need; they were eager. When the people of Israel were camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God told them to build a tabernacle and to bring an offering for it. Listen to what the Word says, *...everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the LORD ...All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do.... And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done." Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so, the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work. - Ex. 35:21-22, 29, 36:3-7.* What a problem to have! See how eager they were to give! Fickle as they were, at that moment, they truly loved to give and just kept on doing it as long as there was need. May God make us eager to give like they were! And here's:

2. the result: Paul says in verse 2 that **it encourages others to give**. It's contagious. The Macedonians heard how eager the Corinthians were to give and the Corinthians' eagerness moved them to follow the example and they, in turn, became eager to give. Eagerness and excitement draws others. If my brothers and sisters see that I am eager to give and all the excitement I get when I give, and how I just love to give, then they are encouraged to be like me. I remember seeing this principle in action many years ago in a former church. We were involved with a missionary in Haiti as I recall, and he had an immediate need for \$600, which in those days was a sizeable sum. At that time, I was a student and we were poor as church mice and didn't have two nickels to rub together, but I remember presenting the need to our folks and saying, "We'll give the first \$100; who will join us?" and before the meeting was over the whole \$600 was pledged. Our example of eagerness was contagious; when you are generous, others are encouraged to be generous. However, with eagerness there is also a:

3. the danger: Paul says in verse 4 that **it must result in action** He was somewhat afraid that since he hadn't been in Corinth for a good while that their eagerness might have become more hot air than actual action. That's why he was sending the team ahead of him to make sure. Eagerness in itself is not enough. It must be genuine and real. To always promise to give and plan to give and then not end up giving, shows people that I'm insincere and it makes me feel ashamed. There are folks like that, you know, people that promise God or promise themselves, "I'm going to give; I will; next week I'll start..." but they never do. That kind of eagerness does more damage than good. The eagerness must be real and must result in actual giving. So, first of all, ask God to make you genuinely eager to give. Now we're ready for principle #2:

II. The Principle Of Generosity (6) Here's an interesting note. The word translated *bountiful* or *generous* here is actually the word *blessing*. The real contrast here is not so much between two amounts as between two attitudes. It is the person who gives with the attitude that giving is a blessing who will give much. The person who feels that it is a chore, a duty, or a difficult thing will give little in comparison. You see, there are:

1. two ways of giving spoken of here under the metaphor of **sowing** or planting seeds in a field. Think about two farmers who go out to plant their crop but they each have a different attitude and so they plant in two different ways. The first man plants:

a. sparingly He sits down and carefully calculates how many square feet of land he has to plant and how much seed he has in the barn. He figures "Well, I can get by with one seed every six inches or so and still get a crop." His attitude is, *Keep as much as you can!* He doesn't want to lose any of that precious seed, because it's money in the hand. Having as much as possible in the barn is his security. So he tries to keep as much as he can and only gives out as much as he can squeak by with. That is the attitude that some people have about giving, "What's important is how much I can KEEP". But farmer #2 plants:

b. bountifully or generously He doesn't throw seed away unwisely or carelessly and waste it, but he scatters the seed evenly and close together. His attitude is, *Sow as much as you can!* He knows that the more seed he plants, the more plants will come up and the greater the harvest will be. So he plants all he possibly can. By the way, if you think this illustration is lame, when was the last time you tried to plant a new patch of grass in your yard? Do you remember what happened? Well, there are:

2. two results of giving (spoken of here under the metaphor of **reaping** or harvesting) If you took the attitude that grass seed is expensive and were more worried about saving money than you were about getting grass and you spread only a thin handful of seed on your bare spot, then you got:

a. a minimal harvest, right? Not much came up. Your lawn probably looks like the top of my head! When you keep all you can and give only what you can get by with, there will never be much to show for it; there won't be much in the way of results. But, if what you really wanted most was grass and you spread the seed on the spot nice and thick, you got:

b. a bountiful harvest, a fine thick crop of grass. And that same law operates in the spiritual realm in many areas, but, Paul says, particularly in the area of giving. We must give with a view to the harvest, to the results that our giving will produce. And if we focus on that, we will give generously; we will give as much as we can. Now, what does generous giving produce, anyway? Well, the first result of planting a crop is that you get to eat it, and, believe it or not, the first result of giving generously is that:

(1) God will meet our own needs Look with me at **Phil. 4:15-19**. Here we have that oft-quoted wonderful promise that God will meet all our needs. But look more closely, because we usually quote it out of context. What Paul really says is, "You have given generously; time and again you gave to me; you gave when nobody else did and my God will in turn see that every need of yours is met!" Now please listen carefully: **WE NEVER GIVE IN ORDER TO GET**. We don't give so that God will give us more in return. I'm simply saying that if you're trying to keep all you can of what God has given you, trying to make sure that you meet all your own needs before anything else, then don't count on God to do it for you! But I'll promise you this, if you love to give and you let God direct the way you use what He's given you and give generously as He directs, **THEN** you can count on Him to take care of your needs. Jesus Himself said, *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.* - **Lk. 6:38**. If we expect God to meet our needs, then we have to relinquish control over our resources and give as He directs. He will meet our own needs as we give, but I don't think that's the primary thing in view in Paul's mind when he wrote about the bountiful harvest. I think he is envisioning the fact that:

(2) God will abundantly meet the needs of others Look again at **Phil. 4:18**. The bountiful giving of the Philippian church produced the tremendous harvest of keeping Paul, the missionary, well-supplied. The more generously I give, the more God can do with it, the greater the blessing to others can be. It is not right to give God a few spare dollars, as if to say, "Here God, You multiply this somehow to feed the missionaries!" If it were my last and only dollar, such a request would be fitting! Rather, it is when I have given all that all I can, that I can ask God to multiply and use it to meet great needs, needs far beyond what I can meet, and He will do just that. Five loaves and two fishes fed thousands when that little boy gave his lunch to Jesus! But he didn't keep back a loaf and a fish for himself to eat when everyone around him was hungry too! He gave ALL he had to Jesus. He gave generously, not thinking about himself, and God multiplied it to bless everyone in the crowd and also to encourage every person who has heard that story since! He will meet the needs of others, with baskets left over, IF we give bountifully from the heart.

Now, once we understand the principles of giving eagerly and giving generously, then and only then, are we ready to understand the third principle:

III. The Principle Of Freedom: (7) Here's what that verse actually means: **I AM FREE TO GIVE WHAT I REALLY WANT TO GIVE!** Now if I had taught that first, somebody might have misinterpreted it to mean, "Give whatever you feel like; it doesn't matter," and that's NOT what it means. Paul is saying three things. First:

1. I should not give because I have to In fact, simply by definition, you CANNOT give because you have to. If you have to do it, it's not a gift; a true gift is freely given. It is not done under compulsion. (We should remember that at Christmas time!) But somebody may be thinking, "Wait a minute, doesn't God command that I am supposed to give a tithe of my income!" This is a subject we should take a moment and examine. In the Old Testament:

a. the tithe was a mandated exaction Listen to the law God gave Israel in **Num. 18:25-28**, *The LORD said to Moses, Speak to the Levites and say to them: 'When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the LORD's offering. Your offering will be reckoned to you as grain from the threshing floor or juice from the winepress. In this way you also will present an offering to the LORD from all the tithes you receive from the Israelites. From these tithes you must give the LORD's portion to Aaron the priest.* Notice the repeated command, **YOU MUST**. The people **MUST** bring one tenth of their harvest to the Levites and the Levites **MUST** bring a tenth of that to the priests. The tithe was a mandated exaction, a God-commanded income tax due from every Israelite, that supported the tribe of Levi, the priesthood and the sacrificial system in Israel. It was not giving in the New Testament sense. That's why tithes were "PAID". Gifts are never "paid"; they are given. The Israelite paid his tithe every year but he could then bring a free-will offering whenever and as often as he liked as a gift to God. However, please understand this: the tithe is never once mentioned in the New Testament in reference to Christians. It is mentioned only in the Gospels in reference to the Jews doing it and in the Book of Hebrews in reference to Levi paying tithes in Abraham. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus or any of the other writers command Christians to give a tenth or to give any other set amount of their income to the Lord or to their church. In this New Testament era, God no longer **COMMANDS** giving; instead, He gave us hearts that love to give through His Spirit coming to live in us and now He simply expects us to do what comes naturally from inside! However, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Even though the command is not given to us:

b. the tithe is still a meaningful example God put it there to show us something and we can learn something from it. Evidently God considered a tenth of one's income both a fair portion and a significant portion to give away to others. In fact, in His way of measuring it, real giving did not even start until after a tenth had already been given. So, if God commanded that of His people in the Old Testament in order to teach them to have giving hearts by an outward command, should our new hearts not be willing to do at least that and more! The concept of the tithe helps us to understand the meaning of the term *generous*. It's a good starting place that keeps us from deceiving ourselves into falsely thinking we're being generous, when in truth what we give is only a small portion of what have. However, if I make a million dollars a year and only give a tenth away while keeping \$900,000 for myself, that may not be generous at all! \$100,000 might seem like a generous gift when looked at from someone who makes an average income, but to a millionaire, giving that much may hold no significance at all. That's why no rule can tell you what *generous* is for you. Generous giving is giving that begins to take a significant bite out of our lifestyle, that requires some level of sacrifice. But again, no one can command you or I what we should give and we should never give because somebody tells us we have to. But Paul also says here:

2. I should not give if I don't want to That is, I should not give out of a sense of obligation. I shouldn't give simply because the plate is being passed to me and I don't want to appear stingy by not putting anything in. If you don't want to give anything, don't! We should not give because somebody laid a guilt trip on us and made us feel bad. Paul says, God loves what kind of giver? A **CHEERFUL** giver, one who gives with joy, one who loves to give. So that means:

3. I should give what I genuinely WANT to give How much I give should not be mandated by somebody else or by some rule:

a. it should be a decision of the heart It should come from down inside, not from a bunch of external things. I should give what my heart genuinely desires to give and decide it on that basis. And therefore:

b. it should be an individual decision Every person decides in their own heart. It is as individual as I am. It is between me and God. So, if my heart is predisposed and eager to give and wants to give generously, there should just be two factors involved in making the decision. First:

(1) I must consider God's provision - 1 Cor. 16:2 says *Each one should give in keeping with his income.* The KJV says *as God has prospered him*, reminding us who gave it to us in the first place. No two people should give the same and nobody will be able to give the same every week forever because income changes. I must ask, "What has God given me?" I must consider what God has given me and then when my heart is willing to give:

(2) I must follow God's direction I pray. I ask God how much to give and where to give it. He wants me to give freely but He would love to direct me when, where and how to do it. All I need to do is ask.

So, there are the 3 principles: *Give eagerly*: ask God to make you love giving. *Give generously*: give all you can because you want the harvest to be great. And *give freely*: give what you truly want to give. Listen to God and gladly follow His direction in giving. And if you do these things, you won't need a rule. You won't need a guilt trip or an appeal to get you to give. You will give naturally in such a way that God will use it to make a great harvest for His Kingdom in the world. *In 1954 a missionary to Japan named Neil Verwey was approached by a Japanese man he barely knew. The man wanted to borrow his bicycle. Neil said yes. A few weeks went by and the bike was not returned. In fact, Neil found out from someone that the borrower, a Mr. Mimura, had pawned his bicycle. What was really puzzling, though, was what happened the next time Neil ran into Mr. Mimura on the street. Rather than taking him to task for not returning his bicycle, the missionary*

felt God prompting him to give the man all the cash he had in his wallet. It was strange but he obeyed that prompting, and a few days later was told that the Japanese man had been about to commit suicide because he had no money and no way to feed his wife and children. Neil didn't see Mr. Mimura again for 25 years. Then in 1980 a Japanese evangelist informed him that a tuberculosis patient wanted to see him. It turned out to be Mr. Mimura, and he wanted to make restitution for the stolen bicycle. Shortly after that he and his wife came to faith in Christ. But Neil lost contact with the new converts. Then in 1996, Mr. Mimura called Neil up and told him he was dying of cancer. He said, "My wife and I have Psalm 23 to carry us through this ordeal." His wife testified, "How can I weep when my husband is so victorious?" A few months later, Mr. Mimura went to be with the Lord. Neil had no idea that when he said yes and gave that bicycle and that pocket full of cash, he was making an investment that changed eternity. [Pulpit Helps, Jul 1997. Page 9.] But Jesus did! Giving God's way will reap a great harvest. John Wesley had a famous sermon he used to preach on giving. Like all good sermons it had 3 points: GET all you can (don't be lazy and skimp by; earn all you can); SAVE all you can (don't be wasteful and fritter it away) and then GIVE all you can (that's the purpose of the getting and the saving, not to keep it for yourself!). If you give all you can, God will use it to change the world.

2 Cor. 8-9 The Grace Of Giving

What Happens When We Give? - 9:8-15

There are many areas in the overall subject of giving which we have not covered in this series, for the simple reason that they are not mentioned specifically in these two chapters. We could, for instance, have talked about the priority of giving, the concept that our giving to God should occur first before we spend our money on anything else. It's the idea that God should be receiving our firstfruits, not our leftovers. Or, we could easily have talked about the regularity of giving, about how giving should be a consistent habit that I practice every week or every time I receive my income, and how I should make sure my giving continues even when I go on vacation or when I am away. I don't get to keep money that belongs to God just because I didn't attend church on a particular day. But Paul doesn't talk about any of those things here. He assumes that if giving is an act of the heart which is done freely and generously then all of these kinds of things will naturally happen. So instead of talking about things like these, he concludes his two chapters on giving by talking about the RESULTS of giving, what happens when we give. Suppose I actually let Jesus live through me in directing my finances and my giving and God makes me a person who loves to give and I give and give generously, all that I can; what will happen? Well, the results are listed in verses 8-15 and I've divided them into three categories so that you can see them clearly. First of all, there are:

I. The Results For Myself in verses (8-11) What will happen to ME if I become a giving person? Paul says several things will happen. First:

1. God will see that I have what I need (8-9) The first concern that somebody always raises is this, "But if I give like that, what will be left for me? How will I pay my bills? How will I know that I have enough to take care of my family?"

Well, let me assure you of this about God:

a. He will never allow giving to hurt me I will have all I need; He will see to it. Let me put it this way; if I take care of God's business, He will take care of mine. He knows what I need before I ask. He's not going to let me sit here as His child and lack the necessities of life while asking me to give those very things away. He's going to see that my needs are met, and that abundantly. Of course, that doesn't mean that I get a vacation home, a yacht, and a sports car and He'll keep up the payments. Being a giving person WILL probably change my lifestyle. Giving as much as I can will definitely cause me to think about the things I invest my hard-earned cash in and not buy some things I am tempted to, but God will never impoverish me by giving! On the contrary:

b. His supply for me will be dependable Look at verse 8. Paul says, in ALL things, at ALL times, God will see you have ALL you need so you can abound in giving. In other words, God has a dependable pattern of supplying your needs. Everything you need whenever and wherever you need it He will supply so that you are free to abound in giving. Then in verse 9, he quotes the Psalms. At first glance you'd think the HE in this verse was God and the quote doesn't make much sense. But listen to **Ps. 112:5-9**, *It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries. He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.* But the HE is not God; it is the person who gives generously! When YOU give generously and freely give your gifts to the poor, that act of righteousness is remembered by God; it is remembered forever. Good will come to you because of it. You need have no fear that God will forget and somehow your need will not be remembered. God's supply for you will be dependable. So, really what we have here is another version of Phil. 4:19 which we looked at last week. When I give God will supply all my needs according to His riches in glory! That's the first result to me. The second is that:

2. God will enlarge my ability to give (10a) If I'm a generous sower, God will enlarge my store of seed. If I love to give, there are so few people like that, that God will gladly give me more opportunity. If I'm willing to let it pour out of my pocket freely, God will pour it in freely. And not only that:

3. God will enlarge the results of my giving (10b) The effects, the harvest, the amount of good my giving does, will be enlarged. Think right now about the amount of good your life is accomplishing for others. For some of you that may be a great deal, for others not much. But God can double and triple and quadruple that if you will let Him make you a real giver. He'll pour more in and more will go out and the blessing will multiply. But in addition, as I give a wonderful thing will happen to me:

4. God will enlarge my heart (11) The more I give, the more I will want to give. On occasion after occasion I'll give until I find myself giving on every occasion. Now, I'm not talking about responding to every solicitation you get in the mail, but you will want to respond to every legitimate God-sent opportunity. Your heart will be enlarged to give more and more. *The story is told of an English woman who had once wanted to do much for Christ when she was poor. But then someone left her a great sum of money and she said, "I cannot do as much as I used to do." When someone asked, "But how is that?" she said, "When I had a shilling purse, I had a guinea heart, but now I have a guinea purse and I have only a shilling heart."* For us that's like saying, "When I had pennies in my wallet, I had a heart that wanted to give thousands; but now that I have thousands in my wallet, my heart only wants to give pennies!" The surest way to change a stingy heart into a generous heart is to give. The more you give, the more God will enlarge it, the more you'll want to give and love to give! Through giving, God will make you a new and different you! But now we must move on to talk about:

II. The Results of giving For Those Who Receive It (12-14) My giving has a profound effect on the lives of others. When I give:

1. their needs will be supplied (12a) The Corinthians (and many other churches) gave and the believers over in Jerusalem and Judea had their needs met. They had food to eat and houses to live in and clothes to wear, when otherwise they would have gone hungry or lived on the street. Try to picture it, if you can. Times are hard in Jerusalem. There is a depression. The believers there are struggling and every day they get on their knees and beg God for their daily bread, but the reserves are running thin. However, a report of this travels a thousand miles and reaches the ears of Christians in Greece. And God moves on their hearts and hundreds of them start to save up to give to a collection. By the time a year comes around the collection is ready to go and is quite a large sum and Paul comes and takes it back to Jerusalem. It arrives just as the last of their meal is used up. Can you imagine their faces as Paul piles it all up and says "Here! This is for you from your brothers in Greece!" Think how you would feel! Now just hold that picture a moment, while I point out again that God answered their prayers and supplied their needs through the giving of others. That's what my giving does! But here's the second effect:

2. they will see the genuineness of my faith The NIV of (13) says *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.* If there was still any doubt as to whether these Gentiles over in Greece and Macedonia were real Christians or not, you can bet it was gone now. They had proved themselves to be real in giving. The world doesn't do that, by and large. People will see that you are really genuine when God puts a desire in your heart to give and you follow it. Indeed, John said the opposite in 1 John, *If you see your brother have a need and don't give, how does the love of God dwell in you?* Refusing to give is evidence of a lack of relationship with God; giving is a sign and a verification of true spiritual life. People will know my testimony is for real as I give and:

3. their hearts will be bound to mine (14) Do you think those Judeans loved the Corinthians after the offering arrived? Their hearts went out to them; they longed for them. The Corinthians became more than a name on a map; they became beloved brethren because they gave. Giving binds hearts together. It's hard to have problems with somebody who gives to you out of love! As I give, it binds the heart of the recipients with mine and as a natural result:

4. they will pray for me, as Paul says in (14a) That love will manifest itself in prayer. They may never be able to repay me, but they will start to pray for me and for my needs. I'll have a new prayer partner. And I will find myself praying for the ones I've given to as well. If you want to become more missions-conscious, just pick a missionary and start giving to them! You will look at every letter that comes with interest and you'll pray and they in turn will pray for you because of the loving gifts you send. But giving not only has results for me and for those who receive it, it has:

III. The Results For God (12-15) Wonderful things result toward Him when I give as well. First of all:

1. He will receive thanksgiving and praise (11b-12) As I said to you last time, when you have a need and somebody comes along and meets that need, who do you get on your knees and thank? Who do you think the Christians in Jerusalem thanked? They'd been praying and they knew this offering was God at work answering their prayers so they thanked Him for it. And then they praised Him for His love and caring and tender mercy and then they praised Him for something else, for the people at Corinth who had done the giving and for His working in their lives. You see, when I give, not only will people praise God for meeting their needs but they will praise Him for ME as well. They will praise Him:

a. for my true Christian character (13) That is, they will praise Him that I am really obedient to the Gospel, that I am a genuine Christian, a true child of God and not merely somebody with lip service. And they will praise Him:

b. for my generosity, for the bountiful way in which I have given, for my willingness to sacrifice and to give beyond my means like the Macedonians did. But most of all they will praise Him:

c. for His grace in working through me (14) They'll know it's not me. They'll know that my giving is an act of grace, the result of God working in me. And they'll thank God that He can still transform the hearts and lives of people and make them like Himself. He will get the credit and the glory for my giving! And in addition to that:

2. His Word will receive credibility (13) There is a hint here that I will be a living illustration of the reality of Christianity and the Christian message. That may not be so much true for believers but certainly for unbelievers. When they see you transformed into a giving person, putting others first, giving and loving it, it will be a means to convince them that Christianity is real, that it makes a difference, that it matters. It touches the pocketbook and the lifestyle. It will draw people to the Savior. And finally, Paul can't stand it anymore. He breaks out in his own word of thanksgiving and praise in verse 15 and that's exactly what will happen when we give:

3. His gift will be fully appreciated (15) Our giving is just a tiny little mirror that reflects for us the indescribable depth of His giving to us. Go back to **8:9**. Though He was rich, for us He became a poor human being and stripped Himself of every right and privilege and went to the cross so that we might share His infinite riches. It is when I give and when I'm given to that I'm led to stand in awe and wonder at the giving nature of my loving Father and His son Jesus who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Jesus did not show the Father's love by hugs and kisses. Instead, He showed it by giving, by giving Himself as a sacrifice for us. And the moment we realized that, we flung ourselves into His arms and were reconciled with the Father. What an indescribable gift! But God wants to do the same with us. He wants to make us givers so that He can send us as living letters known and read by men to tell them of His love by our giving. And He truly will get the praise and the glory forever! I'd like to end this series with a challenge from **Luke 19**, if you'll turn there with me. It begins with the story of Zacchaeus, a rich man, a chief tax collector but also a short guy who wanted to meet Jesus, so he climbs a tree and when Jesus sees him, He calls him down and goes to his house for a meal. That's the part of the story we remember, but the real point comes in verses **8-9**. When Zacchaeus heard Jesus and understood the forgiveness of his sins, his reaction was, *Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor!* And Jesus replied, *Today salvation has come to this house, this man is a true child of Abraham!* In that moment his heart was changed and he became a giver! Think about it, a rich man who gave away half of everything he had! Nobody told him to; his heart was so touched by God's gift to Him that he just did it! Think what people would say if you gave away half of everything you have for Jesus' sake! They'd say, "Now there's a person who was really saved, who really met Jesus; only Jesus could do a miracle like that!"

But immediately Jesus goes on in verse **11** to tell a story, the parable of the ten minas (or pounds in the KJV). I doubt we've ever looked at it seriously. *[read 12-26]* This is really a story about us. Jesus is the man of noble birth who went back to heaven to be appointed King and return. We are the servants He left here. And He's given each one of us a sum of money. Now a mina is equal to 100 days wages in that time. So, to make the math easy, let's figure a day's wage is \$100 today, so each of the ten got the equivalent of, say \$10,000. That sounds like a lot of money to be receiving. Well, I went online to my Social Security account that lists all my income for every year since I started working. And when I added the numbers up, I was shocked to find out that since 1970 when I was 16, I've earned a cumulative total of \$1.6 million so far! Many of you will make MUCH more than that in your lifetime, especially you young people. But, you see, that is my *mina*; that is the sum of His money that Jesus has entrusted to me and His instructions to me are: *Put this money to work until I come back!* Now I don't think He means simply, "Make as much money as you can with this money because I love money and I want more money." I think He means, *Put this money to work for my kingdom; invest it to help people like Zacchaeus find salvation; invest it to get the maximum return for the purpose I've given you, that is, to take the Gospel to every human being on earth, to help the poor, to bring honor and glory and worship to My Name! I pave the streets of heaven with gold as though it were asphalt; it's people I want; it's the church I am building; it's that Kingdom of worshippers from every tribe, tongue, people and nation!* And when He comes back, we're going to stand before Him because He wants to find out what we have gained (for His Kingdom) with what He's entrusted to us. Well, in the parable, one servant said, *Your one mina has earned 10 more*, that is, your \$10,000 has earned \$100,000. That's a 10-fold return or 1000%! No wonder the King said *Well done, my good servant!* Another said, *Your one mina has earned 5 more*, that is, your \$10,000 has earned \$50,000. That's a 5-fold return or 500%! Good by anybody's standards! These two were given great responsibilities in their Master's new kingdom; they became rulers! But there was another guy who had gotten the same mina, the same \$10,000 as the rest, but he didn't do anything for the King with it. He didn't care about the Kingdom. He put it away and hid it and now at the end of his days he simply handed it back and said, *Here is what is yours!* And Jesus calls him a wicked servant, takes it away from him and gives him NO responsibilities in the Kingdom. The question is, Which servant will you be? One invests his life's income well by giving all he can and hundreds or maybe thousands of people come into the Kingdom because of it; another invests it by giving significantly and consistently and dozens or even scores of people come into the Kingdom. But another just hands it back to the Lord when he dies, having invested nothing

or very little by giving and having no real return to show, nothing he can take with him. He doesn't lose his salvation, but who do you think Jesus is going to entrust to rule over important parts of the world during His millennial kingdom? Who is He going to trust to do what He says to do with what He's given them charge over when He comes back? Those who were faithful to His cause while He was away! Think about it; over your lifetime God will have given you maybe 1 or 2 million dollars or more to invest for His glory; which servant will you be? How much do you love the King who gave Himself for you? Will you invest all you can in His business? He invested His very life in yours!

GALATIANS

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GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Need Of The Message Of Grace 1:1-9

The Book of Galatians holds the dubious distinction of being one of the few and perhaps the only KEY New Testament book which I had never preached or taught through in my first 17 years of ministry. I think the reason is that the chief message of this Epistle is that we are saved by GRACE and I already believed that and, since I didn't come out of Jewish background or influence, I had no desire to go back and live under the law. And neither did 99% of the people I've ever ministered to. It was like living in Pennsylvania and owning an elephant gun. It's a good thing to have and you keep it in the closet in case you ever run into an elephant and need it! But more recently, God has been making clear to me that it has a much more direct application to my life and to yours than that, because many of us are Jews in Christian clothing. We talk much about grace for salvation. but we live under law as a way of life. So, God has laid it on my heart to explore this book together with you, as much for me as for you. Now, you'll find that the book breaks down easily into three major sections which I've outlined for you:

- I. Grace: God's Message through Paul (PERSONAL) Chs. 1-2
- II. Grace: God's Method of Salvation (DOCTRINAL) Chs. 3-4
- III. Grace: God's Means of Living (PRACTICAL) Chs. 5-6

And today we'll start at the beginning in the personal section of the book and talk about the NEED we have of the message of grace. In the first two verses you'll find:

I. The Epistle Introduced (1-2) Here you'll find three things:

1. the writer: Paul the Apostle You're saying, "Gee, I already knew that!" But don't miss what Paul is really hinting at here. If I could paraphrase, Paul is saying, "I am a person sent out to do a job, sent not because some man decided somebody needed to be sent nor because some man decided I needed to be sent. I was sent out by Jesus Christ." If you want to see what he means, just read the story of his conversion in Acts 26:15-18. His point is that Jesus Christ stopped him, saved him, and then sent him to take the message of salvation by grace to the Gentiles. The message wasn't his but Jesus', and he's going to spend the first two chapters of the letter proving this very point. So, let me just

add that what I'm going to teach you in this series is not simply my ideas; it is what Jesus wanted you to know and sent Paul to tell you! Now, secondly, you meet here:

2. the readers: the Galatians Galatia was the name of the Roman province that occupied most of the center of the peninsula of Asia Minor. Paul and Barnabas reached the southern region of it on their first missionary journey and planted churches there at Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. They came home from that journey with a glowing report of what God had done among the Gentiles, but when they got back to their home church in Antioch in Syria, they discovered they had a real problem and that is the reason that Paul wrote this letter and sent it back to circulate among the Galatian churches.

3. the reason: the Judaizers (7) Some false teachers had gone there and were confusing the believers. Compare Acts 15:1. There was a group of people, whom we'll call Judaizers, who came to Antioch and got Paul in an uproar. They taught that in order to be saved, a Gentile must not only believe in Jesus, but must also essentially become a Jew by following and keeping all the law of Moses. They said, "You must be circumcised and that obligates you to keep the law as well. So, salvation is by faith, yes, but it is really by faith PLUS works. You must believe, but you must also DO certain things." Paul took the matter straight to Jerusalem, to Peter and James and the original apostles to set it straight. But in the meantime, these teachers did not stop at Antioch. Some of them were really "missionary-minded" and had gotten out into Galatia and were confusing Paul's new converts. But do you know what? Some of them got further than Galatia. Some of their descendants made it to the USA and to Philadelphia and to Glenside! In fact, you'll find them all around you, people who will teach you that you must believe, surely, but you must also work. Some of them are cults who knock on your door or set up reading rooms down the street. Others come under the heading of mainline church denominations. But when you boil it down, their message is all the same, FAITH PLUS WORKS! Now Paul was not merely worried, he was horrified! So, he sent them a letter, this letter, to rescue them from this diabolical danger of being confused about the message of grace. And right at its beginning you have:

II. The Message Stated (3-5) In those verses you have the whole message in a three verse nutshell:

1. Christ alone saves us and this deliverance is two-fold:

a. from the guilt of our sins by His death He gave Himself for our sins. Nothing else can take them away, not our circumcision, not our keeping of the law, or our doing of good works. And, I might add, not our baptism, our communion, our joining of a church or a sect. Salvation from sin was provided completely through the blood of Christ. Now, most of us believe that and cling to it dearly, but there's another half to the message. We are also saved:

b. from the power of sin by His life He gave Himself in order that He might rescue us from the present evil age, and I don't think He's talking here so much about taking us to heaven someday. He's talking about rescuing us from the power of sin in our lives while we live here and now, as you'll see spelled out in the text of the letter. And here's where our Christianized version of legalism or Judaizing comes in; we believe that our eternal salvation is provided completely by Christ, but our day to day Christian walk is provided by US. It is a function of our will, our knowledge, and our strength. We must deliver ourselves from the lifestyle of sin. And that is so wrong! Look at Rom. 5:10. It is His death that reconciles us to God by removing our sin, but it is His life coming into us and flowing through us which changes our lives and delivers us from the wrath to come! Christ alone saves us and Christ alone can produce in us the life He intends for us to live! Now how do we get it?

2. we receive it by grace (as a gift) When you hear the word grace, think GIFT. It means something that God gives without our deserving it in any sense as a reward for what we have done. To be saved by grace means:

a. we did not make it happen It was God's will and plan. It originated with Him. We did not seek God. God sought us and provided our salvation for us in full. All we did was understand that and say, "Thank you". And so:

b. we do not take any credit We are saved by grace not works. It is the gift of God lest any man should boast. That's why all the glory, all the credit, goes to God forever and ever. I didn't save me from the guilt of sin and I didn't rescue me from the power of sin. He did.

That's the message Paul preached and taught and the truth that he wanted to call these Galatian believers back to. They needed it, because here's what was happening to them and what can happen to us:

III. The Process Explained (6-7) You see, it began with:

1. perversion of the message These false teachers came along with another message, another gospel. It sounded the same or nearly so. It sounded good. It made sense. They too said to believe in Jesus and, after all, isn't that what Paul preached? But they added, "and here's what you must DO next! You must be circumcised; you must do this; you must do that. All these things are necessary!" But this was another gospel, a different set of good news, which was really no "good news" at all! And this perverted message produced:

2. confusion of the mind These young believers had had no time to be well-founded and well-grounded. It produced confusion in them. I'll never forget a visit I made to a couple many years ago who had left a standard type church and

become leaders in the Church of Christ in our town. They were a very godly and sincere couple. They lived good lives and worshipped regularly and even took communion every day by themselves. But as we talked, he began to say, "Yes, but doesn't the Scripture say, 'Believe and be baptized and you will be saved?' And doesn't it say, 'Repent and be baptized and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?' So repentance is necessary to salvation and baptism is necessary to salvation. And didn't John write that no one who loves the Father can continue to sin? So, I must also live a clean life." And it was so confusing to me at the moment. I knew it was wrong. Yet here were people who did believe that Jesus died for their sins! However, it soon hit me; they actually believed in salvation by WORKS or by faith PLUS works, which is the same thing! The perverted message had led them astray and they were confusing others! And if you spend time enough reading some of the literature I've received from Jehovah's witnesses and even from Roman Catholic sources, it will bring real confusion if you're not grounded in the message of salvation by GRACE ALONE. And it may lead to:

3. desertion of the Master They were rather quickly willing to give up the message of GRACE and adopt WORKS, which Paul calls desertion, a military concept! It is forsaking Christ. You must see:

IV. The Danger Involved (8-9) These are, I believe, the strongest words in all Paul's writings. Because he sees:

1. the eternal consequences at stake A person who does not trust in Christ ALONE for salvation is eternally lost. These false teachers looked great and pious, but were condemning people to hell by their teaching, confusing them and keeping them from trusting fully in the MASTER. Over in Corinth, the Christians were fighting with each other, tolerating immorality and confusion; they were proud and boastful and all the rest, but Paul says nothing like this to them. This is more serious still. He says that the person who perverts the Gospel stands under the anathema of eternal condemnation himself! Folks, the world all around you is full of nice religious people who believe a perverted Gospel and are headed for eternity in hell and are dragging others with them! It's happening everywhere! And so you see:

2. the priority of the message Paul says, "ANYONE who preaches a different Gospel, I don't care if it's me or an angel from heaven or somebody that is right now there and teaching you, I don't care who the person may be, that person is eternally LOST!" It is the MESSAGE that is true and true eternally. It is the MESSAGE that is from God. The character of any messenger must be judged, not by outward appearances, but by the MESSAGE he brings.

You see, that's why we so desperately need to hear the message of grace! We need to hear it so that we can cling to it, so that we can discern error, so that we can see people for what they really are. I went to a very liberal seminary. My professors would all have said that they believed in Jesus, but they didn't teach that the Bible was inerrant. They didn't teach that Jesus Christ was the only way of salvation. They didn't teach that one must personally repent and trust in what Jesus did at the cross to have forgiveness of sins. In essence, they held to the principle, "Believe in Jesus and be a good person and all of us will go to heaven because God is a God of love." It was a Gospel of works, not grace. And the solid faith of many a student who came from an evangelical background was derailed and essentially destroyed. And he or she went out to share that same false Gospel in churches after graduation. God help us to CLING to the message of GRACE!

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Authority Of The Message Of Grace 1:10-2:10

I'd like to ask you a question. HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE RIGHT? You're a Christian. You say a person is saved simply by trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. You've been taught that. But how do you know you're right and everybody else who teaches that you must work for it is wrong? Have you ever thought about that? What authority does this message we have carry? Where did it come from? Well, you'll find tons of people out there who will attack your faith and say it is a man-made thing. And that's what was happening over in Galatia. As I told you last week, these false teachers, these Judaizers, had come among the churches and were teaching that salvation was by faith in Jesus PLUS being circumcised and keeping the Law. That was not what Paul had taught and, of course, they had to attack Paul's credibility when those Christians said, "Paul never taught us that". So they did. They attacked Paul's motive and message in order that the converts there would listen to them. Word of that got back to Paul and in verse 10 you can see implied the charge they were making:

I. The Charge: Pure Grace Is Pleasing Men (1:10) "Paul, you're not trying to please God. You're tailoring your message to suit your audience, to make it appealing and pleasing to the ear so that people accept it. The Christian faith is not like that. It's hard! There are rules and regulations to keep. After all, look at the Scriptures, look how much of it is given to things that we must DO in order to be acceptable before God. You're tickling their ears with what they want to hear when you say you don't have to DO anything!" And believe me, Paul is not the only one who will catch flack about this. You will too, if you try to share the message of grace. And here's why. There is:

1. the universal belief that we must DO something Everybody believes that. It is human nature. These guys were Jews and the Jews certainly believed that, so when they believed in Jesus, they just carried their belief in Jewish works of the law right along with them. Believing was just another work in the list. But the pagans believed the same thing. They offered sacrifices to idols and mutilated themselves and had all kinds of detestable things to do to placate

the gods! And so you find it today. When you say, "Salvation is all by grace; it is purely the gift of God and there is nothing you must do to get it; it is already done; simply accept it!", all kinds of religious people will disagree with you and give you flak. Why? Because, not only have they been taught that they must WORK for it, they believe it by nature. Talk to non-religious people. If they think about an afterlife at all, they will universally say it is gained by the life YOU live. So, teaching:

2. pure grace is making it easy to attract converts Who wouldn't want to hear that you don't have to do anything to be saved? If you tell somebody that to be saved he has to believe in Jesus and then go get circumcised and then take every seventh day off of work and then celebrate X number of religious holidays, he might hesitate a long time about that. But if you tell him, "There's nothing to do; give your life to Jesus; He has done it all for you. You can have instant salvation by trusting in Him.", that sounds like a pretty good deal. Who wouldn't take that? Strangely enough, do you know that it doesn't work that way? In reality, it is much easier to convince people to be saved by doing certain things, no matter how hard they are. It is easy to start your own cult. All you have to do is speak with authority about what people have to DO and they'll do it. But just try to tell them that all they can do is believe and see how hard it is to convince them. It's against their very nature. If you want to please men, tell them, "Dress a certain way and give so much and eat certain things and repeat certain rituals". They'll love it and flock to it! So, to this charge, Paul gives this:

II. The Answer: Pure Grace Is Pleasing God What Paul is going to say, and what you and I who believe the message of grace must understand, is this: this message carries the very authority of God. And now Paul is going to spend a whole chapter proving that by means of his personal experience. First, he says:

1. it is a message originated by God (1:11) It is not something man made up. If it was, you'd hear it being said by somebody else someplace. But nobody else is saying this except Christians. It is not man's message, nor the message invented by some human group. It is a message originated by God Himself. But more than that:

2. it is a message revealed by God (1:12) Did you ever wonder where Paul got all the deep and wonderful things you find in his writings? Where did the book of Romans come from anyway? Did he take some intensive course in it? No, Paul didn't learn it; he wasn't taught it by any human source, either from other Christians or from the Apostles at Jerusalem. He received it directly by revelation from Jesus Christ Himself. He goes on to prove that by talking about his life:

a. Paul was opposed to it before conversion (1:13-14) For the first part of his life, he was the epitome of everything these false teachers wanted to be. He was an extremely zealous Jew. He was steeped in the traditions of his fathers. He HATED anybody who opposed them and when the Christians came along, he led the persecution. And it's not like he tapered off. At the very moment of his conversion, he was engaged in a trip to persecute people. He didn't have a change of heart; He didn't have time for one. In the middle of the highway, God blinded him with a light and threw him to the ground and talked to him. That's what changed his mind! He never learned about salvation by grace before that! And:

b. Paul was not taught it after conversion (1:15-24)

(1) he immediately spent time in solitude (15-17) His life, everything that he was, was instantly shattered. Having thought himself to be God's favorite, he now found himself having been God's enemy. His message of zeal for the traditions was wrong. He'd been reading the Scriptures wrong. He needed time to think, to be alone, so he went away into the desert, into Arabia, to be alone with God. And there in a tent in the solitude alone with God, with no other Christians, with nobody, he got from God the message of grace alone. That's where the book of Romans came from! Oh, he wrote it later, but that's where all that new understanding of the depths of what grace means came from. God poured it into him there. There was nobody there to instruct him. Then:

(2) he visited Jerusalem only briefly (18-20) three years later. The reason he went (Acts 9 tells us) was that his life was in danger and he had to flee Damascus. So he went to see Peter, the head of the church to get acquainted with him. But his visit only lasted 15 days and he never did get to meet the other Apostles except James the Lord's brother. It seems that he started to preach in the synagogues again and the Jews tried to kill him, so he had to flee. There was no time there to get all of his doctrine from these men. In haste, they sent him off to Cilicia, to his home town of Tarsus, and nearby Syria, which means:

(3) his early work was far away (21-24) He spent 10 years out there preaching where there were no previous Christians for the most part and he had no face to face contact with the churches in Judea where the Christians would have been most numerous. So he didn't get it from them. Well, if he didn't get it before conversion and nobody taught it to him after conversion, then where'd he get it? How did he learn the message he preached?

c. Paul learned it directly from God (1:15-16) What wonderful verses these are. Here's what happened to Paul and what happened to each of us:

(1) God's grace planned it beforehand Now that he was saved, he could look back and see that God had planned it all from the beginning. He'd been at work from his mother's womb to bring him to this place. Only the grace of God could have made him what he was and then changed him into what he became!

(2) God's grace called him on the Damascus Road God stopped him in his persecuting little tracks and Jesus told him what he was thinking, "It's hard for you, isn't it?!" There was no preacher, no Christian present. There was a voice directly from heaven. Paul knew nothing about Christianity, nothing about the doctrine of grace. And then a most marvelous thing happened.

(3) God gave an internal revelation of His Son Not only was there the external revelation to his senses, but the Spirit of Christ came inside and God revealed His Son, who He was and what He did, inside Paul! And then:

(4) God told him to preach it to the Gentiles He didn't decide on that himself. At the very moment of his conversion the Lord told him that he had saved him to take the message to others. So, when we read what Paul wrote, when we believe what Paul preached, we're trusting in a message that came directly to him from Almighty God! The revelation of who Jesus was came directly to his heart in that blessed moment on the Damascus Road. And the doctrines of grace came to his heart in those precious years in Arabia! And do you see the great parallel here? In that moment when I received Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit came in and whispered assurance to my heart that indeed I was a child of God through trusting in Jesus. And over the years there have been those precious moments alone with His Word, wrestling and struggling and finally coming to understand truth. You see, Christianity is more than just accepting what somebody says. It involves a personal revelation. God reveals His Son in you and you know the message of Christ alone is true. It has nothing to do with logic and persuasion. It is an experience of Jesus Christ. But, the critics say, "How do we know you didn't just invent this all by yourself out there in the desert? Maybe the sun got too hot and fried your brain!" Paul answers, "When I finally did get together with the other apostles, I found that they had the same message!"

3. it is a message confirmed by the other apostles (2:1-2, 4-5) Fourteen years after he was saved (Acts 15) he went up to Jerusalem to the apostles to set this whole issue of grace and law straight and to make sure that they agreed with him. These false teachers had come out from Jerusalem and he wanted to set the record straight once and for all. Paul said, "Grace is all; the works of the law are not required." And what he reports about his visit is that:

a. it was followed by them (2:3) He took a Gentile, Titus, with him as a test case and the apostles received him as a brother without requiring circumcision. So, their practice was the same as his. And his message:

b. it was not added to by them (2:6) They didn't say, "No, Paul, you must teach them to be circumcised and keep the law." They did not add ONE requirement for salvation beyond trusting in Jesus. But on the contrary:

c. it was recognized and affirmed by them (2:7-10) They recognized the same Holy Spirit was at work in both Paul and them, that both were preaching the same message, one to the Jews and the other to the Gentiles. What's the point? If God tells person A something and God tells person B over here something about the same subject, then the two things ought to agree, right? Peter carried the message as it was revealed to him by Jesus over three years of teaching and then in the intervening years through the additional things we watch him learn in the Book of Acts. Paul carried the message as it was revealed to him in a tent in the desert with nobody around. Yet when they compared notes, they found they had the same message. It had to be from God! It had to be truth. It had to be right!

And so, Paul quickly sent out this letter to the Galatians to assure them he was right and they were right in believing that salvation is by grace alone, apart from the works of the law. And by it we also stand assured. God gave the message to Peter one way. He gave it to Paul another way. He confirmed the same thing in my heart when I was saved. It is true. I'm right and I know it!

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Example Of The Message Of Grace 2:11-18

As I told you when I began this series, one of the reasons I avoided the Book of Galatians for so long was that I had a hard time relating to it. It was written to Christians who were trying to live under the Jewish law and I knew that I was saved by grace alone and would certainly not go back to a law I was never under in the first place! What did it have to do with me? Maybe some of you feel like that right now. We need an illustration of how this applies to us, an example, something with flesh and blood, something we can relate to. And as we move into the middle of the second chapter of Paul's letter, that's exactly what he gives us, an example of what he's talking about, followed by an explanation.

I. The Example Of Turning From Grace (11-14) In these verses we have the story of something that had only recently happened to Paul, that made this issue very clear. He told about a person who as a believer had started to turn away from grace in his life:

1. the offender: Peter (11) Peter came to visit the church at Antioch and during his visit, he did this very thing; he turned away from grace and back to law. Now wait a minute, Peter? The head of the church? The leading apostle? The great preacher filled with the Holy Spirit who had won thousands of Jews to trust in Christ? Yes, Peter himself was subject to this error. And guess what! If he was, then so are you! Don't think this issue of law and grace is somebody else's problem! It's a problem you face and wrestle with, a temptation you are prone to, and you may not even recognize it. Now what was:

2. the issue: dietary law (12a) Peter was a Jew. All his life Peter, the good Jew, had followed the Levitical dietary law. There were foods that were declared unclean, like pork for instance, or most wild animals. Of course, those foods were commonly found on Gentile tables. So, it was very difficult for a Jew to accept a dinner invitation from a Gentile and it eventually evolved into an entire practice. Jews did not eat with Gentiles, even though it does not strictly forbid that in the Old Testament. So, Peter never ate with Gentiles, but then one day Peter had an experience. Look at Acts 10:9-16. And as he was lying there trying to figure out what God was saying, three Gentiles showed up at his door. Now, the effect of this vision was two-fold. First, it showed him clearly that the old dietary law was now null and void. All foods are clean. And secondly, he could go with and fellowship with and eat with Gentiles. He could no longer call any man impure or unclean. It changed his life. When Peter came down to visit Antioch, he ate and fellowshiped openly with the Gentile believers there and treated them as equals. But something happened:

3. the action: hypocrisy (12b,13) A group came down from Jerusalem, from James, Peter's co-leader there, and they belonged to the circumcision group. They were believers, but they were originally Jews and were still continuing their Jewish observances, only with new meaning now as Christians. They wouldn't eat with Gentile Christians at Antioch. And after they arrived, Peter began gradually to withdraw from it himself and to follow their example. Verse 13 says it was hypocrisy on his part. Now, a hypocrite is an actor, somebody who acts differently from what's really going on inside. Peter really didn't believe in what he was doing, withdrawing from Gentiles. God had made that lesson clear to him. He had been living that way for some time, but here he was acting the old way again, returning to what he knew wasn't right. Why did he do it?

4. the motive: fear (12c) He was afraid. Afraid of what? Afraid he would be accused of not being a proper Christian! Afraid somebody would point a finger at him and say, "You can't be a Christian; look how you live!" Afraid somebody would go back and tell James or the church at Jerusalem and they would look down on him. Right here is a good principle to learn. The true motive of law is FEAR, fear of what will happen if I "don't". The motive of faith is LOVE! And perfect love casts out fear! Now, I think this would be a good place to stop and give some more current examples. Most of us are no longer worried about eating pork or keeping Jewish feasts. The issues have changed and it seems like they always will. Within the memory of many of you, they have become issues like smoking, dancing, attending of movies, or teetotaling. Or perhaps it was hair length on men or skirt length on women. It might be whether you read another version of the Bible other than the KJV or whether you'd let a woman teach a class that had men in it. I've been in services where I felt looked down on if I didn't raise my hands and others where I would have been looked down on if I did. The issue could have been makeup or wearing slacks or shorts. It could have been whether you allowed any beat in your worship music or how many times you attend church each week or whether you go out door-to-door visiting or not or whether you worship on the right day of the week or whether you would shop or work on a Sunday. You see, the circumcision party is alive and well today in Christian circles. They're the ones who want to give you a list, who want to say, "You're not a good Christian, not a REAL Christian, if you don't do this or if you do that." I'm not talking about moral issues, about things the Bible clearly speaks to as not being part of true Christian character. I'm talking about people who want to impose upon you a law of conduct as a Christian that they say is necessary to please God, but is not found in the Scriptures. The church is full of people like that, even today. And when you're around them, just like Peter felt, there is a great pressure to conform, to agree or to at least act like you agree, because you're afraid; you don't want to be looked down on or thought wrongly of. And just like Peter:

5. the result: division (13) These guys from Jerusalem started it and then Peter joined them and then those at Antioch who were from Jewish background followed him. Even good old Barnabas got in on it. And what you had was a split church! Believers who were of Jewish background could no longer eat with those who were Gentile; they were separated. You had two churches which could only grow further apart. And that's always the result of legalism! Christians divide. They separate from one another. They split. They refuse to fellowship. And Christ's kingdom suffers! So what do you do?

6. the remedy: rebuke (14) Paul was not afraid. He spoke openly to Peter's face in front of everybody. He said, "Peter, this isn't right. This has got to stop. You're a Jew and yet you haven't been following the Law. How come all of a sudden you're trying to live by it and by example are causing others to live by it and making these Gentile Christians feel like they have to become circumcised and keep the law in order to be real Christians?" The only remedy for legal-

ism when it appears in the church is to face it openly and squarely, to recognize it for what it is and to declare what it is, whether that's popular or not! So now Paul proceeds to explain to Peter what he's doing. You see, there is a blindness about legalism. People who are legalistic are often blind to it. They have no idea what it is. They think they are pleasing God. They think they are loving God by being careful in all these areas. That's how Paul was before he was saved. That's how the Pharisees were. And that's how you will find believers today. So, Paul helped to sweep away that blindness in Peter with:

II. The Explanation Of Turning From Grace (15-18) This quotation actually goes to the end of the chapter but we're going to stop at verse 18. First, Paul reminds Peter, and us, of what we already know and believe:

1. I am justified by faith not law (15-16) I am declared righteous before God, not on the basis of what I have done, but on the basis of what Christ has done. Now that:

a. it is true for Jew as well as Gentile Paul includes himself with Peter. He says, "Look Peter. We were Jews by birth. We were not 'Gentile sinners', not 'dogs of the Gentiles,' as Jews love to call them. We were keepers of the Law. But we discovered that you cannot be justified by law. We had to come and place our faith in Jesus Christ to be saved. Today we are saved people, justified people, and we got that way not by keeping the law but by trusting in Christ alone. Well guess what, that's the same way our Gentile brethren got that way. They too gave up on their vain attempts to find God through their idolatry and simply trusted in Christ." You see:

b. it is impossible to be justified by law Why weren't we justified by the law? Because by observing the law no one will be justified! Oh, I wish I could print that on a sign a mile high and five miles wide and plant it where the world would see it. NO ONE, NOT ONE SINGLE PERSON, Jew or Gentile, black, white, red, or purple, nice or nasty, priest or criminal, NO ONE, will be justified by what he does, by his actions, his deeds, his works! It is impossible! And what that does is this:

c. it levels all men (17a) It puts us all in the same place. Gentiles are sinners. But so are Jews. Christ died for the ungodly and that's us, every one of us. We all have equal footing. We all have equal standing. We were all sinners. We are all justified simply by faith. No one of us is better or different than the other. As long as we are all clearly trusting in Christ, we have no valid reason and basis to look down on each other or set up standards for each other. The Jews were saying, "Look, when a Jew comes to Christ, you tell him he doesn't have to live like a Jew anymore, that he can live without the law. You lead him into sin. You make Christ responsible for promoting sin!" But Paul says, "NO WAY!" On the contrary:

2. I sin when I return to law (18) The real sin is not dropping the law; it's returning to it! He says, "Peter, you knocked down the law. God used you to show us that it's invalid. You abandoned it. Now by your actions you're trying to rebuild the very thing you've stood against. That's the real sin!" The real sin is not when I tell somebody, "Sunday is not the Sabbath; you're free to do whatever God leads you to do and moves your heart to do on this day." It's when somebody comes along and says, "Hey, you're not honoring the Sabbath to keep it holy! What kind of Christian are you?" The real sin is enslaving people to the yoke of law, rather than the freedom of grace. And have no fear, if Christ really lives in the person and is Lord of their life, they're not going to fall into a life of sin. They're going to respond to the LIFE within them and live out of it and live LIKE it! And that's far better than any law you could ever write!

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Explanation Of The Message Of Grace 2:19-21

I would like to look with you at just three verses this morning. Please notice that in the middle of verse 14 there is a quotation mark but there is no close quote mark until the end of verse 21. These verses are part of what Paul said to Peter on that occasion when Peter came to Antioch to visit and turned away from grace by refusing to eat with the Gentile believers there. Last time we looked at verses 14-18, which are his words of rebuke to Peter, his "chewing out" of Peter, as it were. But verses 19-21 go far beyond that. They are an explanation. Paul explains to Peter, instructs Peter, reminds Peter what the message of pure grace really is. These three verses are the explanation of what grace means to the believer in a nutshell. There are five key principles that he mentions here that are fundamental to our understanding of what it means to be saved by grace and to live under grace. The first is:

I. The Principle Of Death To Law (19) I died to the law. But I want you to know something. In the Greek there is no article, *the*. It simply says *to law I died*. Paul is not just talking about the Old Testament law to which Peter was trying to return. He is talking about law as a principle, as a way of pleasing or being acceptable to God. You see, I died to law as a way of relating to God, the concept of maintaining a relationship to God by keeping a list of commands. I died to that. Now, what does that mean. Well, let's compare Rom. 7:1-6. The result of death is RELEASE. Death releases a wife from the marriage bond so she is free to marry another. Death releases you from all kinds of things. You don't have to pay taxes. You don't have to keep the speed limit. You don't have to work. I know that sounds absurd. That's because you already know that death means release from all those earthly laws and obligations. Paul says, "You know what God did, He killed you. He put you on the cross with Christ. And you died there."

1. what this means: I am released from law My death with Christ means I am completely, totally released and freed from law as a means of relating to God. I am not like the Old Testament Jew who had a law to keep in order to live. I live by a whole new principle. And that means two things:

a. release from law as a means of salvation I have not one thing to do to get or keep my salvation, not one deed, not one good work, not one act of sacrifice. None of those things affect my salvation, my relationship with God, in the least. My relationship with God is on a different plane. God gave it to me by grace as a gift. He put His Son on the cross in my place and took away my sins, and then He put His Son in me and made me His child. That had nothing to do with me! Nothing I did before or after that affects my relationship to God. I am His child and that's that. Isn't that glorious? I don't have to wait and wonder and worry whether I've done enough or been good enough. Grace has made me absolutely free from all of that! I'm dead to it. I have about as much to worry about in that regard as a dead person has to worry about whether his socks match or his driver's license has expired! But that's not all. To the Christian, grace also means:

b. release from law as a mode of living Rom. 7:6 says that through death we were released from law as a way of living, a way of serving God. The old way was this, God gave a written code; God gave a command. With all my strength I tried to keep His command which was contrary to my nature. But now I have a new way, the way of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to live in me and changed my heart, so now I love the very things God loves; I want to do the very things God wants. His law is written on my heart on a tablet of flesh instead of stone. He rules my life personally from the inside. So, I am dead to law as a way of life, as a way of pleasing God and serving God. I am finished with it, done with it. It is over with. The way I live now is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and let Him control my life! I'm dead to law, but let's look briefly at:

2. how I was made dead Obviously God did it, but there appear to be two things listed as agents in the verses we've looked at. First, I died to law:

a. through the conviction of law Galatians 2:19 says it was through law itself that I died to law. Law convicted me of sin. Knowing what was wrong convicted me of doing what was wrong. And the harder I tried, the more I found I could not keep it. It was trying to live under law that drove me to abandon law as a way of being acceptable to God and to flee to Christ. As Paul writes in the next chapter, *The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith!* Law is good and has a purpose, which is to drive us to the Savior so we might die to law and live by grace. But this death is actually accomplished:

b. through the person of Christ Rom. 7:4 says we died to law through the body of Christ. It is in His person on the cross that I died. That's the concept of being crucified with Christ which we'll discuss in a moment. But before we move on to that, let's ask:

3. why I was made dead Why did God kill me? For two reasons:

a. that I might be joined to God You can't be married to two husbands at one time. If you're bound to law, you can't be joined to God, because the law can't justify you; it can only condemn you. So, God caused me to die so I could be free from law and its curse and be joined to Him.

b. that I might bear fruit to God Rom. 7:4 again says that under law I didn't bear any fruit to God. All I could produce were dead works and sins. But now God has planted the Seed of His Son in me and my life bears the fruit of it! Now my life bears the fruits it was meant to bear: love, joy, peace, and so on. Well, now it's time to look at the second principle:

II. The Principle Of Crucifixion With Christ (20) This is one of the first Bible verses I ever really memorized as a young teen before I was saved, and it has stuck with me ever since. I've been able to quote it for years, but never really understood:

1. its meaning: my old self died What was crucified? What died? Is that just symbolic language or did something actually happen to me? Compare Rom. 6:6. My old self was crucified, the old me, my old nature, who I was before salvation. I had a body and that stayed the same. I had a mind and a will and emotions, a mental part, and that stayed the same. But at the core, I had a spirit, a nature, a heart, which the Bible says was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Jesus said my wicked heart or spirit was the source of every evil thought, word, and deed. What happened to that? Is it still around? No, the Bible says God crucified it! He killed it and gave me a new spirit, a new nature, one just like His. My old self is dead and gone. How did that happen?

2. its means: union with Christ It was accomplished on the cross. When I came to Christ, God united my life with His life, which means that in reality, I was on that cross with Him. When He was crucified and died, my spirit was in Him and was crucified and died. Don't ask me to explain how that works, but just trust me it does! But do you see what that means:

3. its permanence It is permanent! It is done and accomplished. I don't have to go out and fight that old nature, crucify myself, put myself to death. It is already done and has been since the cross. All I have to do is learn to appropriate it and live in the light of it! So, I am dead to law and my old nature is crucified, but there is a third principle:

III. The Principle Of Indwelling By Christ (20b) I live and Christ lives in me. You see, as I mentioned earlier:

1. there is a new self created in me There is a new man created there, a new heart, a new spirit, a new nature, one that is like God, holy, righteous, and pure! So, I got a brand-new start in life. God didn't just tell me to improve the unimprovable. He made me perfect at the core. But there's another factor:

2. Christ Himself lives in me He indwells me with all His power, all His strength, all His wisdom, all His love. He lives in my spirit, my new self, and is joined to it as one! Why? So that now I not only want to live the life that bears fruit to God, but I have the Divine power to live that life. Here's a poem I read that illustrates the difference:

*"Do this and live the Law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands.
A better word the gospel brings. It bids me fly and gives me wings!"*

Can you see it? Law said "Do," but I couldn't. Law was powerless to help me keep it. It was like commanding a man to fly. It set up demands but I could not meet them. Then grace came and gave me wings! Now I can live the life God wants because He has taken me out of the system of law, killed me, and given me His life. So how do I live now?

IV. The Principle Of Living By Faith (20c) I live by faith. What does that mean? Well, there is one important fact that I didn't mention. God has set all of this in place. It is true the moment you accept Christ. However, the result, producing the life God wants, is still contingent on one thing, my will. I have been given the freedom to choose. I can either live out of the glorious resources of Christ which have been placed in me or I can choose to live out of my own, out of my flesh, even as I did before I was saved. The deciding factor is this, Who is Lord? Who controls my life? Now when I moment by moment yield myself to the Lordship of Christ, then here's how it works:

1. I no longer do my own living I no longer choose my own will. I no longer do what I want. And I no longer try to do what He wants in my own strength. I realize that the Christian life cannot be lived by me out of the meager resources I have so:

2. I trust Him to live through me Moment by moment I trust Jesus to love, to give, to help, to forgive, to witness, to preach, to sing, to do whatever He chooses to do through me. Living by faith is not really a matter of money, of trusting God to meet my needs. That's only a small part. Living by faith means moment by moment depending upon and calling upon Christ in me to love my wife, to control my anger, to make my decisions, to give me the right words to say. It means depending upon Him for every moment of my life in exactly the same way I depend upon Him for my salvation. That is the new way of serving God that Paul talked about in Romans 7. Grace means depending upon God to guide me into what is right and empower me to do it. There is no law in that! I am dead to that old way of living, finished with it. But I should mention:

V. The Principle Of The Danger Of Law (21) I can choose to ignore this and go back to trying to keep a list of rules in my own strength. I can set aside and frustrate the grace of God and try to live in the flesh and attain righteousness in my own strength. But what a fruitless, crazy exercise! If you could do that, Christ wouldn't have had to die, His death was useless, vain, needless. If all I have to do is to try harder, then what use is there in Christ indwelling me and giving me a new nature, providing all this wonderful stuff for me? Yet somehow, there is always the drive in my mind to slip back into living the old way, trying to live under law, trying to keep a set of rules in the flesh. But it frustrates the very thing God wants to do in me. It actually keeps me from bearing the fruit God wants because in my own strength I can't do it. Yet that drive, that tendency, is there in me and I must guard carefully against it. It's almost like this:

Once there was a man lost in the desert, near death from thirst. He wandered aimlessly through the burning sand for many days, growing weaker. Finally, he saw an oasis in the distance. Palm trees indicated a source of water! He stumbled forward and fell under the shade of the trees. At last, he might quench his tortured thirst. But then he saw something strange. Instead of a pool of water or a well the man found a pump. Beside it was a small jar of water, and a note. The note explained that a leather gasket in the pump must be saturated with water for the pump to work. Within the jar was just enough for this purpose. The note also warned the reader not to drink from the jar. Every drop must be poured into an opening at the base of the pump to soak the heat-dried gasket. Then, as the leather softened and expanded, an unlimited supply of sweet water would be available. The note's final instructions were to refill the container for the next traveler's use. The man faced a dilemma. He was dying of thirst, and he had found water. Not much, of course, maybe not even enough to save his life. But it seemed the height of folly to pour it away, down the base of the pump. On the other hand, if the note was accurate, by pouring out the small quantity of water, he would then have all he wanted. Would he do things his own way or believe the note? I'll let the ending up to you but the moral is this: there is a strong compulsion in your mind to live by law, to do things your own way. God says it doesn't work like that. You must do it His way. You must trust Him to live, not yourself. What will you do?

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Proofs Of The Doctrine Of Grace (I) 3:1-9

At chapter 3 we enter the second major section of this letter Paul wrote. The first two chapters have been personal in nature. Paul gives his own testimony and experiences and shows how God gave Him the message that salvation is completely by grace and verified it through his experiences with the other apostles. Now at chapter 3, his writing becomes doctrinal. He's now writing to teach, to teach the fact that grace is and always has been God's method of salvation. The outline of this section is:

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| I. Grace: God's Message through Paul (PERSONAL) | Chs. 1-2 |
| II. Grace: God's Method of Salvation (DOCTRINAL) | Chs. 3-4 |
| 1. the proofs of grace | 3:1-18 |
| 2. the purpose of law | 3:19-25 |
| 3. the position of the believer | 3:26-4:7 |
| 4. the plea for steadfastness | 4:8-31 |
| III. Grace: God's Means of Living (PRACTICAL) | Chs. 5-6 |

The first issue he addresses is the proof that salvation is by grace alone. How do you know that, anyway? All around you are people, even religious people, who believe and teach that a person's eternal destiny is determined by his deeds. They challenge you on every hand. How do you know that you're right? Why do you cling to the crazy notion that God gives salvation only as a free gift and it can only be received by simply trusting in Jesus Christ? What keeps you holding on to that? Well, Paul lists four proofs that may not mean much to the world, but to you as a Christian they give sound assurance that the message of the gospel of grace you have accepted is true and trustworthy. We'll look at two of those proofs today and two next time. The first is:

I. The Proof Of Your Experience (1-5) Paul says, "How could you be so foolish, so blind as to want to turn from grace to law? It's almost as though these false teachers around you have bewitched you, have put you under a spell. It doesn't make any sense." And then he proceeds to tell them, "Just look at your own life, your own experience." My friend, perhaps the greatest available proof that salvation comes by faith alone is YOU! He asks them four heart-searching questions:

1. How did you receive the Spirit? (2) "How did He come to you? How was your life changed and made different? Was it through deciding to keep the law of Moses? Was it through being circumcised? Was it through keeping the Passover and the feasts? No, you never did any of those things. Even if you were a Jew and you did, that was not what brought the Holy Spirit into your life. You remember when He came in. He came in when you simply believed what I preached, that Jesus died for your sins and that through faith in His name you can have forgiveness." The moment you believed, the Holy Spirit came. Keeping the Law never once brought the Holy Spirit to anybody. When you trusted in Christ, the Holy Spirit came into your life and bore witness with your spirit that you belonged to God. He gave you a new heart. He changed your life. You see, there is one proof the skeptics can't argue with! There is a miracle, a repeated miracle, that happens. I've seen it time after time. When a person trusts simply in Christ, his life is changed, sometimes dramatically, but always surely. It happened to me; it's happened to hundreds of people that I know. Trying to be good and to be religious and to go to church never did that for me. But when I prayed to ask God to give me eternal life by grace, it did. Why would I ever want to go back to something that didn't work in the first place! Now then, in case you would say, "OK, but law will make me a BETTER Christian", Paul asks:

2. How are you being sanctified? (3) You have a goal, a goal of being sanctified, of enduring and becoming like Jesus. If you couldn't save yourself, why on earth would you think that it is your own effort that can sanctify you? If it couldn't change you into a Christian, why would you think it could change you AS a Christian? Sanctification and Christian growth is a work that God does in us, as we are yielded to and obedient to His Spirit. It does not and will never come just by doing somebody's list of do's and don'ts! Then he asks another question:

3. Did you suffer in vain? (4) Here he's referring to the events in Acts 13-14 when he came to Galatia to preach the Gospel the first time. At Antioch, the Jews there got so mad at Paul's preaching that in two weeks they stirred up the Gentile leaders of the city against him and had him thrown out. At the next town, Iconium, they hatched a plot to stone him. At Lystra, they DID stone him and dragged him outside the gate so his carcass would rot there, but he lived. This was where these Galatian Christians lived. Do you think their lot was much easier than Paul's? Paul says here in verse 4 that it wasn't. They had suffered much for becoming Christians, SO much. They had risked danger, defied the system. Paul says, "What was that for? Was it meaningless? If you go back to what those people believe, you won't have any troubles at all. Did you suffer in vain? Or will you stand by what you gave your hearts to?!" And then he asks:

4. Why does God work among you? (5) "Why does He do miracles there? Is it because you kept the law or is it because you believed in Jesus Christ?" Compare Acts 14:3. At Iconium God confirmed the Gospel by doing miraculous signs and wonders. At Lystra He healed a man who had been crippled from birth and never walked. Now, did that

happen by keeping some law or by believing on Jesus? And God is still in the business of doing miracles and answering prayer. He's still visibly working in your life. Why? Because you keep the rules or because you believed in Jesus? Your own experience tells you that trying and struggling and doing gets you nowhere. It doesn't save you; it doesn't bring about wonderful works of God in your life; it doesn't really sanctify you or change you. Salvation from first to last has to be all of God! So, stop and think about your own experience and you'll never believe anybody who says, "No, in order to be a real Christian, you must be baptized and you must join our group, and so on. I'm never going to change my belief. God has done too many things in my life as a result of believing! But there's a second line of proof that Paul moves on to pursue:

II. The Proof Of Scripture (6-9) Now remember, these Galatians did not have the New Testament yet. In fact, Galatians was one of the first parts of it to be written. To them, the Scripture was the Old Testament. So, if all you had was the Old Testament, somebody might easily say, "Well, the Scripture says you must keep the law; what about that?" In fact, that's a problem even today. People do not understand the Old Testament and very often believe it teaches that a man is saved by living according to God's law and they read the New Testament in the same light. So, Paul goes back to where it all started, to Abraham, to the ancestor of the whole Jewish nation, and says, "Let's look at what the Scripture says about Abraham."

1. Abraham was justified by faith (6) This verse quotes Gen. 15:6 where God had made Abraham a promise. God said, "I know you haven't had a child and you're 85 years old, but look up and count the stars. That's how many offspring you're going to have. Trust Me!" And verse 6 says Abraham simply believed what God said and then it makes a comment, God put that to his account as righteousness. He was declared righteous, justified before God, simply on the basis that He believed what God had said. Now let's think what that means, and to do that we'll cheat and get some help from Romans 4. First of all:

a. it was apart from works - Rom. 4:1-5 Verses 4 and 5 are important. There is the principle. If you work for something, it is OWED to you. It doesn't have to be credited to you. You don't need a gift put on your account. You deserve what you get. Abraham didn't do anything. In the matter under discussion, there was nothing he could do. He couldn't produce offspring for himself, that was clear. He simply believed God and that believing was the basis on which God declared him to be righteous. That's how Abraham was justified and that's how we are too. We don't try to work for it. We simply trust in God who justifies the wicked (us) and He stamps our account with Him "RIGHTEOUS". Further:

b. it was apart from the Law Abraham wasn't declared righteous by keeping the Law, because there was no law to keep. Gal. 3:17 reminds us that the Law was not given until 430 years later. God had never given Abraham a single command to keep in order to be made righteous. He never kept the Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles or offered the daily sacrifices. He was justified simply by believing. And further:

c. it was apart from circumcision - 4:9-11a One of the big things with the Judaizers in Galatia was circumcision. They would say, "Abraham was circumcised and all who are to be children of Abraham and share in his blessing and his covenant must be circumcised." Well, read carefully. Abraham was declared righteous before he was ever circumcised. Circumcision didn't make him righteous. It was just a symbol of the righteousness he had already gotten by faith BEFORE he was circumcised. Listen, God's method of saving people has always been the same. Not a single Old Testament person was saved by works or by the Law. Any who were saved were simply saved by believing God and trusting Him! Then Paul goes on to add this:

2. all who are justified by faith are his children (7, 9) His real children are not those who are circumcised in the flesh. His children are those who are saved in the same way He was. Now go back to Romans 4 for the spelling out:

a. this applies to Gentiles - Rom. 4:11b Most of these Galatians were Gentiles. They had never been circumcised. They simply believed in Jesus and were saved, just like Abraham was and therefore, they are His spiritual children. We're just 21st century Galatians, Gentiles, saved the same way! And not only is this for Gentiles:

b. this applies to Jews - Rom. 4:12 People who are Jewish, who are already circumcised, have to be saved the same way. It doesn't matter. They still have to come and trust in Christ if they want to be true children of Abraham! Now, Paul's point is that:

3. God predicted this in Scripture (8) He's quoting Gen. 12:3, "All nations will be blessed through you, Abraham!" You see:

a. God knew He would justify the Gentiles by faith God already had it in mind that Gentiles would be included in the blessing He promised Abraham. It wasn't just for the Jew according to the flesh. It was for the Gentiles as well. And that blessing would come, not simply as a result of their contact with Abraham's descendants. God would bless them directly through Abraham, through his method of being justified by faith. And:

b. He spoke of it beforehand to Abraham He was simply telling Abraham in advance about it, "Millions upon millions of Gentiles will be blessed along with you because, like you, they will trust me by faith! You are their example,

their forerunner, their father. Your offspring will be innumerable, not only those whom I will build into a great nation, but those from all nations who will simply believe ME like you do."

Oh, the Bible teaches it from cover to cover. In Genesis Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. In Exodus they simply believed God and put the blood of the Lamb over their door and were saved. In Joshua they stood still and believed God and shouted and the wall fell down. Jehoshaphat prayed, "We know not what to do, but our eyes are fixed on YOU" and God destroyed the invading army. Hezekiah simply spread out the enemy's letter in the Temple before Almighty God and the next day 185,000 Assyrian soldiers woke up dead. When Daniel knew the king's order was signed, he opened his window and prayed like he always had, knowing His God was able to deliver him from the mouths of the lions and He did. Habakkuk wrote it down, *The just shall live by his faith*. And on it goes until you come to Revelation where you find that they overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb. It is always, always, always, God, not us. It is always, always, always, grace not works. My life and my Bible both say so. I'm never going back to trying to be a law-keeper, are you?

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Proofs Of The Doctrine Of Grace (II) 3:10-18

We are talking about the proofs that grace is and always has been the only way to be saved, about how we KNOW that salvation is a pure gift and not a reward for our works. Last time we talked about what I'd call "look-and-see" proofs. Paul said, "Look at your own life and see what has happened to you since you simply believed the message about Christ. And look and see what the Scripture says, even the Old Testament. Abraham was justified before God simply by believing. So are you." Today we're going to talk about two of what I'd call "just-think-about-it" proofs, logical proofs. You see, it makes no sense at all to rely upon the principle of keeping THE law or A law to make yourself acceptable before God. It doesn't work; it can't work. It's ignorant and foolish to think it can. That's why Paul starts chapter 3 saying, *O foolish Galatians!* They were not thinking straight. So, let's see if we can think straight with Paul and let's look first at:

I. The Proof Of The Curse (10-14) You see, what everybody all around us who is trying to appease God by keeping some kind of law code forgets is this:

1. law brings a universal curse of death (10-12) There is a curse attached to keeping the law. Failure to keep it brings a curse. That is a universal truth. Paul quotes Deut. 27:26 which is part of the Mosaic law, but you can find the same fact elsewhere in the Bible. Under law, sin is lawbreaking and Ez. 18:4 says, *The soul that sins shall die*. Rom. 6:23 says, *The wages of sin is death*. Even in the garden of Eden, God said, "If you break my one law and eat of that tree, you will die" and then when they did, God placed them under the curse of the law and they eventually died. Failure to keep law must be punished by death; that is a universal curse. Now, you might ask, "But how much do I have to fail?" Well know this, if you plan to be accepted by God through what you do, the:

a. law demands perfect performance Law is inflexible. It does not forgive. It does not recognize degrees of failure. Its standard is perfection. The Jew under law was bound to keep EVERYTHING written in the Book. Check out James 1:10-11. It doesn't matter which piece, which part of the law you break; breaking any part breaks the whole thing. The smallest failure makes me a lawbreaker and puts me under the curse. And everybody knows:

b. man is incapable of perfect performance Solomon said, *There is no man who does not sin*. That's all over the Bible. *There is none righteous, no not one!* If you are, please stand up! In his fallen state, man cannot keep the law; it is impossible!

c. hence law cannot save; only curse The only thing law can do for us is to tell us what God's standard is. It cannot save us because we cannot keep it. *The man who does these things will live by them*; but we can't DO them. So that leaves us to the negative side of the law. It can only put us under a curse. And that's why even:

d. the Old Testament recognizes that life is by faith Hab. 2:4 says, *The just shall live by faith*, not by keeping the law! That's why Abraham was counted righteous when he believed God, not through obedience. That's why David wrote, *Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him!* - Ps. 32:2. If life, if salvation, is to come to anyone, it must come as an undeserved gift from God, simply through trusting Him. And here's how that was made possible:

2. Christ redeemed us from the curse of law (13-14) We were under that curse, you know! The Jew stood directly under the curse for not keeping the Old Testament law. But we Gentiles were cursed too. Compare Rom. 2:14-15. In other words, God built the principles of moral law, of right and wrong, into our heart, our nature, and our conscience condemns us for not doing what we know by nature is right! Man is without excuse. Every man stood under the curse of law. Every man was bound to die. But Christ:

a. He redeemed us by becoming a curse for us In other words, the penalty of the curse that should have been ours, He took. In the Old Testament, if we sinned, they would have stoned us to death and then displayed our body on a stake or hung it on a tree as a sign that the curse of the Law had been carried out. Jesus was hanged publicly

on a tree, on a cross, a sign that the Law's demands, its curse, had fallen upon Him. But that curse was not His; it was ours. He took our curse and in so doing:

b. He released us from the claims of law I died in Him. The curse which was on me is carried out and finished. It is no longer there. I am released from any claim the law had against me; I am already killed! The law cannot forgive; it cannot forget the deed done; it must pass sentence. But once the sentence is carried out, the prisoner is free. And the result of our freedom is that:

(1) the gift of justification and the Spirit is passed to us through Christ (14) God cannot give life to a sinner deserving of death, without his dying. But now that we have died, that blessing of justification which was given to Abraham can come to us through Christ. The indwelling Holy Spirit can now come and live in us because we've been redeemed from the curse. And how do we get it:

(2) we receive that gift by faith like Abraham did, by simply believing that Jesus died for us and trusting ourselves to Him. Law can only bring a curse upon a sinner, never justify him. Only Jesus can justify a sinner. And if that's so, then why on earth would any believer ever want to try to go back to a system of law-keeping as a means of pleasing God. Who, knowing freedom, would want to try to live under law? It's doomed to failure! It's stupid. It's nonsense. If law doesn't work, why keep trying to use it? Why try to come to God as a believer and say, "Here God, look what I've done; aren't you pleased with me?" when God is only well-pleased with His Son and what pleases Him is you trusting His Son to live through you. That pleases Him, not the keeping of a set of rules. Now let's move on to another proof of grace:

II. The Proof Of The Covenant (15-18) Now Paul talks about the covenant. What's a covenant? A covenant is more than an agreement or a contract or a deal. It is a sacred and unchangeable commitment made by one party to another. Paul even turns to the legal profession to talk about:

1. the nature of a covenant Even in human commitments like a business contract or a marriage vow, two things are true:

a. it cannot be annulled The person who made it cannot just set it aside and say, "I don't want to do it any longer." Of course, today we've got legal loopholes to get out of just about any kind of covenant we enter. But it did not use to be so. A covenant was binding and permanent and could not be escaped from at a whim. And further:

b. it cannot be added to The terms can't be changed part way through. You can't decide to change the terms of the deal in mid-stream like my bank did on me last week. They just decided to change the terms of my account. In fact, that's a good illustration. I had totally free checking and now the bank says I must keep a large minimum balance and write a certain number of checks, and pay certain charges. Sometimes it looks as if God was like that; He had totally free salvation for Abraham but then He later gave a law to keep. Listen, I'm changing banks and if my God was like that, I'd change gods! So, let's talk about:

2. God's covenant with Abraham To better understand what the text says, let me tell you a hypothetical story. Let's suppose I am a wealthy man and early on in my marriage before I have children, I decide that I am going to leave my fortune to my first great-grandchild. I put it in writing and have it properly registered as a will. Then along comes my first child and he grows up and I give him a house and tell him that to keep that house you have to work regularly in my business. Then my son grows up and has a grandchild and I give him a house and tell him he must work for me. Then my grandchild has a great-grandchild. Now, does my whole fortune belong to him or not? Yes! On what basis? Does he have to work for it? No. What if my child and grandchild object and say that they had to work for it? Does that change anything? No! How I dealt with others in between and the terms I had with them doesn't matter. The covenant was a promise directly to my great-grandchild and nothing in between affects it. So, what's this story have to do with anything. Well, God's covenant:

a. is directly with us through Christ Verse 16 makes a key point. God's promise was made to Abraham and to his seed. The word *seed* is not plural but singular in the Hebrew of Genesis 12 and 13. It is not talking about the many offspring Abraham would have who would form the Jewish nation. It is talking about ONE PERSON, about Christ Himself. *In you (Abraham) and in your Seed (Christ) I will bless all the families of the earth.* Now, what is that blessing? Remember verse 8. The blessing is that the Gentiles would be justified through faith. God's promise to Abraham meant that one day through Christ, God would justify all the families of the earth the same way he was, by faith. So we are saved because of a promise that came from Abraham to Christ to us, because we have been included in Christ. Now, that blessing of being saved:

b. is based purely upon a promise of grace God did not lay down a single condition for Abraham to keep. His covenant did not depend upon a single work, a single act. It was totally one-sided. God graciously gave it to Abraham and thereby to Christ and thereby to us. So that promise:

c. cannot be annulled by the later law 430 years later God turned around and gave a law to Israel and told them they had to keep it to remain in the land and be blessed. But that covenant with Israel did not throw out or make

void or annul the first one given to Abraham. It still stood. God would justify Jew and Gentile alike by faith. The law had an entirely different purpose, which we'll look at in the next section. But it could not change God's promise. God is not like my bank; He is unchanging. He did not change His mind, invalidate His covenant or replace it with a different one. And further His promise:

d. cannot have the terms of law added to it His promise was that we would be justified by believing like Abraham did. He cannot turn around now and say, "Well, yes, you have to believe, but now you also have to keep a law or a set of standards." That's what the Judaizers were saying, "God changed the rules. Believe and do and you will live." But God can't do that. You see:

3. our inheritance comes by the system of grace It does not depend on the law or on performance. My salvation is free and is given to me as a gift by God when I believe. To think otherwise is to think that God can change, that He can revoke His promises and back out on His commitments. We may do that, but He never does. To do so, He would have to deny Himself for He is faithful.

Law can't save and God can't change His mind. Those two things are immutable. Any thinking Christian knows that. Then why on earth would he or she want to try to go back to living under law, keeping this and keeping that, things which don't amount to a hill of beans to God, when he knows he's been freed from the curse and has God's unchanging promise of faith? It's silly. No, it's tragic.

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Purpose Of The Law 3:19-25

All the way through this series we have been saying things like this: "We are dead to the law. We are not under law. Law cannot save, only curse. God never saved anybody by law, only by grace." And the more we say those things, the more it raises a very important question. If that's so, then why did God ever give the law in the first place? If God saved Abraham by grace, why would He then turn around and give Israel a law that He knew they couldn't keep? What is the purpose of the law? Why did God give it? Is it a bad thing or a good thing? That's what I'd like to talk about today and I hope that it will maybe help you to see the Old Testament law in a brand-new light. First, Paul explains to us here:

I. The Nature Of The Law (19-20) There are three things that you must understand about it:

1. it was supplementary The law was ADDED. The covenant of grace came first to Abraham. Later on, the law was added. Now, that word is important. There are two wrong impressions we might get from the word unless we're careful.

a. it did not replace or add to grace The word *add* definitely does not mean to replace. The law was an addition, not a replacement. God's covenant with Abraham of saving people by faith alone continued to be in force. It was not set aside or rendered invalid. It continued to operate from the Garden straight through the cross and on to today. God did not say "OK, now for 1000 years I'm going to set that aside and save people a different way, by keeping a law I'll give them." But the other danger is to think of adding in the terms of adding to what's already there, that God added new terms to what He required of man for salvation. "It used to be that believing was enough, but now new terms have been added. Now he must also keep the law." That's what the Judaizers in Galatia were saying. But the word does not mean that at all. Rather:

b. it functioned alongside of grace The word *added* here literally means *put in place toward*. The law was put in place toward sins. Rom. 5:20 uses another word. It too says, *the law was ADDED*, but there the word is *pareiserchomai* which means it *entered in alongside or entered in parallel with*. It functioned from the time of Moses on alongside of grace. God was still saving people by grace, but He put the law in place alongside that for an entirely different function. It was a supplementary thing. In my courses in school there was always supplementary reading, reading that was not the main assignment, but added to or reinforced the information you already had. Grace was the main thing going on. Law was alongside it to reinforce what grace already taught!

2. it was temporary It was put in place UNTIL the SEED to whom the Promise referred should come, that is, until Christ should come. The Law had a beginning and an ending point. God put it in place through Moses and it was intended to last until Christ. Now, even as I say that, I think of the words of Christ in Mt. 5:17-18, *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.* Now what does that mean? Well, the Law and the Prophets is a Jewish way of referring to the entire Old Testament. Christ did not come to throw the Scriptures away and set in place a new set of teachings and promises. He came to fulfill and complete what was already there. When He hung on the cross and cried, *IT IS FINISHED*, one of the things that meant was that the law was fulfilled in Him. He had kept the moral law and the ceremonial law, the commandments, perfectly. And thus, because we are in Him, He became the end of the law to us who believe. But the Old Testament is full of God's truth, full of information, full of predictions of things that are yet future to us. And every bit of it will have that same fulfillment. What Paul is saying is that law as a system was given to Israel for a temporary period. It served a

purpose until the time when, through Christ, God made possible a new way of serving Him through the indwelling spirit and the law written on the heart, instead of the old way of the written code.

3. it was inferior It was an inferior system to grace. Grace was better. And the evidence Paul cites for this is that the Law was given by a mediator. Now, this is a little hard to grasp, but the mediator he's talking about is Moses. God gave the law through angels to Moses to the people. So:

a. it was mediated, not direct It required middle-men. God was still far off. But God's promise to Abraham was directly between him and God. That's how grace operates. God directly gives justification and righteousness to each individual person. And further:

b. it was two-sided, not one-sided A mediator represents the interests of both parties involved. Under law God promises blessing to man and man promises obedience to God. There must be performance on man's part. But grace is one-sided. God gives it without condition or requirement to each person freely, just as He did to Abraham. Now, which do you think is a better system? So, if the law was inferior and temporary and only intended as a supplemental thing to work alongside grace, then just what was:

II. The Function Of The Law (21-22) Was it opposed to the promise of God? Did God give out two different sets of standards? Did He say one thing and then change His mind and say another? Absolutely not!

1. it was never designed to impart life When God gave it, He knew nobody could ever keep it. Nobody could ever be totally righteous and perfect through obeying it. And He never gave it for that purpose. He never gave it to save, to give eternal life. Then why did He give it. Well:

2. it revealed the nature of sin (19) It was put in place toward sin, not toward salvation. The law was God's means of revealing to man just exactly the nature of what he was doing. Compare Rom. 7:7, 13. You see, without law a person would still practice sin; he would still do wrong. He might feel bad about it, but he would never understand what an offense it is against Almighty God unless God had said so! If nobody ever told me, *Thou shalt not covet*, I would still have coveted, but I wouldn't have seen the moral character of what I had done. Now it's time for a Greek lesson. The common Greek word for sin is *hamartia* which means *to miss the target*, to fall short, to fail. I have a bow and arrow and often shoot at a target. I often miss. I try my hardest but I recognize the fact that I err sometimes. However, that doesn't make me feel too bad; I just try to average better. That, by the way, is how many people feel about sin anyway! The word Paul uses in Gal. 3:19 is *parabasis* which means *to step over a boundary, over a limit*. God gave the law so man would know that he was stepping over the limit. It is not hard for man to admit that he has shortcomings, that he fails. But law shows him the truth that when he sins, he deliberately and directly steps over the boundaries set by God and he is responsible for it. It reveals what sin really is, how utterly sinful sin is.

3. it externally limited the practice of sin This is not even in the text, but is another important purpose. Remember what happened before the flood, in a time when there was absolutely no law at all, no standard for human conduct? The race fell so far into sin that just about every person on earth was lost. How was God to keep that from happening again? Well, after the flood He gave a law, not to save man, but to control man. He said, *If a man sheds blood, by man must his blood be shed*. He said, "Here is one boundary you cannot step over and if you do, you know the penalty." That was the foundation of all government and all law and order. The race needs external limits to put a lid on things or their behavior will run constantly to wickedness. Just imagine that we lived in a land that had absolutely no laws. What chaos there would be! Without law, the nation of Israel would have done much sooner what they eventually did anyway, fallen into total idolatry and sin. In a general way, law makes human life possible on this earth.

4. it brought personal conviction of sin Now look at Rom. 3:19-20. Through the law we become conscious of sin. It not only shows me what sin is, but it points a finger at me and says, "YOU HAVE SINNED". Law is a continual reminder of sin. Conscience you can ignore and salve, but written law won't go away. Every time you stare at it, it points its righteous finger at you and says, "Guilty!" Before you want salvation full and free, you have to realize you need it. The law is God's means of showing you your need through conviction. So:

5. it pointed to the way of grace It condemned the whole world, showed them that they were bound in the prison house of sin, so they were ready for a Savior. The law, by showing a man he can't keep it, is designed to point a man to Christ so he can be saved by faith. In other words, the system of law was put down alongside to point men to their need of the better system of grace! Now, let's reinforce these points by looking at:

III. The Pictures Of The Law (23-25) which Paul mentions. First:

1. it was a jailer (23), a jailer that kept us locked up in prison. Have you ever been in prison? Well, the one thing you want the whole time you're there is a way OUT! The law was the jailer that kept us locked up:

a. it confined us to the consciousness of sin It wouldn't let us forget our sins, wouldn't let us forget the penalty, wouldn't let us tell ourselves we were OK and:

b. it pointed us to the only way of salvation It wouldn't let us stop looking for a way out until we found Christ! It kept me locked up and looking out through the bars until I saw the Savior willing to rescue me without any merit on my part! So, that's one picture. Here's another:

2. it was a guardian (24) In the Greek. Paul says the law was our *pedagogue*. The KJV says, *schoolmaster*, but that's not correct. In the Roman world the *pedagogue* was the term for a household slave who was designated to have charge of a child for the purposes of keeping them out of trouble. He was not an instructor or teacher but more of a guardian to protect them from harm and prevent them from wrong behavior. He was more like a lunchroom monitor or principal. So, a guardian was placed in charge of the child until he reached adulthood when he was free to act for himself. Now, lest you think that weird, we still use a similar system. When a child is young, we use a law system to guard them. We make rules to limit and protect them and keep them out of trouble. They often don't understand the rules or even agree with them because they can't yet. But the goal is that when they are of age, they will have internalized the principles of right behavior and will act right without our rules. So, whether you're talking about THE LAW given to the Jews or the system of LAW which we are all under before we receive Christ, the picture still holds:

a. it was placed in charge to protect Law guards us and protects us from going too far over the edge. It keeps us out of some very serious trouble by externally limiting us to whatever degree.

b. it was necessary before maturity Before we came to Christ and had our hearts changed so that we now WANT to do right, we needed that! Just like a child MUST have rules and discipline while he is young. Law did guard us and was a benefit to us in that way but:

c. it was designed to be replaced The job of guardian has a mandatory retirement! When adulthood is reached it ceases. So when we come to Christ and are regenerated, we no longer need the guardianship of the Law because we live out the Law of Christ from our very hearts. We live from the inside out instead of trying to live outside and make it change the inside. So the bottom line is that for the Christian there is no longer a place for law. I am saved by grace. I am changed by grace. I must live by grace, by obeying the Christ who lives in me and rules my heart, not by keeping external rules. Yet I can be thankful for law because it kept me from what might have been horrible things; it made me conscious of my sin and it pointed me to the Savior to find life.

The best illustration I can think of is this. John the Baptist was like the law personified. He was sent by God, used by God to convict people of sin and produce repentance. He pointed them to Christ to find forgiveness. And when Christ was on the cross, he was gone. His followers he sent to Jesus. His own words were, *He must increase but I must decrease*. He prepared the way, but was not the way. And that's the exact function of law in our lives. It was a blessing from God to prepare the way, but it is not the way, and if we persist in it, we defeat its very purpose. It indeed becomes sin to us, just as it would have been sin for John's followers to continue to follow his memory instead of coming to Jesus.

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Position Of The Believer 3:26-4:7

I want to talk to you today about who you are. Now you might think of that in terms of your relationships, such as "I'm a mother or father or a husband or wife." Or you might think in terms of your occupation or the position you hold at work, such as, "I'm a carpenter" or "I'm a supervisor or a manager." You might think of it in terms of your gifts, for example, "I'm an artist or an outdoorsman or a teacher." But I want to cut through all that low-level stuff that's part of your earthly identity and let Paul tell you who you really are. Read verse 26. You are a son or a daughter, a child of God! How did you get to be that? Simply by exercising faith in Jesus Christ. The minute you believed on Him as your Savior, you became a child of God. Remember John 1:12. God gave you a special gift, a special privilege. He made you His child. That is who you are and that shapes how you think and how you live and how you relate to people and circumstances. You're a child of God. Now let's explore further:

I. The Fact Of Sonship (3:26-29) I guess I should tell you why we're talking about this. It has a purpose. And it's not simply to make you feel all warm and gushy and secure, although if it does; that's a side benefit. The fact of your sonship means something when it comes to this whole matter of law and grace and of whether you live by a system of law or a system of grace. That's where we're going, so follow with me step by step. Here are the deeper ramifications of sonship. First:

1. we have a spiritual union with Christ (27a) We have been baptized into Christ and he's not talking about water here. He's not saying, "All of you who have been baptized are children of God." Baptism never saved anybody or made them a child of God. He says, "All of us are baptized or placed into Christ and so have put on Christ." You see, at the moment of our conversion, the Holy Spirit baptized us into the body of Christ. He placed us into a spiritual union with Christ by coming to indwell us and uniting Himself with our spirit. We are actually one with Christ. There is a spiritually organic union between Him and our spirit. So:

2. we have the singular identity of Christ (27b) We have put on Christ like a fresh garment. Who we are is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ. What He is, we are. What happened to Him, happened to us. What is true of Him, is true of us. We are in Him. He is our identity. And the next verse makes it even clearer:

3. we have the same life in Christ (28) We are no longer doctors, lawyers, and Indian chiefs or red and yellow, black and white. While we may be all of those things, none of those things is our real identity any longer. We are the body of Christ. We all have one and the same mind, the mind of Christ. We all have the same common life, the life of Jesus Christ, lived out through each one of us by the Holy Spirit. Stop looking from the bottom up and start looking from the top down for a moment. Sit in heaven. There is Jesus living in you and you and you. And what do you see, Jesus living out His life through thousands of believers. How many lives do they have? One, His! And that makes them all the same. It takes away all our differences, breaks down all our walls, makes us one in Christ. But, on the other hand, when we stand down here and look from the bottom up, we find another truth:

4. we have the special position of Christ (29) If we are united with Him, then His position is our position. What does that mean? Well, go back to verse 16. God's promise was to Abraham and to His Seed (singular), that is, Christ. Now if we are in Christ and He is my identity, then what do we find:

a. we are sons of Abraham and God Jesus is God's Son and our relationship to God is through Him. We are joined to Him, so we are all sons of God through faith. And likewise, if He is Abraham's seed, then WE are Abraham's seed! The promise given to Christ belongs to us and therefore:

b. we are heirs of God's promise That promise given to Abraham belongs to us in Christ. It is ours by inheritance as we are the very seed of God, the sons of God in Christ. Now, what does that mean? Well, you see, the Judaizers were teaching these Galatians that in order to be children of Abraham and to be heirs to the promise God made to him, they had to go back under the law and be circumcised and all that. They had to do something to merit it. But Paul says, "NO. We have all the position we'll ever need right now by grace. We are already God's children and Abraham's children in Jesus Christ! We don't need to keep the law!" Now, let me press this whole issue a bit further. What does sonship do for us besides get us into heaven? Well, let me show you:

II. The Meaning Of Sonship (4:1-7) And to do that we have to compare who we are now with what we used to be. Here is:

1. the slavery we once knew (1-3) Now, to understand what he's talking about you have to understand:

a. the image of Roman adoption It had nothing to do with taking in a child from another family. Every boy had an adoption in the Roman culture. It was a "coming of age". His father would set a time for it, a certain age when it would happen. Before that time, he was a minor and was subject to the ruling of a pedagogue, a child-trainer, a guardian. Others took care of his possessions for him and made his decisions for him, even though he might be the heir to the whole estate. He was not much different from the household servant or slave who was always told what to do and how to act. But then that great day came when he was declared a full-grown son with all the attendant rights and privileges. He was responsible for his own actions and decisions and possessions. He lived under a new system and was free from the control of guardians. And if you think about it, you'll see:

b. the dual application of the image

(1) Israel: enslaved to the Old Testament law The Old Testament period of the law was like the minor years of a child in the family. The Jew was subject to the Law as a guardian, as something to manipulate and control his affairs. He was a slave to the law, having to do what it said externally. And this also applies to:

(2) us: enslaved to the system of law (3) We may not have been Jews and been under the Law of Moses, but the other week we looked at Romans 2 and saw that the Gentiles have the law of God written on their hearts. Here he calls it, *the basic principles of the world*. We were under the system of law. Before we were saved, we had a heart that was wicked. We needed external control. We lived under law to keep us in check and curb our behavior. So, we were enslaved to the system of law. But along comes Christ:

2. Christ's purpose at the cross (4-5) You see, God set a time just like the Roman father would. And at that time, He sent forth His Son out of heaven to do something about our situation. And what He did was this, He went to the cross and died there for a purpose:

a. to replace the system of law with grace God didn't want servants; He wanted sons. He didn't want people to do what He said, to follow His rules. He wanted children with hearts who loved Him and lived out of that love. So He bought us back out of the slave market by paying the price of death. And in doing so He took us out of the realm of the law in order:

b. to give us the full rights of sonship, so we would now relate to Him in all the full privileges of sonship. The cross was the end of the system of law! Historically, God was done with it; it had served its purpose. So every Jew

should have gone to Christ to find fulfillment. But personally, when I got saved that same thing was true of me. Up to that point I was under law, but now I have a whole new set of privileges. I am under grace.

3. the privileges we now have (6-7) Here's where Paul finally spells it out! We have three great privileges because we are His sons:

a. the privilege of relationship We can call Him *Abba*, "Daddy". The law never gave anybody a relationship with God except as a Judge or Umpire to decide whether they had kept it. The law makes God your Judge. But grace which comes by Jesus makes Him your Father! And He pours out His love on you and you can come to Him with everything that is on your heart. You are one. Your relationship with the Father is through His Son Jesus and that makes you His son. And everything that is true in the relationship between the Father and the Son is true between the Father and you. You have love, access, protection, and everything else.

b. the privilege of the Spirit As His son, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and that gives you a new means of living. You live from the inside out, instead of from the outside in. You live by the direction and power of the Spirit of His Son who lives in you, instead of by the external guardian of the law filled with regulations and principles. You live no longer as a child who must be told, but as a full son whose heart wants to.

c. the privilege of heirship All that belongs to Jesus, all of His inheritance, His rights and privileges, belong to you! You are a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. You, my friend, shall not only inherit the earth, but eternity.

So, back to the point of it all. God saved you to be a son or daughter, to live as a son or daughter lives with all the full rights and privileges of sonship. Why would you ever want to go back to living like you did in childhood, living under a system of law, instead of living like the son or daughter that you are! And, in case you may be wondering why it is so important to talk about this, let me tell you. I know people, Christians, who have spent their whole lives trying to meet a set of obligations, trying to live up to a set of standards, trying to gain acceptance by meeting God's expectations and everyone else's, instead of knowing the freedom they have in Christ to simply be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, who will produce in them the life He wants. If I could only tell them, "You're free; you can stop that futile process now; you've been accepted; you're a SON; you don't relate to God by performance anymore; you're His child and He is well-pleased in you.", it would change their lives. You see, once you understand who you are, you will start to live like who you are. Believe it, my friend. You are not some law-slave to God, some servant keeping His rules. You are His SON or DAUGHTER!

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Personal Plea For Steadfastness 4:8-20

Did you ever watch somebody you love in the process of making a big mistake? Do you remember how much that hurts? Maybe it's one of your own kids who is in the process of making wrong choices or getting involved in a wrong lifestyle and you try to talk to them, you plead with them, as they persist in this direction and your heart is breaking. Maybe it's somebody you've been ministering to. I remember some years ago a young lady we met at the prison who had accepted Christ. We developed a relationship with her. When she was released, some of us took her into our homes. She got a job and got her life together. She became part of our fellowship; she sang in our choir. We cared about her. But there was this guy she had met in prison. He was much older than her. He had a history of years of alcohol problems and deceptive behavior. He had been divorced once and lived with other women. But he said he had become a Christian and he was bent on marrying her. And she bought it. She planned to marry him upon his release. Several of us warned her; we begged her, we pleaded with her not to go through with it. We could see how Satan could use this to take apart her vibrant spiritual life and keep her from fruitful service and involve her in years of personal misery and struggle. It broke our hearts. Suffice it to say, we turned out to be right, but that's another story. I told you this for a reason. That's how Paul feels about these Galatian Christians. False teachers have come among them teaching them that they must keep the Old Testament law in order to be true Christians. And little by little, they're buying it. Paul sees where that's going to lead, away from Christ, and his heart is breaking. He has led these folks to Christ. He loves them. And so, in our text today, he pleads with them on a personal basis; he begs them to consider what they're doing and turn from it and it is every bit as serious as marrying the wrong person or getting involved in drugs. And what this really shows us is how God feels about us, what God would say to us when we turn from grace and begin to try to live by law as a way of seeking Him. Paul asks them, in essence, three very piercing questions:

I. Why Would You Want To Go Back? (8-11) This is the very question God is asking you when you as a believer try to live under the rule of law. Why would you want to go back? Now, in order to understand the question, you first have to understand:

1. where you were (8) before you came to Christ. Do keep in mind that these Galatians were pagans before they were saved. They actually worshipped idols. But their situation is no different from ours. First, they and you were:

a. not knowing the true God These folks hadn't even heard of the true and living God before Paul came; how much less could they have known Him? And I don't care how religious you are, how sincere you are, how much you pray, before you are saved you don't know God. You don't have His life and are separated from Him. And you are:

b. influenced by demons Actual idols are nothing. They are pieces of wood or stone or gold. They have no life and no power. But Paul is not talking about statues here. Behind every idol is a demon promoting its worship. Compare 1 Cor. 10:19-20. In other words, though the person might not recognize it and even be horrified by the thought, when he is praying to his god, he is actually praying to a demon, falling under the control of demonic influence and power. Millions of Muslims praying to Allah, millions of Hindus praying to a Hindu god, all are demon-influenced, and so are you before you are saved. Of course, you live in a Christianized society so that thought is almost revolting. But 1 Tim. 4:1 tells us that people who depart from the faith follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. The false things we believe about God before we are saved are deceptions foisted upon us by Satan and his demons. Who do you think invented the idea that a man can be saved by his works, by being good, by being religious, or by offering prayers? Not God! We bought Satan's teachings and so we were:

c. bound to elementary principles to reach God Verse 9 calls them weak and miserable principles. The word *principles* there is the same word as in verse 3, the elementary *principles*, and it is a reference to the system of law or performance as a way to reach God. The unsaved man is bound in this demonic way of thinking that somehow law works, that somehow his performance can achieve a relationship with God, and it can't work; it's weak. And it makes you miserable because you can't do it. You can't live under law; you constantly sin.

Now, that's where you were before you were saved, whether you like to admit it or not. But look at what Paul says about:

2. what Christian legalism is He spells it out in verse 10:

a. observing Old Testament elementary principles (10) They had begun to observe the ritual of the Sabbath day every week and the feast of the new moon every month and the Levitical calendar of the seasons of fasting and feasting and the concept of the Sabbath year. The false teachers had gradually taught them these things and told them they were necessary to be real Christians. They had begun teaching them that circumcision is necessary, as we find in chapter 5. Remember, these people were pagans. They had never done any of these things before, yet Paul calls what they were doing:

b. returning to where you were again (9) It has different trappings but it is going back under a system of law to make yourself acceptable to God! Listen, when you become legalistic as a believer, whether you try to make rules about Sunday being a Christian Sabbath or you set down rules about what you can and cannot eat or drink or certain modes of dress or certain versions of the Bible, you are going back right to where you were before you were saved, trying to make yourself acceptable to God by keeping a system of weak and miserable elementary principles and being influenced by demons to believe that it works! Now that's a strong statement and I'm sorry, but that's what it says! And that's why Paul's heart is breaking. He's saying, "Why, why would you ever want to go back to that when you have been set free and have been made God's child and heir by GRACE!" Makes you think, doesn't it? Now, on to a second question that Paul asks:

II. How Could You Change So Much? (12-16) Did you ever have anyone turn on you? It might be your own child who you loved and cared for and sacrificed for, who means all the world to you. But for their own good you warn them about something or forbid them something and all of a sudden that's all forgotten. You're the enemy. It happens in ministry. You pour your love and caring into somebody. You bring them to Christ. You nurture them. And then along comes somebody else and teaches them some off-the-wall thing and they buy it and their whole attitude toward you is changed. That hurts too. Paul felt it happening to him with the Galatians. See:

1. their original attitude toward Paul Acts 13-14 tell us the story of how Paul came to the region of Galatia and preached there on his first missionary journey in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. But here we find some information Luke didn't tell us there. We learn of:

a. Paul's disabling illness (13) Paul evidently didn't plan on staying in Galatia. He had his sights set further west, no doubt on western Asia minor and Macedonia and Greece. But he developed an illness, a disabling illness. We can't say for sure, but verse 15 and 6:11 seem to indicate it was a disease of the eyes. Some scholars suggest that it was a disease called ophthalmia, an eye disease common in the lowlands of Pamphylia through which Paul had just passed. It allowed ministry but prevented much travel and it gave him a repulsive appearance. Yet note:

b. their enthusiastic reception (14) Despite the fact that he was a Jew and they were Gentiles, that he hadn't intended to stay, that he was repulsive to look at, and that his illness could have been taken as a sign of the weakness of his God, they received him with open arms. They listened and they believed. They received him as a messenger sent straight from God, in the same way they would have Jesus Himself! In fact, see:

c. their zealous love (15) They loved Paul. They were so grateful to him for bringing them forgiveness in Christ. They would have torn out their own eyes and given them to him if they could have. Yet look at:

2. their current attitude toward Paul (16) Now that these false teachers have come along, all of a sudden, he's the enemy, the bad guy. He's the villain. And he asks, "How could you change so much? How could you understand that I

and my message came from God and love me so much and now you've forgotten that altogether?" Whenever you're tempted to go back to living under law, remember that person who led you to Christ, who helped you understand that grace is free and you can't earn it. Remember their love and let that keep you straight! But finally, he asks them, in essence, a third question:

III. Don't You Understand What's Going On? (17-20) "Can't you see what these false teachers, these legalizers, are doing to you?"

1. the guile of false teachers (17-18) They're deceptive!

a. their process is to court you That whole phrase *zealous to win you over* comes from the realm of courtship, where a man has to "win over" his lady. And you know how courtship can be. You know how often a man uses flattery. He tells you sweet things he knows you want to hear. He says you are as radiant as the sun, moon, and stars, that you are the most beautiful girl in the world. These false teachers are wooing you. That's what false teachers do! They tell you nice things, things you want to hear, but:

b. their goal is to alienate you, to cut you off from the truth and from those who teach it. They wanted the Galatians to reject Paul and his message, to cut off that relationship. You watch. What do Jehovah's witnesses and others do, even legalistic Christians? They try to alienate you from the people that are influencing you spiritually, to turn you against them. Why?

c. their purpose is for you to court them, because when you're cut off from the truthful teachers, you have no place left to turn but to the false teachers! You will then court them and become their disciples! It's a deceptive process. It's a selfish process, not really intended for the good of you but for the good of them. It has to be. Any system of law, Christian or cult, is of necessity self-centered. It has to be, because it is MY performance that pleases God and whether I recognize it or not, you are a help to ME in that process! But contrast:

2. the sincerity of a true teacher (19-20) He has only one desire, to see the image of Christ manifest itself in them, to see them living out the life of Jesus Christ. And he has gone back into labor pains for them all over again. He is in anguish until they have come through and seen the truth again. A true teacher doesn't care about himself and his own benefit, or even that he's been wronged. He cares that you remain true to Jesus Christ and reflect His image.

My friend, whenever somebody's influencing you and you're tempted to live under law, to return to a system of rules and performance as a way of life, just stop and ask yourself these three questions: How could you ever go back to that? How could you change so much in your attitude toward the Gospel and those who brought it to you? Don't you understand what's really going on? Somebody is leading you astray for their own benefit. Every year hundreds of people are led out of Christian background into cults, into liberal forms that masquerade as Christianity, into the New Age Movement, or into churches which try to place them back under Old Testament rules for living. Some of the false teachers are very outspoken; many are very subtle in their influence. Don't give even an inch. Don't break my heart or the heart of God. Remain steadfast in Jesus Christ and cling to Him alone.

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

The Scriptural Plea For Steadfastness 4:21-31

This paragraph is the capstone of Paul's doctrinal section, where he is defending the fact that salvation and the Christian life are both by faith. He sets law and grace up as two complete opposites, systems as different from each other as earth is from heaven and as opposed to each other as slavery is to freedom. These verses are a call to take a stand, to quit riding the fence, to choose to live by law or grace once and for all, instead of trying to cling to both. Now, you must understand that at the time this letter was written, half or more of the Christian church came out of Jewish background, lived in Israel, and still clung to the Temple and many of the trappings of Judaism and they weren't willing to let go. In fact, they were trying to enforce their view on the Gentiles and they were succeeding! So, Paul is really drawing the battle lines. Like Moses of old, he's crying out, *I have set before you life and death...therefore choose life!* And like Joshua, *Choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord!* And he does that by using:

I. The Biblical Illustration: Two Sons (21-23) To those who are trying to go back under law, he shows them an illustration from the Law itself (Genesis, written by Moses, was considered part of the Law). He reminds them of the life of Abraham. Abraham had two sons in the early part of his life. The story of the first, Ishmael, and how he was born is found in Gen. 16 and the story of the second, Isaac, and how he was born, is in Gen. 21. I'm going to assume that you know those stories and not turn back there. Instead let's look at what Paul has to say about:

1. Abraham's son Ishmael First of all, he was:

a. born of a slave woman Hagar was an Egyptian maidservant, a slave in Abraham's household. Sarah ordered her to go and lay with Abraham and get pregnant so she could use her as a sort of surrogate mother. But she did not become a real wife. She was always a slave. And therefore, her son Ishmael, though half of Abraham, was still

half of her and he would never have the same status as the son of a real wife. He would always be tainted with slavery. Second, he was:

b. born as a result of self-effort God didn't have anything to do with it. It wasn't His idea. It was Sarah's and Abraham bought into it. But if you analyze it, it was simply an attempt to fulfill their dream of a child without God's help or perhaps to help God along a little bit. So, his birth was a result of self-effort, man's trying and striving. Thirdly, he was:

c. born by the power of the flesh There was no miracle here, only a natural process of the flesh. Man and woman get together; baby results. It was happening everywhere to everyone all around because flesh is able to do that, but there is nothing supernatural about it. However, 14 years later came:

2. Abraham's son Isaac What a contrast! He was:

a. born of a free woman Sarah was Abraham's wife. Isaac was not his servant but his full son, with all the attendant rights and privileges. He was the sole heir. Sarah even said that Ishmael could never be a joint heir with her son. She knew the difference and so did Abraham. So Isaac was born a son, not a slave. And he was:

b. born as a result of promise His birth was God's idea. God promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son. They were old. They would have given up long ago, except that God kept reminding them time after time of His promise: you will have a son. So, Isaac was born as a result of the promise of Almighty God, not as a result of the self-effort of man. And finally, he was:

c. born by the power of the Spirit (29) Verse 29 uses another phrase to describe him. He was the miracle boy. He was born of the power of the Holy Spirit. Sarah was not only barren; she was past childbearing. She could not have children. The Scripture says of Abraham that his body was now dead also. Yet God worked a miracle and brought Isaac. He was born as a result of supernatural power! And of course, you see his point, don't you? All human beings are pictured by one of these two sons, aren't they? You're either like Ishmael, simply born of the natural process, a child of the flesh, or you're like Isaac, a child of God born supernaturally in your spirit by the miracle of the new birth at the hand of the Spirit of God and according to the promise of God that whoever believes in His Name becomes a child of God! You're either a creation of God in slavery and servitude to Him, or a child of God with all the attendant rights and privileges! Which are you? Well, anyway, Paul goes on to give:

II. The Symbolic Interpretation: Two Women (24-27) Now he focuses, not on the two sons, but on the two women and says that this is an allegory, a picture, a symbol, that can teach us a lesson. While the stories are literally true and factual, the two women, Hagar and Sarah symbolically represent:

1. two covenants (systems), two systems of relating to God. First there is:

a. Hagar represents the covenant of law The law was given at Mt. Sinai and, just like Hagar's son Ishmael was a slave, so those who are born under the covenant of law are children of slavery. They are doomed to try to succeed by self-effort but can't succeed because they have only natural power. On the other hand:

b. Sarah represents the covenant of grace, the covenant which promised Abraham, *in you and in your seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed*, with no strings attached. And just as Sarah's son Isaac was born a son, free, heir to everything his father had, so those who become subjects of the covenant of grace are set into their position by the hand of God and can't lose it! And Paul goes on to say that these women therefore represent:

2. two cities (groups of people) In Paul's day the Law no longer went forth from Mt. Sinai; it went forth from:

a. Jerusalem which represents Judaism Hagar is the picture of the Jews as a people and their religion, Judaism. It is law. It means achievement, the keeping of rules and standards. It is slavery. But there is another city:

b. Heavenly Jerusalem which represents Christianity You read about this city in Rev. 21 where it comes down from heaven and see how beautiful it is. It is the home of the saints of all the ages, those who were saved by faith. So, the heavenly Jerusalem represents Christianity. That's the contrast he's trying to make.

These Galatians are trying to be Jews, to live under the covenant of law. He's emphasizing the fact that Christianity is a whole different thing, a whole new covenant, a new way to live. It is entered by a new means and it produces a new freedom. So these two women have:

3. two types of children Hagar and Judaism have:

a. those who are slaves under law, those who struggle day after day to be righteous by self-effort, keeping the infinite rules and regulations. While Sarah and Christianity have:

b. those who are free under grace, having been placed into their position by faith in God's promise and born of the Spirit of God and are now free to live out the life of God inside them.

See, you are either Hagar's child or Sarah's child, either living under a covenant of law or under grace. You are either in slavery to the elementary principles of this world or free as a child of Almighty God and heir to the whole thing. There is no middle ground. Now so far, this has been a nice story. Maybe you've understood a little more about a particular piece of Scripture, but so what. We need to make:

III. The Personal Application: Two Actions (28-31) And I'll give them to you in a moment but first be reminded of:

1. our status: free (28) We who are born again are, like Isaac, children of promise. We are free. We are not under law. We do not have to do one thing as a means of being acceptable to God; we are already accepted by Him. We serve Him out of love and the desire of our hearts. But do you know what you can expect?

2. our expectation: persecution (29) When Isaac was born, they had a party to celebrate his weaning (a strange custom to us), but at the party Ishmael, the older son, mocked and made fun of Isaac. He was jealous that this little baby had come along to take his favored position! What happened in the early church? The children of law persecuted believers; Jews were the first to stone them and riot and punish them any way they could. And let me tell you something. When you stand for grace, you're going to get persecuted by those who love to live under law. Years ago, Art Bailey of the Billy Graham organization, told me he got at least five calls a day from legalistic brethren who accused the organization of compromise and liberalism, because they exercise their freedom and cooperate with ANYONE who knows Christ, regardless of denomination! Just exercise your freedom and go to a good movie and you'll find some good brother to tell you it is against "Christian law (principles)". Dance with your wife at a reception and somebody will criticize you for it. On the other hand, tell some nice, moral, unsaved person that he can't earn his way into heaven by being good and watch the ear-full you catch. Expect it. We're told to. People under law don't like people who are free under grace. But that's not important. What's important is:

3. our actions: Here's where Paul puts his neck right on the line and gets direct. He stops talking just in pictures and gets straight to the point. He says:

a. reject the proponents of law (30) He says, "Abraham threw out Hagar and he threw out her son because God told him to. That's what you need to do!" He's saying, "You need to throw out those false teachers, those legalizers who have been teaching and influencing you. Kick them out. Call them what they really are and get rid of them!" Just wait until he gets to writing the Book of Hebrews (if he did). Do you know what he's going to say there? "Come on outside the camp. Leave your Jewish heritage. Forget the Temple and the sacrificial system. You've got everything far superior in Christ. Cut the apron strings and let go and walk solely with Christ!" And folks, we need to reject those who try to get us to come back and live under law. I don't mean that we should hate them. I mean we have to stop their teaching and halt it right where it's at. There are far too many folks in pulpits and in Sunday Schools teaching law instead of grace and we need to be careful it doesn't happen here. But secondly, he says:

b. remain steadfast in your freedom (31-5:1) Christ didn't die for us and set us free to watch us become slaves. The price was too high for us to throw away our freedom and try to slip back under a system of law and live like a Jew or an unsaved person. We need to BE what we ARE, to stand firm and let nobody drag us back under law, even a little bit, no matter how influential they may be!

To reiterate, like Moses of old, Paul is crying out, *I have set before you life and death...therefore choose life!* and like Joshua, *Choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord!* Which will you choose in your life?

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

A Life Activated By Faith 5:1-12

When we come to chapter 5 of Galatians, we move into the third section of Paul's letter and again, here is the outline to refresh your memory. While the first section was personal in nature and the second was doctrinal, these last two chapters are practical. They tell us how to actually live by grace and what a difference it makes in our life. As you can see, there are five results of grace, five things it produces when it operates in us:

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| I. Grace: God's Message through Paul (PERSONAL) | Chs. 1-2 |
| II. Grace: God's Method of Salvation (DOCTRINAL) | Chs. 3-4 |
| III. Grace: God's Means of Living (PRACTICAL) | Chs. 5-6 |
| 1. it produces a faith-activated life | 5:1-12 |
| 2. it produces a service-oriented life | 5:13-15 |
| 3. it produces a Spirit-controlled life | 5:16-26 |
| 4. it produces a responsible life | 6:1-10 |
| 5. it produces a crucified life | 6:11-18 |

The basic issue we face in living is not knowing what is right; it is the issue of power, the ability to do what we know is the right thing to do. Listen, there are plenty of drug addicts who know that the right thing is to "Just say no!" but they can't; they have no power. And there are plenty of Christians who know what God's standards for right living are, yet the question remains of how I find the power to live that way. Well, there are only two sources of power available to you, your own limited human strength and the almighty power of God. And those two sources of power are the root of the two systems we've been looking at all through this letter. The system of law says that you can live the life God wants by your own human strength; the system of grace says that you can't! He alone has the power to live that life and that He must channel His power through you! It may seem like only words to you, but, my friend, it's the difference between day and night, between victory and failure, between power and weakness. So let's look first with Paul at:

I. The Weakness Of Slipping Back Under Law (1-4) These Galatians were leaning toward the system of law. They had started keeping some of the Old Testament feasts. But their false teachers were telling them they had to be circumcised in addition to their faith in Christ in order to truly belong to God. This they had not yet done, but they were seriously thinking about it. They had started out by grace alone, but were slowly slipping back into law. So, Paul warns them, "Look! If you accept circumcision as being necessary for salvation, that is adding works to grace and returning to law and here's what it is like." First, if you do that:

1. it is a forfeiting of privilege (1,3) It is carrying a burden you've been set free from and don't need to carry any longer. And that privilege is freedom. Nobody on earth has it but you, believers in Christ. To say that circumcision, or baptism, or communion, or church membership, or anything else, is necessary for God to accept me is to throw away the great privilege of knowing that I am totally accepted by Him because I'm in Christ and I'm free. My debt is all paid. I'm sin-debt free and I don't want to be burdened by spiritual payments anymore! Do you remember what it was like when you turned 18 or 21? Do you remember what it was like to be able to at last have the freedom of making decisions on your own as a mature adult instead of simply being constrained by Mom and Dad's rules? You might have done the very same thing; you might have come home at 11 PM anyway. But you did it because you wanted to and you made a choice and not because you had to! Would you ever want to go back to where all your decisions are made for you and all you do is keep the rules? NO! It would be forfeiting the most wonderful thing you have, freedom! Well, in Christ you have been made free, free to live the righteous life that the Lord wants you to live, not by keeping a bunch of rules and laws, but by simply making the choice moment by moment to yield control of your life to Him. That freedom is a great privilege, one that you might as well not have if you're going to live as a slave under law.

2. it is a forfeiting of advantage (2) Now don't get Paul wrong. He's not saying that you lose your salvation, because he goes to great lengths in many places to prove you can't. He's talking about living here and he's saying that it is doing you no practical good to have Christ in your heart and life, living inside you. You see, you have a great advantage over every person in the world outside of Christ. Christ lives in you. He has placed His Holy Spirit inside you. But when you decide to live on the basis of law by your own strength, you've thrown away for all practical purposes the effect of Christ's being there. You've invited Him to come and sit in you and watch you live the life you think He wants! You've forfeited your great advantage. And that great advantage is power. So, turning back to law:

3. it is a forfeiting of power (4) Again, Paul is not saying you have fallen out of the grace of God that saved you. He's saying that you have let go of your hold on the system of grace and become alienated from Christ. The word *alienated* is not a good translation. It is the Greek *katergeo* which means *to render powerless or ineffective*. You've made Christ powerless and ineffective in your life. When you start depending on your own strength to produce righteousness in your life, you throw away the greatest asset you have, the very power of Christ who came into you to live the life He wants by that mighty power. It's like facing the enemy in battle with your slingshot while your machine gun is strapped on your back! It's like pushing your car down the street instead of turning the key and unleashing its own vast power to carry you! You see, there is one thing that characterizes a life under law, weakness! When I live out of my own resources, I am weak and I fail and fail and fail. So why would they or I ever allow ourselves to slip back into that? Well, let's skip ahead a bit and look at:

II. The Reasons For Slipping Back Under Law (7-12) You see, somebody else is at work here. Verse 8 says that going back under law isn't God's idea; it's not His leading, His doing. It's like you were running a race and you were running it well. But all of a sudden, somebody cut in front of you and broke your stride and slowed your progress. Did you ever have that happen? Well, did anybody ever cut in front of you in traffic and you had to slam on the brakes? You see:

1. it is a stratagem of Satan (7-10) He doesn't like to see you progressing, running the race well, living by the power of God. So, by means of false teachers and false teachings He tries to cut in front of you and slow you down. It's an old strategy of his that has two purposes. It is:

a. designed to keep you from truth (7) If you know the truth that Jesus Christ lives in you and stands ready to live through you and you act on the truth by letting Him do it, you run the race well. You make spiritual progress. And you become an effective tool for Jesus Christ. Oh, does Satan hate that! He has to cut in somehow and stop it. So what does he do? He simply plants a doubt. He sends somebody to tell you that where you are is not enough, that something more is required, that you must be circumcised or do this or do that in order to be fully accepted and

right with God. You must add something to what Christ has done. He plants just a little seed and it takes root and grows. You see it is:

b. designed to spread (9) like yeast in a lump of dough. There was a lady in my first church who kept a lump of sourdough in the refrigerator and every time she wanted to make cookies, she would mix it up with a fresh batch of dough and the yeast would spread very quickly through the whole dough. Then she'd take a lump of that and save it for next time and make cookies out of the rest. A little bit of yeast mixed in spreads quickly. So does this concept of law, the idea that I must add something to what God has done, that I must keep some law. It spreads quickly:

(1) to the whole of your life You can see it in Galatia. They started by keeping the Sabbath and the feasts. Now it was, "You must be circumcised". Verse 3 tells us where it was going, to the whole law. It starts with one thing and then there's something else and something else and pretty soon your whole life is built on the wrong foundation, trying in your own strength to be acceptable and pleasing to God. But it also spreads from person to person until it gets:

(2) to the whole of the church It was happening there in Galatia. It happens today. One person starts preaching law, making rules, and it's contagious. People hop on the bandwagon because it looks good and right, but the wagon has no wheels. It isn't going anywhere and Satan impedes the progress of whole churches by this! So that's reason number one; we slip back under law by falling prey to Satan's influence. We get duped! Secondly:

2. it is an attempt to avoid persecution (11) Somebody must have even said that Paul still preached circumcision. Boy, did that rile him! He said, "Man, do you think I went through all this stuff I suffered when I was in Galatia because I preach circumcision? They stoned me and dragged what they thought was my carcass outside the city wall and left me there! The Jews would never have done that if I was saying, 'You must be circumcised and become a Jew to be a Christian!'" Yet that in itself was probably one of the very reasons these folks were slipping back. The pressure was on. They didn't want to experience the persecution that Paul received. If they submitted to the Law, the Jews would receive them as brothers and they would have peace. Sometimes law is the easy way out. It keeps people from being offended. And then thirdly:

3. it is an imitation of paganism (12) This has got to be the strongest statement that Paul ever wrote, but the NIV kind of overdoes the translation to make it seem more crass than necessary. *Go all the way and...* is not in the Greek. It is derived from one particle which is normally translated *and* or *even*. The NAS says, *Would that those who trouble you would even mutilate themselves*. Galatia was the center of the worship of a pagan goddess called Cybele, the goddess of fertility, and her priests actually castrated themselves. I think Paul's comment is a reference to that, that he's saying, "They might as well go all the way and do like the pagan priests do. There's no difference between the two. They are both systems of trying to reach God by law, by human effort. But if they went all the way people would see it for what it is." Sometimes we slip under law by unknowingly trying to imitate the pagan practices around us, only "Christianizing" them. It happens all the time. The church imports all the latest psychological techniques for fixing people's problems by self-effort, sticks the word God in here and there, instead of telling a person that they have to be changed by the grace of Almighty God and helping them yield themselves to Him. Oh, Satan works so hard to get us to slip back under law one way or another but look at:

III. The Power Of The Life Of Faith (5-6) Don't read these verses too quickly, because in them is the key to the Christian life and we might miss it. Let's take them apart. The first thing we see is:

1. the goal: righteous living Now, I do not believe he's talking about the end times and the return of Christ and having a new body without sin. That's out of context. Righteousness here is a righteous life, a holy life, right here and now. He says that's the goal. We eagerly look for it. That's what we want, what we hope for, what we expect. But how do we expect to get it:

2. the agent: the Holy Spirit It is produced by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives inside of us. The Holy Spirit says "no" to drugs and immorality. The Holy Spirit says "no" to hate and prejudice. The Holy Spirit enables me to forgive instead of retaliating. That's how it's going to come. God's grace, His mighty power, is going to shape my life into that righteous life I so desire. And what will it look like?

3. the result: love When He is in control and running my life by His power, it will be full of love and guess what love is (verse 14). Love is what the law was really all about but couldn't mandate. Love was what God really wanted, for me to care about others and sacrifice myself for them. Love is the life God wants for me that my own effort can't produce. The Holy Spirit can. So, how does it work; what must I do? Well, here's:

4. the key: faith Faith means I trust God to do it, not me. That is living by grace. Gal. 2:20 says here's how I live life. I trust Christ to live His life through me. I throw myself at His feet and say, "Lord, I'm yours; I can't do it but you can. Do it!" That's so simple that it's almost comical, but it works. The life of grace is a faith-activated life. Moment by moment,

situation by situation, I yield control of myself to Christ and the Holy Spirit and ask them to do through me what they want!

And it works! Oh, does it work! On the radio I heard a former homosexual who is now a Christian talking about what he would tell somebody who is involved in that sin right now. His answer was, "They need to know that Christ and only Christ has the power to change them and actually make them into the person He wants them to be. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things pass away." Folks, that's not just for homosexuals. That's for all of us! Christ has the power to make in us the righteous, pure, holy life of love that He wants. All we can do is exercise our faith and trust Him to do it.

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

A Life Oriented To Service 5:13-15

There is a nagging question that has to be lurking somewhere in the dark recesses of your mind. We have been talking for months about the fact that we are free from the system of law. We are not under law. In fact, I even quoted to you from Donald Barnhouse saying, "I will never obey another commandment again!" Now, somebody has to be wondering, "Wait a minute! Isn't this emphasis on freedom going a little overboard? Surely you can't mean that we are free to do anything we want to do? You tell me I am free from the law which says, *Do not steal*. Does that mean I am free to steal? I am free from the law which says, *Do not commit adultery*. Does that mean I am free to commit adultery? Isn't preaching freedom dangerous, like putting a hole in a dam or opening the door on the lion's cage?" Paul gives a very strong answer to that question in Romans 6:15. No way! God has set in place a very strong guard against that possibility that our freedom will result in more sin and that guard is:

I. Love: The Guard Against License (13) We must be very careful to distinguish between the kind of freedom that we have as Christians and freedom in the sense that the world often uses it. That freedom would better be called license.

1. worldly freedom: License It's the old, "I can do anything I want, I'm free! I can say whatever I like, it's a free country" attitude. Now let me point out that that kind of freedom is only an illusion, an idyllic dream that people have. All of life is constrained by limits. You have freedom of speech under the first amendment of our Constitution, but that doesn't include lying under oath, for which you can be jailed or slander for which you can be sued. Freedom doesn't in itself give license to do that which is inherently wrong. License is the abuse of freedom. But freedom can degenerate into license if it is not guarded against. And that same thing can happen in the Christian life. You see, our freedom from the law in Christ:

a. it can be a base of operations for the flesh The word *indulge* in verse 13 is a Greek military term which refers to a base of operations. Every army needs a base of operations to work out of, from which it can be directed and supplied. The NIV *sinful nature* is literally *flesh*. Remember that *flesh* in Scripture is that combination of our mind and body (not our Spirit which is brand new in Christ), which is still indwelt by the principle and power of sin. And when my flesh is under the control of sin instead of the control of the Holy Spirit, it can use my freedom from law as a base of operations to get me to sin. For example, I no longer have some law-type requirement as to how many times I have to worship God, that is, go to church. God does not say I must attend X number of services per week or month. I am free in my worship. However, my flesh can easily use that to operate in me by saying, "Well, you're tired today; don't go to church; after all, you're free!" And pretty soon the flesh can repeat that logic so often that I don't worship God hardly at all with fellow believers and tear my spiritual life apart. It can do the same thing with the idea that I'm free in my diet. I am free to have a glass of wine. And I am. And it can take that freedom and start a habit in me that is utterly sinful in the end. The flesh can cause me to use my freedom to flaunt it in the face of others who are weaker brethren and don't understand and offend and damage them. It can use this freedom in SO many ways and when I let it do that:

b. it results in service to sin Mark it down; license always leads to slavery! What is called freedom ends up in slavery. The power of sin that indwells my flesh ends up making me subject to its control and I serve it, even though I'm a true believer. That must be carefully guarded against. However, God has done something in me as a believer to do that guarding and that makes our freedom something entirely different from license.

2. Christian freedom: Love When I was saved, at that moment, God did a wonderful work inside me. I was born all over again in my spirit. The Holy Spirit of God came to live there, so I have at my core the very nature of God. And He came to produce in me His characteristics. And they are listed a few verses further on:

a. the Spirit of God produces love in us (22) The first fruit or first effect of the Holy Spirit dwelling in me is LOVE. It is not simply a command I'm to follow. It is not simply a test I'm to use in behavior. God loves because God is love. Love is a part of who He is. And when He comes into me, it is also part of my nature as a new creature in Christ to love and to love with His love! You see, I am FREE from law but I am BOUND by love! I may not be under a command not to bear false witness about my neighbor, but I love my neighbor, so I won't lie about him! I may not be under a command not to commit adultery, but I love my wife so I wouldn't destroy her by doing that and I love that other woman with the *agape* love of Christ and I wouldn't damage her life that way by using her. You see, the resultant action is the same, but the motive is a whole lot different! Before, it was just keeping rules to protect me

from punishment. Now I'm free from that, but my nature binds me to love others from my heart and to treat them properly. So, love:

b. it results in service to others My life becomes, not self-oriented as it is under law, trying to do what's best for me, but others-oriented. Love makes me serve others. That becomes the core and focus of my life! I no longer HAVE to; I WANT to! So, it is my very freedom in Christ from having to satisfy some law that binds me to serving others. Now, as I was thinking about this, the Lord brought to mind:

3. two beautiful illustrations from the Old Testament.

a. the voluntary slave - Ex. 21:5-6 Do you remember that in Israel every 7 years the slaves were to go free? But if a servant didn't want to go free, if he loved his master and his family that he knew in service and didn't want to go, he could stay and become a permanent servant in that household. If so, he got an identifying mark. They took him to the door and pierced his ear, not so he could wear an earring, but so everybody would know that this man was not being kept in service by law or by his master, but by love! He loved it and wanted to do it! I tell you what, if I was a master in Israel and had servants, I'd rather have one of that kind than 15 of the kind that were only there because they had to be and who think only about getting out or cutting corners rather than about the quality of the service they rendered! That's what we are, freed by law but bound by love to serve the Lord and others. And that brings us to the ultimate example:

b. Christ Himself - Ps.40:6-8 This is a prophetic Psalm. It looks ahead to the time when Christ would come into the world to die for our sins. Verse 6 says God didn't want the sacrifices made under the law of bulls and goats. The Greek translation of this verse and the quotation of it in Hebrews 10 says, *but a body you have prepared for me! I come to do Thy will, O God!* The Father wanted the Son to take a body and come into the world and go to the cross voluntarily. And look at the end of verse 6. The pierced ear is here a symbol for the loyal servant who loves to serve. Christ says, "I am at the doorpost; pierce my ear; I love you and want to serve; I willingly go, Father!" Christ served the Father and also the world, out of the love that was in His nature. We must do the same! That is our freedom. And when we do it, lo and behold, we find in verse 14:

II. Love: The Fulfillment Of Law (14) Now along with this quick one verse summary, we had better read Rom. 13:8-10, which spells it out more clearly. If you are sharp, you can discern here:

1. two meanings of the term law In the one usage it is:

a. the set of commandments given to Israel, the Ten Commandments and all the rest, a set of rules and laws that must be obeyed. They were given to Israel, not to the church. From this we are free in Christ. But law is also used in another sense to mean:

b. the eternal absolutes of right in God's nature You see, there are absolutes that are unchanging, that go beyond any rules that society or even religion may make, things that are at the very basis of the moral universe because they are in the nature of God, things like truth, honesty, love, and so on. These things are right because they are right. They are eternal "law". They are what the external law of statutes and commands was designed to produce in the first place. So, there are really:

2. two meanings of the statement about love First:

a. the command to love sums up all commands Jesus Himself said so. All the law springs from that command to love your neighbor. Love to your neighbor does not murder, does not steal, and so on. That is the most obvious meaning. But the greater point here is:

b. the practice of love fulfills both laws When I as a believer serve others in love, the law stands fulfilled! Its purpose has been accomplished. I have practiced the eternal absolutes to which the earthly statutes pointed! Anything that law ever wanted to accomplish in me has been accomplished when I live out of the love that is in my new nature. So, I don't need the external statutes to keep; I have an internal nature that drives me now, a nature of love, a nature that does a far better job of causing me to practice the eternal law of moral absolutes than an earthly rule ever could! I now live a life of service to my brothers out of my very heart. And that results in another consequence:

III. Love: The End Of Conflict (15) Something has been going on in Galatia that Paul has not yet mentioned in his letter. There is conflict. The church there is divided. They are quarreling among themselves, just like the Church at Corinth later. Over what? We are not told, but probably over this very issue. Some were siding with the false teachers and buying the line about having to be circumcised. Others were refusing it and a great division was going on there! And that brings out a point:

1. law-observance produces conflict - James 4:1-3 James warned the early Christians about the fighting and quarreling going on among them. Where does it come from? From the desires that battle within you, that is, the FLESH! The flesh is using that base of operations again to divide believers, to divide them over the issue of freedom. And how it usually works is that those who favor law will attack those who cling to grace! The practicing of law, the keeping of

commands, tends to create a bad attitude toward those who don't. A lot of the conflict within Christianity today is a result of this. It breaks up the church. But:

2. love produces unity When the Spirit of God is in control and I love my brethren with the love of Christ, that will only draw us together in unity. It can only unite, not pull apart. Mutual love binds! So, the practice of love is the end of conflict between believers. It was the remedy for the sad situation in Galatia and it is the remedy for today's conflicts as well.

How do you live the life of grace? Well, first you trust Jesus every moment and lean on His strength, not your own. Then you ask the Holy Spirit to control you and fill you with His love for others, and your life becomes a life whose focus is not on yourself but on caring for the needs of others. *Years ago, the Salvation Army was holding an international convention. Their founder, General William Booth, was so physically weak he could not attend. He cabled his convention message to them. It was one word: "Others!"* Law says, "Self!" Grace shouts, "OTHERS!"

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

A Life Controlled By The Spirit 5:16-26

This passage is where the rubber meets the road when it comes to actual living. If you want to know how to live the life Christ planned for you to live, there is only one way. It must be lived under the control of the Holy Spirit or, to put it another way, you must be filled by the Spirit. Now, please understand that when you got saved, at that very moment the Holy Spirit came to dwell inside you and joined Himself to your spirit. That is true of every believer. You don't have to ask for it or wonder whether you have it. If you have trusted in Christ, He is there. But He is not like a demon. He does not take over automatic control of your mouth and make you say only the words He wants, does He? He does not take automatic control of your temper and make you only act like He would, does He? No, He will only control in your life what you place under His control and only for as long as you place it there. Now take your pencil and underline, circle, and star the 16th verse. It is:

I. The Promise Of Spirit-Control (16) This is what God says works, which makes it a promise. You can take it to the bank. You can mortgage your house against it. You can jump out of an airplane tied to it and be safe. If you live by the Spirit, you WILL NOT gratify the desires of the flesh. But before you jump, you'd better understand its two parts. There is an "if" and a "then". It's a big "if", but it's also a mighty big "then".

1. if you depend continually on the Spirit And I emphasize the word CONTINUALLY. The Greek uses the word "walk" because it is talking about a continuing process, one that is part of every hour of every day of your life. You cannot depend on, "I surrendered myself fully to the Lordship of Christ when I was 16" or "5 years ago" or even "last week." Being filled with the Spirit or controlled by the Spirit is a moment by moment process. In EVERY MOMENT I must consciously depend on and look to the Holy Spirit for both the direction of what to think, say, and do, and the power to do it! I must continually through the day be saying, "Lord, You do this; You show me what to say; You help me to react right..." This is yielding yourself to the Spirit's control and when you are under His control:

2. you will never gratify the desires of the flesh This is a double negative in the Greek for emphasis. You will NOT, NEVER, NO WAY, live out the sinful desires that your flesh has. The Spirit of God in control of you will not hate, will not have fits of rage, will not be jealous, and so on. So, in every moment you are under His control, you can bank on it that you will not sin. You will have victory over everything facing you. Count on it. It is sure! So, the more moments you are yielded to His control, the less moments you will fail and fall into sin. And if you are CONTINUALLY living under His control, then your life will be one continual victory. Of course, since the Bible recognizes clearly that there is no human being who does not sin, none of us actually manage to be absolutely under the Spirit's control every moment of our lives. However, don't lose heart. The more we learn to depend on Him, the more victory we'll have and that process will just keep on growing and growing. Now let's move on to:

II. The Explanation Of Spirit-Control (17-18) Why do I find it so hard to stay yielded to the Spirit's control? When the Spirit is not in control, who is? Well, you must understand:

1. the conflict between flesh and Spirit (17) Please keep in mind that the "sinful nature" (NIV) is literally *flesh*. There is a war going on inside of you all the time. When you were saved, the Holy Spirit came and dwelt in your spirit. In fact, He created in you a brand-new spirit, a new nature, one that is like God, holy and pure. But your flesh, your mind and body are still indwelt and corrupted by sin. Sin is a moral law, a principle, a force that is active. So, the power of sin in you is always trying to control your mind to make it think sinful things and to control your body to make it do sinful things. At the same time the Holy Spirit wants to control your mind and body to make them holy and live out the life Christ has for you. The difference is that the Holy Spirit will not force His hand to control you. Unlike sin which exerts its force against your will all the time, He only operates by permission. When given permission, He will bind the power of sin and take control of your mind and body, but *only* with your permission. The key factor is your will. Your will has been freed from bondage to sin in Christ. You have to choose to yield yourself to Him and to call upon Him to do the

work. Now, what happens is that much of the time instead of turning to Him to defeat sin, we simply try to do it ourselves, try to make our own will control everything and sometimes it seems to work, but verse 18 points out:

2. the impossibility of winning by self-effort (18) When your mind knows what is right and sets out to achieve what is right by itself, that is living under law. God sets a standard and I force myself to live up to it. That is law. But if I am led by the Spirit, that is, if I have fully yielded myself to the Spirit and am under His control, I will not be trying to do it by self-effort. I will not be trying to do it by my own strength. And I will succeed. When I try it on my own, I fail. When I live under law I fail! You see, law is just another ruse in the war. If sin can convince you that you can conquer it by yourself without the Holy Spirit's power, by simply keeping the standards, then you are doomed to failure and the flesh wins! What does the promise say? When I depend on the Spirit, I will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. When I don't, I will, sooner or later. In fact, I already have fulfilled its biggest desire, which is to resist the Holy Spirit! Oh, it's so simple and yet so hard to grasp! Now how do I know when the Spirit is really in control of me? Well, in the next paragraph Paul gives us:

III. The Test Of Spirit-Control (19-23) That's what these verses really are. They are a simple yardstick to measure whose control we are under. They are like a litmus paper test. Dip this passage into your life at any moment and it either comes up red or green, flesh control or Spirit-control. Here's:

1. what flesh-control produces (19-21) It produces sinful actions. It produces:

a. sins of an immoral nature like sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery. When the flesh is in control, my mind has lustful thoughts; I am tempted by other women or men; I am tantalized by sexual perversions and stare longingly at the filthy scenes that continually appear on my TV screen. Now, when you sow a thought, you reap an act; when you sow an act you reap a habit, and then, a character and then, a destiny. Verse 21 says that people who actually habitually live this way are obviously not born again and are bound for hell. But the same flesh that is in them is still in you. By God's grace, if you're saved you will not habitually commit the deed, yet if your thought life is full of it, if the desire is there, then it's a sure sign the flesh is in control! The same is true for all the other sins.

b. sins of an idolatrous nature like idolatry and witchcraft, fascination with other religions, with other belief systems, with the occult, fortune-telling, and so on. If those things fascinate and draw you, then the flesh is in control.

c. sins of an interpersonal nature Now this is where it catches most of us: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy. Let me boil those down to two simpler tests. When you find yourself thinking and acting self-centered or when you find yourself angry and divided from other people, the flesh is in control. That covers everything from gossip to holding secret grudges, to talking behind people's backs, to looking down on them and you name it. And don't sit here and pretend none of this goes on in your life. I know better! I hear too much of it (and do a little of it myself!) The point is that when you find yourself feeling bad toward someone, wake up! The flesh is in control and dragging you toward sin! And finally, there are:

d. sins of an indulgent nature like drunkenness and orgies or any other addictive, compulsive behavior where the flesh just totally takes control and goes wild. But now look at:

2. what Spirit-control produces (22-23) Instead of taking this very familiar text apart, I'm deliberately standing back a little so you can see what it's really here for. When the Spirit is in control of you, He produces:

a. God-like internal qualities Love, joy, and peace. When the Spirit controls, you love and care with the love of God; you have His attitude toward the world. You are full of joy and peace, the confidence that all is well because He's in charge.

b. God-like treatment of others Patience, kindness, and goodness. You act unselfishly, kindly. You do what is right and you are patient and forgiving. That is the sign that He's running your life!

c. God-like consistency in living Faithfulness (or dependability), gentleness, and self-control. When the Spirit is in control you find that your reactions are controlled, your life is consistent and committed, and you don't take any of the credit or feel puffed up; you give it all to God.

Now, I don't think this list of fruit is meant to be exhaustive, any more than the list of sins above it (which actually adds *and the like*). The list is not the point. The principle is. When you're under the Spirit's control, you live like God. When you're under the control of the flesh, you sin! It's as simple as that and very obvious. So, in any given moment of your life you can test yourself. You can step back and look at how you're feeling, thinking, or acting and recognize who's in control and do something about it if it's the flesh! Now let's sum up. How do I make a habit of practicing Spirit-control?

IV. The Practice Of Spirit-Control (24-26) It's no big secret. I simply need three things:

1. a confident knowledge of the Spirit's work (24) First, if you don't know clearly and surely what Christ has done, you'll fall into the trap of thinking that this inner war is just a given fact of life and that you're just a poor sinner with a sinful nature and you can't help falling into sin; you're just doomed to it. All you can do is ask forgiveness afterward and

try to do better next time. NO! My friend, that is a lie! God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. In Jesus Christ I am a brand-new creature. I am dead to sin. It has no power over me. And therefore, when sin tries to pump its desires through my flesh, in Christ I am dead to that flesh, to that sin. That has no power over me. Only if I choose to let it! And in Christ I have absolute freedom to choose not to let it! But I need to know that, to realize that and be sure of it! And then I need:

2. a constant yielding to the Spirit's control (25) *Keep in step* is literally *walk* and here's what it means: When I get out of bed in the morning, I put my hand in His and say, "Take control of me today." When I get to the breakfast table and the baby dumps the bowl of cereal all over the floor, I say, "Spirit, control my reaction". When I'm driving down the freeway and some guy cuts in front of me and nearly runs me off the road, I say, "Spirit control my temper". Then at work when I have a difficult decision to make or I have to talk to somebody about a difficult matter or I'm having trouble getting along with somebody, I say, "Spirit, give me your wisdom, act through me, give me the words." And I do the same thing moment by moment through the day until I close my eyes at night. That is walking in the Spirit and if you do that, the flesh hasn't got a chance! But I must have:

3. a clear stand against flesh-control (26) Wuest translates it, "Let us STOP becoming..." You see, since my will is free, I must take a clear stand. I must know what flesh-control looks like and I must take a stand, "I am NOT going to become like this; this is going to STOP!" And then I yield myself immediately to the Spirit and depend on Him to stop it. You see, the final danger is this. I will not live a spirit-controlled life if I don't want to, if I enjoy my sin and am not willing to give it up.

That's a choice you have to make. God has put everything in place for you to live holy. Now you must choose to do it. Trust Jesus to do it in you. Yield to the Holy Spirit. Right now.

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

A Responsible Life 6:1-10

When we live by grace, when we live under the control of the Holy Spirit, what is our life going to look like? What kind of life will be produced in us? Well, our text today tells us that it will be a responsible life. As I say that, I want to warn you not to think of these verses as another list of things to do in your own strength, another set of rules to keep. The only way you can do any of the things put forth here is by the power of the Holy Spirit. Think of it this way: these actions are what the Holy Spirit will produce in us when we yield ourselves freely to Him. Our very freedom in Christ will give us a new depth of responsibility, both horizontally toward other people and vertically toward God. First, if the Spirit is controlling our life, it will be:

I. A Life That Cares About Brethren (1-2) And he has in view here primarily other believers. Certainly, we are to love unsaved people and care for them and seek to win them. But Jesus' primary command to His disciples was that we *love one another* as He has loved us. When the Holy Spirit controls our life, He will produce in us a deep sacrificial love, His love, for our fellow believers. First, we will care specifically:

1. about sinning brethren (1) Sometimes one of us will be caught in the snare of sin, caught so that we are not able to get out of it on our own. It can be serious. It could be immorality. It could be a falling away from spiritual things. For example, a church down the road from our previous church discovered that their treasurer had embezzled money for his personal use. Now, I would trust our treasurer with my life, but suppose some other nameless person was our treasurer and it happened here. How would you react? Well, if the flesh is in control, first there will be a burst of anger, then will come, "press charges, and finally, "throw the bum out of the church!" But look what it says, *you who are SPIRITUAL*. That doesn't mean pious or saintly. That means controlled by the Spirit. If He's in control:

a. the goal will be restoration The first concern will be to restore a fallen brother; it will be for his spiritual well-being. We Christians tend to be like sharks; we eat our wounded. But if I say, "Holy Spirit, how should I treat this person?", the answer will be "gently, not harshly!", "With love, not condemnation." The goal will be restoration, not the justice of the law. The Greek word for *restore* is used in the Gospels of mending a broken net, restoring it to effective usefulness and service. That's what the Holy Spirit wants to do. However, there is:

b. the warning of caution in our restoring We must be careful that we are not tempted by the same thing. The pastor who followed me at my previous church several years later was counseling a woman in the process of divorce. In trying to rescue her from sin he became involved with her and left his wife and three children and married her. I have heard that story many times over about others in similar circumstances, not all pastors! If we try to help people in the flesh, our flesh is susceptible to the same sins! It can be tempted too. That's why we must be sure, before trying to help someone else, that the Holy Spirit is firmly in control of our life! My friend, who is there that you know that is caught or has been caught in sin. What's your attitude toward them? Who is in control of your life? Think about it! Next, we will care:

2. about burdened brethren (2) The word here means a heavy load. Some of our brothers and sisters seem to have those, don't they? Some live under the load of a physical illness or handicap. Others are going through things so difficult mentally and emotionally that we can't comprehend them, like losing loved ones or being abused or watching a child in utter rebellion or having a marriage on the rocks. Others struggle under financial loads like the mother trying to care for several children on her own or the family that's been out of work for more than a year. Every situation I've just mentioned exists in this fellowship and more. Now, how do you react to that? Well, if the flesh is in control, you think about yourself and your own needs. The response comes out something like, "Oh well, it's their own fault" or "They'll get over it." But if the Holy Spirit is in control:

a. the goal will be relief I will realize, "They can't carry that alone!" My heart will be broken for them. I will want to see them get relief. Could you rest easy if you knew one of your children was lying in agonizing pain? No, love won't let you! And if the Holy Spirit is in control, you can't rest easy if a brother or sister is in pain, either! Listen to 1 John 3:17, *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in Him?* The love of God is produced when the Holy Spirit is in control! If He is, you'll care and you'll want to do something. Well, God lays out:

b. the method: carry If you saw me trying to lift our old heavy pulpit up onto the stage by myself, you would instantly realize that it's too heavy. What would you do to help? You would pick up an end or find someone who could, wouldn't you! The answer is simple: HELP THEM. Meet their need however you can. If the need is monetary and you have some, give it! If the need is emotional, give them the listening ear and the time and the kind words they need. If the need is physical, help out with your own strength. That's the Holy Spirit's method. Take whatever resources you have and get under the load and help the person carry it! Friend, who is there this morning that you know in the body that is struggling under a heavy burden? Have you just sat back and ignored it? Who is in control? Thirdly, if the Holy Spirit is in control, we'll care:

3. about all brethren (3-5) A person who thinks he's something when he's nothing, do those words bring anyone to mind? What does he or she look like? Like anyone you saw in the mirror this morning? Folks, that's a description of all of us when the flesh is in control. We are self-centered. We forget that without Christ we can do nothing and without Him we are nothing. And we get an inflated view of ourself. It usually comes out when we're provoked, when we're angry. The person in authority may say, "Well, I'm the boss and what I say goes!" The person under authority may say, "Well, I don't want to listen and I'm not going to." It's the same thing. It happens at home and it happens between brethren in the church. The flesh causes us to deal in pride toward others. There are people we look down our noses at, though we'd never say it out loud. Yet we feel it in our hearts. But if the Spirit is in control:

a. the goal will be humility toward all our brethren! Paul wrote in Phil. 2:3, *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* That doesn't mean the Spirit will give you an inferiority complex. It means that you will count the needs and the well-being of others as more important to you than your own. That will be the attitude the Spirit of God will produce in you. But here's:

b. the method that you can use to allow Him to create that humility First:

(1) do not compare yourself to others It is so easy to get an inflated estimate of yourself when you compare yourself to others. For instance, I might feel that I have quite a lot of hair if I compare myself to somebody that is bald as a cue ball. But that wouldn't be too accurate a standard, would it? My flesh always wants to compare me to others so I can feel superior. It's a protection mechanism that it's built up over the years. I see somebody act a certain way and I smugly say inside, "I'm not like that," which leads to, "I'm better than they are". I would make a terrible parishioner because every time I sit and listen to someone preach, my flesh starts to think of how I could have said it better and I have to ask the Spirit of God to take control of me and make me really listen and apply the truth being taught! Now, before you point the finger, remember that I know that you have the same flesh I do and the same problem! Your flesh is constantly pushing you to compare yourself to those around you. But God has a good answer for that, *Who are you to judge another man's servant; to his own Master he stands or falls!* Instead:

(2) evaluate your own actions Test your own thoughts and actions; hold them up against God's standards. Take 5:19-23 and dip it into your life like we said last week and see how you measure up. I guarantee that will keep you humble! Don't compare yourself to others; compare yourself to the Word of God and ask the Spirit of God to let you see yourself clearly. You see, when it comes to this, unlike the burdens we face in life, we must all carry our own load, our daily pack. We are all responsible to God for our own actions and attitudes. That's where our focus should lie and the Spirit of God will use that to create genuine humility in us. How about it? Is there humility in your life toward ALL? Or is there someone you're not very humble towards? Who is in control? Well finally, if the Holy Spirit is in control we will care:

4. about teaching brethren (6) There are those brethren who instruct us, our teachers, our Pastors, our Bible study leaders, our Elders. If the flesh is in control, we'll react to them a certain way. We'll resent them a little bit because

they're telling us things our flesh doesn't want to hear. We'll be critical of them and they'll have a hard time teaching us. But if the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives, we will love and care about them and:

a. the goal will be fellowship Now, about half the commentaries think that Paul has suddenly switched subjects here and is talking about money, saying that those who are taught have a responsibility to provide materially for those who give their time to teaching. That is true and it's taught in many other passages. But I don't think that's what he primarily has in mind here. Many of these Galatian Christians had turned away from their original leadership to follow the new false teachers that had come teaching legalism. They had broken fellowship and turned critical of those who were trying to instruct them in the truths of grace and that included Paul himself. The flesh was in control. If the Spirit is in control there will be a oneness of heart with those who teach us and we will love them and that will result in:

b. the method: sharing That may mean sharing the material gift of something good. On the other hand, it probably means much more than that, sharing your life, your heart, your blessings, your progress, your joys with them. Wuest translates, "Let the one who is being taught the Word constantly be holding fellowship with the one who is teaching in all good things." If the Holy Spirit is in control, you'll love them and want to share every encouragement you can with them. How about it? How are you relating toward those who teach you the Word, your pastor, your Bible Study leader? Who's in control? Let me close with this:

Some pranksters once rubbed limburger cheese on the end of a man's nose while he was asleep. When he awoke, he sniffed and sniffed, but always found the same odor wherever he went. Finally, going outdoors, he exclaimed, "The whole world smells!" The real trouble, however, was with him! It is so easy to let the flesh be in control and let an uncaring attitude develop toward our own brothers and sisters in Christ. Remember, the problem does not lie with them. It lies with me, with who's in control of me.

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

A Responsible Life (Continued) 6:7-10

This is the second half of the message I started to bring last week, putting forth the idea that the kind of life that God will produce in us through the Spirit when we let Him is a responsible life. We said last week in verses 1-6 that it is a life that is responsible toward other people; it cares about brethren. Today we want to see that the life the Spirit produces in us is responsible toward God as well. I want to start in verse 7 by teaching you a law. You know, for as much as I'm glad to live by grace, I'm also glad the universe runs by laws, by principles you can count on that are unfailing, like the law of gravity. The particular law in view here I call:

I. The Law Of Consequences: You Reap What You Sow (7c) Now any farmer or gardener knows this to be literally true in the agricultural realm. If you plant corn seed, corn grows. If you plant wheat seed, wheat grows. If you plant eggplant seed, it grows eggplants. Never ever will you plant a watermelon seed and harvest a cantaloupe! Furthermore, the amount you reap is directly related to how much you sow, isn't it? You can't expect to freeze dozens of ears of corn and have planted only 1 dozen seeds, can you? The more you plant, the more you reap, and the less you plant, the less you reap, but you always get the same KIND of thing you planted. Gardening would be a very interesting experience if that law did not operate! But God is not here concerned about growing food. He is saying that there is a corresponding law in the moral realm, that what we do with our life has consequences and the consequences are of the same character as what produced them. That's an immutable law. And Paul spells it out in verse 8.

1. flesh-control has consequences (8a) If you as a believer live your life letting your flesh be in control of you and letting it make your choices, you are going to reap consequences that correspond to that. What does flesh-control look like? Compare Phil. 2:21. Believers can live their lives like that, always thinking, "What do I want, what's best for me..." instead of, "What does Christ want; what is His will?" That's flesh-control and it has three basic consequences that are summed up in one word, destruction. First, it brings only:

a. a temporary benefit If something is destroyed, that means it's temporary; it doesn't last. Compare 2 Cor. 4:18. The things you can see are only temporary. Choosing what the flesh wants may actually benefit you in terms of what you can see. It might make you a bunch of money. It might get you a nice big house. It might get you a lot of instantaneous pleasure. BUT none of that will last. None of it is eternal. You can't take it with you. One day you'll die and leave it all behind. If you invest your life in the things your flesh urges you to, any benefit you get out of it is only short-term. Secondly it leads to:

b. eventual corruption That's the literal translation of the Greek here, *corruption*. The flesh is indwelt by what? Sin! And if you're not in tune with the Spirit and the flesh is making your decisions, guess where you'll end up! In sin! Oh, maybe not right away, and maybe not in what looks outwardly horrible, but apart from the Spirit of God, every step you take is one step further out of God's will and into sin. Your life becomes decayed spiritually. In fact, it becomes:

c. a living death All that God wants to do in your life is destroyed, ruined, done away with. You choose your own path and live your own life and His whole design and purpose for you is thwarted. 1 Tim. 5:6 says that a person who lives for pleasure is dead while she's alive! She may be alive physically, but she's cut off from God and the life He wants to flow out through her. Compare Rom. 8:6, 13, 8. It is not that you will lose your salvation. If you are genuinely saved, that is impossible. But if you as a believer are continually living in the flesh, it will be impossible to please God; your life will be a continuing life of displeasing Him (which is sinning), no matter how nice it looks and since, in effect, you have cut yourself off from His work in you, it is a living death. Just like that of an unsaved person who is physically alive but spiritually dead toward God. And the flesh-controlled Christian is doing exactly the same thing! He's living the same way, cut off from God's plan, a living death, as it were, and if he were unsaved, it would indeed lead to death, eternal separation from God. If you sow to your flesh, you will from your flesh reap corruption and death. But here's the converse truth:

2. Spirit-control has consequences (8b) If you let the Spirit control your life, it will have wonderful consequences. And Phil. 1:21 pictures what that means. *To live is Christ*. A Spirit controlled life says, "What does Christ want? What is His will? Yes Lord, do that through me!" When you live like that, there are consequences. The first is:

a. an eternal benefit Living that way produces benefits that last forever. Compare 1 Cor. 3:1, 12-15. You can be one of two ways. You can be *worldly* (KJV *carnal*), which in the Greek is *fleshly*, which means that the flesh is in control. Or you can be *spiritual* which means that the Spirit is in control. If you live fleshly, all those things you produce in life are like wood, hay, and stubble because they were not the work of Christ through you and they all go up in smoke when you stand before Him. But that which was done by the Spirit abides forever and is rewarded with an eternal reward! Nobody else on earth may notice it here and now, but God does and it will not be forgotten for eternity. Secondly, instead of continual corruption, it produces:

b. continual transformation - 2 Cor. 3:18 Under the Spirit's control you are gradually changed into the likeness of Christ in stages, step by step. You grow more and more righteous and holy and loving and kind and gentle and patient, and so on. Instead of ending up in sin, building a heap of disobedience, you end up changed from glory to glory in the image of Jesus. And so, you end up living:

c. a genuine life - Rom. 8:11 Now when they see this verse, most folks think it is a promise of our future resurrection. But that's totally out of the context of all he's talking about before and after. He's primarily talking about right now. The Spirit of God puts the Divine life of Jesus Christ inside us and if we yield Him control, we will live out of that life. Compare Rom. 6:4, 8. We live a new life. We live with Him! He lives through us. Our life is His life and that is real living! That is the abundant life Jesus said that He came to give! That's the life we experience when we live under the Spirit's control. Now let's go back to verse 7 and pick up:

II. The Warning From The Law Of Consequences (7a) Here is:

1. the fact: the Law stands You will reap what you sow. That stands. It is immutable, unchangeable. It is as sure as the fact that the sun will come up tomorrow morning or that tomorrow you'll be one day older. If you live under the control of your flesh, you may reap a temporary benefit, but you are living in growing corruption and living a life that is spiritually dead. If you live under the control of the Spirit, you are laying up eternal benefits, growing in the likeness of Christ and living the abundant life God gave you in Him. You can't live one way and get the opposite result any more than you can shoot forward and hit a target behind you. If you shoot forward, you hit that target. If you shoot the other way, you hit the other target. And here's:

2. the reason: God cannot be outwitted The Greek word *mocked* here is used of a person who talks nice to your face and makes cynical gestures behind your back. You kids do that in school sometimes, don't you? To your teachers! You look like a little angel, but when they turn their back, you snicker or make mocking gestures. Well, that doesn't work on God. You can fool people into thinking you're living a nice wonderful Christian life and all the while be living in the flesh. But you can't fool God; He knows whether He's controlling your life or not! You see, here's the great:

3. the delusion: we can escape the consequences Oh, we believe this so easily in life, "I can sin and get away with it." It is Satan's number 1 lie: *You will not surely die!* You can be sexually active and never get pregnant, never get AIDS. You can do drugs and never get addicted, never get caught. You can lie and nobody will know, steal and not get caught. But God has a law: you reap what you sow. You can no more escape that than you can the law of gravity. If you sin, consequences will follow. And there are a lot of Christians who have been deceived into thinking that since they're saved and know they're going to heaven, that they can now just live a nice moral life and pursue their own goals and not be fully surrendered and yielded to the Holy Spirit and everything will be OK. There won't be any consequences. Yes, there will; you reap what you sow! But let's talk about the good side of this:

III. The Benefit Of The Law Of Consequences (9-10) Paul didn't just write this to people who were living in the flesh, but also to people who were living in the Spirit, because he knew that:

1. we may get weary of doing good without results We may be yielded to the Spirit and following His direction, but when we do a good thing, many times we don't see a result from it. Or we may see a negative result. We may tell the truth and be castigated for it. We may reach out in love to help and be totally rejected. We may put our heart and soul into something the Lord leads us to do and see no visible fruit from it whatsoever. And that can make you mighty weary, especially if you live in some kind of difficult day to day situation like a bad marriage or a terrible work environment. We can get bone-weary of being obedient to the Spirit and feel like chucking the whole thing. Don't you get there sometimes? Well, listen to this good news:

2. we are guaranteed results WILL come in due time There is a law. YOU WILL REAP WHAT YOU SOW! Whether you can see them or not, you are reaping the three benefits I mentioned earlier right now. And the actions you are taking under the direction of the Spirit of God will result in a harvest at God's proper time. They will have their intended result. I don't ever have to wonder whether what I do counts. It COUNTS! God doesn't do anything without purpose and reason and if He's doing it through you, then it counts! It will produce the consequence it's supposed to produce at the time. You may be wholly unaware of it. The result may be known only to God, but you can trust Him that each and every thing the Spirit of God does through you will make an eternal difference. Consequently:

3. we must never cease to yield to the Spirit We must never grow faint and give up and give in to the flesh, for that would have dire consequences. We must determine that whether we can see any results or not, we are going to yield ourselves to God completely. But verse 10 takes it one step further:

4. we should be constantly seeking opportunities for the Spirit to work good through us (10) See the *therefore*? Let me tell you what it's THERE FOR! It means that because there is a law of consequences, because every action we take in the name of Spirit of God will result in a harvest, we should seek opportunities for the Spirit of God to work good through us to everybody, and especially in caring about our brethren, as we emphasized last week. And the Greek doesn't just mean, "Whenever opportunity knocks, do good". It indicates that we should have an attitude that welcomes opportunity, that looks for it, seeks and desires it, one that says, "Spirit of God, use me in the life of this person and that person; I want to be used of you!" Since I know that it WILL make a difference, I should WANT to be used!

GALATIANS: GRACE THAT WORKS

A Crucified Life 6:11-18

Today we come to the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Christians in Galatia and with it, the conclusion of our study. But I don't want to pass over it lightly. People tend not to read the endings to letters, thinking they are filled with things that are not very important. But, on the contrary, it is here that we find Paul's final statement of just how important this letter and what he has said in it really is.

I. Paul's Final Statement Of Importance (11) Now I know that verse doesn't look like much, but there are two things I want you to notice here about the way Paul wrote this letter.

1. he wrote it all personally I assume you're aware that Paul dictated most of his letters to others who wrote them down for him. The people who did this are mentioned by name in other books; Tertius, for example, is named in Romans. But this letter is different. The tense of the verb in Greek is past, not present. I *wrote* to you. He's not just adding a few personal lines in his own handwriting at the end; I think he wrote the whole thing! Now, I know what that means. I have had a secretary myself, and she could take a letter faster than I could dream of writing it myself. But the ones that are the most serious and the most personal, I spend the time to write out myself, laboring over every word and phrase. And what made that even more significant is that:

2. he wrote it with difficulty There were two styles of writing the ancient Greek language. The average person used the common cursive script, much like we do. But the professional scribe used what is called the Uncial script, with letters about an inch high and formed separately without connecting, like our printing. Paul wrote this letter in the large uncial script because, as I shared with you earlier, I believe he had an eye problem. He could not see well. And so, he had to carefully and laboriously print out the whole letter in this huge script and I'm sure it must have been very difficult for him. Why would he go to all that trouble?

3. its message of grace is IMPORTANT! This issue we've spent all these weeks on, this issue of living under law or under grace, is IMPORTANT. It is central. The whole of the Christian life hangs in the balance. You can't sweep it aside and say, "Oh well, it's not important whether you believe circumcision is necessary for salvation or baptism is necessary or taking communion is necessary or joining the church is necessary, as long as you believe in Jesus." Yes, it is! Jesus plus ANYTHING is salvation by works. And then if you grant that, but hold that salvation is done by Jesus, yet your sanctification is done by you obeying the law, that is sanctification by works. Listen, salvation and the Christian life are both by grace; they are both completely the doing of God. Miss that and you miss the boat. It's important!

That's why we've spent so much time on it. And then, to wrap it up, Paul gives a final summary of the problem the Galatian Christians were having with the Judaizing false teachers.

II. Paul's Final Summary Of The Problem (12-15) There is a great contrast here. In verses 12-15 Paul talks about the Judaizers. In verses 14-15 he contrasts himself with them. The key word that distinguishes the two you don't even see in verse 12. The word *outwardly* is literally *in the flesh*. There's that word again. These folks who were troubling the Galatians were operating under the control of the flesh. And in that regard, they can be a good picture of me. When I let my flesh control my life, I have the same basic set of desires they did.

1. when the flesh is in control, I desire: (12-13)

a. to appear well to others (12a), to make a good impression. Like the Judaizers, I'm not concerned about what's on the inside, what's in the heart. I'm not concerned about motives and inner thoughts. I'm simply concerned about how I look to everybody else and what they think of me, about appearances. Do you know anybody like that? They smile and pretend their marriage is great, but at home they fight like cats and dogs. They act very pious and religious under certain circumstances, but when nobody's looking, they're greedy or dishonest. That will be me if I let the flesh win. Then my second desire will be:

b. to avoid pain to myself (12b) The Judaizers who professed belief in Christ didn't want to get persecuted by the actual Jews. They didn't want to suffer what happened to Paul in Galatia. And if they preached the law along with Jesus, the Jews would lay off. So, avoiding personal pain was more important than the truth! Do you know anybody like that? I won't speak up about something wrong because it might jeopardize my job. I won't do it the right way because it'll cost me money. I won't talk to that person and settle the issue because it might be painful; I'll just sweep it under the rug. And that'll be me if I let the flesh control me. And then, in the flesh I desire:

c. to achieve recognition by my efforts (13) The Judaizers wanted to be able to boast about how many they had circumcised, about how many they had won to their cause. They wanted to get recognition. The flesh is proud, isn't it? The flesh seeks recognition and applause. The flesh-controlled Christian wants everybody to notice what he's done, how much he's given, how much he knows, how gifted he is, how many people he witnessed to last week, how much he helped and sacrificed. He wants the "ooohs and aaahs and the wows!" because it builds self up and self, or the flesh, thrives on that. And he also thinks somehow that it impresses and pleases God. You see, the flesh puts me under the system of law or works and that's the result. I live a life that looks religious outwardly, but doesn't deal with the heart. I impress others but inside I live selfishly. I seek to avoid pain and difficulty and to get recognition from people or from God any way I can. But:

2. when the Spirit is in control, I have: (14-15) a totally different attitude in life! The Spirit keeps my heart mindful of grace, that anything whatsoever of value that is in my life is God's doing, not mine! It's a gift, not an achievement. And so, when I let the Spirit be in control of me, I have:

a. no boast but the cross (14a) I can't boast about looks; God gave my appearance to me. I can't boast about intelligence or ability or talent or even possessions; anything I have He gave. I can't boast about spending years in the ministry; if He hadn't kept me there, I'd have quit years ago. I can't boast about helping people; any help they get comes from Him. I can't boast about being a good husband or father; I fail every day and have to pray for His forgiveness and power. But I'll tell you what; I'll boast all day long about my Jesus and what He did for me at the cross! At the cross He took all my sins, every last one, and purchased my eternal forgiveness when I deserved hell. At the cross He identified me with Himself so that my old man, my old spirit, was crucified with Him and I am a brand-new person on the inside. At the cross He united me with Him, rising to a brand-new life on the third day so that now He has come into me in the person of the Spirit and I live by His resurrection power. You see, He did it all for me at the cross. I have nothing to boast about, nothing to glory in, except in the cross! And because of that, I have:

b. no attachment but to Jesus (14b) I have been crucified to everything this world has to offer and it has been crucified to me. Notice it doesn't say, "I AM BEING," but "I HAVE BEEN". It is not a slow dying out. Crucifixion means death. I have died to the world and it has died to me. I have no attachment to it any longer. It may offer me pleasure, riches, fame, recognition, you name it. Or it may threaten me with hardship, persecution, suffering, sickness, or even death. But none of that holds a candle to what Jesus gave me at the cross. As long as I yield myself to the Spirit of God, none of that has any attraction and none of it holds any fear for me. I don't love any of it. I love Jesus! He died for me. He rose for me. He loved me. And I love Him more than life itself! So then when the Spirit is in control I have:

c. no concern but new birth (15) I don't argue and fight with my brethren over side issues. Circumcision or uncircumcision don't matter. How you baptize doesn't ultimately matter, nor does the time of the rapture or whether I can argue theologically that the atonement was limited or unlimited. What matters is that I have been made a new creation in Christ, that I have been transformed by Him. And what concerns me is that others might know Him, not that they might agree with me. To me, all the world is divided into two clear groups, those who have been made new in

Christ and those who haven't. Those who have are my brothers and I must love them and minister to them. And those who haven't must be told, must be reached.
Oh, the Spirit will give me a one track mind: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Boasting only in Jesus, attached only to Jesus, caring only that people know Jesus! That's the mind Paul had and you can see that as you look at:

III. Paul's Final Wishes In Parting (16-18) And what Paul wishes for the Galatians is what God desires for me as well. First, He desires that I would have:

1. His peace for my mind (16) *This rule* is living by grace under the control of the Spirit. His peace is for all who live that way, for the Galatian Gentiles and even for the "Israel of God," for those who are Jews but have become new creatures in Christ. God desires every believer to have His peace, His calm, His assurance that He is in control and all is going according to His plan. Then He desires me to recognize:

2. His ownership of my body (17) Paul was covered with scars. In Galatia he'd been stoned and left for dead. That left visible marks on him. And he calls these marks in the Greek *stigmata*, the brand of ownership that would be placed on a slave to show who his master was. These scars were Paul's brand; they showed who owned his body. He was saying, "Don't mess with me, I'm God's property and if you don't believe it, just look at the brand marks!" And Paul wrote in Romans 12:1 that every believer ought to present his body to God as a living sacrifice. That's our reasonable service. That's what God really wants, that we recognize that our body is His to direct and use and do with what He wants. But He also wants me to know:

3. His grace with my spirit (18) And grace in this use is almost a synonym for power. He wants us to know the gift of God, the power and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ working together with our new human spirit to produce in us the life He wants. In short, He wants us, mind, body, and spirit, to be wrapped up with one thing and one thing only: HIM-SELF!

A.B. Simpson put it this way in his hymn entitled "HIMSELF":

*Once it was the blessing, Now it is the Lord
Once it was the feeling, Now it is His Word;
Once His gift I wanted, Now, the Giver own
Once I sought for healing, Now Himself alone.*

*Once 'twas painful trying, Now 'tis perfect trust
Once a half salvation, Now the uttermost;
Once 'twas ceaseless holding, Now He holds me fast
Once 'twas constant drifting, Now my anchor's cast.*

*Once 'twas busy planning, Now 'tis trustful prayer
Once 'twas anxious caring, Now He has the care;
Once 'twas what I wanted, Now what Jesus says
Once 'twas constant asking, Now 'tis ceaseless praise.*

*Once it was my working, His it hence shall be
Once I tried to use Him, Now He uses me;
Once the pow'r I wanted, Now the Mighty One
Once for self I labored, Now for Him alone.*

*Once I hoped in Jesus, Now I know He's mine
Once my lamps were dying, Now they brightly shine;
Once for death I waited, Now His coming hail
And my hopes are anchored, safe within the veil.*

*Chorus: All in all forever, Jesus I will sing;
Everything in Jesus, and Jesus everything.*

EPHESIANS 1-2: WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Privilege #1: You Were Chosen To Holiness 1:1-4

The whole point of this series of messages is to help you understand who you are in Christ and what has happened to you in becoming a saved person. It is so fantastic, so wonderful, so unbelievable, and yet there are a great majority of believers who go through their whole Christian lives and never really comprehend what has happened to them or what they have as believers in Christ. Disney has an animated movie called the Sword in the Stone, a fabled story about a young boy in ancient England who was raised as a servant in the castle, whose greatest hope of being anything was of being a squire and polishing the armor for some knight. All his life he was treated poorly and with contempt and he lived content that way. But in the castle courtyard there was a sword with the point embedded into a stone and an inscription which said "Whoso pulleth this sword from this stone is the rightful king of England". Nobody had been able to pull it out for centuries. But one day the boy needed a sword and he just grabbed it without thinking and it came right out. One by one the whole crowd fell to their knees and began to say, "Hail to the king...King Arthur!" The little servant boy all his life never knew he was the king until that moment, but he was the rightful king all along. Of course that's just a fable, but it is tragically true that all too many of us Christians go through life living spiritually as though we are only squires when indeed we are actually kings (literally) and indeed much more than that. You have been given privileges beyond your wildest imagination in Jesus Christ. After his greeting to the Ephesian Christians, Paul tells us:

I. The Nature Of Your Privileges (3) He calls them blessings. But note four things about them. First:

1. they are all yours NOW Note the past tense. He has already blessed us with these privileges; they are not something we wait for, something we get after we die or later on as we mature. They are all yours RIGHT NOW, this very moment, as a believer in Christ and they have been yours, as we'll see later, not just for a few years but from eternity past. Second:

2. they are spiritual in nature What do I mean by that? They have to do with your spirit, with that part of you that is the real you, your soul. We are not talking about material blessings, about financial blessings, about fleshly things. God has not blessed you with health and wealth to claim at will. But these are far more valuable. Third:

3. they are heavenly realities We are blessed in the heavenly realms. Where is that? Verse 20, that's where Christ is seated right now and we are seated there with Him, as we'll learn later. We have the spiritual blessings that are visible and true in the heavenly realms right here on earth, right now. And fourth:

4. they are all yours IN Christ Now I want to take some time to explain and think in detail about that little phrase "in Christ" because wrapped up in those two words is the wonderful method by which God has made all these things true for us in our lives. He has given them to us IN CHRIST. That phrase occurs 14 times in the Book of Ephesians and 6 of those are right here in chapter 1. It is used to indicate a 2-fold relationship that you have with Christ. First of all:

a. He is IN you When you got saved, Christ literally came to live, to dwell inside you, in the person of the Holy Spirit. But it's not just that He came to live in you; He JOINED Himself to your spirit. He united His Spirit with yours so that the two of you are inseparably one. Now, what does that mean? It means that what is true of Him is true of you. When I say that you get all spiritual blessings in Him, one thing I mean is that His presence in you makes all those things that are true of Him true of you; it makes what is His, YOURS. Take, for example the illustration of LIFE in 1 Jn. 5:10-12 Here's how you get eternal life. Eternal life is Christ's life, the life of God. It is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting. How does God give it to you? He doesn't simply decree that you have it, though I guess He could. He gives it to you by uniting you with Christ so that Christ's life becomes your life. You got that blessing of eternal life IN Christ. You also got His throne, His nature, His access to the Father and a whole host of other things. You got all these things in Him because He is IN you. But other times when the phrase "in Christ" is used, it points out the reverse truth:

b. you are IN Him A spiritual transaction occurred when you received Christ. You were placed IN HIM spiritually. Now what in the world does that mean? Well, let me use:

(1) the illustration of Levi - Heb. 7:9-10 Levi was the great grandson of Abraham. On one particular occasion in his life Abraham did something, he paid a tithe to a priest named Melchizedek. God's comment is that since Levi was in Abraham, when Abraham acted, Levi acted or in other words Abraham acted for Levi and what he did, Levi did in Him. Abraham acted for the entire line descended from him. Now let's look at something more extensive:

(2) the contrast of Adam - 1 Cor. 15:22 says, *Just as IN ADAM all die, so IN CHRIST shall all be made alive.* You came into this world IN ADAM. Compare Rom. 5:12. That doesn't say "Death came to every man because

every man sins." It says that all "sinned". When? In the one man's sin, in Adam. We are all descendants of Adam. When Adam acted in the garden and chose sin, he acted for the entire race descended from him even though we were not yet born. Your existence is in the person of Adam and so you are born with his nature and his destiny. BUT, when you come to Christ, He takes you OUT of Adam and his line of descent and puts you INTO HIMSELF and His line of descent. So that your life is no longer derived from Adam but from Christ. And your nature is no longer the one derived from Adam but that of Christ. And your destiny is that of Christ. Now whether you catch all that or not, the point is this: what happened to Him happened to you. When He died, you died; when He rose, you rose; when He ascended, you ascended; now that He sits on the Throne, you sit on the throne in Him! So, all the spiritual blessings you have are yours because you are in Him and what happened to Him happened to you. Now that's a bunch of heavy stuff. So, let's look at more heavy stuff. Here is your first privilege in Christ:

II. The Privilege Of Being Chosen (4) You, my friend, are chosen! Did you know that? Now, what does that mean?

1. what chosen means: you were selected for Himself The word *elect* is from the same root word as *chosen*. It means to select out from among and it is in the middle voice so it means to select out from among for yourself. My friend, there are currently over 7 billion people in this world and out of all of them Almighty God has chosen YOU to be His own possession, to be His and spend eternity with Him. Oh, this is a love-note from God whispered in your ear, "I chose YOU!" Did you ever whisper that to your wife? "Out of all the girls in the world, I chose you because I wanted you!" How sweet that is to your ear! Out of the billions of people that have ever lived, you are part of the few chosen to belong to God for His very own! Every now and again you'll see on TV a movie about a kid who's adopted and he'll be wondering why his real parents didn't want him and his adoptive parents will tell him, "Yes but remember this. We didn't have to take you. We chose you. We wanted you for our very own." Oh, that's special and that's what God has done for you. He didn't have to love you; He didn't have to pick you. But He did. He wanted to. It was an act of His will. He wanted YOU. Knowing all your faults and flaws and hang-ups. Knowing all the rotten things you would ever do. Knowing all the secret things that lie at your very core. He still chose YOU! Now let's talk about:

2. how you were chosen: in Him Now, let me just mention very kindly:

a. the 2 positions on election There is a large section of the Christian community including most Presbyterians, many Baptists, and a host of others who hold that election was a simple sovereign choice made by God. Simply put, God chose before ever creating them, who would be saved and therefore who wouldn't be saved based on nothing other than His simple right to do so as God. That's one position. Then there are another whole host of us who hold the position that is my choice, that God's choosing is according to His foreknowledge as 1 Pet. 1:2 says, *who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...* God in His omnipotence knew how He would work in your life and how you would respond to His Son and chose you accordingly. You can view it whichever way you like. Either way, you end up with the same result. You are chosen. But the point of our text is really to support neither one of these, but to say that your privilege of chosenness is a result of being IN HIM. You see:

b. Christ is the Chosen One Lk. 23:35 says, *He is the Christ of God, the CHOSEN ONE*. Is. 42:1 says, *Here is my Servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight...* Christ is the true CHOSEN ONE of God. He is the Father's eternal choice. And remember what I said earlier? What is true of Him is true of you. What happened to Him happened to you. When you came to Christ you were placed IN HIM and united with Him in such a way that the Father's choosing Christ is the Father's choosing YOU:

c. you were chosen in HIM, not based on YOU God did not sit in heaven and watch you live and see all your good and bad points and your attitude and all about you and decide to save you. He didn't even sit back before creation and look down the corridors of time at your life and all your characteristics and decide to save you. He chose Christ and YOU were chosen IN HIM, so that your chosenness, your belonging to God is not based, even one iota, on anything you are or do. It doesn't depend on you! Your chosenness depends on Christ. Now let me ask you this? Is the Father ever likely to get tired of the Son and "UN-choose" Him? Never! And neither is He likely to un-choose you because your chosenness is IN HIM. In fact, look at this:

3. when you were chosen: eternity past He chose you IN Him before the foundation of the world. Before time began. He chose you in eternity past in the eternal choice He made in Christ. What does that mean? Simply this: you are secure! On the grand time clock of God, you've already been chosen long before your birth or your parents or their parents or the birth of Christ or David or Moses or even Abraham. Thousands of years ago, before Gen. 1, before God ever said, *Let there be light*, you were chosen to belong to God and be His very own. It's old hat to Him and it's as sure and steadfast as the mountains you admire or the very earth you stand on. But there's one final thing to understand:

4. what you were chosen to: holiness You were chosen not simply to belong, but to be something. To be holy. God chose way back then, not just to have you but to make you something, to make you holy. And my friend because you are in Christ, right now today:

a. you are holy in position You are blameless before Almighty God; you stand before Him HOLY in Christ. He died on the cross and when He died you died in Him. And your sins were done away with right then and there, all of them, first to last. That's the blessing of being in Christ. That's how come you can be a child of God bound for heaven even though you still sin. You are in Christ and in Him you are absolutely blameless. But it's not just your position:

b. you are holy in being On the other hand, when Christ came IN YOU, he made a brand new you. He created a brand-new spirit in you, a new nature that is holy and just and pure. Your old sin-saturated spirit is dead and gone and your spirit is as holy as that of Christ Himself. That is not blasphemy; that is truth. Read it in Colossians. You are blameless because you are IN HIM and you are holy because He is IN YOU! He has chosen you to be so! Well then, how come some of you are wandering around earth wondering how God could ever love you, how He could ever want you with all your faults and failures and shortcomings. You think you could never please Him and you never do anything right anyway. You don't even like yourself. And maybe you worry about your salvation, about whether you're really going to make it after all as you look at your life and how you sin again and again. MY FRIEND, IN JESUS CHRIST YOU WERE CHOSEN BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD TO BE HOLY! That's what God says about you. And all your life you've been walking around living like a squire; you've been crawling around like an ugly caterpillar hoping that someday you'll be the least little bit like that beautiful butterfly you admire. And what you don't know is simply that GOD CHOSE YOU TO BE A BUTTERFLY BEFORE TIME BEGAN. You may not look like a butterfly, but you are ALREADY A BUTTERFLY just as surely as Jesus Christ is alive.

EPHESIANS 1-2: WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Privilege #2: You Were Predestined To Sonship 1:5

We could sum up the theme of this series in one word: identity, that is, who you are. If you know who you are, it will determine how you live. Yet so many Christians go through their entire lives with a wrong understanding of who they are, never realizing the privileges that have been given to them because they are in CHRIST. The first privilege we talked about is in verse 4; you were CHOSEN, selected by God before the creation of the world from among all the people who would ever be born to belong to Him and to be made holy in His presence. You are not simply a person who continues to be a sinner, yet saved by grace. You are a person who used to be a sinner, but who in Jesus Christ was transformed and given a new spirit and made righteous and holy and pure, so that right now you are a SAINT! It doesn't matter how you feel about yourself or that sin still lives in your flesh and sometimes you give in to it. You have been made a saint. God never asks you to become something you're not; He simply asks you to LIVE like what you already ARE! Now today, let's look at verse 5 and talk about privilege #2: you were predestined to sonship.

I. The Meaning Of Predestination: To Determine Beforehand Predestination is admittedly a very deep and difficult subject. Strong Calvinists, like our Presbyterian and Reformed friends, love to talk about it. People from a more dispensational background like mine usually hate to talk about it, because we're too busy shouting "Whosoever Will may come!" And sadly enough, it has become for many of us something we almost don't believe in. Yet the Bible teaches it and we can't ignore that. So let me clearly say that I believe in predestination. It is one of the most blessed sweet truths that God has whispered to us as His children. The Greek word means literally *to mark out the boundaries or limits* of something beforehand, to determine something before it starts. When you hear predestination, think predetermination; the outcome of it is fixed. Jesus Christ is coming again and Satan is going to rot for eternity in a lake of fire. That fact is predestined. It is determined and fixed right now, before it ever occurs. So predestination involves two things on God's part:

1. it involves an act of decision God decided something; He decreed something, if you like. I do not, by the way, believe in fate, that what will be will be. I believe that God determines things. He decides they will be. Predestination means that God made a decision about YOU. But it also involves something else very important:

2. it involves the power to ensure the carrying out of the decision I can predetermine that my child will be president of the USA. I can make that decision, but I'm missing something. I have no power to make what I have decided come true. God, on the other hand, is omnipotent. He has the power to ensure that whatever He has determined will come to pass. It cannot fail to happen, because its occurrence is rooted in His Almighty power. So, God has predestined you. He has decided ahead of time certain things about you as His child and His power will see that they are accomplished. Now in verse 5 you can see:

II. What You Were Predestined To: The Adoption Of Sons The Greek word is not a verb, but a noun here. It is not "to be adopted AS His sons" but to "the ADOPTION of sons". I emphasize that because the Greek word *huiothesia* used here does not refer to the modern practice of taking a child from another family into your own and officially making him yours. Indeed, the biblical doctrine of adoption really has nothing to do with that at all. You don't get INTO God's family by adoption; you are BORN into it by the new birth. Adoption means "to place as a son" and it refers to a rite of passage that EVERY male child in the Roman world went through right in his own family. Let me illustrate from Paul's own writings:

1. its meaning: to receive full rights - Gal. 4:1-5 Every boy had an adoption in the Roman culture. It was sort of a rite of passage, a "coming of age". His father would set a time for it, a certain age when it would happen. Before that time, he was a child, a minor, and was subject to the ruling of a pedagogue, a child-trainer, a guardian. Others took care of his possessions for him and made his decisions for him, even though he might be the heir to the whole estate. He was not much different from the household servant or slave who was always told what to do and how to act. But then that great day came when he was declared a full-grown son and invested with all the attendant rights and privileges. He was responsible for his own actions and decisions and possessions. He lived under a new system and was free from the control of guardians. That is the adoption which every son experienced in Roman times; it referred to the time when you were invested with the full rights and position of an adult son and heir. Now, Paul uses this figure in two ways. In the Galatians passage it has:

a. its present application: You SERVE now as a full son Because you are in Christ, you serve God, not as a child under law, but as a full son under grace. It's not that you have a heavenly Master who tells you what to do. You have a Heavenly Father who has put His Spirit in your heart and you serve Him out of love. Your heart longs to please Him as the heart of a son is united to that of his father and wants to live a life that mirrors His in its character and quality. But that's another sermon. In Ephesians and in other passages Paul uses the same image of adoption and gives it:

b. its future application: Turn over to Romans 8. Just as in Roman culture the father would set a day on which his son would be transformed from a child into a man and would be invested with all rights and privileges, so God has set a time for every one of us when we His children will go through a similar transforming experience.

(1) you will be glorified at Christ's return - Rom. 8:23 In the one sense we are already full sons and invested with the full rights of sons right now. But in another sense, we are not yet fully invested with everything we're going to get. We are lacking something, the resurrection of our bodies! Our spirits are brand new, regenerated. We are new inside. But sin and its effects still dwell in our bodies and affect our minds. Consequently, we groan because we are not yet complete. We yearn to be made whole, to become fully all that we were created to be, all that we're going to be and that will occur at Christ's return, at the Rapture of the Church, where we will all be transformed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, instantly glorified and caught up to heaven to be with Him forever! That's the moment our eyes are fixed on, that moment when we are fully invested with all our rights and privileges as the sons of God, when we are made like Him in every way, body, mind, and spirit, and when we sit down with Him on His throne, coregents, joint heirs with Him. That is "the adoption" Paul is talking about. And what Eph. 1:5 is teaching is that God made a decision about you long ago that you would have that moment and He will certainly carry it out. It is teaching that:

(2) you were predestined to be like Christ - Rom. 8:29-30 Predestination in all of its uses in Scripture is not really a doctrine about salvation; it is about glorification. God decided that YOU would be made exactly like His Son, that You would be made one day like Jesus Christ, that you would have His glory, all of it! He did not simply want Christ to fellowship with forever; He wanted a whole race of beings made like Himself to share His glory and His image and to spend eternity in fellowship with Him. Now let's look at some other passages to help you see it more completely:

2. its explanation - 1 John 3:2 says that we don't know yet what we shall be. You can't comprehend all of that and it hasn't been given to you. But you can know one thing which covers it all: in that moment when He appears (at the Rapture) that you will be made like Him! That means:

a. you will be made fully like Him in body - Phil. 3:20-21 Your lowly body, this body which shows all the effects and scars of sin, which is slowly aging and dying and wrinkling and crinkling and aching and paining, will be exchanged for a glorious body made just like His, a spiritual body which never does any of those things. It never hungers or thirsts or grows weary or old or knows pain. It is just like His. Then:

b. you will be made fully like Him in behavior - Col. 1:22-23 At that day God is going to present you to Himself and you will be completely holy and without blame. All trace of sin will be removed from you. The sin principle or the law of sin which infected all your members will be removed, so that your every thought, your every word, your every act will be just like His, holy! And then:

c. you will be made fully like Him in position - Rev. 3:21 says you will sit down with Him on His throne and share it just as He sat down with the Father on His throne. His position will be your position, His authority your authority, His dominion your dominion, His possessions your possessions.

Oh, what a grand and glorious day that will be, that day of adoption, that day when you are placed as a son and invested with everything that is yours in Christ. There's not much in our culture to compare with this. You might think of the anticipation and the "I can't wait" feeling you had about getting your driver's license or about getting married. But nothing compares to this, being made like Jesus on that glorious day. But the best part of it is that you can't miss it, because you were predestined to it. God chose to do this to you and He has the omnipotent power to carry it out. Now, if you really want to knock your socks off, think about this:

III. When You Were Predestined: Eternity Past Verse 4. He chose us in Him before the creation of the world. He predestined us. That choice, that determination that you would one day be a glorified being like the Son of God was made in the councils of eternity before anything was created! It has already stood for thousands of years, more immovable than the Rock of Gibraltar and nothing can shake it. Jesus said, "My Father is greater than all and NOBODY is able to snatch you out of His hand". Nobody and nothing is big enough and strong enough to change what God has predestined to be. It WILL be. Did you hear it? *Those He predestined He also glorified.* It is done! It is finished. For Him to think it or will it or speak it is for it to be accomplished! That meets the first of my basic needs, security. I am absolutely secure and nothing on earth can change it. What comfort! And here's:

IV. Why You Were Predestined The reason is the last two words in verse 4, about which nobody is sure whether they belong to the phrase before or after them, to election or to predestination, but it doesn't really matter since it applies to both actions. Whatever He has done for us:

1. it was out of His love He loved you. That's why He decided that one day you will be glorified and made like Him! You say, "Me? Poor old me? Sinful, rotten, failing, ugly, little me? Me who has nothing about myself to love?" Yes, you! Moses told Israel that the Lord did not set His love upon you based upon anything in you but because He loved you. He loved you because He loved you. What difference does it make why? That's just the kind of God He is! And whether anybody else ever loves you or not, whether your mother or your father ever love you or your children ever love you or your friends ever love you, God loves you. And He loves you knowing all about you (after all He created you). Oh, just sit back and bask in it, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so!" That meets the second of my basic needs, to be loved. You have always been loved and you always will be. And catch this, the end of verse 5 tells us that:

2. it was according to His desire It was in accordance with His pleasure and will. That is, because He wanted to. Why did He love me and predestine me to glory? He wanted to! He wanted to glorify me and place me in His presence and give me everything He had. And that addresses the third of my basic human needs, the need for significance. I am worth something. I matter. I have eternal value. Why? Because God wants to do something in me and with me. He wants me! Finally, just notice God's method:

V. How You Were Predestined: Through Christ It was by being placed into Christ and Him being placed into me that my life was merged with His into one. God's determination that His Son would be glorified and reign forever and ever is now mine. My future is as secure as His. The love God has for me is as great as His. I am predestined for glory!

A friend passed on to me the words of this poem by A.B. Simpson:

Oh, what a wonderful place Jesus has given to me! Saved by His glorious grace, I may be even as He. When with my Lord I appear, Like Him I know I shall be; But, while I walk with Him here, I may be even as He.

One in His death on the tree, One as He rose from the dead; I from the curse am as free E'en as my glorious Head. One on the throne by His side, One in His sonship divine; One as the Bridegroom and Bride, One as the Branch and the Vine.

One in His merits I stand, One as I pray in His name; All that His worth can command, I can with confidence claim. One in His faith and His love, One in His life I may be. Sealed by the heavenly Dove, I may be holy as He.

One in the sorrows He bore, One in His service so true, Even His tears I may share, Even His works I may do. Even His peace and His joy Jesus hath given to me; What can distress or annoy? I am as happy as He.

One in the rapturous hour, When He shall come for His own; Raised by His glorious power, I shall sit down on His throne. All that He has shall be mine, All that He is I shall be; Robed in His glory divine, I shall be even as He.

EPHESIANS 1-2: WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Privilege #3: You Were Given Grace 1:6

I want to talk about something today that's very hard to talk about. Now I know you thought that when I talked about election or being chosen as our first privilege in Christ that that was hard to talk about. And then last week when I talked about predestination as our second privilege, you thought that was hard to talk about. But this third privilege of ours in verse 6 is really hard to talk about! You were given grace. Now, why is that so hard to talk about? Because grace is one of those words that is so common and you use it all the time in talking about your faith, yet it is hard to detail its own meaning. When I was in the sixth grade, I got in trouble for something (which I really didn't do) and, as punishment, was told to write an 800 word essay on the meaning of responsibility. Have you ever tried that? You know what responsibility is, but try to define and describe it. After the first couple sentences, I wound up giving a long list of examples of it, such as a captain's responsibility is to his crew. You almost have to use the word in talking about its meaning. And that's what you end up

doing with the word grace. You know what it looks like in action, but it's very hard to talk about the concept itself. But let's take a stab at defining:

I. The Meaning Of Grace: GOD'S FREE UNDESERVED FAVOR That's a good definition. It contains three key words we have to talk about. First, the word FAVOR. What's that? It's a word we don't use too much. It refers to the attitude which one person has toward another. In this case:

1. it refers to the attitude of favor which God has toward you The dictionary says it's an attitude of friendliness toward someone. But it's more than that. Persian law in the time of Esther said that no one could approach the king in his chamber without being called. The penalty was death, unless the king extended his scepter and showed favor to the person. Queen Esther dressed up and approached the king anyway to save her people. When he saw her in all her royal splendor, he extended his scepter and showed her favor. Favor can mean liking someone and tolerating them because of it. Some people see grace that way; God tolerates us even though we've sinned. But grace is more than that. Cain and Abel each brought God an offering and Gen. 4:4 says the Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering not on Cain. So, God was pleased with Abel and what he did. But grace is more than God being pleased with someone.

a. it is not merely tolerating nor being pleased, but LOVE Grace is rooted in the concept of LOVE! In LOVE He predestined us to the adoption of sons and His grace has been freely given us IN THE ONE HE LOVES, Jesus Christ! He loves us like He loves Him! God does not just put up with us and tolerate our presence. He is not simply pleased with us and glad for how we act. He LOVES us. He loves us the way He loves His own Son! When the Bible says you have been given grace, it means that God has chosen to love you! You are the object of God's love and:

b. it is a permanent standing - Rom. 5:1-2 We stand in this grace, in this relationship of love that the Father has established toward us. With earthly kings, favor is something you fall in and out of. But Israel was told, *The Lord has set His love upon you...* And the Psalmist says, *The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who love Him.* Grace means that God has decided to love you forever and ever. You have been placed in His eternal favor. And then:

2. it refers to the way in which that favor came about Let's look at the other two words in the definition. First of all, that grace, that favor, that eternal love:

a. it is free; you DO NOTHING to obtain it The word *grace* is almost synonymous with the word *gift*. A gift is something that is free. You don't pay for it; all you do is accept it. This attitude of eternal love that God has for you came to you as a free gift. It was not based on you or anything about you. It was not because of your looks or your IQ or even because of your good moral nature, kindness, prayers, or piety. Absolutely nothing in you moved God to choose to love you. He loved you freely. Isn't that how you want somebody to love you? Yet it is not only free:

b. it is undeserved; you DO NOT DESERVE to have it It's not just that God didn't choose to love you for something He saw in you; it's that He chose to love you IN SPITE OF what He saw in you! What was that? SIN! And what is the one thing that our Holy God hates? SIN! As the old saying goes, you were a sinner both by nature and by choice. You were born with a nature that was utterly opposed to God and you chose all through your life to do things that offend the righteousness of God. You still do sometimes! By rights, justice demands that you deserve to die, not to be loved eternally by Almighty God! To illustrate, grace is not you having pity on a starving man and feeding him. Grace is you saying, "I love you" to the man who stole all your money. Grace is you saving the life of the man who murdered your child. It is love you do not deserve. Now please don't let your reaction be, "Oh, I feel so guilty; God loves me and I'm so unworthy of it; I don't deserve it; O what a wretch I am!" God never expected you to deserve it or be worthy of it! Your reaction ought to be, "Hallelujah, I don't deserve it but God loves me anyway!" So, at its root, grace is God's favor or love for you that is both free and undeserved. But the word *grace* can also:

3. it refers to the benefits you receive as a result of that favor All the things you have as a result of the fact that God loved you and established a relationship with you can be called *graces* or, we might say, acts of grace or gifts of grace. For instance:

a. salvation is the result of grace - Eph. 2:8 Your salvation comes to you as a result of grace. You do nothing to obtain it and you don't deserve to have it. Yet God gives it to you as a gift. Now we all understand that. That is fundamental to becoming a Christian. If you don't realize you are saved by grace, you're still trying to climb up some other way, but it won't work. However, many times we think of grace as ONLY extending to salvation and see the areas of our Christian life as areas where WE WORK. Well, the Bible says:

b. spiritual gifts are the result of grace - Rom. 12:6 The spiritual gifts you have, whether you can teach or preach or sing or organize or help or serve or whatever, are gifts of grace. They come to you as a result of God's love for you and you do not obtain them or deserve them. They are gifts, freely given by God to you to exercise in His service. For instance:

c. sacrificial giving is the result of grace - 2 Cor. 8:7 The ability to give is an act of grace on God's part, not something you work up yourself. The very ability to give to someone else goes against the nature you were born with and it is the grace of God that puts in you a giving heart! But these gifts are not simply abilities God has put in you and left you alone to exercise:

d. power for service is the result of grace - 1 Cor. 15:10 Paul is referring to his missionary career. He says he worked hard and yet at the bottom line, it was not him, but the grace of God that worked in him! Grace is often a synonym for power in the New Testament and it refers to the fact of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit living in me to live out the life and will of Christ which I could neither obtain or deserve. God in His love does it! So God gives me grace to serve Him and that means that out of His love for me He gives me the thing I need, the power, wisdom, or whatever. Do you get the point?

Any Connection Between You and God Is By GRACE! Whether it's salvation, or Him helping you, or Him working through you or living the Christian life or exercising your gifts or having a ministry. It all stems from grace, God's free undeserved favor and love for you! Where you get into trouble is when you think it depends on you and you try to do it apart from expecting God's grace to operate in it. Listen, every breath you take is grace! Every finger you lift is grace! Every choice, every action, every right word, it is all grace! The right thing to do is to simply recognize that and to ask for grace in everything you do! Ask for His strength to work in and through you, for His wisdom to guide you in every task, for His comfort in every sorrow. It is all yours by grace. Now, let's talk about:

II. The Receiving Of Grace How did I receive this attitude of eternal love that God has toward me which I couldn't earn and don't deserve. Well, verse 6 gives us three important facts:

1. it has been given to YOU freely If in English you could take the noun *grace* and turn it into a verb, you'd understand what Paul did here in Greek. It doesn't say merely that God GAVE us His grace; He literally "graced" it to us! He gave it to us freely and undeservedly! Further:

2. it has been given to you once and for all The Greek verb is in the aorist tense, which means an action that has been fully completed once and for all in the past, one that has happened and is over with. A gift is given at a particular time and place and once it's given, you have it. The act is done. And God's favor and love have been given to you once for all, permanently. It's not like human love, something that is growing and maybe you'll have it all someday. It's not like human favor something that can be given and retracted. No, God's favor and love have been set upon you completely and forever, freely and with nothing on your part to obtain it or deserve it! How?

3. it has been given to you IN THE ONE HE LOVES In His Son Jesus Christ. When God gave you the gracious gift of His Son coming into your life and merging your life into His so that His life became your life, then something marvelous happened. The attitude that God has toward His Son became the attitude He has toward you. The favor that He has toward Jesus is the favor He has toward you. The love that He has toward His own beloved Son is the love that He has toward you! Think about it! He loves me the same way He loves Jesus. Oh, that's grace! And that's why we need to close by mentioning:

III. The Nature Of Grace Paul describes it in verse 6. He says:

1. it is glorious I don't have words to describe it. There are no words to convey the wonder of grace. We use words like "amazing", "marvelous", "wondrous", and so on. Maybe this year someone will write a new song, "awesome grace" or something. Just to think that the God who made the universe, Almighty, Holy God, would set His love upon me and choose me and predestine me to share a glorified eternity with Him, even though I was a guilty sinner, lost and bound for hell, that is glorious! And so:

2. it must result in praise Paul says He did all this to the praise of His glorious grace. You know what Romans 8 says? The whole universe is waiting for the unveiling of the sons of God. One day when God unwraps His finished work (us!), not only will we sing His praises, but as the hymn puts it, "The universe with joy shall sing when grace has won the day!"

Paul knew what grace was. A blasphemer and persecutor of the church who tried to stamp it out, God freely gave him grace on that Damascus Road and by grace gifted him to become the greatest apostle Christendom has ever known. *John Newton was the son of a sea captain who was engaged in Mediterranean trade. His mother died when he was 6. After 2 years of formal school, he joined his father's ship at age 11. His early life was one of immorality, debauchery and failure: rejected by his father, in trouble with employers; jailed and degraded. Later he served on slave ships and even became a "slave of slaves" after incurring the hatred of his employer's negro wife. He was brought to his senses by reading "The Imitation of Christ", by Thomas a Kempis. His actual conversion was the result of a violent storm in which he almost lost his life. He became a minister at age 39 and on his tombstone is this epitaph, "John Newton. Clerk: once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy." It was the pen of John Newton which*

gave us the song "Amazing Grace." He knew what a privilege it was to be given grace! Oh my friend, do you? Let's fall at His feet together!

EPHESIANS 1-2: WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Privilege #4: You Were Redeemed And Forgiven 1:7

Thus far we have studied that in Christ you were chosen to holiness, predestined to sonship, and given grace. What more could there be? Well, verse 7 tells us you were REDEEMED and FORGIVEN! Now, like the word grace, those are terms we use all the time. They're in all the hymns that we sing. Yet most of the time I think we just see them as synonyms for being saved or becoming a Christian and never really think what it means that I have been redeemed and I have been forgiven. So, let's start by talking about:

I. The Meaning Of Redemption There are at least four different Greek words translated *redeem* or *redemption* in the New Testament, each with a slightly different shade of emphasis: 1) *agorazo* which means to buy in the marketplace, emphasizing that God PURCHASED you, 2) *exagorazo* which means to buy OUT OF the market (you are off the market, not for sale any longer), emphasizing the permanence of that purchase, 3) *lutrosis* which means to set free or release, emphasizing that God FREED you from something that bound you, and 4) *apolutrosis* which means to free away from, a strengthened form of 3), emphasizing the COMPLETENESS of your freedom. And that is the word used here. All of these words carry two basic elements of meaning:

1. it means to set free from bondage It may in some instances be the bondage of debt or in others the bondage of slavery or even the bondage of prison or a sentence of judgment. But, however it is used, the person or the object is in bondage and is set free, released. But also:

2. it means by the paying of a price or ransom There are a lot of ways to set somebody free. You can liberate a captive by physical force, by helping the prisoner escape. But these words all mean to set free by the paying of a price. A ransom is paid. Something of great value is given in exchange for freedom. So, now let's talk about:

II. The Nature Of Your Redemption Your bondage, of course, was not physical but spiritual. It was a bondage to sin. In fact, there are three kinds of bondage you experienced, three ways in which you were bound. And so, there are three ways in which you have now been set free in Christ. First you have:

1. freedom from the penalty of sin, that is, forgiveness or justification Now in order to illustrate the various aspects of the freedom you have, I'd like to look at some illustrations of things that were redeemed under the Old Testament law as examples. There was, for example, the redemption of a forfeited life in Ex. 21:29-30. Here is a man whose life is forfeit. He has committed a crime of neglect by refusing to chain up or destroy his destructive animal and it has killed another man. By inference HE has killed another man and the penalty is death. The sentence is proclaimed and it hangs over his head. He is going to die. He is going to be put to death. He has only one hope: that he might be redeemed, that a ransom might be paid to spare his life, to give him his life back again. And, my friend, that's exactly:

a. the nature of your penalty Before you came to Christ, you were a criminal condemned to die. God had pronounced sentence, *The soul that sinneth, it shall die!* You were guilty. Your life was forfeit for all eternity. The only prospect before you was eternal hell. And you were bound to that penalty. You could not escape it. No matter how good you were and how many nice things you did, you could not erase the crime nor remove the eternal penalty. But by dying in your place, Christ took the penalty upon Himself. He paid the price to redeem you from the forfeiting of your life by giving you His own. And redemption in that sense, verse 7 calls forgiveness.

b. the nature of your forgiveness The word *forgive* means to send away. To forgive sins means to send away their penalty. In the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement there was a scapegoat. Actually, there were two goats. The leaders would confess the sins of the people over them and symbolically transfer their sins to the goats. Then the one goat would die to show the price of the redemption from sin's penalty. And the other goat would be led out into the wilderness and released never to be seen again, symbolizing that by means of death the sins were separated from Israel and removed completely. The freedom was complete. Redemption means you are absolutely, completely FREE from the guilt and penalty of your sins! The sentence is lifted. Rom. 8 says *there is therefore NO CONDEMNATION to those who are in Christ Jesus!* You will never suffer the penalty for a single sin that you have committed throughout your whole life in eternity. You don't have to wait and worry until you die to see whether God's going to be in a forgiving mood. Christ redeemed you from that. You are FREE RIGHT NOW from the penalty of your sin! But that's not the only freedom you have; you have:

2. freedom from the power of sin, that is, victory or sanctification In the Old Testament we have another example, the redemption of a slave in Lev. 25:47-49. Here's a man who, for whatever reason, extensive debt, unexpected emergency needs or foolish spending or whatever, has fallen under the control of another man. He has forfeited his ability to control his own life and it has been given to another. He has become a slave. And his only hope is redemption, that somehow the price can be paid which will set him free and give him back control over his own life. Now, you may never have realized it but the Bible says clearly that before you were saved, you were a slave!

a. the nature of your slavery - Rom. 6:17 You and I used to be slaves to sin! What does that mean? It means that the principle of sin was our master; it controlled us. We committed sins because the drive to sin or the law of sin was inside us and thoroughly saturated every part of us and, even though we tried hard to fight it much of the time, we couldn't win. At the bottom line, it controlled us! You were a slave to the nature and principle within you. You had no control! Your only hope was to be redeemed from that slavery. And Christ did that; look at verse 18:

b. the nature of your freedom - Rom. 6:18 Christ set you free from that slavery. How did He do that? He killed that old nature inside of you and gave you a brand new one, one that is pure and holy and righteous like His. And by identifying you with Him in His death, he made you dead to sin. You are set free from its power; it no longer has control over you. You don't have to sin! If you do it anyway, it's your choice. You have victory over the power of sin in your daily life; you're free! You're not doomed to the empty way of life that was passed down to you by your fathers; you have freedom to live God's way because you've been redeemed from sin's power. But that's not all the freedom you have in Christ. One day you'll have:

3. freedom from the presence of sin, that is, liberty or glorification Look at this Old Testament illustration, the redemption of a possession in Lev. 25:25-26. Here's a man who owns a piece of land, but because he's in debt for whatever reason, he's been forced to sell that land to a stranger. It was his possession, but it was not his to use or to have completely. Somebody else lived on it or farmed it and used it. Unless it could be redeemed. Unless a price could be paid by him or someone else that would fulfill that obligation and return it to him. Now, instead of imagining that you are the owner, this time pretend that God's the owner and you're the piece of land, that you're the possession. And then read verse 14 to see:

a. the nature of your current state - Eph. 1:14 A number of times when the word *redemption* is used, it is used in the future sense, pointing to that time of Christ's return. Your current state is something like that land. Though the payment has been made and your freedom has been bought, God is still not in complete possession of you. The presence of sin still dwells in your body. Your spirit is redeemed; it's free, but your body isn't. Compare Rom. 8:21-23. This lifetime is one of groaning. It is one of longing to be free, free from the effects of sin altogether. But one grand and glorious day Jesus Christ is going to call you unto Himself and accomplish what you've been waiting for, the redemption of your body, when it too is set free! And look what it says about that:

b. the nature of your future state Rom. 8:21b, 23b Right now we have the first fruits; we have the down payment, the guarantee. We have the Holy Spirit present in us. But we're waiting for the glorious liberty of total redemption when our bodies are redeemed totally from the presence of sin and it can't touch us anymore! My friend, you are COMPLETELY FREE if you are in Jesus Christ today! You are from sin's awful penalty, you are free from its awesome power and you have the guarantee that one day you'll even be free from its annoying presence! You are delivered, set free, REDEEMED! But verse 7 also tells us there was a price.

III. The Price Of Your Redemption: His Blood A price was paid. A ransom was put forth. There was a cost to provide that redemption for you and the price was the blood of Jesus Christ. The price was that He laid down His life for yours! Now, you can only fully appreciate redemption if you understand the value of the price that was paid to procure it. In this case you need to see:

1. the eternal nature of the price - 1 Pet. 1:18-19 Notice the contrast here between being redeemed by corruptible things or a precious thing. The Greek word for *precious* means "of great value". Silver and gold are corruptible things, things that are perishing. Do you see the contrast? What is truly valuable is what is lasting. Silver and gold may buy an earthly slave freedom out of an earthly bondage, but they are not nearly valuable enough to buy somebody out of slavery to sin. They are temporary and perishing. The blood of Jesus is precious because it is eternal, forever. The value of His life given for us is infinite and therefore, so is:

2. the eternal nature of the benefit - Heb. 9:12 What kind of redemption did His blood purchase for us? ETERNAL. Our redemption is not just freedom from this thing, until the next thing comes along. It is ETERNAL REDEMPTION. I AM FREE FOREVER AND EVER. I WILL NEVER BE A SLAVE AGAIN. NOBODY AND NOTHING CAN PUT ME IN BONDAGE EVER BECAUSE I'M FREE! And then be sure to look at verse 7 again and check the tense, because that tells you:

IV. The Possession Of Your Redemption: Now WE HAVE redemption, present tense. You have it right now. You may be waiting for the final piece of it to be delivered, but it was paid for up front in advance. It is all yours, every bit of it, right now. You don't have to wait to be set free. You're free now, and even being set free from the presence of sin is guaranteed to you because Jesus shed His blood to pay the price and gave you the Holy Spirit as a down payment guaranteeing that which is to come. *In the pre-civil war South, a slave could be redeemed; he could be set free or buy his freedom. And then he was given "free man's papers" signed by his former owner which told the world he was a free man.* My friend, here in Ephesians are your "free man's papers". You are free! And they are signed by God Almighty! And finally note how you got that way. How did God do it?

V. The Method Of Your Redemption: In Him He took you and placed you into Jesus Christ so that when He died, you died and the penalty of your sins was exacted, leaving you free. When He rose victorious, you rose with Him to a brand-new life with a new spirit in you that is free from sin. And when He ascended on high and sat down, you ascended with Him and are seated with Him there, guaranteeing your actual arrival there in His full image one day. It's all IN HIM. He is your life. He is your redemption. You are set free.

G. Campbell Morgan told of a miner who came to him at the close of one of his services and said, "I'd give anything to believe that God would forgive my sins. But I just can't accept the idea that all I have to do is trust Him. It's too cheap." Morgan looked at him, "My dear friend, have you been working today?" "Yes, I was down in the pit." "Did you pay to get back out?" "Of course not. It didn't cost me anything. I just got in the cage and was pulled to the top." "But weren't you afraid? Wasn't the ride too cheap?" "Oh no," he said. "The ride was free, but the company paid a lot of money to sink the shaft and make it safe." Suddenly the truth broke upon the miner's soul. He saw that salvation was free. But he also realized that it had cost God a tremendous price to come down from Heaven and rescue fallen man. My friend you have absolute freedom today and you have it absolutely free. Live in it, enjoy it, utilize it, claim it, but never, ever forget the price that was paid to obtain it.

EPHESIANS 1-2: WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Privilege #5: You Were Given Wisdom 1:8-10

Let me review the first four privileges that you have in Christ.

- (1) you were chosen to holiness (4)
- (2) you were predestined to sonship (5)
- (3) you were given grace (6)
- (4) you were redeemed and forgiven (7)

And now we come to the fifth privilege in verses 8-10. **YOU WERE GIVEN WISDOM!** Now, let me ask you this. Did you understand what those verses say? Those are 3 deep verses, the kind you'll read over and often ignore in your devotions. However, if we will subject them to study and cross-reference, they yield up to us some very important truths. First, they tell us that we as believers in Christ have:

I. The Privilege Of Receiving Wisdom (8) Now, there's something I should tell you that I haven't yet. In the Greek, verses 3-14, which list our privileges, are all a single, long, run-on sentence. There are no periods. In fact, it was originally unpunctuated. That's why you have the marginal notes in the NIV at verses 6 and 8. It's hard to tell whether words belong to the phrase before or after them sometimes. It's hard to tell whether verse 8 is saying that God lavished His grace on us with all wisdom, or whether, as the margin suggests, with all wisdom He made known to us the mystery of His will. Both things are obviously true. God obviously has all wisdom and He used it in dispensing His grace to us. But the point verses 8-10 seem to be making is the opposite, that God has given us all wisdom and understanding to know His will. We have the privilege of having received the very wisdom and understanding of God. Now, let's examine the words to see:

1. what it is There are two distinct words here:

a. wisdom (*sophia*) is insight into the nature of things From this we get our word *sophomore* (wise one). It seems to indicate more than just knowing an abundance of facts. An encyclopedia merely has knowledge, not wisdom. Wisdom is insight into the way things really are and the meaning of them. Let me try to illustrate the difference at a simple level. Knowledge is knowing the fact that a skunk walked into your office. Wisdom is the insight to realize that this event will have a profound impact upon your life. It will ruin that newsletter you planned to write this afternoon and put production behind schedule. It will ruin the lovely dinner you had planned for this evening. In fact, it may ruin the entire relationship you have with your girlfriend. Wisdom is seeing the true meaning and nature of things and the consequences they have.

b. understanding (*phroneo*) is knowing how to act in light of your insight Knowledge says, "There's a skunk". Wisdom realizes, "This will ruin your life". And understanding says, "If you scream, he'll squirt you; you'd best feed him the sandwich you packed for lunch and edge quietly out the door and go home early". Now, we have received both wisdom and understanding. God has not given us all the facts there are to have in the world. We couldn't contain them in our finite minds. But He has given to us wisdom, not just in the simple terms I've described, but in terms of having genuine insight into the nature and meaning of life and of mankind and of the world we live in. In our generation alone the human race has gathered reams of information, volumes upon volumes of facts about life and about man and about the natural world. But man in himself has no real wisdom about these kinds of things. A relative dragged me to a seminar one time where they talked on and on about what it meant to be "truly human". But at the bottom line they had no idea as to what man was really like in his nature; in fact they had no idea what the purpose of life was nor where the world was headed. And the room was filled with high level management executives. The Mayor of Philadelphia was even there as a participant. And so, they had developed an understanding of how to act that was totally flawed, that behavior is neither good nor evil; it is simply constructive to the purpose of building human relationships or not. Whatever you do is OK. But there may be better or more useful ways to act. It sounds good. But it makes clear to me this fact which God long ago recorded: *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of*

God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." - 1 Cor. 2:14. They don't have it and can't get it. But WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN IT! How?

2. how we get it: in Christ There is a lovely passage over in Colossians that helps to explain this. It says that:

a. all wisdom is found in Him - Col. 2:2-3 He is the treasury, the storehouse in which all the valuable, precious things, both facts and meanings, knowledge and wisdom, are carefully stored up and hidden away. Just like you would take your precious jewels and cash and bonds and hide them all in a carefully chosen spot, your treasury, so all the precious treasures of wisdom are found in Christ, who, because He is God, not only knows everything but knows the meaning and purpose of everything and how to act accordingly. So, all of this is IN HIM. And where is He? IN US! That's why it says:

b. He IS our wisdom - 1 Cor. 1:24, 30 To us He has become our everything. By His presence in us, He has become our power to act. but He has also become our wisdom to know! So, the obvious implication of this to me is that GROWTH IN WISDOM DOES NOT COME SIMPLY FROM GATHERING INFORMATION; IT COMES FROM A DEEPENING KNOWLEDGE OF HIM! That's what Paul prayed for the Colossians, that they would have a growing knowledge of HIM. That's why James writes that if you lack wisdom you should ask of God and He will give it to you. The closer and more intimate your relationship with Christ, the more you will know about spiritual things, the more of those hidden things He will reveal to you. Your growth in wisdom, in understanding the meaning of things and in how to act accordingly will be directly proportional to the depth of the relationship you develop with Him! Now, while we're on the subject of getting wisdom, notice in verse 8:

3. how much we get You see, when we get Christ, we don't just get SOME wisdom:

a. we get ALL wisdom Look at **1 Cor. 2:10-16** with me. Did you see what we have? Since we have CHRIST, we have the MIND OF CHRIST in us. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ indwelling us, so the very MIND OF CHRIST, the storehouse of all that wisdom, is right there inside us, all the deep things of God. They are all there, even though the Spirit chooses what and how much to reveal to us according to our need. But we have it all! We have all we need. In fact:

b. we have more than enough He LAVISHED His grace on us in all wisdom and understanding. He POURED IT OUT. He caused it to superabound, to fill up and flow over! What a comfort that is! If we need wisdom in life, we can cry out to God who is right inside us and He will never rebuke us for wanting to know, but will give us what we need to know liberally! He's not stingy with it! It may not come instantly. It may take weeks and months, sometimes years, for God to prepare us to understand what we want to know, but it is all there and the closer we get to Him, the more we'll know. Now, in verses 9-10 Paul goes on to talk about:

II. The Special Wisdom We Have Received (9-10) There is a particular aspect of God's wisdom that we know that is very important and yet the world has no idea of it. You see:

1. God has revealed to us a secret, a mystery, something that was hidden to all the generations before Christ came into the world, something that remains hidden even today to all the great minds of the world who are without Christ. And here's:

2. what that secret is Let me spell out the ideas in these verses in simple outline form for you. First, He has revealed to us that:

a. the whole universe is ordered toward a time goal All of history, all of the existence of the world, is moving toward a particular point, a specific goal. Paul tells us:

(1) there will be a time of completion The world has had many times, many eras, many ages or epochs. But they all point toward a fulfillment, a completion, actually toward a single day that we know as the return of Christ, when Jesus Christ visibly becomes King of Kings and Lord of Lords over the entire universe. Now, that in itself is contrary to anything that mankind thinks. He doesn't think the universe is going anywhere. It is evolving and changing who knows where and the best we can do is to help make it a better place in some small way. But, my friend, on the calendar of God there is a day marked down when all of history, when all of the universe will come to experience what it was created for. Jesus talked about it in Mt. 19:28. He said, *At the renewal (or regeneration) of all things when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne...* When Jesus sits visibly on His throne the whole universe will be renewed, recreated, remade. Peter said in his sermon in Acts 3:21, *Christ must remain in heaven until the time comes to restore everything...* that is, for everything to be returned to its originally intended state, the way God wants it ultimately to be. There is a time on God's calendar when that glorious event will happen and:

(2) God is managing everything toward that time He is orchestrating and administering all of human history, all of the events in the world, arranging and governing them toward that day, the same way that you might manage all the affairs of your household toward a particular event like a wedding. You see, God didn't just wind the universe up and let it run. He is executing a plan from beginning to end; He has a will that is being carried out.

And it all culminates in that one time, that one day, in the exaltation of His Son. Now, what's going to happen at that time?

b. at that time Christ will be the sum of all things is literally what it says. The verb in verse 10, *to bring together* literally means the sum or total of a column of figures, which in those days would be written at the top of the column. When you "add up" everything in heaven and earth, everything in the whole universe, it all will all add up to Christ. What does that mean? It means, as the NIV says, that:

(1) all things will be placed under Him - Phil. 2:9-11 says that *God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* And on that day that is going to happen. Everything in creation is going to submit itself to the Lordship of Christ and fall under His direct control and further, it means that:

(2) all things will be restored in Him - Rom. 8:18-21 The entire physical universe is wrecked and ruined by sin and it is groaning and decaying. It is waiting expectantly for the same change you and I are waiting for, to be released from the bondage of decay and the anarchy and distortion that was brought on by sin and be restored to what it was created for! The universe is going to be put back the way it was created to be. Human beings will relate to God the way they were created to be. Everything will be summed up and focused in relationship to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! What a day! It's a mystery, a secret that the world doesn't know about. But the wisdom of God has revealed it to us! What for? So that we might, because of the wisdom given to us, live in hope, so that we might live in the confidence that God's will and plan are in place, that the universe and our lives ARE on track and all of it is going toward that seemingly impossible goal. Oh, some days it doesn't seem that way, does it? Some days life doesn't seem to have that meaning and purpose; it doesn't seem to make sense, to go anywhere, but God is still at work orchestrating the whole thing toward one goal, the day when Jesus is exalted.

In India many years ago there was a war. A young soldier was assigned the difficult task of carrying a heavy gun to the top of a high and brushy overgrown hill, a strategic but inaccessible location. After trying three times, the recruit returned to his superior saying, "The mission is impossible!" He replied "Impossible? Impossible? Why, I've got an order for it right here in my pocket!" So the soldier went out and faced the seemingly impossible hill again and this time made it to the top. Oh, sometimes life seems almost like an impossible mountain, like what God has called us to face or to do is a task beyond us, like our life doesn't make sense and God doesn't really know what He's doing. But I've got a Book that says it does here in my hand, a Book that tells me that the plan of God is at work and will not be thwarted and ultimately will come together in the exaltation of Christ. And that same Jesus is already in me with all the wisdom and understanding I'll ever need. Be encouraged, dear friend; one day that plan will come together and with the whole universe you will bow and confess that Jesus is Lord, high and lifted up!

EPHESIANS 1-2: WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Privilege #6: You Were Made His Inheritance 1:11-14

The sixth and final privilege we'll study in the first 14 verses of Ephesians is this: You were not only chosen to holiness, predestined to sonship, given grace, redeemed and forgiven, and given wisdom; you were made His inheritance! Now we need to talk about:

I. The Concept Of Being Made An Inheritance, because when I say the word *inheritance*, immediately you think of something YOU're going to get someday. You think of passages like 1 Pet. 1:4 which says that God has given us new birth *into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you.* Passage after passage talks about YOUR inheritance, the things God has prepared for YOU in heaven. But that's not what I want to talk about this morning and that's not what the verses of our text are really talking about, even though in our English translation it may seem so at first. In verse 11 the NIV says, *chosen*. But in the margin it says, *made heirs*. The KJV says, *obtained an inheritance*. The Greek word *kleroo* used here is used only one time (here) in the New Testament and it means to assign a portion by the casting of lots. And it is in the passive voice, so it is something done TO us. Literally, it means that WE have been chosen or assigned as God's portion, as God's possession, as God's inheritance. You see, the Bible declares very plainly that God Himself has an inheritance and that:

1. God's inheritance is His people To really understand Paul's concept, you have to understand:

a. the Old Testament concept: Israel - Deut. 32:9 This is an ahead-of-time reference to the way Moses and then Joshua were told to divide up the land of Canaan. Each tribe was assigned an inheritance, a portion to possess for themselves, by casting lots. Now understand that this was not simply an impartial way of choosing (like "let's flip for it"), but it was Israel's way of letting God choose. They had the "Urim and Thummim" kept in the High Priest's breastplate which were cast as a means of showing God's will. So, God by this process assigned an allotted portion to each of the 12 tribes which would become their possession forever. And then God turns around and says, "And I also have chosen a portion, a possession, an inheritance for Myself; it is YOU, Israel! What I choose for Myself is

not a plot of ground, not even a vast kingdom, not even great wealth. I have chosen YOU to be My special possession forever." Now look to Eph. 1:18 and see:

b. the New Testament concept: the saints (18) It is not FOR the saints or TO the saints but IN the saints. We who believe, the church of Jesus Christ are God's chosen possession, God's inheritance, God's treasure, His riches! Now pause and let that concept sink in a little while I point out that:

2. God's inheritance is not yet completely possessed (14) When the 12 tribes were assigned their portions, they owned them but did not fully possess the use of them immediately. Some of those sections were still under the control of Canaanites that had to be driven out, so the land could be finally freed and actually occupied. Then later when the Israelites did occupy it and it was divided up to individuals, each man got his inheritance, but the occupation of it could be lost. A man could end up in debt and have to sell it or forfeit it. It remained his but it was under the control of another until it was redeemed, until a sum was paid and it was set free and returned to his control or until the year of Jubilee came when every portion was returned to its rightful owner. And God's inheritance is like that. We are His possession; we belong to Him. We have been bought with a price. But we have not been fully and completely possessed yet. Sin still dwells in us; still has a claim on our bodies. But there will come a day of redemption, that day Rom. 8:23 talks of, when we are placed fully in the position of sons through the redemption of our bodies. So, as His inheritance, our eyes are fixed on and waiting anxiously for that day when He redeems us and possesses us completely. God does not yet have His treasure completely in hand. But He has done some wonderful things to make sure that He will. Let's talk about:

II. The Stages Of Being Made An Inheritance Three things happened to you that made you God's inheritance. First:

1. you were chosen to become God's inheritance (11) In eternity past before the foundation of the world God selected and chose you in Christ to be part of that treasure composed of a portion of the human race that God would enjoy with Himself forever and ever. Now just imagine:

a. the privilege of selection What a joy to think that God's treasure, the thing He has chosen to be His and enjoy forever is ME! Out of all the wonders of creation, the galaxies of stars and planets, the beautiful hills and mountains, all of the graceful animals, He chose people to be His. The thing He really loves, really wants, is people. And of all the people that have lived, of all the geniuses and kings and generals, of all the beautiful and handsome and talented people the race has ever produced, He chose ME to be His portion! And He did it before I ever existed and knowing everything I would ever do. Hallelujah! What a privilege to be His inheritance! But that inheritance has not yet been made up completely and finally possessed. God hasn't got me all the way yet. I am chosen to be His inheritance, but what is it that makes sure that I will actually BE His inheritance on that day when Jesus comes? It is:

b. the surety of predestination God has determined that it will be so ahead of time. And God has this wonderful thing that none of us have. He makes a decision or a plan and then has the power to make everything work out according to that plan! God has DETERMINED that I am His inheritance, His portion to enjoy and HE WILL HAVE ME, because He works out all things in the universe according to His will. Nothing can escape it! So that was stage one. God CHOSE you in eternity past. Then, there was a time when:

2. you were included in God's inheritance (13a) It was chosen to be true of you before you ever existed in eternity past, but in the working out of that plan there was a time when you were actually and actively included in God's inheritance. And it happened through a three-fold process:

a. the process: First there was:

(1) hearing You heard the word of truth, the Good News of your salvation, that salvation had been already provided for you through Jesus Christ. Then came:

(2) trusting You believed. You trusted what you heard. You said, "It is true and I want it" and trusted Jesus Christ to save you and, in the instant that you trusted, you were included, placed in Christ and then came:

(3) marking God marked you as His own with the seal of the Holy Spirit, signifying that you were included. We'll spend more time on this in a second, but just notice:

b. the time of inclusion: at salvation You were chosen in eternity past to be His inheritance, but your actual inclusion as part of it came to pass the moment you trusted in Christ. You were sealed as His, right then and there. You don't have to wait or hope for it later. It is an accomplished thing right now and that mark, the Holy Spirit, was already applied the moment you believed. Don't you let anybody tell you that you don't have Him if you know you have Christ! You became everything you're ever going to become and got everything you're ever going to get the moment you believed! So, you were chosen and then you were included and then in that same moment:

3. you were sealed to guarantee God's inheritance (13b-14) Today we don't know much about seals. To us a seal is a slimy animal you see at the zoo or what you do to a Zip-loc bag or a letter. But we still have seals of a similar va-

riety to the biblical pattern. A notary public has a legal seal to verify documents. This church has a corporate seal that we use on legal documents to verify them. In those days all men of stature had a seal, a ring with a distinctive carved image on it which could be pressed into clay or wax and give official authority to what it was located on. A seal was used much like our concept of a signature. Now, when God included us in His inheritance, He stamped us with His seal:

a. the identity of our seal: the Holy Spirit The Holy Spirit did not seal us; He Himself is the seal. God marked us in a way that separated us out from all other human beings by placing in us His Holy Spirit. Now why?

b. the purpose of our seal The Holy Spirit was placed in us for many reasons, but in this sense, He is three things:

(1) He is a mark of ownership: God's title Seals are often found on clay jug handles and pots as a mark of ownership. The seal says, "This belongs to so and so". God's placing the Holy Spirit in us says we are His property, that we are His possession; we belong to Him and no one dare claim us or touch us or try to take us out of His hand for we are His. Secondly:

(2) He is a mark of approval: our assurance In 1 Cor. 9:2 Paul says the Corinthians were the seal of his apostleship, the proof that he really was a God-ordained apostle. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to us a proof-mark that we are His. The fact that the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16) bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God is proof to us that we belong to God. The fact that He works through us and empowers us and works His gifts through us and bears His fruit in us is our continuing assurance and proof that we belong to God, that we are indeed His inheritance. And finally:

(3) He is a mark of security: God's guarantee Pilate's seal was placed on Christ's tomb as a mark of security. It could not be opened or altered. It was secure. Compare 4:30. The Holy Spirit is our seal for the day of redemption; He is God's guarantee, not that WE will GET an inheritance as verse 14 seems to read, but that GOD will get HIS INHERITANCE which is US. A guarantee is simply a commitment that says you absolutely will get the merchandise you paid for. Listen, God paid for you and God is going to get you! The Holy Spirit's presence in you guarantees it! You see, the Holy Spirit is actually God Himself and the Bible says He has come into your spirit and literally joined Himself to your spirit so that you are ONE and inseparable. That's what guarantees that God will have you and enjoy you forever! Now, in closing let's consider this. Why would God want us for an inheritance anyway?

III. The Reason For Being Made An Inheritance: Praise (12, 14b) It's simple. It is all for the praise of His glory. God's glory is the awesome splendor of everything that God is and has done. On that day when the veil is lifted and Jesus returns and God's finished, polished possession, His church, is presented to Him, what will be evident is the greatness of His person, His glory. And when His glory is fully revealed, it will result in praise by His creatures. First:

1. we will praise His glory Read the book of Revelation and watch what you're going to do when you get there. The 24 elders fall down and worship and say, "Holy..." The saints all sing a new song unto God. In chapter 19 they sing the Hallelujah chorus to the Lord together. Oh, we'll spend eternity praising His glory which He demonstrated in choosing us and including us and sealing us and then finally redeeming us fully! But it will not only be us:

2. the universe will praise His glory - Rom. 8:18-19 tells us that the whole universe is waiting for that moment when the Sons of God are revealed, when God takes the wraps off His finished inheritance, His most precious possession, and says to the universe, "Here, look at this and see My glory." **2 Thes. 1:7-10** says His is coming on that day *to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at [IN] all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*

Oh, God wants to take you and me and hold us up and display us before a watching universe which will ooh and aah in wonder at God's glory in doing such a thing. My friend, this includes you, if you know Christ. God chose you, included you, and marked you as His. You are a trophy of His grace. You may not look like much right now. I knew an older guy whose hobby was restoring antique cars. He would take what looked like the ugliest piece of junk from the 40's and 50's with rust and dents all over and roll it into his shop. And when he was all done with it, it emerged as a thing of beauty with shining paint and plush upholstery, a joy to the eye, and you would say, "Wow, that's beautiful" without even thinking about it! And he was proud to display it because its beauty told something about who he was. Each car was a trophy of his own ability. You are God's trophy. And when He is done with you in that day, you will shine like no trinket on earth ever did. You will reflect His glory. And the universe will erupt in praise to God for you will display the splendor of God. If those antique cars had feelings and could talk, how wonderful and privileged they would feel to belong to that man and to be the trophies of his work. I cannot even imagine how wonderful and privileged we will feel to be the trophies of God's grace.

EPHESIANS 1-2: WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

Your Experience: What You Need To Know 1:15-23

In studying the first 15 verses of chapter 1 we talked about your PRIVILEGES in Christ. Now we're going to cover the text through 2:10 and talk about your EXPERIENCE in Christ. When you came to faith in Jesus, it was not simply an intellectual decision to believe. It was an experience you had in which all kinds of wonderful things occurred both inside you and concerning you. It was kind of like the experience of being born. When you were born, incredible things happened to you. You emerged into a whole new world you had never seen before. You went from living in water to breathing air. You quit taking in nutrients through your navel and started to drink with your mouth. You could see light for the first time and hear sounds clearly. Now, it took years for you to understand that experience, but it happened to you nonetheless. The same is true of your new birth in Christ. It was a tremendous, momentous experience, even more radical than your physical birth, and you are not prepared right away to understand it. With most of us it takes years to get any kind of an in-depth understanding of that experience and to learn to appropriate all that we received through that experience. Now, Paul was a praying man. He prayed for all the churches he had planted and he prayed regularly for the Ephesians. And in verses 15-17 he tells us what he prayed for them and, by extension, for us. You see, Paul recognized that your chief need and mine is not to be healthy or to be happy or even to be busy:

I. You Need To Know Him Better (15-19) The Ephesians were a mature, well-grounded church. They were doctrinally sound and busy working for Christ. They were not unlike us. One would think that what they needed was success in the ministry. Paul says, "No, I pray that you will know Him better! That's what you need!" I don't care who you are, what office you hold in the church, how long you've been saved, or how much Bible education you've had. You and I have one and the same greatest need, no matter what we think we may need: to KNOW HIM BETTER! Paul revealed his own deepest desire and need when he said in Phil. 3:10, *...that I may KNOW Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings*. And that's what you and I need. Now let me mention:

1. the way you need to know Him (17-18a) First:

a. you need a proper mental understanding of the facts You need God to reveal to you the things about Him and about yourself that you need to know, through His Word and through other people. Much of what we know or think we know about God has been "caught" along the way in bits and pieces from things we've heard people say to us or impressions we've had through the things we've experienced. And not all of those things are right. For instance, you may have been raised in a very legalistic background and have this picture of God as the Heavenly Rulekeeper that you have to please somehow so that He doesn't crack your knuckles with His heavenly ruler. Or you may have been given just the opposite picture, that God is so nice and so loving that He would never punish anybody for anything. It is absolutely vital that you know the truth about who God is and what He is like and what He is doing and He reveals that to you gradually over the years as you read His Word and as you are taught by others who know Him. But you need more than an academic understanding of knowing the facts:

b. you need a deep heart experience of the Person Many years ago I married LuAnn. I didn't know her very well at that time. We had known each other a lot less than I now recommend to all our young couples! However, as a married couple we spent time with each other. We experienced the things that happened to us together and reacted to and with each other. Now we can almost read what the other is thinking at a given time. It's uncanny and yet I'm still getting to know her better; I'm learning things about her even now that I never knew before. And so it is with God. You need to walk with Him and talk with Him in the garden of life and in each event that happens as you run to Him He lets you experience for yourself more of His love, His power, His sovereignty, His heart, or whatever. You need that process to be happening to you. The shame of it is that there are lots of saved people walking around who know that they are saved, but have never really gotten to know their Savior in an experiential way and the result is that they have never grown much, so God cannot use them very much. Now, Paul points out three of:

2. the things you particularly need to know about Him (18b-19a) in order to live this life properly. First, you need to know:

a. the future which He has planned for you, ...the hope to which He has called you. Hope in the Bible is usually a reference to the future that God has planned for us. To many of us and even to me too many times, heaven is sort of a vague thing; my eternal future is kind of a happy, but blurry, ethereal concept. However, there have been a few Christians I have known over the years who talk about heaven as though it is a real place (which it is) and about their new body as something they're really going to have (which they are) and about their Savior as Someone they're really going to see (which they are). When they faced death, it was not with fear, but with certainty and anticipation. Friend, you need that and I need that! We need to know Him in such an in-depth way that He becomes more real to us than the people we see each day, that spiritual things become more real to us than the house we live in and the job we have now. Oh, if you really knew the hope to which He has called you, you would live so much differently; so many of the things that take your time and attention would take second place to things that really matter. Then in order to live properly you must know:

b. the value which He has placed on you, ...*the riches of His GLORIOUS inheritance in the saints*. That's what we talked about when we were dealing with your privileges. Oh, you are His riches, His inheritance, His precious treasure. You and others like you who believe are the thing that He values most in the entire universe, the thing on which He has set His heart. And everything in His entire plan for the whole world has always been and is now pointed at one goal, to create through faith a people for His own possession, to bring many, many sons and daughters to glory with Him forever. That is God's value system and you need to understand that. Then thirdly, you must know:

c. the power which He has placed in you, the mighty resource which He has made available to you to live the life He has called you to. That's the subject Paul goes on to talk about in verses 19-22 and that's what I'd like to spend the rest of our time this morning talking to you about:

II. You Need To Know His Power (19-22) Understanding, experiencing, and appropriating the power of God is the very foundation of the true Christian life. Now, in verse 19 we have:

1. the description of that power (19) It's not so obvious in English, but in the Greek Paul uses in this verse every word at his disposal for power. He says:

a. it is a superior power (*uperballon megeqos*) It "throws further in greatness" than any other. It is far above and beyond any other power; no other power in the universe, no physical power, no material energy, no spiritual force, not even Satan, has anything close to it. It is omnipotent power. Secondly:

b. it is a capable power (*dunamis*) This is the Greek from which we get "dynamite". It means to have inherent ability, to be able. God's power means that He's able. We sing it, don't we? "He's able, He's able, I know He's able..." Compare 3:20. God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine! Then:

c. it is an effective power (*energe*) That's energy. Energy is power at work doing things, having an effect, accomplishing things. Phil. 2:13 says, *for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*. God's power is at work in you, it gives you thoughts and actions. It is involved and at work in every area of your life. It works in your behalf. Fourth:

d. it is a mighty power (*iscus*) This word means strong and speaks of sheer overwhelming strength. He is the Mighty God! No one can compare to Him for sheer might. Here it's an adjective modifying the next word:

e. it is a dominating power (*kratos*) This is power which dominates, which controls things. It is sovereign power, power which takes charge.

Words can't do it justice. Power like God's can't be just talked about and described; it must be experienced, so God gave to us once and for all:

2. the demonstration of that power (19b-22) in Jesus Christ. What did God do by His mighty power? Well, first:

a. He raised Christ from the dead He took a dead man who had lain in the tomb until the third day and made Him live again. There is no miracle in the natural realm which strikes us like this one. In all our experience there is one thing we are sure of, a corpse will not get up. We can take life away, but try as hard as we can, we cannot give life once it is gone. Compare **Acts 2:22-24, 31**. God's power did that! Yet not only did He raise Christ by His power, but:

b. He seated Christ at His right hand He transformed and glorified Him and caused Him to ascend to heaven and sat Him down on the throne at His right hand! And that, my friend is not simply a choice seat, it is a place of authority, of equality with the Father. So, by His power:

c. He exalted Christ above all angelic authorities, above all the rulers of earth, above all the forces which exert themselves on this world, above every name that you can name, past, present, and future. He is set over every other being in this universe and there is not a thing they can do about it because:

d. He subjected all things to Christ He put everything under His feet and made Him Lord. That means everything, not the least of which is the church, you and I, of which He is the head. Think of it. A dead man, a lifeless corpse, yet God has placed Him in control of every being and object in this universe. That is the power of God. There is no power to match it! There is none like it. But go back to the beginning of verse 19 and notice:

3. the direction of that power That same power that was demonstrated in Christ is active in YOU! It is directed toward YOU! It has already worked in you:

a. it saved you from your past When you came to Christ, He did it all over again. He made a dead man live. That's what 2:5 says, He made you alive when you were dead. By His power, He once more brought forth life out of

death -- inside of you. And that's what we'll talk about in the next messages. But that mighty power not only saved you in the past:

b. it supplies your present right now. It is inside you in the person of God the Holy Spirit to deliver you from the POWER of sin, to empower you to live the holy, righteous, pure life God wants you to live. It is in you to live the life God intends for you, whatever that may be. But not only that:

c. it secures your future That power will last into the ages to come. It has already seated you with Christ spiritually and it will see that your body gets there and catches up with it! The same mighty power which saved you and supplies you also secures you forever.

And that, my friend, is the entire key to the Christian life that you need to know. You need to understand and experience and appropriate that mighty power of God in your life right now, today, so that you live by His power and not your own. The Christian life is a supernatural life and it is lived by supernatural means. It is lived by the Divine Power of Almighty God flowing through you as you yield yourself and ask for it moment by moment. And it is also lived by seeing with the eyes of your heart the truth of God rather than looking at the world around you. I heard a pilot who was also a Bible teacher share this illustration one time. There are two ways to fly. You can fly by sight, which is how everybody starts out. You line yourself up by looking at the horizon and at the landmarks which you can see. But your flying is limited by your visibility. But there is another way to fly. You can learn to fly by instruments. And then you can fly in the darkest night or the thickest fog. There are times when you may feel like you're upside down or standing on one wing or like the right way to go is 180 degrees opposite. Yet your instruments tell you the way to go, the way to hold the plane and you trust your instruments and do what they tell you and the power of the plane carries you safely home. However, if you enter that storm and try to do it on your own, by your own understanding and your own ability rather than trusting the instruments and the power of the plane, you'll crash. Just so, there are two ways to live the Christian life. You can live it by sight, make the best estimate in your own knowledge of the way to go and the thing to do. And you might be OK while the weather's clear. But to make it through the storms you've got to really KNOW the Master and trust Him and do what He says and trust His power to get you through. Otherwise, you're in for a real crash. Paul's chief desire was to know Him and know His power. He knew the right way to fly. How are you flying?

EPHESIANS 1-2: Who You Are In Christ

Your Experience: What You Used To Be 2:1-3

Last week I told you that it often takes a long time for a believer to understand and appropriate what happened to him when he came to Christ. That's what we're going to spend the next couple of messages on. First of all, because coming to Christ was an experience that transformed your life, it is utterly impossible to understand what you are now, without understanding what you used to be! Now, all of us probably have a picture that we have painted for ourselves in our minds of what we were like before we were saved. Some of us who have had rather dramatic conversions and colorful pasts have a pretty good idea of how bad we were. We sold drugs, we drank, we cursed, we stole, and did all sorts of sordid things.. We saw a dramatic change in ourselves. However, many more of us had fairly moral, placid pasts. We don't see ourselves as having been "bad" people; we were nice people. We were simply mistakenly trusting in the wrong thing to save us. Indeed, a good many of us were children when we accepted Christ and did not really have any "past" to speak of, so our picture is that we were just cute little kids and fortunately our Christian parents led us to Christ before we could "fall into sin" very far. I don't know what your picture of your own past is, but I'd like to paint another one for you today, the one the Bible paints. I'll tell you up front it's not very pretty and it may be totally unlike the one you've got in your head. It may even make some of you mad. But Eph. 2: 1-3 is the portrait God has carefully painted for you to hang on the wall of your mind to remember what you were like. First of all, He describes for you:

I. The State You Were In: DEAD (1) Most of us read this and think it means that "you used to sin more back then". Let me shock you. You were born dead. Every last one of us is a stillborn child. You say, "What do you mean? I was alive!" God says you were dead. Now, what's death? Compare **4:18**.

1. the definition of death is separation from the life of God You see, God is life. Christ is life. There is no genuine, eternal, forever life apart from Him. And you were born without Him! And not just without Him, but separated from Him. Babies are not like the new computer you buy that come with all the software you need pre-installed inside. You didn't come with God and His life installed inside you. You were separated and cut off from the presence and life of God because sin was inside you. David said in Ps. 51:5, *"I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me!"* And the sin principle that was in you, that was passed to you from your parents, cut you off from the life and presence of God. You were dead, but not in body. Rather:

2. the realm of death was your spirit You are (at least in my understanding) a three part being. You have a body, a soul (mind, will, emotions), and a spirit. The spirit is that internal part of you that is designed to be the place that relates to God, where God is meant to dwell. It is the core of who you really are, your nature. And, instead of being born with

God and His life dwelling there, sin was there; evil was present and God was not. You were spiritually cut off from His life. Now ask me to prove it. Alright:

3. the evidence of death was transgressions and sins Notice the plurals; it means acts of sin. If you were born with spiritual life inside you, before you were able to understand and make conscious choices, you would have lived out of your nature. You would have been loving, kind, gentle, unselfish, sinless. But you were not born like that, were you? Oh, you were cute, but almost as soon as you could act, you were demanding and selfish; you hit other kids and took things from them. You demanded your own way and threw tantrums and had to be TAUGHT to do things that were right, because by nature you did things that were wrong. That's because you were dead inside! You did not become a sinner because you sinned; you sinned because you were already a sinner; you had a nature of sin inside. Now just in case you're worried about babies or children that die, I believe the Bible teaches that God in His mercy takes them to Himself, that He loves little children and that they belong to His kingdom. However, that's not because they are good. It's because they have not yet been made accountable and responsible for their actions.

So, that's the way you were born: dead. What a baby picture, huh! And you stayed that way, no matter how nicely you were trained to behave, until the moment you received Christ and He put His life in you. Now let's talk about:

II. The Way You Lived: WRONG Whether you were 5 or 15 or 50, before you were saved, you lived in slavery. Rom. 6:17 says clearly, *You used to be slaves to sin!* You were not a puppet, exactly, but you were a controlled person, a person being controlled by forces inside and outside himself, driven to do things that were wrong and sinful and ungodly. You were basically controlled in three ways. First of all:

1. you were controlled by the world (2a) There's a good Christian word. Christians have been castigating "the world" for years. But what is it?

a. what the world is: the place/time environment you live in The Greek here is a very peculiar expression, literally, *the age (era) of this world*. You were born at a particular time in history in a particular place in a particular country in a particular culture, to a particular family with a particular background in a particular neighborhood. When you come into this world there is an ordered environmental system all about you which exerts its force upon you from the earliest part of life until the day you die. Before you are saved it dominates and controls you.

b. how it controlled you: you followed its ways You walked on the paths that system had laid out for you. You dressed in the manner it laid out. That's why you wear pants today instead of a kilt, men. You cut your hair according to its patterns. You listened to its music. You were inoculated with its general beliefs and patterns of thought, with its values and customs. And those things were ingrained in you to a great extent, even if you grew up in a Christian home which sheltered you from some of its effects. Unfortunately, as we'll see in a minute, the one who is controlling the thought patterns and systems of the world is Satan. So, the greater majority of the paths that have been laid out for you to walk in by the forces of your environment are self-centered, self-serving, and self-gratifying; they are sinful and opposed to God. But let me ask you this, when you walk through thick brush, where do you walk? Do you make your own path or go down the trails already there? You follow the paths, don't you, because there are too many obstacles to making your own; being different is too hard. And to top it off, inside you there are forces which make you WANT to go down those paths, as we'll see shortly. But at any rate, you were controlled by your particular world and then:

2. you were controlled by the devil (2b) It sounds terrible, doesn't it? We don't like to think of ourselves that way. But look at:

a. who the devil is: the ruler of your environment He is the prince with the authority over the air, that is, the surface of the earth, the world of men. He is called elsewhere the "prince of this world" and the "god of this world". He is the one controlling that world in which you live. What do I mean? Well, name me a society anywhere on the face of the earth that is an Israel, a society where God is in charge, where He sets the paths and the whole culture is dedicated to following Him. It's been tried for a few fleeting moments by little enclaves of Christians here and there, but basically there has never been one. The entire world has always been dominated by Satan and has followed paths that he has laid out. Now, his tactics are different at different places and times. Multiplied millions in Asia have been enslaved for centuries following false paths of religion that he has laid down in Hinduism, Buddhism, and more. Greek and Roman culture were led down a path of pleasure-seeking idolatry, which the USA seems to be bent on repeating. The devil has been allowed control over the systems of this world and he has ordered them in opposition to God. Now let's get personal and talk about:

b. how he controlled you First, the text says he was not only at work in the world *around* you to keep the gospel from getting to you, but:

(1) he worked in you You were one of those called "the disobedient" and he was at work inside you. How? Well, **2 Cor. 4:4** says he blinded your mind to the gospel. He worked in your mind to keep you from understanding spiritual things, from understanding God, from understanding your own condition. If God in His mercy hadn't reached in and turned on the light, things were so dark in there that you never would have seen! Think of how

many years some of you labored trying to please God through religiosity and good works, rather than trusting in Christ. Satan blinded your mind; he worked in you. And then also:

(2) he worked on you For instance, **Heb. 2:14-15** says he made you afraid. He was able to control you through the fear of death. He was able to hold you in slavery, to get you to do what he wanted through fear, particularly through the fear of dying. He could get you to believe wrong things, to worship wrongly, to get involved in all kinds of self-centered, self-preserving things that are ultimately rooted in the fear of dying. He uses many other means as well. One obvious means would be temptation. He knows your inner desires and weaknesses and used them to lure you to sin, much like you can call the horses into the barn by rattling the feed can. **2 Tim. 2:26** says unsaved people become captives of Satan *at his will* (KJV) or *to do his will* (NIV).

So, on many occasions in your life, you sinned; you did wrong, consciously or unconsciously simply because Satan was driving you to it and you weren't even aware of it. Then thirdly:

3. you were controlled by the flesh (3a) The words *sinful nature* in the NIV are always a not-so-good translation of the Greek word *flesh*. Inside you, there was a force controlling and manipulating you in the wrong direction. Now let me give you a simple definition of:

a. what the flesh is: your mind and body indwelt by sin I told you earlier that you have a spirit, a soul (mind, will, emotions), and a body. Another way to view the same thing is to say that you have a spirit and you have flesh, flesh being everything else that is not the spirit. The flesh is your mind, it is your emotions, it is your body with its drives and desires. Think of it as your **self**, the person you were apart from God. Now, the trouble is that your flesh is indwelt by and thoroughly saturated with the principle or force of sin. It is a spiritual force exerted on your being just like gravity is a natural force exerted on your body. Your flesh is not in itself evil, but it is **indwelt** by sin. And even now that you are saved, you still have it. You now have a new spirit, but still have flesh indwelt by sin. Before you were saved, this flesh controlled you and here's:

b. how it controlled you: by producing wrong ways to meet your needs You were born with a set of basic needs, primarily the need for love and acceptance. God created you with those needs so that He could fill them. But since you were born without Him, the sin principle in you began to connive all kinds of ways for you to get those needs met. You began to experiment and see how you could get those needs met and sin provided all kinds of creative solutions.

(1) it produced wrong (selfish) desires For instance, you could feel acceptance and worth by exercising power over others and dominating or controlling them. You could find it through having money and things and possessions, through having an image and a reputation and you name it. You could find the love you needed through performing right for people and doing what they wanted. Or if you didn't get much of it at home, you might try to find it through illicit sexual relations. The flesh produced in you from moment one all kinds of wrong and selfish ways of meeting your own needs, which then, as they were used time and again, became ingrained patterns of living and:

(2) it produced wrong (selfish) patterns of thought along with those desires. You developed wrong ways of looking at yourself and other people, for instance, seeing yourself as more important and treating others as objects to be used to serve your purposes, or being critical of others to make yourself feel better and meet your need for acceptance. It produced wrong views of yourself, as either inferior or superior, worthless or wonderful, and all of the above without God!

To think in practical terms, your flesh became your **old ways**, the ways you used to live because the power of sin in you dominated your life and built habit patterns for surviving and meeting your needs all by yourself without God. So, there you were, spiritually dead at the very core of your being, cut off from the very life of God, living a life where you were being controlled and driven by the world around you, by the devil manipulating you from within and without, and with flesh inside you filling you with desires to serve yourself rather than God. Theologians have a word to describe that. They say you were totally DEPRAVED, completely incapable of doing anything about the sin which completely engulfed you. Now, where we get into trouble is by comparing ourself with others. Nobody is trying to tell you that you were as bad as you could possibly have been or that nothing you ever did was nice or kind and no thought you ever had was positive. The degrees to which each of these things controlled us and the paths into which they led us are as varied as the number of persons in the room. But you see, God is not interested in talking about types and levels of sin, any more than you would be interested in talking about levels of disgustingness and classifications of garbage. Garbage is garbage and sin is sin and people outside of Christ are people outside of Christ. To one degree or another, in one variety or another, they are all the same, dead in spirit, living wrongly because they are without Christ, and here's:

III. The Destiny You Were Headed For: WRATH (3b) The first part of the verse already said that you were among them, the disobedient. You were one of them. Now look what **5:6** says:

1. God's eternal wrath comes upon the disobedient You're talking about all the wrath of God poured out upon sin. Your future contained a one-way trip to a black pit of fire where you would cry out in agony forever and ever. You're talking about eternal death. That wasn't somebody else; that was you. And notice what it says:

2. it was your destiny by nature - John 3:18, 36 Anybody who does not believe is ALREADY condemned. You have to come to Christ to get UN-condemned. The wrath of God REMAINS on all those who reject Christ. They're already under it. It was your natural destiny because of who you were!

And that, my friend, whether you like it or not, whether you agree with it or not, is the picture that God has painted of you. It's not very pretty. In fact, it is downright horrible. But in verse 4 come the two most wonderful words someone like you would ever want to hear: **But God...!** God loved us and God did something about us! He saved us, He rescued us, He delivered us from everything that we used to be and made us something new. *The story is told of a famous blacksmith of medieval times who was taken prisoner and confined in a dungeon. He began to examine the chain that bound him. It had always been his boast that no one could break a chain that he had forged. So he began to examine the chain in order to discover some flaw that might make it easier to break it. As he turned it carefully in his hands, his countenance fell and he let the chain drop in despair. For there on the link were the marks, the initials of his own workmanship.* That's how it was with us. We were bound with a chain we couldn't break. We had a nature we couldn't get rid of and we forged a life of actions that we could neither stop nor erase. And the weight of that chain was pulling us slowly into the pit forever. Today I just want you to sense the despair and hopelessness of that blacksmith, but next week I want you to see how God, the heavenly Blacksmith reached down and cut that chain completely off and set you free! Hallelujah!

EPHESIANS 1-2: Who You Are In Christ

Your Experience: What Happened To You 2:4-7

Last week I painted for you a picture of who you were without Christ from verses 1-3. If you remember, I told you that you were spiritually dead, that you lived a life of slavery, being controlled by the habit patterns of the world around you, by Satan himself, and by the self-serving desires generated by your flesh, and that, as far as eternity is concerned, you were an object of God's wrath, headed for hell. That was a sad but necessary first step in understanding who you are in Christ. Did you ever see one of those diet or exercise program (or hair treatment) commercials where they have before and after pictures? You can only appreciate the "after" picture when you put it beside the "before" picture. Last time I painted your ugly "before" picture. Today in verses 4-7 I want to paint your lovely "after" picture. I want to help you understand:

I. What God Did To You: He SAVED You! in every way. He radically changed you, transformed you, in every sense. He changed your state of being, your way of living, and your eternal destiny all in one fell swoop! To begin with:

1. He gave you a new state of being: ...He made us alive with Christ (5) The KJV had a good old-fashioned word, *quicken*. It means to give life to something dead. The Greek word means to give life together with. When you gave your heart to Christ, God placed you IN Christ, He gave you His life so that what happened to Him happened to you. God made Christ alive and God made YOU alive.

a. the meaning of this new state Now remember:

(1) your former state: dead, which means separated from the life of God (4:18) Your spirit, the core part of you, made as a place for God to dwell, was instead, full of sin and therefore you were cut off, separated from the life of God. But at that moment of salvation, you entered:

(2) your current state: alive, which means joined to the life of God - Rom. 8:10 Your body still has sin dwelling in it, but your spirit became alive. And here's how it happened:

b. the method by which He gave you life It was a radical operation, the spiritual equivalent of a heart transplant:

(1) Christ replaced your old dead spirit with a new one - Col. 2:11 He circumcised your heart. What does that mean? He cut off that old dead sinful spirit and threw it away. He killed it. You died with Christ and in its place, He created a brand new one. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. And **Eph. 4:24** tells us what this new spirit you have is like. It is just like God. It is righteous. It is holy. It is pure. It loves God. It loves to do right. It loves everything that is good and holy and just and hates evil. Now, how did He make this "new you".

(2) Christ entered you and joined His spirit to yours - 1 John 5:11-12 Christ is life. God gives you His eternal everlasting life in a Person, the Person of His Son. He gives you His life by coming and actually dwelling inside you and joining Himself to you. **Rom. 8:11** says His Spirit is joined to yours and He gives life to your old mortal dying body by putting His life in your spirit.

So, begin to get a new picture of yourself. It's like an engine transplant in an old beat-up worn-out car. It had an engine that couldn't run, that was broken and had failed. The parts in it were no good. But the mechanic took it out and put a brand new one inside that purrs like a kitten, perfect. That's you. But that's not all:

2. He gave you a new way of living: ...He raised us with Christ (6a) Now, when it says *raised*, Paul's not talking about the ascension, about being raised up to heaven. The Greek word is the word for resurrection of the dead.

Compare Col. 2:12. And again it is a special verb that means "to raise from the dead together with", that is, to be co-

resurrected with Christ. You are now in Christ, so when God made Christ alive, He made you alive; when He raised Christ to a new resurrection life, He raised you to the same:

a. the meaning of your co-resurrection ...we live a new life - Rom. 6:4 The KJV is more literal, "that we should walk in newness of life", that is, that our walk, our habits of life, our way of living should be brand new. Being made alive dealt with your spirit. Being raised deals with the way you live.

b. your method for living Now look back to verses 2-3 and see:

(1) the former way: controlled by the world, Satan, and the flesh You lived in slavery. You were controlled. You didn't have God so you looked for ways to get your needs met on your own. The world around you offered you some and Satan kept you from understanding that God wanted to meet all your needs and offered you some ways of his own. And the sin which dwelt in your body kept constantly generating new ways to get your needs met through wrong desires. You were, unwittingly, all the time being pushed and controlled by all these forces. But now you have been raised with Christ. You have a brand-new spirit. You are free! And so, you live:

(2) the new way: controlled by God Instead of the power of sin being the controlling factor in your life, you now have the very power of Almighty God living inside you, dwelling in your spirit in the person of the Holy Spirit. Plus, your mind has been unblinded, you can see. Your will has been freed; you can choose. And so:

(a) you submit to the control of the Spirit - Gal. 5:16, 25 *Keep in step with* is literally *walk in*. We live, not out of our own resources, but depending on the power of the mighty Spirit of God to live through us. We enter every situation saying, "Spirit, control me, speak through me, use me, YOU DO IT!" So that's a new way to live. When you react to a situation, instead of grabbing the wrong answers that the world or your flesh throw out to you, you see them for what they are and say, "I choose to let the Spirit of the living God control me!" And He does and you reject the sinful way of reacting and do it God's way! So, by your will you choose to yield yourself to God and then:

(b) you set your mind on heavenly things - Col. 3:1-3 Literally, it says, *set your mind...* *Raised* here is our word "co-resurrected" again. You've been raised to a new life, the kind Christ has. Now picture Him seated in heaven. You're seated there with Him anyway. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. Look around you at the splendor and glory of heaven; feel the love and acceptance of your Father wrapping His arm around you and saying "I love you." And now look down at the world and at your life from there and see your situation and your problems. They look different, don't they! The things that matter so much right now don't matter so much, do they? And things that are not very important right now are much more important than they seem here. What we just did is called setting your mind, fixing it on heavenly things. It is choosing to think and to see from God's perspective. And when your mind is set and your will is submitted, you will live out the paths that God has laid out for you, won't you?!

So, He made you alive by giving you a new spirit and He gave you a new way to live through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. But that's not all:

3. He gave you a new destiny: ...He seated us with Christ (6b-7) Now I know this one is a little hard to grasp, but if what happened to Christ happened to you and if His life is actually your life, then you are already seated right there on Heaven's throne with Him and in Him. Your spirit is joined to His, One, inseparable. His spirit is in heaven and so is yours in its connection with Him. What does that mean?

a. you have intimacy: you are already with Christ You don't have to wait to be with Christ; you are already with Him and He is with you. Your former destiny was to be separated from Him eternally and punished by His Wrath. Now your destiny is never to be separated from Him. You're joined, so completely that you are already with Him now. And it also means:

b. you have security: you are there now and for the ages to come For as long as Christ is seated there, you'll be there. You're already there and you'll be there through all the ages with Him! Nothing can separate you from His love, not a thing, nothing you say, nothing you do, not Satan, not the world, not the flesh, NOTHING! You are secure!

That's what God did for you in saving you! He changed your nature, your life, and your future, all in an instant of time! Look at your "after picture". You have now been given God's own nature, supplied with His own power to live His way and been secured to Him forever. You are saved from your condition, your way of life, and your destiny, all at once and instantly. Now why on earth did God do that for you? Why would God take you, all dead and enslaved and under His wrath and save you and make you His glorious child?

II. Why He Did It Paul gives us two reasons:

1. He loves you with a great love (4) An *agape* love, a self-sacrificing, absolutely committed, unconditional love.

a. it is a compassionate love: mercy Mercy is compassion on one who is in trouble and unable to help themselves. And God is rich in it. He knew you were dead and dominated and bound for hell. He knew you were as

helpless as a man going down over a waterfall trying to swim up. And He cared about you! His rich mercy said, "I'm going to save that one." But what's even better is that:

b. it is an unmerited love: *grace* (5b,7) It's not just that we were helpless; we were sinful. There was sin in our hearts, sin in our lives, and sin in our future. Everything about us was diametrically opposed to God. We were doing it OUR way! But it was God's grace that loved us anyway. He is RICH in grace, grace that said, "I love that unlovely one; I'll save that unsavable one". You say, "But why? Why did He in His grace have mercy on me and love me?" I don't know. What is it that makes one person genuinely love another person? Is it the things they do? Is it the way they look or act? No, I hope not. True love is a one-sided thing; it demands nothing in return and doesn't love in order to get love back. It loves because it loves. I don't know why He loves you, but He loves you and that's all that matters. Bask in it. Understand it. Enjoy it! And know this:

2. He plans for you a great purpose: *to display His grace eternally* (7) For all the ages to come God is going to display you, His child, to whoever and whatever He creates, to whoever and whatever exists, and say, "Look at this one. I took a dead, dominated, hell-bound wretch and transformed him into this, My child, like Me in spirit, in mind, and in body. This is the trophy of My grace."

Oh, let that picture sink in, my friend, as you listen to this poem which describes the new you, the you which you are right now:

*Child of the eternal Father,
Bride of the eternal Son,
Dwelling place of God the Spirit,
Thus with Christ forever one.*

*Dowered with joy beyond the angels,
Nearest to the throne;
They the ministers attending
His beloved one.*

*Granted all my heart's petitions,
All things made my own;
Feared by all the powers of evil,
Fearing God alone.*

*Walking with the Lord of glory,
In the courts divine,
Queen within the royal palace,
Christ forever mine!*

*Say, poor worldling, can it be
That my heart should envy thee?*

- Ter Steegen

EPHESIANS 1-2: Who You Are In Christ

Your Experience: How It Happened To You 2:8-10

I spent the last two messages painting pictures for you, "before and after" pictures. From verses 1-3 we saw God's picture of you as you were before you were saved, spiritually dead, living in slavery, and bound for hell. Then from verses 4-7 we saw God's picture of you as you are now, spiritually alive with a brand-new spirit, living a brand-new way by the indwelling Holy Spirit and already seated with Christ in heaven. Today I'd like to paint another picture for you, God's picture of how you got that way, how this experience of salvation happened to you. You probably have a picture of it in your mind already. For some of you that picture is one of a little child tearfully asking Jesus into their heart and the joyous hugs of Mom and Dad. For others, you remember years of struggling and searching, maybe floundering deep in sin and finally running across somebody who told you about the Savior and the tears of joy as you sensed that your sins were forgiven. Now, those pictures are fine and I wouldn't in any sense want to discourage those fond memories. But I'd like to add to them. When you understand what the Bible says about how you came to be saved and how God views your salvation, it will enhance your appreciation of it so much the more! However, before we get to the heavenly picture, let's keep our feet on the ground and talk about:

I. The Earthly Mechanics Of Salvation (8-9) These are verses I memorized at age 15 before I ever got saved. They probably helped me to understand the fact that I needed to trust in Christ and stop trusting in my own being good to save me. And the same is probably true for many of you. However, though God uses these verses like that, they were never

written to unbelievers to bring them to Christ. They were written to believers like you to help them understand the process by which they have already been saved. There are two key concepts that you must understand:

1. it is *by* grace, which means that the source of your salvation is God The prepositions here are extremely important. And I want to belabor that point. There actually is no preposition in the first phrase, just a dative case. It literally says *For of* grace... Then look ahead to the phrase *not from yourselves*. The word *from* is the Greek ἐξ which means *out of*. Verse 9 is the same, *not out of works*. Paul's talking about the source of your salvation, where it comes from, the well from which it is drawn. Your salvation is completely and entirely from the grace of God. Now notice he says:

a. it is *not* the result of anything you do (of works) It did not result from your own energy, from anything you have done. As we saw when we looked at the "old you", there was nothing you could do to save yourself. You sit here today as a saved person not for one single thing you ever did in your life. It was not because you were nice or because you were religious but misguided. It was not because you sought God. God drew you! Nothing you did could change your dead spirit; nothing you did could change your eternal destiny. God is the agent who changed it. Further:

b. it is *not* the result of anything in you (of yourselves) It did not result from your nature. We looked at that; it was dead, utterly cut off from and opposed to God. It did not happen because you were nice or had a sensitive conscience or even had any glimmer of hope for improvement. Being saved resulted from nothing that was in you. I think of what the Lord told Israel in **Deut. 7:6-7**. What's He saying is that there was nothing in you, nothing about you, absolutely no merit for this wonderful salvation on your part. Rather:

c. it is a *present* from God (gift of God) The dictionary says a gift is something freely given by one person to another for his benefit. It is not given out of any sense of obligation. There was absolutely nothing in you or about you that compelled God in any degree to save you. It was His gift. He handed it to you and said, "Here, it's yours; I choose to love you!" You didn't "find" God; He reached down into the murky darkness of your life and claimed you as His own. And that's the neat part. There was nothing about me likeable, nothing about me savable. But God loved me and saved me and made me His child anyway! I didn't work to get it and I don't have to work to keep it. It is God's free choice to love and save me and it is eternal! Hallelujah! That's how God wanted it, so:

d. you have *nothing* to glory in (boast) There is nothing in you or about you that you can glory in. Nothing in you or about you that is one whit better than any other human being. Compare **1 Cor. 26-31**. It is of Him that you are in Christ Jesus and Christ Jesus has become to you everything you were not! Nobody can ever stand before God and glory in anything about themselves, not even their achievements as Christians. The only boast, the only thing we can glory in, is Jesus and of Him I'll boast forever! Jer. 9:23-24 puts it like this, *This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.* You see, Jesus is everything and He saved me. It's all of Him. Now here's the second key concept:

2. it is *through* faith, which means that you receive your salvation by faith in Him Faith is the vehicle through which you received God's present of salvation. Now let me make a statement that may shock someone: Faith does not save you; God saves you. Faith is not a work. It is not something you did to get God to save you. Faith was your response when you understood the work Christ had already done for you. Perhaps it will help to talk for a moment about:

a. what faith is *not* First:

(1) it is *not* intellectual assent to facts It is not simply knowing and understanding the fact that God exists or that Jesus came and died on the cross for your sins. Yet that is as far as many people's faith gets. Most simply believe there is a God. The Bible says demons believe in God and tremble. They have a faith of sorts, but not the kind the Bible talks about. You see, the object of faith is not a thing. It is not a fact or a doctrine or a dogma. It is a person. Most of us believed the truths of the Bible for years before we had any genuine faith. And:

(2) it is *not* turning to God for assistance It is not asking God for some kind of temporary help and believing He will help you. Faith is not evidenced by the fact that you pray to get well when you're sick or for help when you're in trouble. Lots of people do that.

b. what faith is: *complete transfer of dependence from self to Christ* You see, it's not what you know or what kind of help you want, that saves you:

(1) we are saved by depending on Him as the source of eternal life Believing is depending, trusting. Salvation was provided for you before the world began, before you ever existed. When you simply recognized that and depended on that and quit depending on yourself in any way, Christ came in and changed you instantly. It wasn't when you raised a hand, when you went forward, or when you prayed a prayer. It was the moment you depended on Jesus Christ completely. Faith was the response of your will choosing to accept the truth of what Jesus did at the cross and depending on Him completely as the source of your eternal life. Now, there are a lot of Christians sitting in a lot of churches that don't understand that. They think evangelism is getting people to

pray the sinner's prayer and that's why the "converts" don't last. They were told, in essence, "Do this and you'll be saved." But faith is not doing; faith is depending! You didn't do anything; you simply chose to depend on Someone to do it for you! Now catch the implication of this:

(2) we live by depending on Him as the source of daily life The new way of living that God gave to you is a life of faith, not trying to believe that God can do certain things, but simply depending on God through His indwelling Holy Spirit as the source of your daily living. It is depending on God to cook your eggs, depending on God to drive your car, depending on God to do your job, to parent your children, to love your spouse, to witness to the unsaved, and so on. It is depending on Him completely for everything, putting yourself in His hands, and then marching ahead in obedience, leaving the results completely to Him. Just like with salvation, you simply choose moment by moment who you're going to depend on, yourself or Christ, as the source of the actions and the reactions and the feelings you have.

Now, having understood these earthly concepts, let's take a trip up to heaven for a moment and see from God's perspective:

II. The Heavenly View Of Salvation (10), the picture as God sees it. Here's a picture that will change the way you live. It begins with a tremendous truth:

1. you are God's masterpiece The word *workmanship* literally means a masterpiece. Every skilled craftsman, at least in olden times, had a masterpiece, a work that displayed the best of his skill. Every painter had his greatest painting, every composer his magnum opus, his greatest single work which displayed the depth of his skill. And God has His. Compare **Rom. 1:20**. *What has been made* is literally "from the masterpiece." The entire creation is God's masterpiece, His fine work which displays His glory as a craftsman to anyone with eyes. If you find a fine gold watch on the ground, it immediately tells you something about the nature of the jeweler who made it. The creation is God's masterpiece to declare certain things about God, His eternal power and divine nature. Oh, the wonder and the splendor of the natural universe. Yet God has another, an even greater masterpiece:

2. He created you in Christ Jesus And I'm not talking here about your physical creation, which was amazing enough as Ps. 139 declares. I'm talking about the new creation God has made inside you, the new spirit which is righteous, pure, and holy, made just like God. You are His masterpiece, His finest work, the work that displays the most of Himself and His nature and His glory! Like we saw last week, when God wants to display to all the universe His glory and grace, He is not going to hold up the creation, He's not going to hold up Mt. Everest in its height and beauty or the Nile in all its power or the Grand Canyon in its divinely carved depths. He will hold up you and I and say, "This is my masterpiece, the thing that most clearly displays my grace and glory!" And when He created you:

3. He prepared in advance a path of good works for you to walk in *For us to do* is literally *for us to walk in*. God, in creating you in Jesus Christ, laid out beforehand a path of good works which He wanted to accomplish through your life, a trail of things He wanted to do through you and with you that is part of His grand plan for the Church of Jesus Christ. Now, living out that path, however, involves choices of your own will. You are not a puppet. You have to choose to cooperate with God by allowing Him to live out that path through you. The problem, of course, is that when you are saved, God doesn't hand you a manual that outlines every step of every day of the rest of your life for you. You have to recognize the path He has laid out beforehand. Now how do you do that? In two ways:

a. the character of that path is revealed to you in Scripture That's what chapters 4-6 are all about. God's path will always be holy, pure, honest, righteous, kind, loving, and so on. So, in many cases, knowing what God wants you to do is simply choosing the option that is in line with His character and yours. When you walk by the man who's been robbed and left for dead in a ditch, you don't have to sit and weigh out whether God's path is for you to help him! Living and making choices according to the principles of God's Word is always part of that path of good works but:

b. the specific steps in that path are directed by the Spirit They are only found by specifically submitting yourself to the control of the Holy Spirit each day, the Spirit of Himself, whom God has placed in you to guide you step by step. And as you place yourself in His hands and give Him freedom to live through you, then He orchestrates and directs the choices you make, so that indeed you do live the life God has planned out for you. Now let me emphasize that:

4. He created you in Christ Jesus to live out that path through you by faith He did not create you and lay out a path for you and say, "Go do it, go live it, go walk in it." He created you in Christ Jesus to live out that path of things He wanted to accomplish in your life by Him doing the living, not you! It is to be lived by you depending on Him absolutely and completely, exercising complete faith, complete trust, leaning on Him to accomplish that path. And frankly, that's the only way you can! You can't go about accomplishing the will of God in your own strength. It's not just difficult; it's impossible! You can only do it by faith, by allowing Jesus Christ to live it through you. **Gal. 2:20**, *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by FAITH in [by depending on] the Son of God who loved me...!*

Oh, do you see the picture? God created you a masterpiece in Christ Jesus and laid out a master plan which He wanted to accomplish through you, a plan of truly good works, the actual works of God. You see, none of it has its source in you, not being saved, not living the life, not ending up in eternal glory. It is all of God and it is all by simply depending on Jesus Christ alone! *A father sent a child from a woodland camp to carry a letter to the village. He pointed out a trail over which the lad had never gone before. "All right Father, but I don't see how that path will ever reach the town," said the boy. "Do you see the trail as far as the big tree down there?" asked the man. "Oh yes, I see that far." "Well, when you get there by the tree, you'll see the trail a little farther ahead, and so on until you get within sight of the houses of the village."* And maybe that's the way you can picture yourself living the Christian life. Your Father created you and when He did, He laid out the path for you to follow. But you can't see it all. So, you must trust God, being willing to follow the direction of His Spirit and trusting His power one step at a time.

EPHESIANS 1-2: Who You Are In Christ

Your Purpose: You Were Made Part Of Christ's Body 2:11-18

At verse 11 we enter a third major section of the book and the last one we're going to consider together. In 1:1-14 Paul explained your **Privileges in Christ**, in 1:15-2:10 he explained your **Experience in Christ**, what it was that happened to you. Now, in the rest of the second chapter, he explains your **Purpose in Christ**, what God is doing with you and why. To this point these chapters have had the **individual** in view, what God has done for and in you. This section has a **corporate** view, what God is doing with you and all the other believers in the world together. Now in order to understand that, you have to think historically and you have to think in terms you are not used to thinking in. You have to stand in heaven with God and look with Him at His plan for the entire human race over the course of human history and then at how you fit into that scheme. So, let's begin by considering:

I. Your Position In The Human Race By Birth Verse 11 gives us two important facts about the Ephesians in Asia Minor in the middle of the first century that are equally true of you in America in the 21st century. Just like them:

1. you were a Gentile by origin (11) For 1800 years God had been talking about the human race as divided into two groups. In Gen. 12 God chose 1 man, Abraham, and declared that his descendants would become a great and mighty nation and that God would use that nation to bless all the families, all the peoples of the earth. So, for 1800 years after that, the whole world was either Jew or Gentile. There was God's nation and there was the whole rest of the world, the Gentiles. Like the Ephesians, all of us sitting here this morning (most likely) are Gentile by origin. We are not physical descendants of Abraham, not part of that nation which God had planned to use to bless the whole world. And so:

2. you were "uncircumcised" Circumcision was the mark of belonging to Israel, the sign of the covenant that God gave Abraham. *Uncircumcised* was the derogatory term that Israel came to use to describe all the Gentile nations who did not worship the true God. David called Goliath an "uncircumcised Philistine". You see, instead of seeing their role as one of blessing the nations of the world, Israel became proud and despised the Gentiles. So, to be uncircumcised means to be **despised by Israel**. You see, if it hadn't been for the cross, our ancestors were all idolaters, all pagans who worshipped false Gods, and today we'd all be sitting here as pagan as our ancestors, as pagan as any unreached tribe in the jungle. Think of it; the only nation in the world who knew the true and living God refused to tell our ancestors! The only people in the world who had any light refused to shine any of it! Generations of our great, great.... grandparents were eternally lost in darkness and so would you be, if God hadn't done something. In fact, Paul lists:

II. The Consequences Of Your Position As A Gentile First:

1. you were separated from Christ (12) The Jews may have been proud and self-righteous, but at least they had and recognized the promise of a coming Savior, a Christ who was to come and rule over the House of Jacob. We had no such promise. In fact, the Christ was to come and smash all the Gentile nations of the world with a rod of iron! Our fate was destruction and we didn't even know it. Then:

2. you were excluded from Israel Compare **Rom. 9:4-5**. They were the nation called God's Son. They had the visions of Divine glory. They had the covenants God made to their ancestors. They had the Law and the Temple worship and the Divine promises. And from them, the Savior came. We had none of those things. We were excluded from every privilege that God had granted to mankind.

3. you were outside the covenants of God, foreigners, aliens to it. The covenants, the promises, belonged to citizens of Israel and you were an alien, a foreigner, and had none of those things and so:

4. you had no future hope You were an object of God's wrath and without any hope of the knowledge of Him. Now, you personally were born in Christianized America where the Gospel is freely available and there are a lot of Christians in our day. However, for literally billions of people this statement is still almost as true today as it was of the Ephesians. They have no Bible, they have no church, they have no relationship to Israel, and no Savior. They are bound for hell

with no one to tell them. They have NO HOPE! Generations upon generations have lived and died with no hope. How sad! And finally:

5. you were without God in the world The world is Satan's domain. He rules. Your only hope of withstanding Him is God, but here you were absolutely without God on Satan's turf, a victim waiting to be victimized.

There is probably no sadder phrase in all the Bible than this, *without hope and without God in the world*. Cut off altogether from the grace of God. That's your heritage, the heritage of your Gentile ancestors, and it would be yours in full if God had not stepped into the world and changed things through the cross.

III. The Changes God Made Through The Cross You see, the cross is the watershed of all human history. Jesus Christ, God's Son, came into the world and died upon the cross and rose again and that event changed God's purpose for the entire human race! It had three tremendous consequences that changed the entire subsequent course of human history. First of all:

1. He placed all men on equal footing (14-15a) After the cross, Rom. 10:12 says, *there is no difference between Jew and Gentile*. It was no longer to be that the Jews would be privileged and the Gentiles have no hope. Rather, all men would be placed on an equal standing before God. How did He accomplish that? Well, first:

a. He abolished the Law Jesus Christ came and fulfilled it in Himself once and for all and abolished it, put it out of business, removed it. It is no longer in force and we are not under it. Compare **Gal. 3:19**. The law of which Israel was so proud and was so privileged to have, was an addition to God's promise to Abraham. It was added to control and point out the character of sin externally and to bring conviction of the need for a Savior. It was only to last until the Seed (Christ) should come and when He came, it was cancelled! You might say He "crossed it out" at the cross! And in doing so:

b. He broke down the dividing wall The possession and keeping of the law was the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. Now that there is no law to keep, all men are on an equal footing before God, lost and needing a Savior and so:

c. He killed the hostility by removing its source. Of course, all you have to do is read the book of Acts to see how hard it was for this hostility to die. Nevertheless, the hostile separation between Jew and Gentile received its death blow at the cross.

So, He removed the Law which separated Jew and Gentile and:

2. He created one new body, the Church (15b) He made a new man, a new creation, the Church of Jesus Christ. His plan was now to call out of all nations alike, Israel and the Gentiles, a people for His name. So, the division of the human race was changed entirely. It was no longer Jew and Gentile from God's point of view. It is now those who have His Son and have eternal life who are part of His body and those who don't have His Son and are not part of His body. Compare **Gal. 3:28**. You see, in this body, it doesn't matter what your national heritage is or what your physical characteristics are. We are all one in Christ Jesus and there are no distinctions between us along any of those lines because:

3. He reconciled all alike to God through the Cross (16a) Both Jew and Gentile, red and yellow, black and white, come to God the same way, through the cross. All alike are saved by God's grace, not on any merit or privilege of their own.

OK, let's review. The cross changed the status of the entire human race. For 1800 years it had been Jew and Gentile; now God created one new body, the Church, out of both, and for 2000 years the great distinction has been whether you are part of his body or not, and the opportunity to be part of it is equal to all. But why did God create this one new body? Verse 17 hints at it. He was going to use this one body to preach peace with God to all men, Jew and Gentile alike. Israel had not done their job. So now, to this new body, the Church, God gave the commission to take the message of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins to the ends of the earth and for 2000 years it has been doing just that. And that is why you are sitting here today! Your Gentile heritage was one of no hope; it was this "new man", this Church of Jesus Christ, that brought you hope, that preached the Gospel to you and your family and brought you to find peace with God and to become part of that Body. Now, all of this is well and good, but it doesn't make much of a sermon in terms of my life here and now. So, let's finish by talking about:

IV. The Application Of This One Body Truth To Your Life First of all, from this we learn that:

1. you are united with Him as His body (13-14a) You who had the heritage of being far away from God have now been made near. In fact, you have been actually united with Christ as part of His body. Jesus Christ actually dwells in each one of us and together collectively, we form the physical body through which Jesus lives and acts and does His will on earth. That's what we're going to talk about in the rest of the chapter next time. But at the moment, my point is that we who were so far away as to be without hope and without God in the world are now actually so close to God as to be united with Him as His body! Then secondly, we learn:

2. you have the same privilege as every other believer; there is no difference (17-18) Our heritage no longer matters. You and I have the same privilege of access to God through the same Holy Spirit who lives in each of us. There is no distinction between us. There is nothing that one believer has in Christ that you do not have and no privilege given to someone else that is denied to you. All of us are equally loved, equally reconciled, equally equipped in Christ Jesus, and equally destined to the same glorious future. Now, we may be at all different levels of maturity, and God may use us differently, but every promise of God is equally ours. Don't ever feel inferior. There are no second or third class Christians. And on top of that:

3. you have a unity with every other believer; there is no division The division is between those inside the Body and those outside the Body, not between parts of the Body itself. You have a unity with every believer. The same Holy Spirit who lives in them lives in you, no matter where they are in the world or their background or their language or their customs or the way they worship or the way they interpret certain non-crucial Scripture passages. Now, I don't want to even get into the concept of why then there are so many denominations and church bodies. Let me simply say that the real problem is that many organizations which call themselves churches today have few or no members who are really part of the Body the Scripture is talking about because they don't have a personal relationship with Christ. The division between true believers and "Christianized" persons, who are actually non-believers, must always exist. However, among true believers everywhere there is no division in God's eyes and there shouldn't be in ours. For the longest time it was considered a "sin" for Baptists and good independents to fellowship with Presbyterians or evangelical Methodists or with Pentecostals and it really offends some of us to think that there are genuine believers inside the Russian Orthodox or Roman Catholic Church and if there are they must certainly be sinful for remaining there! Listen, there is no division between true believers no matter what label they wear or what circumstances they are in. We are all brothers and sisters, members of one and the same body. There is no division between your eyes and your hands and your feet, is there? That's ridiculous. And so is thinking that there are divisions within the Body of Christ. We are One! And finally,

4. you have a peace with every other believer; there is no hostility (14) He himself, the Lord Jesus, by His presence in us, is the peace between us. All hostility between us and other believers simply should not exist. All feelings of being better than some other believer or more capable or more gifted or jealousy, any sense of hostility or animosity, has no place in the Body. And yet we see it all the time, believers carrying grudges toward one another, offended and not forgiving, even deliberately hurting each other, when God has given us peace. That's what it means to be ONE body.

5. you have a purpose as His body; it is to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone who is outside the body and invite them to come into it. Israel refused to take the light of God to the Gentiles, so God created a body in which He could personally dwell and walk about and tell the world about Himself and the cross. But His biggest problem is getting his hands and feet to do what their head tells them to do, so the job can get done! We are His body and our Head is telling us to take the knowledge of Him to the uttermost parts of the earth, to every last people. If we don't, for many millions in the world, the cross will have meant essentially nothing. They will still be without hope and without God in the world. They will still have their heritage as Gentiles and never be able to escape it.

When Hudson Taylor reached China to begin his life's work, one of his early converts was a middle-aged Chinese man who was one of the leading officers of a sect of reformed Buddhists. He had studied long and hard but found no rest for his soul until he met Jesus Christ. Then he eagerly testified to the Buddhists of the peace he had and he began preaching Christ to his fellow countrymen. Shortly after his conversion he asked Hudson Taylor how long the Gospel had been known in England. When Taylor told him it had been known for hundreds of years, the man was shocked. He replied, "What! For hundreds of years, you have had these glad tidings and only now have come to preach it to us? My father sought after the truth for more than twenty years and died without finding it. Oh, why did you not come sooner?" It was that question that spawned the dream of the China Inland Mission to reach every province with the Gospel. The answer to it is that very often the Body has been busy doing other things than what the Head has commissioned it to do. God made you part of His body, a body that He designed to reach the world. Are you taking your place in that task?

EPHESIANS 1-2: Who You Are In Christ

Your Purpose: You Were Made Part Of God's Temple 2:19-22

Today we conclude our series in Ephesians. We finish chapter 2 with yet another picture of who you are in Christ as we conclude our look at God's purpose for you. It revolves around the Greek word *oikeo*, which occurs six times in various forms in these four verses. It means to dwell, to have a home, to build a home, to belong to a home. It's a very warm word, just like our concept of home. And it is the concept which completes the picture of what God did with us. Verse 13 told us that we Gentiles, who were once far off from God and without hope, have been made near to Him, have been made part of His body. Now we are told that we have been made His dwelling place, His home. Verse 19 is the transition verse which brings us to this concept and in it we see:

I. The Pictures God Uses To Express His Purpose For You (19) This verse begins with the first of three different images. First:

1. you became a citizen in His Kingdom You are no longer a foreigner, a *xenos*, a stranger, an alien, a non-member, like you were as a Gentile according to the nation of Israel. You are now a fellow-citizen with literally *the saints* of God, God's holy people. You've been made a member in God's Holy Kingdom with all the full rights of citizenship. Remember verse 12? As a Gentile, all the promises, all the covenants, all the privileges belonged to God's nation Israel; now they belong to YOU in Jesus Christ! In Phil. 3:20 Paul tells us that our citizenship is in heaven. You're a fellow citizen of that holy country where everyone is a saint and God reigns as King over all. But you became more than that:

2. you became a member in His Family You are no longer an alien, a *paroikos*, one who lives next to you, a neighbor, a temporary resident, a near person. You became an *oikos*, a member of the household, a family member, one who lives IN the home! God made you His own child. You're not just a subject of His Kingdom; you're His Son or Daughter, a member of His own family, sharing one Spirit with Him. That's how near God has brought you to Himself. But God's purpose for you was not merely to be a subject or even merely to be a member of His family:

3. you became a stone in His Temple/Dwelling (22a) You became part of God's *oikos*, His home, His dwelling, which verse 21 calls a temple. There are two Greek words for *temple*. The one used here (*naos*) is always used to refer to the inner part of the Temple, the Holy Place, the place where God dwells. You became God's residence, His dwelling place. And **1 Pet. 2:5** describes the image a little more fully for us. God's house is not a temple made with hands of bricks and mortar. The place where God dwells is a spiritual house. It is made of people and you are one of them. You are a living stone in the big building God's building. What a concept! A house, a dwelling place made out of millions and millions of stones, living stones, stones inside each one of which, the Builder Himself lives! And together they form His dwelling place, His home, the place where He lives on earth. Wow! Now let's examine:

II. The Process By Which God Is Building His Temple (20-21) And like good builders we'll start with:

1. the foundation layer Of course, the real foundation of the church, this "new man", this "new body" God has created is:

a. the person and work of Christ Paul has used this image before:

(1) He is the foundation; He supports the building - 1 Cor. 3:9-11 God is building a building and the foundation is Jesus Christ Himself. His person and His work support the building. There is no other foundation. Christ on the cross purchased the building by saving the people who would be part of it. And then He indwells them by His own Person. His very Spirit lives in each one of us. So He is literally the foundation on which this whole new entity that God is making, the Church of Jesus Christ, is built. Without Him it would crumble to dust. And then, back in Ephesians, Paul says:

(2) He is the Cornerstone; He orders the building Cornerstones have been reduced in our day to ceremonial objects which display the building date and in which you hide some relics for people to discover 200 years from now when they tear it down. But a real cornerstone was very important. It was the first stone laid in the building and it had to be perfect in its shape and situated exactly at the right angle on the foundation because the lines and shape of the entire building were taken from it. The church is all built on Him and shaped by Him. Then comes the foundation layer of the building:

b. the work of the apostles and prophets They were foundation layers. Remember what Paul said in 1 Cor.3, *I have laid the foundation...*

[Author's Note: I regret that the only the outline of the remainder of this message has survived in my electronic files.]

2. the rising building

a. it is a growing building: stones are being added

b. it is a designed building: stones are carefully fitted and joined

c. it is a holy building: stones have the character of the Cornerstone

III. The Purpose Which God Is Accomplishing Through You (22)

1. He dwells in us: the Temple concept

a. He has a vital union with His people

b. He has a permanent union with His people

2. He walks about in us: the Body concept- 2 Cor. 6:16

a. He has a mobile dwelling: the Tabernacle - Ex. 29:44-46

b. He accomplishes His work of building the Temple through us

PHILIPPIANS

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PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN 1:1-11 - Consistently Caring In The Midst Of Suffering

Paul wrote letters to a lot of churches. They were as different as churches are today. The church at Corinth was full of divisions and squabbling, not to mention other kinds of serious problems like immorality. The churches of Colossae and Galatia had doctrinal problems. Thessalonica was doing well, but it was young and needed teaching. The church at Philippi, however, was a mature church, probably the most mature of all the Gentile churches Paul had started. It had strongly organized leadership. All through his later ministry they had sent gifts time and again to help support him. Indeed, the reason Paul is writing this letter is to acknowledge a gift that has just arrived from them, hand delivered by one of their own men, Epaphroditus. Philippians is a letter of encouragement. It is a letter to Christians who are doing well to encourage them to keep on doing well, to not give up, but rather to be consistent in their doing well. I want to study through Philippians with you, not to chide you, but to encourage you, to help build in you the thing I see the greatest need for in many of our lives, consistency. Now, here's how important consistency is in the Christian life. Accordingly, each chapter tells us something about it.

I. Consistency: Our Triumph Over Suffering	Chapter 1
II. Consistency: Our Basis For Acting	Chapter 2
III. Consistency: Our Sign of Maturing	Chapter 3
IV. Consistency: Our Key to Blessing	Chapter 4

In the next three messages we'll talk about chapter 1 and the subject of suffering. The Philippian Christians were going through some suffering according to verse 30. I don't think there's any one of us that doesn't go through some, and if you haven't, you will. But if you and I can learn to be consistent in our Christian faith through the midst of it, we can triumph over our suffering, instead of letting it conquer and defeat us. Paul demonstrated that in his own life in a marvelous way that I'm sure was a tremendous example to the Philippians, and I know it is to us.

I. Paul's Continual Suffering This letter was written late in Paul's life and ministry. Let's look at his circumstances:

1. he was imprisoned Compare Acts 28:16, 30. Philippians is a prison epistle. It was written during those two years that Paul was held at Rome. Now remember, though, that he had spent the two previous years in prison at Caesarea, so that means for at least 3-4 years Paul has been deprived of his freedom. He could not go where he wanted and do what he wanted. And lest you think that his preferential treatment at Rome sounds luxurious, notice that:

2. he was chained (1:13) He was not just guarded inside a house. He was chained by the wrist to a Roman soldier 24 hours a day. Now that's painful. They didn't have padded, sculpted shackles, I'm sure. But beyond that, it meant that Paul couldn't even move without making somebody else move. He had not even a moment of privacy, not when changing or going to the bathroom or talking with friends. And with many different soldiers on the other end of the chain, I'm sure that some days were pure misery! But beyond that:

3. his life was endangered (1:20) He was awaiting trial before the Emperor. The Emperor happened to be none other than Nero, the man who was steeped in every kind of vice you can imagine, the man who, a year or two after this time, blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome and had them thrown to lions and lit as human torches in his gardens. Paul honestly did not know whether he would live or die from day to day. And to top it off:

4. he appeared to have been forgotten (4:10) The Philippians had not contacted him for some time. It was not that they didn't care, but they hadn't had opportunity to send anyone. And you know how it is when you're hurting and no one seems to notice, when nobody calls! You feel forgotten!

So, Paul was continually suffering and had been for some time. Listen carefully. Satan's number one strategy when suffering comes into your life is this, he tries to get you to forget about the rest of the world and concentrate on your own problem. He tries to get you to become self-centered and consumed with that suffering, so that you lose all concern for others and thus, the real purpose of your life becomes negated and lost. But not Paul! Look at:

II. Paul's Consistent Caring (3-8) Look how consistently he kept on caring for them:

1. he kept thinking about them (3) He says, *every time I remember you*. Obviously, that wasn't every six months. He thought about them regularly and wondered how they were doing. What would you be thinking about in chains waiting to die?

2. he kept being thankful for them (3-5) Even though he hadn't heard from them for a while, he kept right on being thankful for them and for all the blessing they had been to him through the years. Did you ever notice how somebody can really love us through the years and then when trouble comes, if they don't respond the way we think they should, we're down on them for not caring. We forget how they cared through the years. Not Paul.

3. he kept praying for them (4) When we hurt, the focus of our prayer life usually turns inward. "Lord help me, Lord deliver me, Lord change this circumstance." Paul prayed regularly for others in the midst of his suffering. He kept up that habit of prayer that he had all along, interceding for others.

4. he kept caring about them (7) He says, "I have you in my heart. It doesn't matter whether I'm suffering or preaching, you are with me; you are part of what happens to me." When we suffer, very often we begin to care much more for ourselves and what happens to us. Paul cared about the Philippians and what happened to them.

5. he kept longing for them (8) It was more than human longing. He longed for them with the very deep affection and desire of Jesus Christ. They were the desire of his heart. When we hurt, very often our deepest longing becomes a way out, a way to stop suffering. You see, Paul's caring did not change with his circumstances. It was consistent. It didn't matter whether he was well or sick, in jail or free, near or far away. He was consistent in caring for them. And look at what Paul prayed for the Philippians:

III. Paul's Constant Prayer (9-11) He had two regular requests for them. In the Greek text, the first begins in verse 9 and stops in middle of verse 10 with the word *best*. The second begins there and continues to the end of verse 11. The first has to do with their love for others, the second with their lives. He prays for:

1. a consistent increase in the quality of their love Note he's not praying simply that they may have MORE love than they have now. He's praying that their love will increase MORE and MORE, that it will be continually increasing, consistently growing. Think of it in terms of your bank account. You don't really just want an account with MORE money. You want one that is consistently increasing more and more! How can love increase? It can grow to:

a. greater depth Literally, *deep knowledge*. He prayed they would have a deeper awareness of the needs of other people, one that would grow greater and greater in its ability to recognize when a brother is hurting and what needs exist!

b. greater discernment, the ability to perceive things and evaluate them and understand them from God's perspective. And then:

c. greater discretion, the ability to choose, not just what is good for the other person, but what is really the best for them, the best way to demonstrate your love and help them. You see, he prayed that they would consistently love better, with more commitment and yet with more wisdom in doing the right thing, not just the most obvious thing. The two are sometimes very different! But the bottom line is that he wanted them to be consistent carers like he was, though they were suffering! Then, he prayed for:

2. a consistent production of fruit in their lives There's nothing worse than an apple tree that only gives apples every now and again. He wanted their lives to bear fruit on a consistent, regular basis, suffering or not. He wanted them to have:

a. consistent motives The NIV *pure* is literally *sincere* and it means *unalloyed*, referring to a metal that is not mixed with any other, like pure gold. I think it's their motives in view here. Paul's desire was that they wouldn't be motivated by love one day and then by selfishness the next, that their motives would be consistent and unmixed.

b. consistent behavior *Blameless* is literally *without stumbling*. He prayed that they could walk without tripping spiritually, that they would consistently serve the Lord and obey Him without falling into sin in between times.

c. consistent character The *fruit of righteousness* is usually linked with the fruit of the spirit in Gal. 5:22, which for our purposes, means that he wanted them to display a consistent Christian character, to be consistently patient, kind, gentle, and so on.

So many times when we suffer, we let the fruit fall out of our lives. We develop selfish motives; we fall into sin because we're hurting; we change character and become impatient or bitter. You see, consistency is the key to really triumphing over suffering, consistently continuing to care about others more than yourself, consistently continuing to live a vibrant Christian life that turns suffering from an opportunity for Satan to drag you down into an opportunity for God to use you as a testimony to others (verse 11b). When you suffer in a godly fashion, God gets the credit. I don't know what difficulties and problems are in your life. I don't know what suffering you may face. But I want to encourage you to continue to be consistent in caring about others in spite of it! *Years ago, the Salvation Army was holding an international convention. Their founder, General William Booth, was so physically weak he could not attend. He cabled his convention message to them. It was one word: "Others!"* When you're suffering, don't let the most important word in your life become "Me". Let it be "Others". This is victory!

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

1:12-18 - Consistently Serving In Spite Of Suffering

We said last week that the first danger that occurs when suffering comes into our lives is that of becoming self-centered, starting to care more about ourselves and our problem than about others. So we need to be consistently caring about others while we are suffering. There is a second danger that occurs as well. Let me illustrate it through the life of a dear retired missionary whose life our church was part of. Anna Speak gave 25 years serving the Lord in the hills of Kentucky. She went with her husband Frank to schools and jails and homes and little country churches, sharing the gospel and teaching people. Then, Frank went home to be with Jesus and she entered old age, living with a niece here in Philadelphia. Her suffering was simply the limitations that came with old age and not driving. Yet she spent hours every day in prayer. She prayed every single day for the sheet of requests that I sent every two weeks. She did the same for Child Evangelism and a handful of other organizations. Yet when we would talk, she would always say, "I wish I could do something for God; I feel like I'm not doing anything!" Is that true? You see, the danger is to think that suffering is keeping me from serving God, that I can't serve God because of this problem in my life, whether it's health or finances or being married to an unsaved person. You see, there are:

I. Two Views of Suffering (12) The first is quite common:

1. suffering is a means of hindering the Gospel This is the view that Paul was worried that the Philippians might have about him and about their own suffering. Paul might easily have had it himself:

a. what Paul planned - Rom. 15:23-25, 28 Paul wrote to the Roman Christians from Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey and laid out his plans. "I've got to go to Jerusalem and deliver this love offering to the church there, but then I want to reach out and pioneer a new area; I want to go to Spain. And I want to stop by and meet you on the way, as I've wanted to for a long time." Now, I don't think that those were presumptuous or proud plans.

I'm sure Paul had prayed about them and felt the Lord's leading in that direction. But, you know about "the best laid plans..."

b. what Paul experienced Paul got to Rome alright, but not in the way he imagined. His stay in Jerusalem ended up in a two year prison term at Caesarea. The way he got to Rome was by appealing to the Emperor and the two years there, he spent as a prisoner! Now, you could look at that and say, "My, how the Gospel was hindered. Paul couldn't plant any more churches, couldn't gather any more large crowds and preach the Gospel, couldn't travel on and evangelize unreached Spain. Wow, Satan really hindered the Gospel!" Isn't that how we look at some of the problems that come into our lives? "If only I didn't have this problem, I could do that for God." But look what Paul said again in verse 12:

2. suffering is a means of advancing the Gospel In the Greek *advance* means *to cut forward*! It's the word used for a settler who clears away the brush on new farm land. The Gospel wasn't being held back; it was moving forward, clearing new territory. Compare Eph. 6:19-20. You see:

a. Paul adjusted his outlook He said, "I am now an ambassador in chains." He told the Corinthians that we are all ambassadors for Christ, that we have all been entrusted with delivering the message of reconciliation through Christ. Now he says to the Ephesians from prison, "Nothing is really different; I am just an ambassador in chains. I will represent and serve Christ within the confines of my chains, my circumstances." See:

b. Paul determined to serve while suffering He said, "Pray for me that I will be bold and open my mouth fearlessly to testify for Christ here in my prison." Circumstances weren't going to stop him from serving. They just changed the type and nature of his service. And that's what we need to learn to see! When problems and suffering come into our lives, we can continue to serve, just as we always have, but maybe in different ways. Maybe we have to pioneer some new ground, but we can consistently serve the Lord all our lives, suffering or not! So let's read on as Paul demonstrates in his own life to us:

II. The Effects of Serving While Suffering If you make up your mind to consistently serve God in the midst of your problems, it does three things:

1. it opens new doors of ministry You may not be able to do the old things you used to do, but God will open up new things for you if you're looking for them. For instance:

a. Paul ministered to guards (13) We would think, "Oh how awful to be chained to a guard all the time." Paul said, "Alright, I am chained to a guard 24 hours a day; that means I have a captive audience to witness to!" Paul was guarded by the soldiers of the Emperor's official bodyguard and, one by one, Paul shared his testimony of faith in Christ and over a period of time, guess what? Look at 4:22. They came to faith! Caesar's household would include his servants and guards. Paul was winning people to Christ under the Emperor's nose! That's what happens when you stop concentrating on what you can't do, look at those right around you and start saying, "Lord what can I do?"

b. Paul ministered to fellow Jews - Acts 28:17 He still had credentials as a Rabbi, privileges of respect among the Jews, so he took the opportunity to call them in to listen to him as fellow countrymen. It didn't work too well, but nevertheless, he got to do it, to minister to people he had things in common with. And then:

c. Paul ministered to visitors - Acts 28:30-31 He couldn't go out to them, so when people came to see him, he witnessed to and taught them, so much so, that in 1:13 he could say that his testimony was clear to the *whole palace guard and everyone else*. On top of that, while he was in prison, Paul wrote letters that we call the prison epistles. Some of the deepest and most poignant books in our New Testament (Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon) we would not have, except that Paul had a ministry while suffering. When you say, "OK, I'm suffering, but I'm not going to waste it; I'm going to find ways to serve God," God opens up avenues you wouldn't have dreamed of. And:

2. it encourages other Christians to serve better Now:

a. some were encouraged by his example (14) It happened in two areas:

(1) the silent were encouraged to speak The local Roman Christians said, "If this guy can be under guard by the Emperor's own soldiers and speak out so boldly, then why are we being so timid about witnessing?" His example gave people the boldness they needed to overcome their fears. But I'm also sure that:

(2) the suffering were encouraged to stand Those who saw him minister in his suffering were encouraged that they could do the same. Compare 2 Cor. 1:3-7. Simply put, God brings suffering into our lives so that we can have a ministry of encouragement to people who suffer like we do! If we consistently serve God in the midst of our problems, others who face them will too! For example, think of Joni Eareckson Tada's ministry to millions of handicapped people. However, not all were encouraged by his example:

b. some were encouraged out of envy (15-17) Paul doesn't say enough for us to understand fully what happened, so we can only surmise. There were some genuine Christians who were envious of Paul's ministry, of the attention he got and the authority he seemed to have. And now they said, "He's out of the way so we'll get busy and do the work; we'll serve the Lord and people will notice us preaching the Word." Paul's reaction was, "I don't care, as long as Christ is preached; it doesn't matter whether my serving motivates others out of example or envy; it's just great that in the end God is using it!" So, when you consistently serve God in your suffering, it motivates others, whether for right or wrong reasons. But still, the work of God goes forward and that's what counts. And finally:

3. it changes your attitude about suffering (18) Most times when we hurt, we complain about it. Not Paul. Since he was serving God, he was able to rejoice. Now note:

a. Paul did not rejoice at the circumstances He didn't say, "Hallelujah, I'm in jail". Nobody expects you to say "Yay, I broke my foot!" or "Yay, I'm suffering!"

b. He rejoiced at God's use of his circumstances He rejoiced that God was using his circumstances to win others to Christ and to encourage the work of the Gospel. To use his own words from chapter 4, *Rejoice in the Lord always!*

So, if you want to sit around and mope about your suffering and complain about all the things you can't do, go ahead. But if you want to triumph over your suffering and turn it into a thing of victory for God, you can do it by determining to keep on serving in whatever way you can find! And by the way, do you remember Marah? When the children of Israel got there in their wandering, the waters were bitter and undrinkable. So, instead of trusting God, they grumbled and complained and had a big pity party. But God told Moses to take a tree and throw it in the waters and when he did something wonderful happened; the bitter waters became sweet and drinkable. And when you come to suffering in your life, you can do like them and pity yourself. But God has a tree. Jesus died on it for our sins. And if you will throw the cross into the middle of your bitter circumstances, if you will determine to serve Christ, to find a way to serve Him somehow even until the day you die, you'll find that a wonderful thing happens. The bitter waters you couldn't drink before, somehow become drinkable and even, in a sense, sweet, because your suffering is bringing glory to Jesus Christ.

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

1:19-26 - Consistently Seeing the Purpose of Living

Let me ask you a big question. What is the purpose of your life? Why are you living? Most of us never think about that. We just live. We go to work or go to school and go to church and cook the meals and whatever else. And then suffering comes into our lives. We get seriously ill or have to have an operation and then the thought of death pops into our minds or someone close to us dies, and down deep we're reminded that one day that will be us. And one of two things happens. Either we panic and become angry at God and wallow in self-pity thinking, "Oh why did this have to happen to me!" or we begin to think about the real purpose of our living. In the previous messages I told you that in order to triumph over suffering you must continue to care about others while you're suffering and you must continue to serve God however you can while you're suffering. But you can't do either one of those until you can do this, until you can consistently see the purpose of living. If you don't know why you live, then you can't live right and you can't suffer right. So Paul, sitting in confinement at Rome awaiting trial, not knowing whether he'll live or die, reminds us of:

I. The Goal of Living: to magnify Christ (19-20) The word *exalted* in the Greek is literally, *magnified*. It means to make great or enlarge. Now think about that for a moment. A microscope takes something little and makes it big enough for people to see. Something invisible is made visible. But I'd rather have you think of a telescope which takes something that may be very great, like a star or planet, yet it can't be seen because it's so far away, and it brings it up close so people can see it. That's what we are doing in life as Christians. We are the body of Christ. There is a wall of sin that separates people from Him. To them He is invisible. But in our lives, He is magnified, lived out through our actions and words, made plain so they can see Him. Literally, I am to be a living manifestation of Jesus Christ to people. So, Paul says he has two concerns:

1. I don't want to be ashamed of anything I do I don't want other people to see Jesus sin, to see Jesus hate, lie, fail or give up through me. One day I'll have to stand at His throne for my rewards and the criterion will not be simply, "How many church services did you attend or how much money did you give," but "How well did you represent ME?" I don't want to do anything in life that would bring Him shame. And particularly:

2. I don't want my circumstances to hinder me I want enough courage to face whatever might happen to me and still be a good testimony. I want to be consistent. I want to keep on magnifying Christ to people, no matter what happens to me, whether I live or die or suffer or whatever. If I live, I want them to see Jesus in me doing good things. If I suffer, I want them to see Jesus in me enduring suffering, just the way He did in the flesh. If I die, I want them to see me face death with the same confidence He had. Now, in order to do that, I have to understand:

II. The Nature of Living: to live Christ (21-24) Let's sort out what Paul says here very carefully because it lists for us some important facts about what living is and what dying is.

1. living is:

a. to live out Christ's life (21a) To live is Christ. That doesn't mean simply that to live is to serve Christ. It means that Christ is living out His life through me. Compare Gal. 2:20. I am dead. He lives out His life in me. If I fulfill Rom. 12:1 and present my body to Him as a living sacrifice and say, "OK, my life is not mine, it's Yours; live out your life through my body," then to live is to live out Christ's life not your own! That principle is known as the exchanged life. And when you get hold of that, it will change the way you live. It's not up to me to just do the best I can. It's up to Him to let His power flow through me and do what He wants. I don't live in my strength, but through Him who infuses His power into me. I don't worry because my life is His life and it's His responsibility. That's real living!

b. to carry out Christ's task (22a, 24) As Christ lives through me, my life becomes a carrying out of His task. My work is His work and His work is for the benefit of others. I don't live for me; my goal in life is not to do what's best for me, what I like. It is to do with my life what He wants, to fulfill His purpose, to do what is best for others. Sure, Paul would have liked to be freed from prison and he's even confident he will be, but he's ready to take living or dying or whatever comes, because the way that Christ wants to use him is the most important thing.

c. to long for Christ's presence (23a) This life is not supposed to be utopia, to be the perfect place where everything is roses. That's heaven. To live is to be in a state of longing for something better, to long for heaven, to long for Christ. If to have it all now is your goal, then you will not be able to magnify Christ and live out His life. You will live for you; you will live selfishly; you will do what feels best! Now, on the other hand:

2. dying is: not the ogre that the world makes it out to be. It is not the ultimate thing to avoid. If for us to live is Christ, then dying is:

a. interest on the principal of living (21b, 23b) *Gain* means *profit*. The principal is good, but the interest added to it is even better. If to live here is to have intimate communion with Christ and to live His life, then to die is even better!

b. freedom from the bondage of living (23a) *Depart* means *to loose*, to cast off, to weigh anchor, to be free from the bondage and the limitations of this life in the flesh that hold us back. Think of it; no more doubt, no more fear, suffering, pain, sadness, or any of those things. Instead, there is:

c. union with the Source of living (23b) It is to be at last with Christ who is our life, to be united with Him face to face forever! It's to experience the final fulfillment of what we're already living out in practice!

You see, that's what we say we believe. That's what our faith tells us. To live is Christ; to die is even better. We affirm that with all our hearts. But when we're out there on the street and we're suffering, that's what reveals whether we really are committed to what we believe. You see, here's:

III. The Dilemma of Living: to please Christ (23-26) Paul said he was in a dilemma, a struggle. He was torn between two things. So here's:

1. the struggle I must face (23-24) In Paul's case, since he might be facing imminent death, his struggle was over whether he would choose to live or die, if the choice was up to him. Would he choose what was best for him or what was best for others? And that's the struggle we all face. There are:

a. my personal desires (what's best for me) That is, what would feel good, what I would like, perhaps for the pain to go away or the situation to get better, for the conflict to stop. In Paul's case it was to die and be with Christ! But then there is:

b. God's will for me (what's best for others) Remember why I'm here. God put me here to magnify Christ for the sake of others so they can see Him. And sometimes for them to see Him, I have to be sick, I have to bear sorrow, I have to face pain and loss. Earlier in his life Paul prayed three times that God would take away his thorn in the flesh and God said, "No, in order for Me to display just how strong I am, you have to be weak!" What Christ wants and what I want may not always be the same. So here is:

2. the choice I must make (25-26) Paul said, "Since I know you need me, I'm sure the Lord is going to leave me here for your sake and that's OK with me." You see:

a. I must choose God's will over my desires That's what Jesus did in Gethsemane. He wrestled and struggled with what would be best for Him and the will of the Father which would be best for us. And He said, *Not my will but Thine be done*. Sometimes we may not be able to choose our way out of the circumstances. Paul couldn't choose to live or die. But he could choose how he was going to look at the whole thing. He could choose that he was willing for God's will to be done. That's how we need to pray. When we suffer, we often pray, "Lord get me out of this!" But we need to pray, "Lord, here's what I'd like but if you can better magnify Christ to people in me by leaving me in

these difficult circumstances, then that's what I'd prefer, because that's what I live for!" And it's not just that I must choose and give assent to God's will, but:

b. I must be content with God's will I must not choose it, all the while grumbling and complaining inside. I must trust that His will is best for me. His life is better than the one I would choose. I must not only leave my life in His hands, I must be content with that.

What are you living for? Do you see that His will is best, that His life is best for you? Do you see it even though the road is tough and long? Do you see it when you hurt and struggle? It's only when you can consistently keep on seeing that you're not here for you, but you're here for Him, that you can turn suffering into victory. I know I've told you this story before but it's so powerful. *During the Korean war, a lady and a two year old child were walking down the road. An enemy patrol threw a grenade on to the road. Just before it exploded, the mother threw herself in front of the child. It exploded and as she lay dying, she said, "Don't worry son; Jesus will take care of you." Later an American patrol came by and one of the men saw the boy crying over his mother. He took his hand and said, "Why don't you come with me; I'll take care of you." The little boy looked up and his eyes got wide with wonder. He asked, "Are you Jesus?"* Friend, you are the only Jesus people will ever see. Do they see Him in you? Does His love touch them through you? Or do they see just another human being with a different set of beliefs, who lives for himself just like they do. What are you living for?

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

1:27-30 - Consistently Standing in the Face of Opposition

You remember that chapter 1 is dedicated to the subject of how consistency can bring triumph over suffering in your life. Now, not all suffering is sickness or losing your job. Some of it is opposition and persecution. When Paul founded the church at Philippi, he was jailed and then, even after an earthquake crumbled the prison, he was asked to leave town. Compare 1 Thess. 2:2. Verse 30 says the Philippians are now going through the same struggle of being opposed which Paul had and now he still has it as he sits in confinement at Rome. And some of your suffering, if you are living any kind of a godly life, will be more than just problems and pain; it will be people opposing you, sometimes making fun of you or trying to discredit you because you're a Christian, sometimes trying to prevent you from witnessing to others. Now before we get started, let me paint a clear picture. Everybody always thinks that we Christians are kind of planted here on Satan's turf and Satan and his hosts spend our lifetime pummeling and attacking us and all we're doing is trying to stand up in one spot! Think carefully on what Jesus said He is doing. Mt. 16:18 says that He is building His church and the gates of hell will not prevail or stand against it. Gates are stationary; they don't move. It is the church that moves. God is expanding His turf. His army is marching forward, pushing on the gates of hell, Satan's stronghold over the world, and they can't stand against it! When you get persecution in life, it is simply Satan resisting what God is doing to push forward through your life! It is his counterattack, because his gates are starting to crumble, so if you can stand firm like a good soldier through that counterattack, you can keep pressing on and victory is yours! So, soldier, let's look at how you can stand that heat when opposition comes and be ready to press forward.

I. The Soldier's Consistent Conduct (27) How should you act when people oppose you or try to persecute you? Well, if you're like me, there is a great temptation. You want to lose your Christianity for a while and return the favor! You want to get angry and do something nasty in return, don't you? But that can't be. A Christian must be:

1. consistently conducting himself, being a testimony His conduct as a good soldier must not change under pressure. That which he does in peacetime on the drill field, he must do the same in the battle under fire. The way you live now must continue when you're opposed. Now, if your conduct, the way you act, is going to be a consistent testimony for Christ, then it must be done:

a. in a worthy manner The Greek for *conduct* is literally *live as citizens*. If you fight under the flag of the USA which stands for freedom and the equality of all men, you don't take your prisoners and turn them into slaves and treat them like dirt and kill them at will like Hitler did. And you're a citizen of heaven. You serve under a greater banner, the banner of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You represent Jesus to men. So, your conduct under fire must continue to represent Jesus, to be worthy of Him, to be something of which people can say, "Jesus would do that!"

b. with independent motivation Paul doesn't know whether he will ever get back to Philippi to check up on them in person or not, but he is concerned that whether he does or not won't make a difference in their conduct. A soldier has to be independently motivated, to conduct himself in a worthy manner, whether anybody is watching or not. You can't hate those who oppose you when nobody's looking and then pray for them when you're around others. If you're going to represent Jesus Christ to people who oppose you, you have to do it sincerely and do it even if you're the only person around. So, the first thing when someone opposes you is to be sure that you keep your conduct consistent. The second thing is:

2. consistently standing firm, having tenacity Standing firm is not retreating, not giving up. It is continuing to press forward, even if slowly, when the opposition is fierce. For example, there's a type of fish I like to catch, the bluegill or sunfish. It's only a small fish but it doesn't stop fighting, even when hanging on a hook in the air. That's tenacity, not

giving up and throwing in the towel. When people oppose you, there's a real temptation to give up, to quit trying to be a witness, to hide your Christianity. To turn it into victory you've got to keep on, to be consistent. Then there's a third thing:

3. consistently striving together, using teamwork We're not a one man army! God has given us a local body of believers, a platoon if you will, to work together with us. When there is opposition, we need teamwork. Did you ever look at a squad of soldiers marching? They march in exact coordination, as one man! That's what we need. When some of us face opposition, we need to all work together to support them in prayer and presence and to keep on struggling forward together! Now, how can we do this? How can we keep on consistently conducting ourselves as soldiers of Christ, even when people oppose us and give us a hard time and work together and not give up? How can we have the courage and the fortitude to do that? The answer lies in:

II. The Soldier's Consistent Confidence (28) The reason that we can keep on is that we know that in the end we win! So we can fight on fearlessly! We don't have to be afraid! We may be set back. We may be hindered. We may be persecuted. We could even be killed. But we can't lose; Jesus wins! In the end we are delivered and those who oppose us spend eternity apart from God if they don't repent! If you know you can't lose, it makes it a whole lot easier to keep fighting when the going gets tough! That's the confidence we have. Now note:

1. its source It comes from God. It is not in ourselves. It's not because we are so great or so committed or so deserving. It's because our Captain is invincible. He controls the battle. God is greater than anyone who is giving me a hassle, than anyone who makes fun of me, than anyone who tries to sue me or persecute me! And in the end, His purpose will be done. Now that doesn't say God will always get me out of the suffering in the way I would like, but I can rest assured that whatever is happening is for the good and for His glory!

2. its extent Literally the Greek says, *Not being terrified in nothing*. I guess God wanted to make the point plain. We don't have to be afraid of anything. Jesus said we don't even have to fear those who kill our bodies because after that they have no more that they can do. They can't touch us! You can trust Him to take you through absolutely anything, no matter what form that opposition may take, whether it's being fired, being divorced, or being threatened, knowing that in the end it is glory.

3. its effect When you keep on being a testimony for Christ in the face of everything the opposition throws at you, here's what happens. Instead of you being terrified, it terrifies the enemy! Suppose, for sake of example, that you get in a fight and slug your opponent with everything you have and he just grins and keeps walking forward. Think of the fear that goes through your mind! And when those who oppose you see that they can't stop you, can't keep you down, can't make you give up your trust in the Lord, it can touch them; they can see the hand of God at work in you. Think of Saul standing by and watching Stephen get stoned and watching him not quit, but dying with the words, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge* on his lips. You think that didn't touch Saul? It made him mad, drove him to throw himself wholeheartedly into persecuting the church. And the more he persecuted, the madder he got because he couldn't stop it. And that's what made him ready for the Damascus Road where he surrendered to Christ! My friend, you will have a far greater effect on your enemies by being a consistent testimony for Christ than by trying to hurt them back. So have confidence. The Lord is with you in your suffering and will use it to further His Kingdom. And there's something else you have to understand:

III. The Soldier's Privilege (29-30) Now, it probably seems foreign to you to think like this, but being a soldier is not a generous service on your part; it is a tremendous privilege. In fact, you have two tremendous privileges:

1. to believe on Christ It is only by God's grace that you've been saved. You could have been born in Russia or Libya and never heard the Gospel, but you weren't. You could have heard the Gospel and rejected it, but God worked in your heart and you didn't. Think about it; to you of all people it has been granted to believe on the Lord Jesus, to have eternal life, to go to heaven. What a privileged person you are out of all the billions on earth! But because of that you have another privilege:

2. to suffer for His sake He suffered for you! He bled for you and died for you. He gave his back to the smiters and his cheeks to those that plucked out the beard. He carried that heavy cross up Calvary's hill and made the supreme sacrifice for you. My friend, if you have to suffer for Him, to put up with opposition, it is not a burden, but a privilege, a sign of favor from God. Compare Acts 5:41. These men had just been flogged. Their backs were hurting and they were ordered to shut their mouths, but they saw beyond that. They rejoiced that they could suffer for the One who had suffered so much for them.

So don't give up! Don't be discouraged! Are you facing opposition today? Is there hardship for you because of your faith? Be consistent. Keep on acting like a soldier of Jesus Christ. And be confident. God's in control and He's working out His purpose. But above all, thank Him that He has granted you the opportunity to do something that costs for Him. *Some years ago, a Hindu woman was converted chiefly by hearing the Word of God read. She suffered much persecution from her husband. One day a missionary asked her, "When your husband is angry and persecutes you, what do you do?" She*

replied, "Well, sir, I cook his food better; when he complains, I sweep the floor cleaner and when he speaks unkindly, I answer him mildly. I try, sir, to show him that when I became a Christian, I became a better wife and a better mother." Whether your persecution comes from within your own family or from without, it can only serve God's purpose if you consistently stand for Him through it. Are you willing?

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

2:1-11 - Consistently Imitating the Example of Christ

In chapter 1 we saw that consistency is what makes us triumph over suffering in our lives. In chapter 2 we shift gears. Here we find that consistency is our very basis for living the Christian life. Being consistent is the key to the kind of life Christ wants us to live. And the first thing we must be consistent about is imitating the example of Christ Himself. So let's look at:

I. The Life We Live: Imitation (1-5) Read verse 5 again. Our attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ. How often? Once a year? Now and then? No, consistently. All the time. Our life should be a constant reflection of Jesus Christ. Now see:

1. the privileges we continually enjoy (1) Paul's *if you have* is Paul's way of saying, "you know you have". We have continual privileges that we constantly enjoy through Christ. Paul names four:

a. encouragement - strengthening us when we are weak How many times has the Lord been there when you needed help, when you were ready to give up and didn't think you could go on, and He infused strength into you. He encouraged you.

b. comfort - consoling us when we are suffering How many times were you hurting and God was there to comfort you through His word or through a Christian friend who stopped by just when you needed it or through speaking peace to your heart?

c. communion - sharing with us and not leaving us alone How many times have you felt like nobody understood, like you were all alone in the world, but the Holy Spirit was there reassuring you of His presence and His caring and the fact that you are never alone, that He understands?

d. compassion - caring for us when we are in need How many times have you seen Him meet your need, exercise tender caring and mercy even down to the details of life?

On what basis does He do those things? When He feels like it? When it's convenient? No, continually; every time. You see, God treats us in a consistent fashion. So, we ought also to live and treat others in a consistent fashion. Now here are two of:

2. the principles we should consistently display Paul says, "It would really make my day (and God's too) if you would be consistent in displaying..."

a. harmony (2) I don't think that the sameness he's talking about is simply that we should all think alike. He means we should have the same mind toward others as Christ has toward us, the same love toward others that He displays toward us, the same purpose toward others that He has toward us. And all of us should be like that. The privileges, the mercies and the love we experience constantly from Him, we should consistently show toward others. And the way we do it is by displaying:

b. humility (3-4) Now here you have a biblical definition of true humility and it has three parts. Humility is:

(1) refusing to strive for yourself: your goal is not to advance you over other people; it is to minister to other people.

(2) elevating others above yourself: your attitude is not that everybody is better than you and you are a total nothing, but simply that you care more about others and their feelings and their hurts and their needs than you do about your own.

(3) considering others as well as yourself: your action, not that you totally neglect your own needs like rest or food, but that in every situation you always consider others and not simply yourself.

Now, if we're going to consistently display humility, here's the greatest example of how to do it. Simply imitate Jesus Christ. Do for others what He did for you:

II. The Example We Imitate: Submission (6-11) This is one of the most beautiful passages in all the Bible. It is deeply theological, but it is intensely personal. Paul reminds us that Christ was submissive. First:

1. Christ willingly laid down His privileges (6-7) Christ was in very nature God and equal with the Father. Now with that goes a lot of privileges like enjoying the glory of heaven, knowing no limitations of any human sort like tiredness or hunger or mobility, or not knowing. All these were His, but:

a. He who was God became a man Think what that means. He didn't stop being God. But He didn't count all those privileges He had as God things to be hung onto selfishly. He laid those privileges aside and took the nature of a man, a being who gets tired and hungry and knows pain and sadness. And He did it for us! So, to imitate Him:

b. we must consistently lay down our privileges You are privileged with many blessings God has given you, things which other people don't have. It might be a nice nest egg in the bank, a nice home, a schedule with lots of time for yourself, but when others have a need, we have to be willing to lay down our privileges. Christ's submission also meant that:

2. Christ willingly laid down His position (7) In heaven Christ was the Master of all. The angels jumped to do His bidding. Nobody could oppose Him; nobody could thwart His commands. But:

a. He who was Master became a servant He stooped down from that position to a new one. He came into the world as a servant. His most vivid illustration of that fact was that night in the upper room when He took a towel and washed the disciples' feet, something a household servant would do. And in doing that He showed us that:

b. we must consistently lay down our position, whatever it may be. Nothing must be beneath us when it comes to others. And don't think this applies only to those who have some high position in the business world or the community. All of us get served by other people all the time from the mailman to the man that repairs our car to the students in our class who have to do what we say. But when the need is there, we have to be ready to lay our position down and serve them. Christ's submission also meant:

3. Christ willingly laid down His desires (8) He was Lord. His will was done in heaven and on earth. His desire counted, but:

a. He who was Lord became obedient He laid down His own desires and submitted to the will of the Father. Think of that struggle in Gethsemane, of Jesus, desiring with every fiber of His being not to have to face the cross, but knowing it was the Father's will. He became obedient and went to the cross. So:

b. we must consistently lay down our desires We have to be willing to put aside what we want in favor of what the Lord wants and yield our desires to those of others. This affects so many areas of life, where you live, what you do, who you date or marry, the schedule you'd like to keep. It gets so practical. Maybe you want sausage on the pizza and the other guy wants pepperoni; maybe you want to go to the Zoo and they want to go to the ball game. Do you always insist on your own desires or are you willing to lay them down? Parents do this continually for their kids. Christ's submission went even further:

4. Christ willingly laid down His life (8) He is life. He created life. He is the giver and sustainer of all life and yet:

a. He who was the Life-giver went to the cross He was not forced into it. He laid down His life voluntarily on the cross for our need of salvation. And:

b. we must consistently lay down our lives Maybe literally if necessary, like Jim Elliot and Chet Bitterman and some of our missionary brethren, but this thought epitomizes Rom. 12:1 for me. He laid down His life for us. We lay our lives at His feet and say, "Here Lord, take my life; make it a living sacrifice for you; let it be what will glorify you the most." Submission is where it's at. That's what we're called to imitate, to put Christ and others first. The world looks at that and says, "Man, what a miserable life," but just look at:

III. The Reward We Receive: Exaltation (9-11) Christ submitted Himself totally, but the Father raised Him up again and He was lifted up to Heaven where He is seated in exaltation at the right hand of the Father and one day the entire universe will bow to Him. And the same will be true in principle for us. Ephesians tells us we are already seated in the heavens with Christ. Revelation makes it clear that we shall reign with Him, sharing His glory and exaltation one day. It will be worth it all!

Friend, are you consistently imitating Jesus Christ, living in a spirit of true humility? Or are you living for yourself, putting yourself on the throne of your life? *A woman was enthusiastically telling her friends the value of her first-aid class that she had just completed. She said, "Why just yesterday I was driving down the street and heard this awful crash in back of me. So, I pulled over and ran back to find a car wrapped around a telephone pole. When I got to the injured driver, he was a horribly bloody mess. My knees went limp and I didn't know what to do. Then I remembered my first-aid training so I bent down and put my head between my knees, and it worked! I didn't even faint!"* Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But an awful lot of folks, when the pressure's on, do the same thing; they do what benefits themselves first. Will you be consistent in putting others first? That's imitating Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

2:12-16 - Consistently Exhibiting the Reality of Christ

I told you last time that chapter 2 is showing us that consistency is the very basis of the Christian life. The first part of the chapter told us that we must consistently imitate the humble attitude of Jesus Christ. Our text this morning tells us that we must consistently exhibit to others the reality of Jesus Christ. It would help us as we begin in verse 12 to get a clear understanding of:

I. The Nature of the Christian Life: Outworking (12) There is a continual process here, a thing that Paul wants to see happening in a consistent way in these Philippians. You see, the whole of the Christian life is a working out of your salvation. Now let me explain what that means. When we say "working out", we often mean making arrangements for something to happen. We work it out so that we can do something or so that we can buy something. The goal is out in front of us and we arrange things so we can get there. But that's not what Paul means at all. We don't work out the details of getting to heaven. That's salvation by works. Salvation in that sense is already settled and past. But sometimes we use "working out" in another way. We make a decision and then "work out" the effects of it later. For instance, you get married and then you work out who's going to take out the trash and what school the kids will go to and all the hundred other things that marriage brings. You take a job and then you work out the details of how to operate the computer, or learn the proper company procedures for things, and so on. The goal is behind you; you already have it and now you're living it out decision by decision and step by step. That's how salvation is. You have it from the moment you accept Christ, but you work out the effects of it in your life until you die! That's what the Christian life is, the working out of the salvation you received. Now, Paul says that:

1. it must be serious It should be done with fear and trembling. This is not fear and trembling because you are wondering about whether God will let you into heaven. It's the fear and trembling you get when you've been handed an awesome responsibility, like when you're walking down the aisle and the thought hits you, "What have I done" or perhaps when that first baby is born and the responsibility hits home. Living a Christian life is a serious thing; it represents Jesus Christ. We must take the way we live, the way we work out our salvation seriously, solemnly, carefully.

2. it must be self-motivated He already said this back in 1:27. He doesn't know whether he'll be released from prison or not, whether he will get to be with them or not. But he's counting on the fact that this process of being serious about living out their commitment is going to happen anyway, regardless of whether anyone is there to push them along or not! So our Christian life is a serious thing, but there's good news in verse 13.

II. The Source of the Christian Life: God (13) In 1:21 he said, *To live IS Christ*. Now he explains that further. The Christian life is not something I go out and do on my own. It's not a set of rules I keep or actions I take. It is not me working out my own life. It is God working in me, living in me, living out His life through me. That's what makes my life such a serious thing. God is at work in me doing something and I have to cooperate! Now, what is it He's doing in us?

1. He is the source of our willing He gives us the power to will to do what pleases Him. He shapes and forms our desires and our will so that we gradually come to want what He wants and desire to please Him. For example, the last thing in the world I wanted was to be a pastor; I told God that, but He worked in me until I wanted what He wanted! But not only that:

2. He is the source of our doing It is not up to me to simply act in my own strength. He is at work in me both to will and to do. The Greek word is *energeo*, which means to energize or empower. He empowers me to do what He wants! That's the Christian life. Once I'm saved, God lives in me and He works out my life; He shapes my will to be like his and He energizes me to do the things that please Him. That is, if I cooperate with Him and yield myself to Him. Now, what is:

III. The Effect of the Christian Life: Purity (14-15a) My life takes on a special quality that is very important, moral purity. Everything I have to face in life, everything I have to do, I should do without complaining or arguing. Complaining means murmuring. That's between me and God. That's the "I don't want to" that's down inside of me and even though I do the thing because I know God wants me to, I still don't like it inside. Arguing is external, how I react to other people. It's the "I don't want to" that I give to other people. So I argue and fuss with them. But God's goal, what He's trying to work out in my life, is that I become two things:

1. pure internally before God The Greek word for *pure* is used for a metal that has not been alloyed, but is pure silver or gold. That's talking about the sincerity of our motives. If we yield to Him, we become unmixed, not two-willed, but sincerely wanting what He wants, which is always that which is right and pure.

2. blameless externally before others Literally, the word means *unblameable*. God wants to build your life so that nobody can point their finger at you and say, "There, that thing in your life is wrong; you shouldn't be doing that!" OK, so thus far we learned that our Christian life is a serious thing because God is at work in us, shaping our wills and our actions so that we display purity, so that our motives are clean inside and our actions are straight outside. Now here is:

IV. The Purpose of the Christian Life: Shining (15b-16) Here's why God is doing all of this, so that we can shine, like luminaries, like stars in the darkness of space, like straight people in the midst of a generation that is crooked and depraved. You see, the point of the Christian life is really:

1. exhibiting the reality of Christ to others How will they know He's real except that they see the difference He makes in our lives compared to their own and those around them? That's why consistency will either make me or break me. If I consistently demonstrate a difference to them, they will know that Christ is real and He lives in me. I don't merely imitate Jesus Christ, I demonstrate Him; I put Him on display as an exhibit for all the world to see. Compare 2 Cor. 4:4-7. Unsaved people are in darkness, but the light lives in us. We are simple clay vessels. Yet if I can let the light shine through my clay exterior, others will see it and as a result I am doing something else:

2. holding out the offer of life to others The Greek term *hold out* would be used in a situation where there is a guest at a banquet and the host holds out a cup to them, offering them a drink. By our lives, we offer people a drink of the water of life, living water that will well up in their souls. But we are the clay vessel in which this precious treasure is kept and that's why the character and quality of our life is so important! I have to polish and make the glass clean so the light will shine through. When you wash windows, the thing that keeps the glass clean is consistency! The more consistent we are, the more clearly people see Christ living in us and the more real He becomes and the offer becomes to them.

Now, Paul seldom leaves a passage that reminds us of our responsibilities without saying something about our rewards and so we have:

V. The Reward of the Christian Life: Glorifying (16) Now Paul thinks ahead to that Day when we all stand in the presence of Christ and what it's going to be like. He says if they are consistent, he's going to boast. The word *boast* is not a good English translation here, because in English to boast is to brag and has a negative connotation. That is not necessarily true of the Greek word, which is why the KJV translates it *glory* in most places. It's not the concept of "Everybody look what I did," but rather, "Oh, just look what God did with me! I never dreamed...!" And you and I will do the same. If you live a consistent Christian life, then on that day you too will glory:

1. in the effect your life has had on others You'll marvel that God brought others to Christ through you and they brought others and so on. You'll shout Hallelujah and your eyes will well up with tears of joy and you'll worship the Lord because so many others have been touched by your life. But not only that. You'll glory:

2. in the fact that your life counted, that it wasn't in vain, wasted, useless, that you invested it in eternal things, things that last.

But if you want to glory on that day, you've got to be consistent in exhibiting the reality of Christ right now. What does consistent mean? *Let me ask you a few questions. If your car starts 1 out of 3 times, do you consider it consistent? If the paper boy skips the Monday and Thursday editions, are they missed? If you fail to come to work 2 or 3 times per month, does your boss call you consistent? If your refrigerator quits for a day now and then, do you excuse it and say, "Oh, well, it works most of the time?" If your water heater greets you with cold water once in a while, do you call it faithful? If you miss a few mortgage payments each year, does the loan company say, "Oh well, 10 out of 12 isn't bad?" If God had to tell you your rating right now, would He call you consistent, consistent in your walk with Him, in your quiet time, in your assembling with other believers, your giving, your obedience, your attitude, your behavior? If we expect faithfulness from other people and things, does not God expect the same, if not more, from us?*

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

2:17-29 - Consistently Appreciating the Ministry of Others

At verse 17 Paul digresses for the moment from what I call doctrinal or teaching material, and enters a block of personal material. After all, Philippians is a letter that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. I told you in the beginning of this series that the occasion for writing this letter is that the Philippian church had sent Paul a monetary gift and he wanted to acknowledge it and thank them for it and then also to lay out some of his immediate plans which happened to concern two men, Timothy and Epaphroditus. The thing I want you to look for is the way that Paul appreciated the ministry that other people had toward him. First notice that:

I. Paul Appreciated the Philippians' Giving (17-18) What's going on in these verses doesn't strike us, because the concept of making an animal sacrifice is so far removed from our society. But, both to the Jews and to the pagan Gentiles, sacrifices were a vital part of their worship and were made every day. Paul is painting a word picture here. He sees their monetary gift as a sacrifice being offered to God. Compare 4:18. He sees the Philippians as priests serving God. And he sees the fact that his own blood might be shed by the Romans, as though it would be a drink offering poured out on top of an animal sacrifice. What he's saying is, "Thanks for your wonderful sacrificial gift; even if I am poured out on top of it as a drink offering (that is, even if they kill me), I am still glad and rejoice with you!" You know, most folks find it awfully hard to be appreciative of others when their own life is on the line, or even when they're going through a tough time. Not Paul. He appreciated what the Philippians had done, even though he might die and not get to use it. Here's why:

1. he recognized their sacrifice The very concept of sacrifice has in it the idea of cost. A sacrificial animal had to die. To offer a sacrifice was a serious act, even if that sacrifice was not alive. The Philippians didn't just write him a check out of their thousands in the bank. They scraped together an offering to send. They dug down deep and maybe did without something to give to him. And Paul knew that and he appreciated it. The fact that he was making a sacrifice himself by being in prison, that he might have to die, didn't lessen in his mind the sacrifice that they made for him. Also:

2. he recognized their service Service is the word for priestly service, the making of an offering to God. Paul saw that in their giving they weren't just feeling sorry for him. They were offering their best to God by giving to him. And Paul appreciated that. Ministers and missionaries are often in a better position to understand this because of all the special gifts people give them, but it's not limited to them. There are times in your life when people give you things too, things that are costly, things that they give to you because they love God. And often it happens in a time when your need is greatest. Do you appreciate them? But giving is not the only thing Paul appreciated:

II. Paul Appreciated Timothy's Caring (19-24) 1:1 tells us that Timothy is there with Paul as he is writing and is also sending his greetings. Paul has a plan for Timothy. He's going to send him over to Philippi soon so he can be with them for a while and then come back to Rome and report to Paul how they are doing firsthand. And then Paul shares the reason he appreciates Timothy the most. Timothy was like Paul; he didn't have any money to give, but he gave his love. In fact, Paul says:

1. he genuinely cared for others Here's an interesting thought. The Greek word translated *care* here is the usual word for *worry*. It's used in 4:6 where we're told not to be anxious. Timothy was genuinely concerned about other people. He like Paul worried (in the good sense of the word) about what was happening to them and whether they were progressing spiritually.

2. he sought the things of Christ Most people are not like that. They look out for number one, for themselves, for their own interests. But Timothy sought one thing in life. His primary interest was those things which matter to Christ. He was out to see that people got saved and that they were growing and maturing in Christ. Now, there's something we could imitate!

3. he proved himself by service Paul had watched him in action. They had labored side by side like father and son for years. He remembered that. He didn't forget all those things and let his mind be occupied by his current predicament. He appreciated the way Timothy had demonstrated that caring heart over the years. And he said so! Do you? Do you appreciate the caring that others have shown for you, those who have comforted you and worried about you and stopped by or called to check on you? But there was another man there with Paul and:

III. Paul Appreciated Epaphroditus' Coming (25-29) Epaphroditus was from the church at Philippi. The church had sent him to Rome to see Paul and to hand-deliver their gift. Now, don't forget that was no easy undertaking in those days. We're talking 700 miles as the crow flies. From the east side of the Greek Peninsula, across the Adriatic Sea to the west side of the Italian Peninsula. He almost certainly went part way, if not all the way, on a ship. It was a trip that took weeks, if not months, and was fraught with danger and especially so, since he was carrying a sum of money! But there were other dangers. Along the way somewhere Epaphroditus fell sick. Maybe he arrived at Rome sick and it got worse there, but in any event, he nearly died of the illness. Word of his illness was sent back to Philippi and now they were worried about him. However, he's well now and has evidently spent some time with Paul and Paul is going to send him back to Philippi carrying this letter to them. But Paul has come to appreciate some things about him:

1. he was a brother You see, other Christians are not just other people who agree with us. They are family; they are brothers and sisters. We share a common life and a common love and common concerns. Moreover:

2. he was a fellow-worker Epaphroditus was working for Christ right alongside Paul. So many times, the people we appreciate the least are those who labor alongside of us, those who give their time and energy to serve the Lord with us. It might be the other Sunday School teachers, the other members of the Youth Staff, the Properties Committee, or the people working to serve the dinner. Sometimes we fail to appreciate the work of others. But Paul noticed his fellow-workers and appreciated them.

3. he was a fellow-soldier Epaphroditus was not only working alongside Paul. He was fighting alongside him in the cause of Christ. Soldiers who serve together rapidly learn to appreciate each other, don't they? They fight together. They learn to depend on one another. They are committed to each other. They will often endanger themselves for one another. Christians ought to be like that. And that's what Paul appreciates most about Epaphroditus:

4. he risked his life (30) He almost died in serving Christ, in bringing the gift to Paul. But the point is not just that he almost died. It says he *risked his life*. The word *risk* in Greek means *to throw aside*, the way a soldier might throw aside his shield and expose himself to the enemy in order to save a wounded friend. Epaphroditus knew it was going to be hazardous going to Rome. But he threw aside the security of his home and situation. He risked his life to meet Paul's need and bring him the gift. And Paul appreciated it! Maybe somebody's gone out on a limb for you a time or

two. Maybe they've risked something to meet your need, to be your fellow-soldier. That risk might have been physical like this one or maybe financial or legal or maybe they just stood by your side at work when you were taking abuse from the rest or at school when you were being picked on. Do you remember it? Do you appreciate it? What I'm driving is that:

IV. We Must Appreciate the Ministry of Others And I think we can glean three ways of appreciating people who have ministered to us and been a significant part of our lives from this passage:

1. rejoice over and with them (18) Rejoice is a term of ATTITUDE. If you want to appreciate somebody, your attitude toward that person and when you're with that person should be one of joy and gladness toward them. You should be glad for them and glad that you are with them. When you get a letter from them, does it stir a note of joy inside? If they show up on your doorstep, are you glad to see them? Appreciation is always expressed in joy.

2. receive them with joy (29a) *Welcome* is literally *receive* and is a term of RELATIONSHIP. In Greek it is *prosdechomai* which means *to receive deliberately to yourself*. *Dechomai* has at least 7 different prefixes. There is one that means "receive gladly", one "receive without reserve", one "receive under your roof as a guest", and so on. This one means, "receive to yourself". It's the word the Pharisees used in Lk. 15:2 when they said of Jesus, *This man receives sinners*. Jesus built personal relationships with them. He made them part of His life so He could reach them. Appreciation means more than just being happy for somebody. It means letting them into your life, building a personal relationship with them. You can't truly appreciate somebody and keep them at a distance. You make time for them in your life. You talk. You call. You pray. You give yourself to them.

3. reward them with honor (29b) Honor is a term of VALUE. Literally, it says, *such ones hold in honor*. Count them as being important to you, valuable to you. Tell them so when you have opportunity. Show them so by choosing them over less important things. If you want to honor your wife, don't just tell her how much you appreciate her; choose being with her over a night out bowling with the guys sometime! In other words, live so that your appreciation shows, so that the other person can see how valuable they are to you. And honor is not just a personal thing; it's a public thing. Tell others how valuable this person is to you, how much you appreciate and are glad for them. And treat them with respect and honor in front of others too!

Well, are you consistent in appreciating the ministry of others? I don't think any of us are. We all have people we just take for granted. We receive the blessing of having them in our lives without appreciation. And often it is those who are the closest to us. Let's make a new start in really learning to appreciate in a Biblical way those who mean the most to us.

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

3:1-9 - Consistency in Sound Doctrine

In chapter 1 we saw that consistency is what brings us triumph over suffering. In chapter 2 we saw that consistency is our very basis for living the Christian life. In chapter 3 we find that consistency is the sign of our maturing as believers. When you look at a young person, what is the sign that you look for to determine that they are becoming mature, that they become responsible, that you can count on them to do what they say, that you can trust them to behave properly without supervision? You look for consistency in their behavior. And that's how it is in the Christian life. The immature believer is like a roller coaster, up and down, on and off, obeying and falling. But a mature believer is consistent. The peaks and valleys have pretty well leveled off into a steady upward climb toward the goal, which is being like Jesus Christ. Now, if we're becoming mature, then Paul says it will occur in two areas. The first one is found in our text today and it is sound doctrine. The mature Christian is consistent in what he believes, not like a child blown about and tossed by every wind of doctrine, by every new theory that comes down the block, but holding fast to precious trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what we have here first is:

I. A Warning Worth Hearing (2-3) for all of us, whether we are new Christians or have been saved for many years. It's a warning:

1. against some dangerous people (2) There are some dangerous people out there and he's not talking about the Hitlers and the Castros and the persecutors of the world.

a. who they were The KJV calls them the *concision*, the flesh-cutters. They were false teachers who taught that it was not enough to believe in Christ, but that in order to be saved you also had to be circumcised as a Jew and keep the law. We commonly call them Judaizers and they crop up again and again in the New Testament. The church dealt with this issue clearly in Acts 15, stating plainly that circumcision was not necessary nor law-keeping, but people kept on teaching it and it spread throughout Asia Minor, to Galatia and Colossae and now it has crossed the water to Macedonia, to Philippi. It's almost like wherever Paul went and planted a church, sooner or later these Judaizers would come along and try to work on his converts to bring them into their own camp. But here's:

b. what they were really doing They looked good. They seemed to be Christians. They had a faith of sorts in Christ. They loved the Bible. They worshipped God. But Paul says they were really doing evil. He calls them *dogs*. Now, you have to understand that dogs in Bible times did not enjoy the privileged position they do today. Few families had a little pet dog to enjoy. For the most part, dogs roamed the streets and ate what they could; they were scavengers. When they killed Jezebel and left her body lay in the street for a couple of hours, the dogs ate her! A dog would look to steal any bit of food he could and that's what these false teachers were doing. They were trying to steal Christians away from true faith in Christ and bring them to their own cause.

There are still a lot of dangerous people out there today. They call themselves by various names like Jehovah's witnesses, Mormons, Christian Scientists, or New Agers. These groups are always looking to scavenge people away from true faith in Christ. Yet not all the false teachers are cults. The liberal theology which has all but taken over many of our mainline denominations, which denies the Bible, which denies the necessity of accepting Christ's atoning death, is the same thing! And here and there this false teaching will scavenge away somebody from faith in Christ alone. False teachers are everywhere and they are dangerous spiritually. Yet Paul is not merely warning against these dangerous people, but also:

2. against a deceptive principle (3) The problem with these folks was not so much their behavior or morality, but the principle of their doctrine, which is quite different from ours:

a. theirs is putting confidence in the flesh They believed in Christ, but they trusted in the flesh. It was Christ plus things that they had to do, works. Christ plus circumcision plus keeping the Law. Christ was not enough to be accepted before God. They trusted that their works, the things they did, made all the difference. That's the exact principle that all these false teachers today advocate. They want you to trust in the flesh, in works, in ceremonies, in joining their group, in anything except Christ alone. On the contrary:

b. ours is putting no confidence in the flesh We sing, *Jesus paid it ALL*. I put no trust in anything I do or say to save myself. I have absolutely no hope that my good deeds count one iota toward my salvation, either before I accept Christ or after. I don't save myself and I don't keep myself saved. I trust completely in Christ to save me. He says:

(1) we have circumcised hearts, not flesh Their hearts haven't been changed. They haven't been born again. They have circumcised flesh but we have circumcised hearts, hearts that are cleansed by God, whether or not we are circumcised in the flesh. Further:

(2) we worship by the Spirit, not the Law Our acts of worship are of the Spirit; they are moved by the Holy Spirit who lives inside us, not by mechanically doing what the Law requires. And the point is:

(3) we glory in Jesus Christ, not ourselves This is that same word *boast* from 2:16, remember? We don't tell God, "Look what I did; see how I kept the law". We simply stand in awe of the fact that Jesus did it all for us and shout "Hallelujah!" Now Paul gives us:

II. An Illustration Worth Comparing He gives his own testimony. He had everything the Judaizers were striving for and counting on. He was a supreme case. Here's:

1. what Paul previously trusted in (4-6) He had:

a. a good connection: Hebrew He was a native-born Jew, one circumcised the eighth day, not a proselyte. He was a Benjamite, a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents.

b. a good religion: Pharisee He was a law-keeper to the first degree. He was of the strictest sect of the Jewish religion. His ultimate concern was to keep God's law.

c. a good commitment: persecutor He didn't just go through the motions. He was sincere. He was zealous for his beliefs to the point that he persecuted those who disagreed with them!

d. a good record: faultless Nobody could point their finger at him and say, "There, you broke God's law". He was externally spotless as far as other men knew.

Lots of folks today trust in those things. They come from a good moral God-fearing family; they have a good religion (they are good Lutherans or Methodists or Jehovah's Witnesses); they are sincere (they get involved, they help the needy, they go to church often). And they are good moral people; nobody can accuse them of outright sin like greed or adultery. But they count on those things to make them acceptable to God. That's what Paul did once, but look:

2. what Paul did with it (7) Paul says, "Look, if I wanted to place my trust in fleshly things, in my own credentials, I have better ones than any of you! But none of them matter. I count them as loss, as wasted effort, compared to what Christ did for me!" You see, we have:

III. A Position Worth Holding (8-9) and Paul details it for us:

1. we count all things as worthless for salvation It's not that all the good things I ever did or will do are bad. It's just that when it comes to saving me, they are a loss, a waste of effort. In fact, they are more than that. They are rubbish or garbage or trash. Isaiah said that all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags when we try to hold them up to God and say, "This will save me". It's like holding up a wooden nickel to the cashier and saying, "This will buy that diamond". That's not the position I want to be found in when I stand before God. But we have a better position:

2. we have Christ's righteousness by faith I have the God-kind-of righteousness. I have the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself. 2 Cor 5:21 tells me we traded places. He took my sin; I got His righteousness. Compare Rom. 4:5. When I quit working for my salvation and simply trusted that Jesus bought it all for me, then God counts my trust in Christ as righteousness. So my whole hope of heaven, my whole confidence, is not one iota in me, but all in Christ Jesus! I wouldn't trade that for all the credentials in the world! But you already know that! Then why does Paul put this in the middle of a letter written to mature Christians? For that matter, why am I preaching it to you? Because it is:

IV. An Exhortation Worth Repeating (1) To hear it over and over again is safety; it is protection. You see:

1. we need a continual vigilance Satan's not stupid. He doesn't have his people go around chanting, "salvation by works". He'll put his point to you another way like, "Your neighbor Joe is alright; he's a faithful member of X church; you don't need to witness to him!" or "Those people over there are OK; they have their own way of worshipping God; they don't need a missionary!" or "After all, God's a loving God, how could he reject those thousands of faithful people who are striving with all their hearts and are so devoutly religious?" He might even go after you saying, "Are you sure you're saved? After all, you sinned yesterday and you never got baptized and you don't give very much to the church..." Do you see how clever Satan is? That's all salvation by works. We need to watch out, to be continually awake, and also:

2. we need a consistent avoidance We need to see those teachings for what they really are and consistently steer away from any other position than totally trusting in Christ alone. We need to consistently hold fast to sound doctrine.

One of the saddest things in my ministry has been a young man who gave his life fully to Christ in our former church. He grew and had devotions regularly. He began witnessing and I trained him and he began doing visitation evangelism with me. He began singing in church and giving his testimony. He got to where he would even preach. Shortly after we moved here, he felt called to the ministry. I urged him to go to come east and go to a good Bible school, but the pressures of family and illness and money weighed heavy and he went to a liberal college close by. He began pastoring some small churches. When I finally was able to visit him again several years later, he said, "You know, I've changed a lot. I can't really believe the Bible is verbally inspired anymore." When I asked, "Well, have you led anybody to Christ here?" his answer was, "I don't know. I hope so. Well, I mean I hope people are believing in Jesus as they worship." He was so bright, so on fire, so zealous for Christ. But he was scavenged by false teachers who lured him away from sound doctrine. And it can happen to you if you're not consistently vigilant and careful to avoid it.

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

3:10-15 - Consistency in Spiritual Growth

Chapter 3 is telling us that consistency is a sign of spiritual maturity. We learned last week that if we are mature then we will be consistent in sound doctrine. We will cling to our faith in Christ alone for salvation and never let go of it or waver from it. But there is a second thing that should be happening in our lives on a consistent basis and that is this thing we call spiritual growth. I've always felt that spiritual growth was sort of a nebulous kind of thing that you couldn't really put your finger on. It's hard to talk about. Physical growth is not something you can observe well each moment. If you want to know how much a child has grown, you wait a month or a year and then measure the effect the growth has had by the changes that have been made in them (height, weight, and so on). And spiritual growth is also hard to see in process. You can only tell whether it's happening to you by measuring the spiritual changes that have occurred in yourself over a period of time. Now, Paul tells us in verse 10 the changes that he wants to see occurring in his life, and by doing that, he gives us:

I. The Definition of Spiritual Growth (10) Spiritual growth means that four things are happening in my life and they are leading to a fifth. Growing means:

1. deepening my relationship with Christ Now obviously, Paul already knew Christ as his Savior. He already had established a personal relationship with Him. But the Greek word *know* means to accumulate knowledge by experience. Christ is a real living person. You can talk about knowing a person as an academic fact. "Yes, I know X; I met him once," indicating that you know who the person is and what they look like. But then you can talk about really knowing a person and you mean just what Paul does, accumulating knowledge by experience. When I met LuAnn, I knew her; when we got married, I had accumulated a lot more experience with her and knew her better. After many years of marriage, I've accumulated lots more experience and *really* know her! What does knowing someone mean? It means knowing how they think, how they feel about things, how they react to things, what they like, what pleases them. But it's more than knowing things about each other. It's growing closer to one another, being more dependent and involved

with each other, being able to share and communicate at a deeper level. See, a growing relationship deepens and that should be true of your relationship w. Christ.

2. experiencing more of His power in my serving If you want to understand *the power of His resurrection* more clearly, compare Eph. 1:19-21. Power is the Greek *dunamis*, dynamite, explosive power that is incomparably great. It is so great that it not only spoke the world into being, but it raised Christ up out of the grave and caused Him to ascend to heaven and placed Him in authority over every other being in the universe! That power of God is for us. Compare Acts 1:8. It is planted inside of us in the person of the Holy Spirit and it manifests itself, not in miracles, but in witnessing, declaring the reality of Jesus Christ to others, whether in our words or our deeds. Paul said, "I want to be experiencing more and more of that power as I serve." Now, most of us think that spiritual growth is equal to doing more. The more a person is involved in the church, the more responsibility they take, the more we feel they're growing. But did you notice Paul's desire wasn't to do more? In fact, at this moment he was doing less than he had for years; he was in prison, confined! He didn't want to do more; he wanted to experience more of the power of Christ in what he did do. So many of the things we do, we just do. We prepare the lesson. We put on our robe and sing in the choir. We invite someone to the program or we cook the meal and take it over, with no thought that in order for there to be any value in it, the mighty power of God has to flow through that act to someone. It doesn't depend on you. The effectiveness of your service depends on Him. Spiritual growth is being more and more dependent on His power and less and less on your own human effort.

3. drawing closer to Him in my suffering It wasn't that Paul wanted to suffer. He just knew he couldn't avoid it. He wanted to suffer in a special way. Compare 2 Cor. 1:4-5. The sufferings of Christ in verse 5 are spelled out in verse 8 as Paul's sufferings. This is a bit of a mystery, but somehow when we suffer, we participate in the sufferings of Christ. Here Paul says we share in His sufferings and he says that as I share His suffering, there is a special thing, a fellowship, a communion, that He and I have together. When I suffer, I am drawn close to Him in a special way. And that is spiritual growth. When I suffer, does it draw me into a closer relationship with Christ? Do I love Him and lean on Him more? Or do I turn away from Him and lean more on myself to solve my problem?

4. surrendering more fully to Him in my living *Becoming like Him in His death* means that we become inside more the way He was as He went to the cross. And what was He like? He was sinless and pure and He was surrendered to the Father's will! His going to the cross was the final sign that He was fully surrendered, fully given over to the Father's will, without a hint of rebellion in Him. And if I'm going to be like Him, then I'm going to have to die, to die to myself and my own will and my own desires. Growth means that more and more I'm willing to lay my own will down and do His; I am more and more surrendered. Now, these four things are what growth is and, as they happen in me, the more I look forward to a fifth thing:

5. eventually joining Him at the Rapture (11) The word *resurrection* here is a special word in the Greek, used only here, and literally it means the *out-resurrection from among the dead*. In fact, in some manuscripts the preposition *out* is used in the verb and then again before *the dead*. He's talking about the time when some dead people will be raised selectively out from among all the dead. When's that? At the Rapture! On a surface level, the word *somehow* seems to mean that he's unsure about whether God will raise him from the dead unless he grows. But that's not it at all. The *somehow* indicates, not that he's uncertain about getting there, but that he's uncertain HOW he'll get there. Let me translate it like this, "So that I will arrive by whatever path at the out-resurrection, the Rapture". He doesn't know whether he'll get there by dying or whether he'll live on and be alive when it happens, but that's the ultimate end of growth. When I see Him, I will be made like Him, perfect and holy, full-grown!

Now that we have defined growth, let's talk about:

II. The Promotion of Spiritual Growth (12-14) I can't just go out and say, "I'm going to grow today". Spiritual growth is something that happens to me as a result of all the experiences I face and how I react to them. If I want to grow, what I have to do is to adopt the right kind of attitudes and habits that will allow me to grow when things happen to me. Growth requires four things:

1. it requires caution: watching for pride Paul says in verse 12, "I don't have it all; I am not totally mature" and then he says in 13, "And I don't ever count myself as being there; I'm ever climbing the rope but I haven't touched the top yet!" Spiritual growth will never happen if you become proud enough to think you have no room left to grow! Oh, watch out for that! It creeps in so easily! You start comparing yourself with others and look at how much more you do than they do and you feel pretty smug. You start to feel like there's little room for improvement, so you don't work on anything in your life! That's when you're dead in the water! Get ready for trouble!

2. it requires attention: forgetting the past When you're running, looking back slows you up. It doesn't matter how many hills you've climbed already, how far you've come. What matters is not what's back there, but what's between you and the finish line! It's wonderful that you've gained some victories and God has made some real changes in you. Thank God you're not what you used to be! But if you're going to grow, you can't focus on that. Growth requires giving

constant attention to your life the way it is right now, recognizing the problems and flaws there now and working with God on those.

3. it requires effort: straining forward You don't just sit back and say, "OK God, grow me." Did you ever watch a track race as the runners come into the home stretch? Every runner kicks in with all he's got and sticks out his chest as far as it'll go and strains with every ounce of energy toward that mark, that finish line. Growing means doing what it takes. If it means getting up earlier to have devotions, then I get up. If it means giving up something I like, then I give it up. If it means changing the way I am, then I work at it with everything I've got, all the while counting on the Lord to do the real work. But if you're not willing to put out any effort to make changes in your life, then there's no room for growth to occur!

4. it requires stamina: pressing on Literally, the word is *pursuing*. If I'm pursuing something, then I don't let anything stand in my way. If there's a roadblock, I go around it. If there's a flat tire, I change it and keep on. But I don't quit. No matter how tough it is, I don't give up. Spiritual growth requires that kind of stamina, determination. No matter what disappointment, tragedy, failure, setback or trial comes to me, I won't stop. I'm going to grow. I'm going to get to be more like Jesus until I get to the finish line, the high calling, the upward calling, the calling to heaven, the Rapture, where God the judge gives out the rewards!

Now, before we quit, let's look at:

III. The Measuring of Spiritual Growth (15) How do I measure my spiritual growth. Well, here are two definitions to help:

1. maturity is consistently seeing these things in me For this life, spiritual maturity is not sinless perfection. Maturity is when I consistently see this attitude in me, when I consistently see that I want to deepen my relationship with Christ, to experience His power, to draw closer to Him when I suffer, and to surrender to His will! Maturity is when I realize I have faults and flaws and am putting my all into working on them with Him.

2. growth is consistently seeing God change me Where I differ from that attitude, where my thinking isn't like that, then I should see God changing me little by little. And when I consistently see that God is changing me, changing my priorities, changing my unwillingness, changing my attitude to want Him and what He has for me, then I am growing!

How about you? Is spiritual growth a consistent reality in your life? Do you see God at work in you? Are there changes in your habits, your personality, your attitudes, changes in those areas we've talked about? Or are you the same old you that you were last year? Somebody put it this way, "I'm not what I ought to be and I'm certainly not what I'm going to be, but thank God, I'm not what I used to be!" And that "what I used to be" isn't just before I was saved. It should be what I was last year or last month. The scientists have several tests for determining whether an organism is alive. One of them is growth. Growth is evidence of life. If somebody used this test on you spiritually, would they know you're alive?

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

3:16-21 - Consistency in Seeing the Future

New Year's Day is always a landmark in our lives. It's our official way of concentrating our thinking on the concept of the passing of time. Another year is gone; a brand new one lies ahead. People are always using it as an opportunity to evaluate themselves and to make resolutions to change things in their lives for the coming year. It's a shame that it takes a national holiday to do that. Time is something that should always be on our minds. The Bible has many admonitions about the importance of time, such as "redeeming the time", "numbering our days", "now is the time", and so on. And one of the signs of maturity in our lives as believers in Jesus Christ has to do with time. Think about children. They live for the moment. What's important to them is right now, whatever game they're playing, whatever fun they're having now. Tomorrow or next week or next year is a vague concept to them. It doesn't matter that if they eat all their candy today, there will be none left for tomorrow. But sooner or later they begin to mature and one of the sure signs of it is that they begin to see the future as well as the present. It may show in little ways like beginning to save money toward things they really want instead of spending it on the first thing they see. Of course, some people never grow out of that! But the sign of maturity is that we begin to focus our thinking not only on the present but on the future and we consider what we do now in light of what lies ahead! And so it is in the spiritual realm. A mature Christian is one who is consistently seeing the future and letting that impact on his life in the present. Now, Paul gives us here:

I. The Consistent Mindset of the Mature Christian (18-21) He does so by contrasting two different ways of life, the way that most people pursue and the way that we who love the Lord should follow.

1. how enemies of the cross live (18-19) Paul probably has in mind here the false teachers, the Judaizers from verse 2, but his description is really appropriate to the mass of unsaved people. They may have some degree of religion and some may be engrossed in this way of living more deeply or in a more openly vulgar way, but basically this is how the world lives:

a. their god is their bodily desires The Greek *belly* literally means the whole body cavity and is often translated *womb*. So here it stands for all the bodily desires from the stomach to sex and all the other desires of the old na-

ture. Basically, people worship and live for what makes them feel good. That's what matters to them, whether it's having money or power over others or luxurious living or sexual gratification. It doesn't have to be bad things. It could be charity and helping the unfortunate or it could be family. They are committed to the things that give them good feelings inside.

b. their glory is the shameful things they do What they glory in or revel in is those things which make them feel good, things that in many cases are shameful things. People glory in having taken advantage of someone in a business deal, in having ripped the government out of taxes through some shady method, in gorging themselves with food or immersing themselves in music so as to forget every care in the world. In my late teens I worked in a machine shop and heard men brag about the girls they picked up and how drunk they got and heard women glory in the fornication they'd committed. That's what turns people on.

c. their goal is earthly things For most of them there is no concept of death and the hereafter. Their goal is here and now, to produce their own little heaven right here on earth, to have everything they want here and now. That's their goal in life. But:

d. their end is destruction Every human being ends up dead and will, unless the Lord comes first. And those that live this way end up, not annihilated, but separated from God in hell in torment forever and ever. They may get their little utopia now, but now is small drop in the bucket of forever. Yet that's how most of the world lives, consciously or unconsciously. Now here's:

2. how citizens of heaven live (20-21) There's a glorious truth here. We are citizens of heaven. The Philippians understood what Paul was saying perfectly. Philippi had a privileged status in the world; it was declared a Roman colony. That meant that all its residents had Roman citizenship conferred on them. So, even though they were living in Philippi, their citizenship was really in the city of Rome a thousand miles distant! And they were governed by the laws and privileges of Rome! Well, we've got a better deal! We're citizens of heaven. We live here, but here's not home. We are aliens and sojourners, pilgrims living abroad, in the world but not of the world. You see:

a. our God is the Lord Jesus Christ, Our Master The thing we worship is not ourselves and our own desires. It is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is what matters more than anything in our lives. He is the one who saved us and who freely gave us eternal life. Our highest allegiance, our first place, belongs to Him above everything else. And so:

b. our glory is to be like Him The thing that turns us on, what we want more than anything else, is not what makes us feel good, but it is to be like Him. The greatest thing in the world that can happen for us is for Christ to return and give us our brand new resurrected and transformed bodies. Compare 1 John 3:2-3. When He comes, I'll see Him and I'll be made like Him and that has an effect on my life right now! If that is the thing I really glory in, then I'll be striving to get as close to it as I can right now in this life. And so:

c. our goal: we await the Savior If we're mature and we realize that our Savior's coming, then we should live like kids anticipating Christmas morning, eagerly waiting, looking forward to that moment. Compare Col. 3:1-4. Our hearts and our minds are to be set on heavenly things, on the things of Jesus Christ, on the fact that we will spend eternity with Him! And of course:

d. our end is heaven We're citizens and one day there's going to be a census taken and all the citizens are going to have to come home and stay there!

So there you have it, two ways of living, one with the head buried in the sand and the other with the head lifted expectantly toward heaven. The tragic thing is that a believer in Christ can actually choose either one, at least to some extent. While a genuine believer is not going to stoop to all kinds of immorality and the like, it's very possible for him to live just like the world does, to invest all his time and energy into earthly things like making money and acquiring things and gaining a position and having a leisurely life, and never witness to anybody, never serve God or have any kind of ministry, never even develop much of a relationship with God. A mature believer has his eyes consistently fixed upward. He's alive with service to God, with things that count for eternity. He's always conscious that life is short and eternity is long and each moment is precious and what counts is heavenly things. Now, how is it that a Christian can keep that kind of a focus in life? Well, here's:

II. The Consistent Method of the Mature Christian (16-17) Paul gives us a couple of pretty simple things that can help to keep our eyes focused upward. First, the mature Christian is:

1. consistently walking in spiritual progress (16) What Paul's calling for is a commitment to never go backwards. Whatever state of maturity we get to, we commit ourselves not to revert to earlier levels. What a shame to see believers lick old habits, only to fall back into them years later, to see them move ahead and get excited for God and be serving diligently and then to see something get in the way and watch their service slack off and their excitement die out. The first commitment we have to make if we really want to mature is this: I will not go back! As I grow, wherever I get

to, I will only stay there and go forward; I will not let myself return (relying of course on God's power to make it so). But then Paul gives us a very practical way to help make that happen and that is by:

2. consistently focusing on good examples (17) The Greek word here is the one from which we get the word *mimic*. We are to mimic or to imitate others who provide a good example for us. Isn't that how we grow as children? We try hard to do what others do and afterwhile we're doing it for ourselves and on our own. Then there's another word here that's important, the words *take note*, or KJV *mark*. It means to fix your eye on something, the way you would aim at a target, to focus on it and gaze at it carefully. One of the things that will really help us to mature is to pick somebody that is more mature than we are and focus on them and work to be like them in every positive way. Of course, we all have:

a. the example of Paul We have the biblical record of his life and ministry and his thoughts expressed in his letters. That provides for us a constant unchanging example that we can imitate along with every other Christian. But we should also imitate:

b. the example of others Now, please understand me carefully. I know that everyone has faults and flaws and if you fix your eyes on man, he will let you down. I know all of that and the warnings against it. I'm not advocating hero worship. But Paul is saying that we can easily find people within our circle of acquaintance who are mature and use them as spiritual examples. When I was a young Christian getting excited about Christ, I wanted to be like my pastor and a few of the older couples in the church who were witnessing Christians. And all along the way there have been others who have touched my life and displayed certain qualities of balance or humility or love or preaching style that I've tried to imitate and incorporate into my life. If you want to consistently go forward and continue the upward path of growth, look around you at the Christians you admire and respect and focus on them and learn what there is that you can from their example and strive to be like them in those ways and then move on to ever greater and greater examples, balancing it all the while by the biblical example that we have. You'll find it a great help.

Folks, I don't know when Christ is coming, but I know He is and that today it is closer than it's ever been before. *An elderly lady decided to take a short railroad trip through an especially beautiful section of the country. It was to be her first experience of this kind, so she looked forward to it with great anticipation. After boarding the train, however, it took her quite a while to get settled. First, she couldn't find the right seat, then she spent a long time arranging and rearranging her baskets and parcels on the rack overhead. After they were finally in place, she took great pains to adjust the shade on the window until it was just right. When at last she was ready to sit back and enjoy the scenery, the conductor called out the name of her station and she had to get off the train. "Oh, my!" she lamented, "if I'd only known we would be here so soon, I wouldn't have wasted all my time fussing about those little things that really weren't important."* What will you focus on? Will you bury your eyes in the little things of the present or will you focus them on your glorious future? The choice is yours.

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

4:1-9 - Consistency: The Key to Peace

Philippians has shown us over and over just how important a thing consistency really is in our spiritual lives. In chapter 1 we saw how consistency is what turns our suffering into triumph. In chapter 2 we saw how it is our very basis for living. In chapter 3 we saw how it is the mark or sign of our spiritual maturity. And now in chapter 4 we are going to see that it is the key to obtaining all the great blessings that God has promised to us as His children. As you know, Philippians 4 contains three of God's greatest promises in verses 7, 13, and 19, promises of His peace, His power, and His provision. And in each case, you'll find that, even though those things are promised to us, not all Christians obtain them. And the key that unlocks those blessings to us is consistency. So today, let's talk about the first blessing, peace. In verse 7 you have:

I. The Peace of God Explained (7) Most of the time we think of peace as some kind of special substance that God "zaps" us with when we're in trouble of some sort. Please notice that none of the verses in our text says anything about troubles or disasters. Peace is not something that is only for bad times. It is a constant attitude that should pervade your life. It is not something you get zapped with, but something you cultivate, an attitude with which you face life. First of all:

1. it is God's peace, the peace God has. Did you ever think about how God faces things? Does He worry when He sees a problem coming? Does He get afraid that things might not work out right? No, He faces everything with perfect confidence. He knows it is under His control. He knows nothing can shake or move Him or overthrow His plan and authority. So, God has a perfect calmness and confidence. Now, that is the very attitude that God has promised to you. You can face life like He does, without worry and fear, with absolute calm and confidence that God has everything under control and that He will perfect everything concerning you. Now note:

2. it is beyond human understanding There is a supernatural element to this. It is not merely positive thinking, working yourself up to believe that everything will turn out alright. There is a Divine transfer here. That peace which is God's, which Christ had when He said, *Father into thy Hands...*, that peace which He said is, *My peace which I give to you*, is actually given to us, placed in us by Divine action. Just like assurance is not simply a human thing but is the re-

sult of the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit inside us that we are children of God, so peace is the work of the Holy Spirit inside us filling us with the unexplainable conviction that, because we are in Christ Jesus, everything is alright and God is in control, even when it looks like the world is falling apart. And here's what it does:

3. it guards the heart and mind Like an army of soldiers guards the fort, it protects both your heart, which points to your feelings or emotions, and your mind or your thoughts. From what? Well, you only have one Enemy! And what does he try to do to you? He attacks your mind to get you to doubt God's control and God's caring or even your own salvation. Or he attacks your feelings, trying to make you feel like God doesn't care, like things can't possibly work out. But when you have God's peace, it is like a mighty shield inside of you, protecting your mind from those thoughts of worry and anxiety and your heart from those feelings of self-pity and bitterness. Now, the big question is how do you get that peace in place in your life?

II. The Peace of God Obtained (1-6) That peace comes to you in the person of Christ Himself and the Holy Spirit who live inside of you. Verse 1 tells us that the key to obtaining it is how well we stand firm in the Lord. That is, how consistently we allow Him to be the very center and focus of our lives. And that means some very practical things about the way in which we live. First, if we are to know peace, it means:

1. consistent correction of strained relationships (2-3) Now here are two ladies in the church who have somehow gotten at odds with one another. They were evidently mature Christians and had worked side by side with Paul and a number of other key workers at Philippi. But now they can't agree or, it seems more likely, won't agree! Paul pleads with them to make peace with one another and asks others to help them do it. You will never have peace inside as long as you are willfully at strife with another believer. The whole world can be mad at you for being a Christian and that's fine, but you cannot allow yourself to continue in a state of bitterness or anger with a fellow believer and expect God's peace to pervade you. Rather, when you find a relationship with someone becoming strained, you've got to consistently do what you must to correct it! And the more consistent you are about doing that, the more you will experience of that peace you need.

2. consistent concentration on the Lord (4) Often we read this phrase too fast and think it means that we must try to be happy all the time. What it says is that we must consistently, always, when in trouble and when not, focus our attention on the Lord and what He's done for us and let that bring us joy. The very birthplace of peace is the cross. In dying on that cross, Jesus made peace for us with God. We are reconciled. We are at one with the Father. We are His and He is ours. And that is all that really matters in the whole universe! The earth can explode tomorrow; I can die; somebody can run a bus over me and what really matters is that He is in me and I am in Him. That secures me forever! And the more consistently you focus on that and concentrate on that and fill your mind with that, the more joy you'll have AND the more consistently you'll experience His peace!

3. consistent concentration on others not self (5) The KJV says *moderation*, the NIV *gentleness*, the NAS *forbearing spirit*, but the Amplified hits what I consider the key concept in the word, *unselfishness*. Whether it means holding back or being gentle with others or being fair with others, the key thought is focusing on others. The minute you begin to focus and concentrate on yourself and how you've got a problem and the great needs you have that are more important than others, you're dead in the water; your peace will evaporate. The Lord is near; in fact, He's right inside you and knows every thought. And if you're consistently concerned about yourself rather than others, it shows that you're not really concentrating on Him and depending on Him. So, peace comes as you consistently leave self to the Lord and concentrate on putting others first. But it also requires:

4. consistent communion with the Lord in prayer (6) Peace comes through consistently being in personal touch with the Lord daily and moment by moment. Now, that prayer needs to be:

a. when you are anxious Note the contrast here. Be anxious about no-thing, but be in prayer about every-thing. Whatever thing you don't want to be anxious about, pray about! Practically, this means that the moment you sense yourself beginning to worry or fret about something, just stop and pray and tell Jesus about it. And if you start to worry five minutes later, do it again. Keep on doing it until it quits! And do it:

b. with specific detail *Petition* and *requests* are specific words. Tell the Lord all about it. Tell Him what you need. Tell Him how you're starting to feel. Tell Him everything that's in your heart or mind and lay it all at His feet and say, "There, now it's yours and I trust you with it!" And do it:

c. in an attitude of thanksgiving, thanksgiving primarily for Him and for belonging to Him and for Him being in control. And when you get consistent at exercising prayer all the time, especially when you're worried or anxious, you'll find that that supernatural confidence of God is there and it protects you and you are able to sail through it all with an unshaken heart! So, consistency is the key to having God's peace in your life and it is also the key to seeing:

III. The Peace of God Sustained (8-9) Consistency not only brings it into action in you, but keeps it there and sustains it. And what keeps it sustained may be summarized in two things:

1. the consistent thinking of proper thoughts You can control your thoughts. You can choose what you think about. You can deliberately decide to think about things that are true instead of false, that are clean instead of dirty, that are right instead of wrong, that are positive instead of negative. You've got to consistently fix your mind on these things, let your mind dwell on these things instead of the other. And then there is:

2. the consistent practice of proper deeds You've got to be doing, putting into practice, the things you've been taught in church and have been told by others and been shown in the lives of the people who are your spiritual examples. You've got to develop behavior that is consistent. And when you do these two things consistently, you can count on:

3. the consistent presence of the God of Peace You see, our peace comes to us wrapped up in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that Person is not going to make His presence felt while our minds are not yielded to His control, but are focused on all the things WE want, nor while our bodies are not yielded to His control, but are focused on doing what WE want. Oh, His Presence will be there, but He's not going to let us sense it by giving us peace. That consistent yielding of the mind and yielding of the body to Him is what causes Him to give us continual and unshakeable peace of mind and heart.

You see, everything I've said could be summed up in one sentence spoken by Isaiah the prophet in 26:3, *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee for he trusteth in Thee*. If you consistently trust God with every particle of your life, you'll have peace. If not, you won't. If God is everything to you, nothing else will matter and you'll have peace. If anything else is everything to you, the only peace you'll have will be the temporary kind you feel when you have a lull between problems and everything's going right. But Isaiah said that God's peace is literally "*peace, peace*", real, genuine, perfect peace, peace the world can't give and the world can't take away. And it can be yours. Fix your mind on Him.

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

4:10-13 - Consistency: The Key to Power

Paul pauses in verse 10 to say thank you to the Philippians for the gift they had sent him. It had been a long time since their last gift because they had no opportunity to send one. Paul rejoiced and thanked God, not only for the gift and what a blessing it was, but also for their continued love and concern for him. However, he wanted to be careful not to give them the wrong impression. He was in need, no question about it. He was under house arrest at Rome. He was living in a house that he had to rent with a soldier chained to his wrist 24 hours a day. He had to pay for the rent of the house and all his own food, but he couldn't leave the house to work and pay for it. Perhaps he was able to make a few tents while chained up and sell them from home but no doubt he lived also on gifts sent by his friends. It was a rough time for Paul, but the alternative was the Mamertine Prison which was free, but the last place anyone would want to go! So, gifts like the Philippians' were really important to Paul, a real lifeline. Yet he doesn't want them to think that his excited "thank you" meant that he was in dire need and hinting for more. Rather he made it clear that he was content in his circumstances, even though they were difficult. Are you? Some of you are living through difficult times right now, maybe physically difficult, maybe financially, maybe emotionally. Are you content where you are in life? Now first, I guess we'd better talk about:

I. The Meaning of Contentment *Content* in English conjures up pictures of a nap in the sunshine after Sunday dinner. It means enjoying your circumstances so much that you don't want anything in life to be different. But if that's what contentment means to you, I'm afraid you'll never have very much of it in life. The Greek word for *content* here means something you wouldn't even dream of; it literally means to be self-sufficient. Scriptural contentment is:

1. knowing we have the power to endure circumstances It is knowing that whatever circumstance comes my way, I'll have the strength to make it through. If my life falls apart, if the things I love are taken away, if I am in an accident and crippled, no matter what happens, I have full confidence that I will be strong enough to endure it. That's contentment. But it is more:

2. it is knowing you can endure without dependence on others It is knowing that your ability to make it through is not dependent on your wife or your husband being there, or your children being there, or your friends being there, or the government being there. Now, I want to clarify this so you don't get me wrong.

a. we can ask others for help Lots of people have the idea that they have to do everything in life by themselves without ever asking anyone to do anything for them. That's often rooted in pride. We don't want to admit to ourselves or anyone else that we need help. Even Paul asked people to do things for him. He asked Timothy to bring him his coat and his books and parchments. There's nothing wrong with asking other people for some help when you need it. God never made a person that could live without help from others. And:

b. God does use others to meet our needs Oftentimes, in fact almost always, other people are the answer to our prayers. I'm sure Paul was praying about his finances there in Rome; he prayed about everything else! And God moved the Philippians to send a gift. Contentment is not the feeling that I can lick the world by myself, that I don't need any help from anybody. What I'm saying is that:

c. our dependence cannot lie in others Contentment is knowing that my ability to make it through the circumstances is not dependent on any other human being. It is knowing that even if everybody in the world fails me or forgets about me, that I still have the power to make it through any circumstance. The sufficiency that I have doesn't come from counting on Mom and Dad or husband or wife or anybody else. That's what keeps a lot of people going. They know that they always can come home or that they always have someone to whom they can turn. Well, what if things change and that someone you're counting on isn't there? Contentment goes further than that; it is knowing that you can have the power to endure anything whether anybody's there for you or not. That's a tall order, isn't it? You're probably thinking, "How can I have that kind of confidence, that kind of power?" Well, Paul tells us here:

II. The Secret of Power And notice that he does say:

1. it is a secret The Greek word here is interesting. In Paul's day there were "mystery" religions, idolatrous religions who had certain teachings that they kept secret, for members only, much like secret societies today have special things they tell nobody, for example, the Masons. Paul says this is something the average person doesn't know! In fact, it is something that maybe the average Christian doesn't know, or at least hasn't really grasped. But Paul discovered it. And you can too. How?

2. it is learned in the experiences of life Paul says, "I learned it". Where? By being hungry, by being in need, by being shipwrecked and arrested and beaten and mocked and despised and stoned and a hundred other things that I'm sure Paul never thought he would face, any more than we thought we'd face the difficulties we've had in life. It wasn't something Paul read in a book and adopted mentally. It was something he had tested over and over again in the laboratory of life. He found that no matter what came along, he made it through; he had the strength for it. And here's what he figured out:

3. the strength is not mine but Christ's who lives in me I could never make it through all that Paul endured and come out standing for the Lord. Paul could never make it. But listen to what he says literally in verse 13, *I have strength for all things IN HIM who in-powers me*. That strength lies not in me but IN HIM and He lives in me, so He supernaturally releases His mighty power in me as I need it. That's how I get through things. Remember Acts 1:8, *You will receive POWER* when the Holy Spirit comes to live in you. You see, the doctrine of the indwelling Christ is not just a theological statement. The mightiest being in the universe, El Gibbor, the Mighty God, actually dwells inside me when I receive Christ. Therefore, the life I live is no longer lived merely in my own ability and strength. Paul put it this way in Gal. 2:20, *...I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me*. So I find that:

4. in Him I have strength for all things The Bible asks the question, *Is anything too hard for the Lord?* Well, is it? No, Christ has power sufficient for anything I might face and that means that I can have power for:

a. each particular circumstance, for whatever state I find myself in. Wherever you are right now, no matter how difficult or how hard, He has power sufficient to get you through it. Wherever you may be tomorrow, He has power for it. In every moment of your life, you can stop and look at it and say, "God can handle this!" So, you can have power for:

b. any kind of circumstance Paul lists a range of them from well-fed to hungry, from need to plenty, from not having enough to having more than enough. And you might add from sick to healthy, from fatigued and burnt out to energetic, from despised and rejected to beloved.

Listen, here is contentment, knowing that whatever circumstance you face in life, the Christ who lives in you will give you sufficient power to face it. If He brings it into your life, He will give you the power to endure it! Look back at your life. Hasn't He always brought you through since you've been saved? Haven't you always found that when you needed it, you had the strength? Well know this: that will always be true! Whatever He sends you, He'll strengthen you to endure! So, why are so many Christians so miserable and despairing and fearful when they face problems instead of having a calm assurance? And why do we sometimes not experience this power and strength? It's because there is a key that unlocks this power and that also unleashes true contentment. And, as you might guess, it is:

III. The Key of Consistency There are three things that I must be consistent about:

1. I must consistently remember my own insufficiency Whenever I think to myself, "I can handle this. I don't have to pray about it. I don't need God's help on this one", you can rest assured that God will let you try it without His help. As long as you feel that you are strong enough, don't expect God to be supplying you with His divine strength. His strength can only be made perfect in weakness. I have to consistently remember what Jesus told His disciples, *Without Me you can do nothing!* That must be my consistent attitude. I can't prepare a sermon, I can't preach, I can't counsel, I can't be a good father, I can't be a good husband, I can't do anything in and of myself. I need His power. Then:

2. I must consistently remember His all-sufficiency This is the key that unlocks contentment and confidence in my life. I have an all-sufficient Savior. I need to remember that, *With God nothing shall be impossible!* And when I am convinced of that, that God is bigger and His power greater than any problem I face, then I will be able to rest quietly in my circumstances, whatever they are, trusting in Him. When I forget that, I will be full of worry and anxiety and fear. And finally:

3. I must consistently look to Christ for strength I must depend on Him moment by moment, through each day. It becomes a matter of prayer. When I get up in the morning I pray, "Lord, live my life today; let me do everything I do in your strength." And when trouble or problems come, I go to God in prayer saying, "Lord, I thank you that you are sufficient for this and that I have your strength. I am relying on You." Whose strength are you relying on?

You know, if there's one line that I heard from my children when they were young, it was, "I can do it, Dad; let me do it myself." And that's healthy when you're talking about children learning life skills. But sometimes Dad knows they can't. And they try and try and get frustrated and get mad. And sometimes they walk away and never achieve what they want. But sometimes, they turn and say, "Dad, would you help me?" because they know that in their eyes Dad can do most anything. Folks, we have a Heavenly Father who really CAN do anything, who really can empower you to face anything life may throw at you. Won't you turn to Him in childlike faith every day and say, "Father, would you empower me to live my life today?"

PHILIPPIANS: THE CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN

4:14-23 - Consistency: The Key to Provision

What a beautiful chapter full of promises this is. Paul says that through Christ we have PEACE for every circumstance, we have POWER for every difficult situation, and, today, that we have in Him the PROVISION of our every need. Now, that concept is somewhat removed from many of us. If I were to ask how many of you prayed for your daily meals this week, not too many hands would go up. Why? Because you and I are used to the idea that our needs are met by things like paychecks, credit cards, loans, and insurances. We need to constantly remind ourselves that every penny we receive, every bite of food we eat, every piece of clothing we wear, is a gift that God has provided for us. Of course, He did it through means, like a job or something natural, probably, but nevertheless, it is from Him and He could cut off any and every one of these things if He wanted to. So, on what basis does God provide for me? Is it automatic, the way I provide for my children? Well, to some extent it is. God seems to somehow always keep His children from starvation, basically. And then there are plenty of Christians who never pray about finances and make an adequate amount of money and go through life without ever being in real need. However, the real question is, "When the time comes that I have a real need in my life, can I count on God to provide it? Can I know that God will not just keep me alive, but will meet the needs that He brings into my life if circumstances change?" To answer that, I'm going to share:

I. The Principle of Giving Luke 6:38 says, *Give and it will be given to you.* Here is a timeless, unchanging principle that you will find all through the Bible in different ways. God's giving to you depends on whether or not you are a giver. Now I know that is the exact opposite of every financial principle the world will ever teach you. The laws of economics say that to meet your needs, you must get all you can and keep it. Only give it away if you know it will come back with interest. But God has a different law; for Him to fully provide for your needs, you must be giving. I have noticed over the years that when Christians get into need, here's what usually happens first. They don't shut off the cable TV. They don't sell the new car with its expensive payment and get one they can buy for cash. They don't give up the family vacation or cut down on Christmas. The first thing they do is to quit giving! That's following the wrong principle. You live under a different one. If you want God to fully provide for you, then you must give. So let's talk about:

II. The Practice of Giving The Philippians had sent a substantial gift to Paul to meet his needs during his confinement at Rome. Paul is thanking them for it in this section, but in the process he is laying out some key things about the practice of giving.

1. it is participation (14) Let me make this clear. Paul is not saying, "You shared money with me when I was in trouble". He's saying, "You shared in my troubles with me by giving!" Giving is special. It is participating, taking a joint role in the situation. When my friend has been sick and off work and can't pay the mortgage and I give to him, in a very real way I am sharing his problem, taking it on my shoulders too. When I give to a missionary as we do, we are participating in the life and work of that missionary as a co-laborer, sharing with them in the ministry. When I give to the ministry of a local church, I am sharing in the life and ministry that local church has. The ministry our church has to every community family, to every soul we bring to Christ, to every Christian we encourage and build up, I share a part in that because I give. Giving is so much more than writing a check and subtracting the balance. It is sharing in the life of others. But:

2. it is against our nature (15) The Philippians were the only church that gave Paul a missionary support gift as he left them and went on. The churches of Cyprus and Asia Minor never did. Yet when he left Philippi, they felt obliged to

give to his ministry. Why were they the only ones? Things haven't changed much. Do you know that the entire cause of foreign missions is supported by only 25% of the evangelical churches in this country? 75% give little or nothing to missions. Why? Basically, because giving is against our nature! What God asks and expects us to do goes against our grain. Don't expect other folks to understand the fact that you give significantly to God. And don't expect it to come easy at first. It may be tough to watch that money go off to the Lord's next project, when you have so many of your own! But as you do it, you'll discover how God really blesses you because of it.

3. it must be consistent (16) When Paul left Philippi, he went to Thessalonica. He stayed there a relatively short time, perhaps as little as two months and certainly not more than six, but during that time the Philippian church had sent him gifts at least twice (the NIV *again* is literally *once and twice*). Now Paul is confined at Rome at least 7 years later and they have sent another gift. No doubt they have sent gifts all through the years. Compare 1:5. The point is that they saw the need to give consistently, not just once and done. They gave as a way of life, a consistent habit. And that is the key that unlocks God's promise of provision! I wonder how many of us have a consistent habit of giving where we covenant with God to set aside 10 or 15 or 20% of all that God gives us to give to Him. The kind of giving God wants to see in us is the kind that is repeated and consistent, a way of life, so that it is as natural to put aside God's money each week as it is the grocery money!

4. it affects your account with God (17) God's an accountant, a bookkeeper; did you know that? And you have an account with Him in heaven. A record is being kept of your service for Him and part of that service is giving. Paul wanted to be sure that his readers weren't taking him wrong. He didn't intend them to see his words as a plea for money (neither do I want you to see this sermon that way), but he wanted them to understand that the Heavenly Father who sees you give in secret will reward you openly one day. So, the long-range effect of giving is that it affects the reward that we receive at the judgment seat of Christ one day. Like an IRA, you can't touch it now, but it has been carefully gathering eternal interest for that day! Now here's one further thing to realize:

5. it is toward God (18) When you give, whether it is to some individual or to a missionary or to the local church, it is far more than that. The act may be earthly, toward an earthly cause, but:

a. its fragrance ascends to God, just like the sacrifices that were made in the Old Testament. They were offered on earth and then the priests got to eat them for the most part, but Leviticus says time and again that their sweet savor ascended to the Lord. Close your eyes and picture Thanksgiving dinner at home; now smell it, can you? Remember how good it smells and the delight it gives you to smell it? When you give, it smells good to God. In fact:

b. it is an acceptable sacrifice for Him You don't bring a lamb to church, do you? Why not? It would not be acceptable to God, because, as far as salvation goes, your Lamb was already sacrificed on the cross. Ah, but your giving is just as much a very real sacrifice offered to God, just as the Israelite would bring his lamb. It is the sacrifice that God has designated for us to bring, the one that is acceptable to Him. And so you see:

c. it greatly pleases Him when you give When you make that sacrifice and give, the aroma of it satisfies and pleases Him. Think how you feel when you see your child be touched the need of poor children and give away a toy of their own. You are well-pleased. That child has a heart like you want them to have. They are becoming the kind of person you desire. So it is with God as we give. And because of that we have:

III. The Promise for Givers (19) Now please, if you're not giving seriously (and I'm not talking about quantity alone; the poor widow impressed Jesus with two coins because it was all she had), if you're not giving a significant portion of your income on a regular basis (and God's Old Testament definition of significant was at least a tenth), then please don't expect to hold God to this promise. It is for His children who are consistently practicing giving. But if you're a giver, look first at:

1. God's assets God is rich; He is wealthy. But notice Paul does not say, "His riches in the world". He says, *His riches in glory*. Frankly, I don't understand what that means. I imagine it has something to do with the verse, *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him*. I can conceive that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills and the wealth in every mine. I can conceive that He owns heaven and earth. But His assets in glory are far beyond that, beyond what my mind can imagine and they come to me in the person of Jesus Christ! If I am in Him, then every one of those things God has prepared is mine and I will have it; I am a joint-heir with Him. But the point is that if I'm going to have someone guarantee my welfare, God is the One! I wish they would let Him cosign for me at the bank! There is never a need that you have that is too great for His resources! And here's:

2. God's commitment First:

a. to meet every need Financial needs, yes, but it's not limited to that. God's riches aren't limited to that either. It includes physical needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs, emergency needs, regular needs. It's not just that if you give money, God will give you money back when you need it. If you're pleasing God by giving, then God will see that every genuine, legitimate need you have is met, and not only that; He promises:

b. to completely meet it The word *meet* means *to fill full*, to fill the empty bag right up to the top. Listen, there are needs some of you have that you don't see how God could ever meet all the way. But God's not in the business of doing things half way. Of course, some things you think you need, are not really needs at all. But God has committed Himself to completely fill up every genuine need you have and you can bank on that. You can count on it. Most of the time He'll do it by using other people just like he used these Philippians to send Paul a gift. And in verse 18 he says that it fully supplied his need at that point!

Folks, I stand before you a living testimony that this is true. From the time I began to consistently give as a teenager, God has ALWAYS, without fail, met every need that I and my family have had. I have a lifetime of experience in proving that this is true. If you will trust Him and become a consistent giver, He WILL meet all your needs. Trust Him!

COLOSSIANS

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Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

Colossians is a short letter which is a very important part of our New Testament. Let me give you a brief:

Introduction: The Letter To The Colossians (1-2) First, note:

1. the circumstances of the letter: 4:10,18 tell us it was **sent from prison**.

a. the author: the Apostle **Paul** who was in prison **in Rome** about **60-62 AD**. From there he is writing letters to the churches and individuals he cares so deeply about to encourage them in their spiritual walk.

b. the readers: **the church in Colossae** (which is reasonably **near Ephesus in Asia Minor**, modern Turkey). Now, Paul had not been to Colossae. He had not founded this church, but it was probably a result of the outreach that occurred during his three years at Ephesus and he felt a spiritual responsibility toward them.

c. the occasion of this letter seems to be **a report from their founder Epaphras (7-8)**. According to Philemon 23, Epaphras somehow wound up in prison with Paul there in Rome. It sounds as though Paul had originally sent him out on a mission to Colossae, but now here he is in Rome sharing a report of all the wonderful things God had done in establishing the church there, how the Colossians were full of love and faith and how the church was growing. That filled Paul's heart with joy, but Epaphras also shared some of the problems that were going on there and that brings us to:

2. the content of the letter: it was **sent for prevention**, to prevent the church from falling into the things they were being confronted with by the world around them. So, the first half of it:

a. it is doctrinal: to guard true faith in the face of growing heresy - Chs. 1-2 There were false teachers around then, just as there are today. Some of them were legalists who were trying to make rules that believers must follow. "You must do this and you can't do that." They taught a gospel of performance. "If you do this and don't do that and do it well enough, God will accept you." Isn't that what the majority of the people around you believe even today? If they have any kind of a belief in God at all, it is usually based on this belief. Then there were others who would be called Gnostics, "people in the know" who thought they knew better. "Jesus was not really and fully God. He was someone God created, a great teacher, a moral example." And you know, that Gospel is preached even in church buildings throughout our land and, indeed, the world today. "Jesus was a great prophet and teacher but he cannot save you; you must do that!" So, Paul spent two chapters clarifying doctrinal truths, confirming who God is, who Jesus is and who we are in Him. Then after that you'll find this letter:

b. it is practical: to help believers apply their faith to their daily lives - 3:1-4:6 Paul talks about the process of holy living. He talks about the family, about husbands and wives, parents and children. And in the end, you'll find:

c. it is personal: to communicate his love for them and invite their prayers for him - 4:7-18. So, let's begin our study where Paul begins, by talking about:

God Our Father: The Builder Of The Church - 1:1-8

Read verses 3-8. First, let's look at what Paul says about:

I. Who God The Father Is Notice a very important fact in the end of verse 2:

1. He is OUR Father (2b) God has placed Himself into a special relationship with all of those who believe in His Son. Jesus taught us to relate to Him that way. He said, *When you pray, say, 'Our Father.'* He is the God of the universe, but He has entered into a family relationship with us where we are His children and He is our Father. That may not mean much to you, especially if you don't have a healthy image of a father to relate to, but it actually means everything. *A missionary was teaching a Hindu woman the Lord's Prayer. Hindu gods are capricious and vengeful. You fear them and you try to appease them. So when he got to the end of the first clause, "Our Father which art in heaven," she stopped him. "If God is our Father," she said, "that is enough. There is nothing now to fear." All fear toward God ceases when He becomes our Father.* Paul wrote in Rom. 8:15-16, *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* If you have come to Christ, you have a Spirit inside you that calls God, "Daddy!" You run to Him with joy. You crawl up on His lap for comfort. You ask Him with confidence to help you. You trust Him to take care of you. When God is our Father, all fear is gone; it changes everything! He's no longer our Judge, no longer a shadowy dark angry figure we have to face when we die, no longer a distant being who rules the world and sends storms and earthquakes and tragedies to punish wickedness. Do you realize how many people around you and

throughout the world see Him that way? They're afraid of Him. They dread Him. But He's our Dad; He's our Father and we are the very children of God! What a privilege to know Him in that way! But then notice in verse 3 that He is also:

2. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (3a) That identifies Him as being unique. He is not one of the gods that the Greeks or the Romans talked about. He is not the god that Mohammed later claimed to reveal to Muslims. He is not any of the gods mentioned by the Hindus or Buddhists. He is not the higher-power god talked about by new-agers today or the kind of idol god worshipped by tribal peoples. There is not "one god behind all religions". God our Father is the God whom our Lord Jesus Christ called "Father". He is the one and only true and living God, the One who in the fullness of time sent forth His Son, Jesus, to save us. Paul wrote the Corinthians in *1 Cor. 8:5-6*, *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.* People are big today on saying, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe in God!" and they formulate a god in their own image. They say, "God would never send anyone to hell" or "Surely God is not against the kind of sincere love that two homosexuals have." People indeed have many "gods," but for us there is only one God, the Father who revealed Himself in Jesus, and all the rest are false. They don't exist! Thirdly, in the end of verse 6 we're told that our Father:

3. He is a God of grace (6b), a God who gives us what we don't deserve and could never earn, freely and unconditionally. He is a God who loves those who were His enemies and sent His own Son to die in order to rescue them from the penalty of their sins, a God who accepts us not on the basis of any merit or behavior or performance on our part, but who offers us His own eternal life as a free gift, if we will simply believe the good news and accept it. There is no other god like that! That is what sets Our Father apart from all the other so-called gods that men have invented and our faith apart from every man-made religion. *Eph. 2:8*, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...* Our Father is also in the end of verse 6:

4. He is a God of truth (6c) While the world is casting about asking with Pilate, "What is truth? Who knows!", our God cannot lie. He cannot deceive. With Him there is no variableness or shadow of turning; He does not change like shifting shadows as other so-called gods do. Everything that He has told us in His Word is true. Everything He says happened, really happened. Every promise He has made, He will keep. Truth is His very character; it is at the core of His being. John wrote in *1 John 5:20*, *We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true--even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*

That's who our Father is! Now here's:

II. What Our Father is Doing: Building A Global Church (6-7) There is a process going on all over the world. Jesus said the world is like a field and a sower is going out into that field and scattering good seed. That good seed is:

1. the Gospel (the Word of Truth) and as it takes root and germinates, it **is bearing fruit and growing**. That process happened right there in Colossae. The Gospel:

a. it came to them through Epaphras and they heard it When Epaphras came to town there wasn't one believer in the whole city. Nobody had ever heard the name of Jesus Christ. Most everyone worshipped pagan gods. But Epaphras began to scatter the good seed; he began to tell the story of Jesus, of His life, of His death, of His resurrection. And as the people of Colossae heard it:

b. God enabled some of them to understand and embrace it His Spirit spoke to their hearts and said, "Let there be light" and suddenly they saw the truth of grace. Jesus died for their sins! And they believed it and they repented of their sins and reached out in faith to Jesus. They became believers and the church was born at Colossae. And this Gospel seed continued:

c. it produced spiritual fruit in them It changed their lives. It produced in them the very character of God. It produced hope and faith and love. And they kept on planting seed, sharing the Good News with others and some responded and the church was growing. That's the process that happened at Colossae and that same process is happening right here in Glenside. We're planting seed and people are responding. The Gospel is producing the firstfruits of a harvest. And Paul's point is that:

2. the Gospel is doing the same thing all over the world, not just here. You see:

a. our Father has a global heart The Colossians needed to know it was happening in Rome and in Corinth and in Thessalonica and in Ephesus and in Galatia. All over the Roman world from east to west the Father was planting seeds and growing a church for His Son. In our day those borders have expanded to include literally the whole world. In the farthest reaches of the globe, from the church that is mushrooming into millions in China on the east, to the islands of the Pacific on the west, from the tip of South Africa to far north Russia, our Father is sending out the Gospel to every people on earth and it is bearing fruit and the church is being born and growing. Among the

remotest peoples, in the deserts and the jungles and the hard places, the Gospel is growing and bearing fruit. We live in the time of the greatest harvest the world has ever known. The point would be that:

b. we must be involved with Him in the process both here and around the world. And we are. Here is a letter written directly to all of you by our national missionary partner Urias who is an evangelist in the lowlands of West Papua among the 6000 Iraputu people. Listen:

17 June 2002

To Rev. Yohanes Kless, the one whose name we lift up,

We greet you in the name of God, to all you people, from our place here. We greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus also. From January to now I ask your forgiveness because I have not written to you. For one thing, I was sick in my chest, like liquid [probably bronchial pneumonia]. Then I went to a film seminar, then to other towns for seminars. I am thankful to God for the time now to write to you. It is important for us to write what is happening in Papua to all God's people there. Because all of you, God's people, can pray with power. Therefore, we want to tell you these things, so that you will pray and we can all give thanks to God also.

First of all, I thank God for helping me to show the Jesus film 5 times already. (Probably more by now.) Many who see Jesus dying on the cross, they cry too. I waited for the TV and generator from missionary Lunow to come. They are easy for me to carry and to run. We thank God for this because we prayed for them for 2 years. And now this year God answered us. And we thank missionary Lunow too for helping us get them. Also, when I showed the Jesus film, it hit one lady's heart and she returned a machete that fell in the garden. She found it and used it for a long time. But when she saw the film, she gave it back to the person it belonged to. The woman who owned it was someone from our group.

We also give thanks to Pastor Kless and all the people there, because you gave us as much as 5 million rupiah for fuel for the boat. Therefore, Ibu Lois and my children, and all the people here in Babo/Aroba-Papua here say thank you to you all too.

We also praise the Lord concerning the first lady that Lois brought to the Lord. She recently died. But a few nights before she died, she said she could see her name written on the cross of Jesus. We really praise God for this to show her name to her. Because when we first came to Aroba, we saw many people die. They all had hurting flesh and many became unconscious, but they only saw the darkness. But this lady told everyone she saw her name on Jesus' cross; she was going to be with him. This made their hearts wonder at our message too.

Please keep praying about the idol worship houses. The people have stopped going to them and the grasses and weeds are all growing up along the paths to them. Pray now that God's voice will be like a sword and cut their hearts from the idols, permanently. Pray that the ones who have asked Jesus already into their hearts that Jesus voice will be very important in their hearts. And that they will invite me into their homes to teach them....

A while ago I went to the head of the Catholic religion in my area to get permission to show the Jesus film in his area. He told me to only show the film and not to preach, or say anything to the people. He also told me not to teach against their idols. But I told him that this teaching against idols is not from me, it is from God's voice to all mankind, not to worship idols. So whatever he is speaking against, he is speaking against God himself. All of this teaching is in the 10 commandments too. So he told me to bring the letter about the film to him, and he would sign it. We truly thank God because he opened this leader's heart, just a little. In September I want to show the film in his area 3 places. Please pray for us in this. In June I showed the film to the children that we teach in Babo town. I think this is all. I will tell you more about showing the Jesus film another time. Now we greet you, Pastor Kless, our older brother in the Lord. And we also greet your wife and your children. And to all of God's people in Glenside, we give your life to you. May God himself watch over all of us. Your lives to you, from us, Urias and Lois, and children.

Literally all over the world, Our Father is building a global church, growing a harvest of souls who receive His grace and wait for His Son to return. And we are co-laborers with Him in that process. And, amazingly, no matter where the Gospel falls and is believed, it produces the same results in the lives of the people who receive it. So, let's look at:

III. What Our Father Produces In Us (3-5) Paul had heard what the Gospel had produced in these Colossians. Because of it their lives were filled with three things that we also have. First:

1. we have hope: What's hope? Biblically speaking, hope is **a present certainty based on a future reality**. I am absolutely sure right now about what is going to happen in the future because I've been told so by a God of truth and He has guaranteed it. So I'm just waiting and looking forward to it! That's why that dear Iraputu woman could die in peace. She was filled with hope, with that certain knowledge that she belonged to Jesus and she was going to be with Him in heaven. Jesus said in *John 14:1-3*, *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.* Dear friends, we have a sure hope that is stored up for us in heaven. We're going to be with Jesus and we can live and die looking forward with certainty to it. That's what the Gospel has produced in us. Secondly:

2. we have faith: What's that? In New Testament terms, faith is ***an absolute trust in Christ Jesus alone***. The Psalmist said *some trust in horses and some trust in chariots*; today some trust in money and some trust in their own ability and their own performance; some trust in their religion and some trust in their extensive knowledge. But we trust in the name of the Lord our God; we trust in the only name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, just as we were saved by trusting Him, we now live by trusting Him. Paul said we glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, no trust in our own ability, our own wisdom, our own power. We trust in Jesus alone; we run to Him with everything, with every care, with every problem, with every circumstance. That's what the Gospel has produced in us! And finally:

3. we have love: What's that? In this text it refers to ***a sacrificial caring for all our fellow believers***. The world's philosophy is "me first", every man for himself. We come programmed with that. But when we came to Christ, *Rom. 5:5* says, ... *God poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*. So, we love one another with our Father's love. And they loved not just a few select friends, but all their fellow believers, even new converts or strangers to the body, ones who are traveling and needed a place to stay, ones who were hungry or hurting or persecuted, the ones who were slaves and the ones who were masters. They loved all the brethren and so will we. That's what the church is to be known for and how it will impact the world. Jesus said, *By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*. That's what the Gospel will produce in us.

As Paul wrote this, he was thankful. Every time he prayed for the Colossians, he thanked God for what the Gospel had produced in them: hope, faith and love. And you know what? When I see the Gospel produce these things in you, I'm thankful too, because I can see our loving Father at work building His church in your lives. Come to your Father. Thank Him for being your Father, for being the Father of our Lord Jesus who died for us, for being a God of grace and of truth and for giving you hope and faith and love for all the saints. And thank Him that all over the world His Gospel is producing a tremendous harvest of people just like you whom you'll be with forever.

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

God Our Father: The Source Of Our Living - 1:9-12a

I once saw a special on television about how Sept. 11 impacted people's faith in God. For instance, they interviewed the man who was on the 82nd floor, cried out to the Lord for deliverance and was empowered to break through a plasterboard wall and get all the way to safety before the tower collapsed. But they also interviewed a number of people whose belief in God had been shattered by 9/11, who blamed God for allowing it to happen, who couldn't bring themselves to pray to Him or who couldn't even believe in His existence anymore. It's always puzzling to me why human beings seem to blame God for the evil that they themselves do to one another. But the paradox is striking: on the one hand you have a Lisa Beamer who lost her husband writing, *"God has whispered two words to me over and over: Look up...look up. Through that quiet voice I'm reminded to look beyond my own little life to the Creator of the universe. Without fail, looking up brings peace to my soul."* On the other hand, is another woman who lost her husband and says, "I always prayed and talked to God for 35 years. I would say, 'God bless my husband or God bless my child or God bless this or that or thank you God for this or that.' You know, the way you talk to God. But I can't bring myself to talk to God that way anymore." What's the difference? How can one be drawn deeply to God and one be moved to reject Him? I think the answer is in what we studied last week from the end of verse 2 and following. It's in whether we know God truly as Our Father, personally, instead of merely as the God who's in charge of things, who I hope will like me and help me. When we receive Jesus Christ personally into our heart and life, everything changes in our relationship with God. In that moment He becomes our Father and we become His child and all our fear, all our doubts, melt away. He's our Dad; we're His child whom He loves and nothing that happens can change that. Adversity and tragedy drive us into His loving arms because He is our refuge, our Father. Now, this morning we're going to move ahead and talk about:

I. The Life That Our Father Intends For Us (9-10a) Let's start with verse 9 and take these phrases apart. Paul was praying about the lives that the Colossian believers lived. He wanted them to live the life that the Father intends for His children to live. Very often we tend to define that life in terms of specific behaviors. If I asked you what a godly person was like, you might be tempted to give me a list like: he goes to church, he reads his Bible, he prays, he tithes, he is honest and doesn't lie or cheat, and so on. But that's not what Paul prays for them. The life he prays for them to have:

1. it is a life that is filled with the knowledge of His will He prays for them to have:

a. spiritual wisdom Translated into practical terms that means **knowing what He wants** us to do. And also, he prays for them to have:

b. understanding which means **knowing how to apply it in my life**, in the specific details.

And the goal is for us to be *filled* with that kind of knowledge. That word filled is a special word. It's used again over in 2:9 where it says that *in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives*. It means the complete fullness, all of it. The life our Father wants for His children is simply one that is completely filled, completely occupied with one thing, seeking, knowing and doing His will, right down to the specific details of life. "How does my Father want me to greet my family when I get up

in the morning? How does He want me to get in the car and drive? How does He want me to respond to the kid I sit next to in school or the one who pushes me at recess? When does He want me to spend time with Him and listen to Him in His Word? When does He want me to talk to Him and when and how should I worship Him?" It's a life where I think about Him and what He wants every moment of the day in every situation, where He Himself is the central focus of my life, not simply the keeping of a list of rules. Now, how am I ever going to have such a life?

2. it is a life that is experienced through continual prayer Paul said, "I never stop praying for you that this will be the case, that you will have this kind of "want to please Him in everything" life. And that's what it means for us too. It means praying, talking to Him continually, "Lord, what do I do with this? How do I respond to that? What should I say to him?" and then listening with my heart for the answers. Nehemiah was the cup-bearer to the King of Persia, but his heart was broken over the fact that his native city of Jerusalem was lying in rubble. He sensed that God wanted him to go back and rebuild it. But he knew he had to ask the king for permission and that was a scary thing. So, when that day came and the king asked him, "What is it you want?" Nehemiah says, "Then I prayed to the God of heaven and I answered the King..." I can imagine that quickly-breathed prayer, "Lord, what do I say? Lord, speak your words through me; say what you want said!" That's how we live the life God intends. We pray to the God of heaven and do what He wants. When we deal with the misbehavior of our kids, when we have a disagreement with our spouse, when we are mistreated or when the unthinkable happens, we pray to our Father in heaven and say and do what He wants. If I am consumed with doing the will of God, I will be constantly in prayer, constantly seeking that will in everything! Now in verse 10 Paul uses another phrase to describe that life:

3. it is a life that is described as:

a. a walk You don't see that in the NIV, but *live a life* is literally the Greek word *walk* and whenever the New Testament tells us to "walk" in a certain way, it is referring to **a consistent manner of daily living**, a habitual way that we live, something that characterizes our life on a continual basis. For instance, we are told to "walk in love", to "walk in the light", to "walk as Jesus did". It means a consistent, continual pattern of living. But in this case Paul calls it:

b. a worthy walk, a consistent manner of daily living that is worthy of the Lord (Jesus). Now what does that mean? What is a life that is worthy of Jesus? Well, that word *worthy* means "of equal worth or weight with the object of its comparison". Let's look at how the word is used in two other places. To have a walk worthy of Jesus means that:

(1) it represents Him - Rom. 16:1-2 The Romans are to receive Phoebe in a way that is worthy of the saints. That doesn't mean "receive her as you would receive a saint". It means, "receive her in the way that one who is a saint (like you are) should receive her". In other words, your behavior is worthy when it matches what you are! Now, in Colossians, we are the Lord's. We belong to Him. We bear His Name. He lives in us. We are His people. Our daily walk is worthy when it matches and displays our relationship to the One whom we profess. And secondly it is worthy when:

(2) it reflects gratitude to Him - 1 Thess. 2:12 This verse has a different meaning of worthy. The sense is, "God has done a marvelous thing for you; He called you into His kingdom and glory; your life should be proportionally affected by what He has done for you." A life that is worthy of the Lord Jesus is a life that is impacted to the very core by what He has done for us. When we understand and believe that Jesus died for us, that should impact us to our very core; the entire rest of our life should reflect our gratitude continually.

A walk that is worthy of the Lord, Paul continues, is one **that is so completely impacted by Jesus** that it is:

c. a pleasing walk: one that pleases Him in everything That becomes the goal of our whole life, not to keep a rule or behave in a certain way in order to impress Him and win His approval or gain some reward, but simply and genuinely to be so filled with gratitude and love for Him that in every moment of every day my chief concern is not what I want, but it is to please Him, to know what He wants me to do and to do it.

Now, what does that look like? How can we tell if that's really happening? Paul goes on to mention:

II. The Marks Of The Life That Our Father Intends for us (10b-12a) There are four of them and for you English students, they are all participles. First, when our life is consumed with pleasing Our Father:

1. we are bearing the fruit of good works A good tree naturally brings forth good fruit on its branches. And the natural fruit of a life controlled by God's will is going to be a continual flow of good works. In fact, Eph. 2:10 says that we are *created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*. They're part of His plan. They come naturally when we seek and follow His will. Our life is filled with them because we want to please our Father. Secondly, when our life is consumed with pleasing Our Father:

2. we are growing in the knowledge of God Not book knowledge, not knowledge about God, but deep experiential knowledge of Him. The more we want to please Him, the more He reveals of Himself to us. I know so much more of His grace than I did when I met Him at age 15. I know so much more of His ways than I did then. I know so much more

of His heart for the world and I have seen so much more of His power at work doing great and mighty things. Pleasing the Father leads to a continually growing experience of Him. And it also leads to this:

3. we are being strengthened with all His power: Now by that, Paul doesn't particularly mean that we run around doing miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead, displaying His power in signs and wonders. He's focused in another direction. The result of being strengthened by his power is that we display three things. First, we display:

a. endurance, which means we continue without quitting If we know and experience His power and live out of it, we persevere when the going gets tough, even when it gets impossible, because we're living out of His resources, His almighty power, not our own. And we display:

b. patience, (in the Greek *longsuffering*) which means we suffer without retaliating We go through injustice and persecution and ill treatment and still love our enemies and bless them and pray for them. That's the mark of His power. And thirdly we do it with:

c. joy In the Greek, *with joy* belongs, in my humble opinion, to what precedes it, not to what follows as in the NIV. *To all endurance and longsuffering with joy...* That means that in the midst of our struggles and suffering **we rejoice without ceasing**; we rejoice in the Lord always. We find joy in Him and nothing in all our circumstances can take it away! That's a sure mark that we are living out of His power, because that's not in us! And finally, Paul says in verse 12, if we are living a life that is consumed with pleasing Him:

4. we are giving thanks; we continually thank our Father instead of complaining. We never lose sight of what He's done for us. Let me tell you a story that illustrates what I've been trying to say to you this morning very vividly:

*A ragged boy with a violin under his arm roamed the streets of a great European city. Because he had no home or family, he wandered around for food and shelter. He had a strange gift for music and had somehow gotten hold of a violin, and would stand on the corners and play for the crowd. When he finished, they would toss some coins and this is how he lived. In the same city was a famous musician. One day he happened to hear the boy playing and was impressed by the quality of music. "Son, to whom do you belong?" he said, "I don't belong to anybody," the boy answered. "Well, where do you live?" was the next question. "I don't have any place to live. I just sleep on the streets or wherever I can." The man thought for a moment and then asked, "How would you like to be my boy and come to live with me? I'll teach you all I know about how to play the violin." The boy's eyes sparkled, and he said, "Mister, I'd love it." So the great musician took him to his own home, had him cleaned and dressed up, and the man became like a father to him. For several years he poured into the eager young mind and heart all he knew about the violin. Finally, the boy was ready to appear on the concert stage for his first public recital. The house was filled to capacity. At last, the boy came out, put the violin beneath his chin and began his concert. He played beautifully and there was much applause. But the boy paid no attention. He just kept his eyes turned upward and continued to play. The audience was mystified by his behavior until someone said, "I don't understand why he is so insensible to all this thunderous applause. He keeps looking up all the time. I'm going to find out what is attracting his attention!" Moving about in the concert hall, the observer found the answer. There in the topmost balcony was the old music master, peering over the banister toward his young pupil. He was nodding his head and smiling, as if to say, "You are doing well, my boy; play on!" And the boy did play on, not seeming to care whether the audience laughed or applauded. He kept his gaze upward. You see, he was playing to please the master only. Oh, do you see that we were that boy? Lost, hopeless, bound, dead in our trespasses and sins, but God reached out to us and said, "Would you like to be My child? Would you like to belong to Me and come live in My house?" We said "yes" and He redeemed us, He clothed us and fed us and poured His love into us all these years. And that should have impacted us so deeply that now we can imagine only one way to live. We live to please the Master only. That's all that matters. Forget the applause. Never mind the criticism of others. His "well done" is the very heartbeat of our lives every moment of every day and it shows in the way we live. That's what Paul prayed for the Colossians and for us and that's what we must pray for continually. I leave you with *Phil. 2:13, For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for [His] good pleasure. (NASB).**

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life God Our Father: The Source of Our Salvation - 1:12-14

May I remind you that the first half of the letter to the Colossians is doctrinal and it opens with some deep truths about God our Father. First, in verses 1-8 we saw what our Father is about: He is building His church all over the world and He has called us to be involved in that process where we are. Then we saw in verses 9-12 that our Father is the source of all our living, that the primary purpose and goal in our lives as His children is simply and only to please Him. Today in verses 12-14 we'll see why pleasing Him is all that really matters to us. It's because our Father has saved us; He is the source of our salvation. Now, that's a word we use so often and so broadly that it often loses meaning for us. LuAnn heard the story of a woman who was buried alive in the rubble of the World Trade Center. She was in darkness; her head was wedged between pieces of concrete; her limbs were immobilized by steel girders and debris so that she couldn't move, yet she was conscious. Periodically she yelled for help. She could sense that eventually the full darkness of night came and could

barely sense when morning came. After hours and hours, a hand reached down through the rubble and grasped hers and a voice said, "My name is Paul. I'm going to stay right here and hold your hand until we get you out." Hope came alive in her heart but it took still more hours to free her from her concrete tomb. When she was at last free, she asked, "Where is Paul; I have to thank him; he held my hand." And the rescuers said to her, "Paul? There is no Paul on this squad; none of us held your hand." She could only conclude that God had sent an angel to her in her hour of deepest despair and had saved her. Her experience is a pretty good picture of what happened to us. Our Father saved us when we were lost in darkness, dead in our sins and without hope in the world. He reached down His mighty hand and lifted us out of our dark prison. No wonder we are driven to thank Him! Verses 12-14 spell out three aspects of how our Father saved us that should fill us with gratitude. First:

I. Our Father Has Given Us An Inheritance (12) In modern terms an inheritance is something that is promised to a child or an heir upon the death of the giver. Its biblical meaning is a little broader; it means simply "a promised possession". For instance, Heb. 11 says God called Abraham out of Ur to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance. God promised him that his descendants would possess the land; it would be theirs. For hundreds of years that promise was repeated to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and when Joshua finally led them into it, God gave them their "inheritance", the land He had promised, and they divided it up by lot. So, Paul says our Father has given to us an inheritance; He has caused us to possess something very special that He has promised and he explains:

1. the nature of our inheritance Notice that:

a. it is an inheritance we possess right now We are not waiting to receive our inheritance; we have already been made partakers of it, participants in it. That is, we have it, we possess it right now. Then notice that:

b. it is an inheritance that belongs only to saints Please keep in mind that Paul is writing in the first century. There was not even a hint of a concept of a saint as a specially designated person. The word *saint* means "holy one", "one who is holy and pure" and it is the term that God used way back from the days of Samuel and on to refer to His people, His holy ones. What our Father has given us is an inheritance that only people who have been made holy, who have been made God's holy people can have. And that inheritance:

c. it is the light of His own presence In the NIV the words "kingdom of" are inserted. They are not found in the Greek texts. God has caused us to share in the inheritance of the saints IN LIGHT. Light is the object; light IS our inheritance. Now what does that mean? Well, let's look at a couple of other scriptures that can help us understand. First, Paul told Timothy that:

(1) God dwells in unapproachable light - 1 Tim. 6:16 Light is the symbol of His holiness, His absolute purity. God lives in absolute purity and holiness, light so bright that no one can come near it. No one can approach it. No one can look at it or see it in all its glory. No creature with the slightest taint of sin can draw near without being utterly destroyed. When God was on the mountain, no person could even touch the mount because of sin. Even men like Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament had to cover their eyes or be hidden in the rock when God's presence passed by. John said, *God is light and in Him is no darkness at all! He dwells in unapproachable light.* But Peter says:

(2) God called us into His light - 1 Pet. 2:9 Look at that! We have been made a holy people, a people belonging to God. How? We were in darkness. We were in sin and destined for death. But He reached His hand down and called us out of that darkness into His wondrous, marvelous, amazing light, the very light of His Presence. We have the privilege of approaching and dwelling with Him who is unapproachable. But how could He do that? There is more:

(3) God put His light into us - 2 Cor. 4:6 Just as on the day of creation God said, *Let there be light!* and suddenly in the midst of a dark void light came into being, so on the day that we received Christ, God's light, His very own holy, unapproachable, ineffable Presence shone in us in the person of Christ. He placed the holiness of His very person in us. That is our possession! We believers have what no other human beings on earth have, the very person of the Living God of the universe dwelling in us. Compare **Col. 1:27**. Christ, the true light that lights every man, lives inside us, His people. That is the glorious mystery. That is our hope of glory. Christ in us! When Joshua divided the land, one tribe, the Levites, were not given any inheritance in it. They were told that the Lord, the God of Israel Himself was their inheritance! Folks, that's us! Our Father has caused us to share in the greatest inheritance a human being could ever have, a personal relationship with Him where His own holy presence dwells in us! Now go back to 1:12 and look at:

2. how we came to share in it Our Father qualified us. You see:

a. we did not qualify Compare **2 Cor. 3:5-6**. The word translated *competent* here is the same word translated *qualify* there. In and of ourselves we were not competent to qualify for anything! We could never approach God; we could never come into His holy Presence. We could never be sufficient, never be enough. But what does it say? **HE HAS MADE US COMPETENT** or in Colossians, our Father has **QUALIFIED US!**

b. our Father fitted and equipped us to receive it by grace Only saints, only Holy Ones, could approach His presence; only in saints could He dwell. So, by His grace HE MADE US HOLY ONES, SAINTS! He made us pure and holy so that we might know Him and so that He might live in us and that we might live with Him forever and ever. Listen, our inheritance is not just a bunch of jewels and crowns and mansions and rewards and bliss in heaven someday! It is the unimaginable act of being made holy and His presence entering us right now!

Is anybody ready to stand up and shout hallelujah yet? Glory! Our Father has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in His glorious light! But that's not all. In verse 13 we read a second thing:

II. Our Father Has Rescued Us From Our Slavery (13) Some years ago I saw a movie that was on TV. The basic story went like this: There was a father who was a soldier during the Vietnam War and was captured. After the war he was still being held powerless in a prison camp in North Vietnam. So, his young son, together with some friends, staged a daring raid right into the heart of enemy territory, broke into the prison, freed the father and brought him back home to freedom. If, in your mind, you can reverse the places of the father and the son in the story, so that the son is in the prison and the father comes to get him, you have a pretty good picture of:

1. the meaning of rescue You see:

a. we WERE under the power of darkness If light is the symbol for purity and holiness and God is light, then in the Bible darkness is the symbol for evil, impurity and Satan, who we refer to as the prince of darkness. We were captives. We were under the power and authority of darkness. Elsewhere Paul says that we were slaves to sin, that we were taken captive by Satan to do his will, that we all at one time followed his ways as the prince of this world. Jesus sent Paul to the nations of the earth *to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God*. That was us; that's who we were! But:

b. we are NOW under the rule of His beloved Son We were rescued from that old sphere of authority, from that old power, from that old slavery, from that old fate of destruction and placed under the legitimate authority and rule of the Son He dearly loves, Jesus Christ! We were given a new Master who is the object of the Father's love and in whom WE become the object of the Father's love! One of our missionaries wrote from the Brazilian jungle and said, *I would like to ask special prayer for Bianca, the 11 yr. old we are trying to give in adoption to a Christian couple... The people here will likely pressure Bianca's father to refuse to give her up. They will promise to care for her, which will all sound wonderful to an outsider. However, the truth is that if Bianca returns here, she will again be mistreated, neglected and used as a prostitute. This abuse had already begun several years ago... Bianca has had such a hard life and that has been hard to watch. Please pray with us that she will be successfully given to this Christian couple.* Poor girl! 11 years old and she has lived a life of suffering and abuse because she's been under the authority of an evil, wicked father who uses her for his own purposes! If only she could be legally transferred to the authority of a father and a mother who genuinely love her! That's a living picture of what happened to us! She's who we were; we were under the authority of an evil, wicked father who used us; we were under the dominion of darkness, but our Father rescued us by transferring us into the kingdom of the Son He loves! And notice:

2. the method of rescue: The words *brought us* are literally, *he removed us to*. They indicate **complete removal** from one sphere of authority to the other. The same is used where Jesus said that with faith you can tell that mountain to be removed from here and cast into the sea. It's not here anymore; it's there. Bianca is away from her father right now but still under his authority. She needs to be completely removed and given to a father who loves her. And we were. Aorist, past tense! The dominion of darkness has no longer any authority over us. It has no power over us except for that which we voluntarily choose to give it! We are set free from the power of sin, free from slavery to it, free from bondage to Satan's will because our Father rescued us from our slavery. But that's not all:

III. Our Father Has Redeemed Us From Our Punishment (14) The word *redeem* means "to free by the paying of a price". The freedom that we now enjoy as children of God was not easy; it came at a price:

1. the price was the blood of Christ, which you'll notice is in the margin of your NIV (which simply means that not all of the manuscripts of this verse have those words). But Paul wrote the identical phrase in his letter to the Ephesians and there it says, *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.* - Eph. 1:7. The blood of Christ, His very life, is the precious price that was paid for us. And make no mistake, it was not paid to Satan to buy us out of his service. It was a price our Father paid to His own justice and righteousness and holiness. The Father dwelling in unapproachable light could not let sin into His presence, but we were sinners. He had to separate us from our sins and remove it so that His justice could be satisfied and He could remain holy and at the same time have us! So, He sent His dear Son to die in our place, to take our sentence, our punishment, to shed His blood for ours, to take our sin upon Himself, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him! The father paid that horrible price and:

2. the result for us was the forgiveness of sins And forgiveness is not just forgetting about sins. A just God can never overlook sin, can never excuse it and pardon it at whim. It must be paid for. So our forgiveness means, first of all, the:

a. satisfaction of the penalty The punishment for sin has always been death, but because the blood has been shed, that penalty has been paid, that punishment has been exacted. Christ took it. He paid for it, so it is no longer hanging over our heads. We are free and clear. We are truly pardoned; there is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! But forgiveness goes even deeper than that. It is:

b. separation from the act itself The Greek word means “to send away”. Every year in Israel on the Day of Atonement the High Priest would take two goats and he would lay his hands on the head of each one and confess over them the sins of Israel. Thus, symbolically the sins of the people were transferred to the sacrifice. The one goat was slain and burned as a sin offering outside the camp. His blood was offered on the altar. That took care of the penalty! But the second goat was known as the “scapegoat”. He was taken out far away into the wilderness, “carrying those sins” and there he was released, never to be seen again. The sins were not only paid for; they were GONE, remembered no more. When my Father looks at me, He doesn’t say, “Now there’s my child with his bunch of paid-for sins. I don’t hold them against him.” Hebrews says, “Our sins and our iniquities He remembers no more!” He has chosen to separate them from us, to remember them against us no more. When He looks at me, He doesn’t see “my son, the forgiven sinner, my son who used to be dead in sins”; He sees “my son, the saint; my son whom I have made holy, my spotless, pure precious child!” That’s what forgiveness means!

No wonder verse 12 says that our life should be constantly characterized by giving thanks to the Father. He has forgiven us all our sins; He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son and He has qualified us to share in the inheritance of saints, the light of His own presence dwelling in us! Our Father has saved us!

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

Jesus Christ: The Supreme Lord of All Creation - 1:15-17, 19

At verse 15 in this doctrinal portion of his letter, Paul moves from talking about who God the Father is to talking about who Jesus Christ is. After all, that is a primary question, isn’t it? Jesus asked it of His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered, “Some say this and some say that...” Then He pressed them, “But who do YOU say I am?” And Peter confessed, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!* There is a big difference between who people say Jesus is and who He really is. Some say this and some say that! Paul warned in 2 Cor. 11:4 that someone might come to you and preach a Jesus who is other than the Jesus he preached. In Colossae that was certainly the case. There were false teachers there who also taught about Jesus, but the Jesus they taught about was different from the one Paul believed in. Their Jesus was a created being, a sort of half-god, half-angel who mediated between God and created things. He was not Jesus, God the Son, the second person of the Godhead. And Glenside is really no different from Colossae or Corinth. There are false teachers right here who preach another Jesus. You’ll see their literature. You’ll see them run ads on TV. Some of them will knock on your door and try to talk to you about what the world is coming to. Some of them preach in the pulpits of churches down the street. They write religious columns in newspapers and articles in magazines. They come with all kinds of labels. Some we call cults; some we refer to as liberals or modernists; some are proponents of other world religions. But the thing they have in common is this: their Jesus is somebody other than Paul’s Jesus, somebody less than the true Jesus of Christianity, the One we believe in. Let’s read verses 15-17. There are two major facts about our Jesus in these verses that I want to make clear. The first is that:

I. Our Jesus Is God (15a, 19) He is the image of the invisible God. When we think of image, we think of a photograph, something that looks *like* the real thing but is *not* the real thing. The Greek word for *image* would translate into English as “icon” and it means “a visible representation”. If you have a computer, you’re familiar with “icons” on your desktop, little pictures that you see. They are visible representations of programs you can’t see, invisible files stored away on your hard drive, but the presence and the nature of the program is revealed through that icon so that when you see and you touch that icon you see and touch the hidden program. This is a poor illustration, but Jesus is not simply something *like* God; He is the visible representation or expression of the invisible God. He is God in seeable form, as compared to God in unseeable form. Now, this is a deep concept so let’s take it apart. First:

1. He is the revelation of Deity Look with me at two other Scriptures if you would. First, **Heb. 1:3**. The Greek word here for *exact representation* means the impression left by a seal in clay. Have you ever played with Play Dough? When you take a coin, for instance, and press it into the clay and then carefully peel it away, what do you have? An exact representation of the coin. The markings correspond point for point and detail for detail. So Christ is the exact image of the being of God, not something lesser. So much so that Jesus could freely say, *He who has seen Me has seen the Father*. Philip had asked on that occasion, *Show us the Father* and Jesus replied, *Have I been with you so long a time and you do not recognize Me?* Now look at **Jn. 1:18**. No one had ever seen God, not even Moses who spoke with Him face to face. They saw only manifestations, not His real being. But Jesus Christ who is God the One and Only, who is with the Father, has made Himself seeable and knowable by becoming man! God who is invisible revealed Himself visibly in the person of Jesus Christ so we could know Him! Secondly, notice:

2. the completeness of His Deity (19) He repeated it again over in 2:9. That word fullness means complete fullness. Everything there is of God was in Christ. He was not part God and part man. He wasn't half-God, and half-man. He was fully God, of one substance with the Father. And thirdly, in verse 19, notice:

3. the permanence of his Deity The word *dwell* implies a permanent continuing. Some have tried to say that God came upon and into the man Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the cross. Not so; Jesus always was God; He is God and He will always be fully God!

Now, that's the Jesus I know! He's not the Jesus the Mormons talk about! He's not the Jesus the Jehovah's Witnesses speak of. He's not the Jesus the Unitarians discuss nor is he the Isa presented in the Koran. When Thomas finally believed who He was, fell at Jesus' feet and cried, "My Lord and my God!" Why am I making such a big deal out of this? Because it's easy to be completely sincere and yet be badly mistaken! *Tom Olson told about a physician who was administering a controlled mixture of oxygen and anesthetic gas to a patient in a New York hospital. When one of the tanks was empty, the doctor used a new one marked Oxygen. Almost immediately the patient died. The coroner's autopsy revealed carbon dioxide poisoning. Upon investigation the second tank was found to contain pure CO2 and had somehow been mislabeled. The manufacturer denied any wrongdoing. No one knew how it could have gotten by the inspectors. The doctor had no doubt that he was using oxygen when he administered the lethal gas. No one wanted the tragedy to happen, yet they were all sincerely wrong.* Lots of people are religious and sincere, but this is a matter of life and death. If you put the label "Jesus" over the wrong commodity and administer it to a person who is in danger of death, the person doesn't live; they die! Forever! But if you give them the REAL Jesus they live forever! Our Jesus, the real Jesus, the true Jesus, the only Jesus that can save anyone, is fully and completely God! And then verse 15 gives us a second major fact:

II. Jesus Is The Lord Of All Creation (15b-17) Another way that people mislabel Jesus is that they see Him as sort of "second-in-command", somehow a little bit less than the Father (who is the real boss) because He is the Son. But here Paul says:

1. He is the Firstborn over all things What does that mean? Often we think that in the same sense that Jesus was Mary's "firstborn" son, that He was also God's firstborn. But the scripture is careful never to say that. It uses the term Firstborn of Christ only a few times and each time, just like here, it does not describe His relationship to the Father, but to the creation or to the church. In relationship to the Father Christ is the "Only-begotten" or "the One and Only Son". It is in relationship to created things that He occupies the position of Firstborn. In my family there were three kids. My brother was the firstborn; I was last, 18 years later. Today that would mean basically that he gets old before I do. But in Old Testament times it would mean much more. Not only would it mean that he was around before I was, but that he would get a double share of the inheritance when the parents die and he would also get to be the leader, the ruler in charge of the family clan. I've always been glad we don't live back then! But that's what Paul is implying about Jesus. Verse 17 points out that:

a. He exists before all things And you'll notice the present tense. It's not just that He was around before all things but that He eternally IS before all things. All other things had a beginning, but He had none. He is eternally pre-existent, not part of the creation. He told the Jews in *John 8:58, ...before Abraham was born, I am!* and they tried to stone Him because they knew He was saying, "I am the eternal God, the great I AM". As firstborn, He exists before us and:

b. He rules over all things Look what God said about David in **Ps. 89:27**, *I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.* David was not a firstborn; he was a last-born in his family, like me! But God appointed him to the position of firstborn, the position of rule and authority. And that is a picture of Jesus who is the real Firstborn in relation to all the kings of the earth, or to put it another way, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is to say that everything in all creation is under His authority and control and that includes:

(1) the material creation mentioned in verse 16, the things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible. From the farthest stars to the tiniest microbes. Earth, sun, sky and sea, animals and mankind. Christ has authority over all these. But it also includes:

(2) the spiritual creation in the end of verse 16. Thrones, powers, rulers and authorities are orders of angels that he's talking about. In Eph. 6 he used the same words to describe the orders of Satan's demonic hosts. Christ is Lord and Master over all the angelic beings, good or bad. 2:18 tells us that in Colossae some people worshipped angels. Jesus is not just the chief angel, the greatest angel who is next to God; He is Lord of all the angels.

He is Lord of all things, because He is Firstborn over all things! Then, verses 16-17 remind us that:

2. He is the Creator of all things There are three prepositions you should note in these verses. Paul says all things:

a. they were created IN Him The NIV word *by* is literally *in*. It means that He is **the SOURCE** of all things, the spring from which all created things flow. Without Him there would have been no creation; without Him the world would not exist. All of creation is wrapped up in His person. Then at the end of 16 we read again that:

b. they were created BY Him or literally, *through* Him. That is, He is **the AGENT** of creation, the One who actually did the creating. John says, *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* - *Jn. 1:3*. Not one piece of anything in the whole creation was made by anyone else but Him. He made it all. When we read in Genesis that God said, *Let there be light*, it was Jesus saying, *Let there be light* along with the Father and the Spirit. That's why God spoke to Himself in the plural on the sixth day and said, *Let US make man in OUR image*. Jesus created you and everything you have or see! And finally, verse 16 says:

c. they were created FOR Him He created them for Himself; He is **the BENEFactor** of all things; they are for His benefit. Look back to **Heb. 1:2**. He is the heir of all things, the owner of them. They belong to Him and He can use them to suit His purpose. We think the world should be here to suit us and things should go our way, but the truth is it's here to suit Him and He can do with it and with me whatever He wills! It's a good thing He loves us! And finally, Paul tells us that:

3. He is the Sustainer of all things (17b) Jesus didn't just create it and set it all in motion and sit back and watch it run:

a. He holds the universe together He makes it all stay together in a compact organized unit, right down to the very molecules that make up your body! It is His sustaining power that makes the law of gravity function and the seasons change and the earth rotate. It is His sustaining power that causes wounds to heal and birds to migrate and all those marvelous mechanisms of creation to operate. Without Him it all falls apart. And **Heb.1:3** tells us how He does it:

b. He carries it by the power of His Word Literally, "He carries it by the power of His spoken Word". He said the word, "Let there be..." and the universe is still obeying the authority of that spoken Word today, moment by moment without fail! That is the power He has over creation!

Now, that's the Jesus I know; that's the Jesus of Christianity. He's the Eternal God; He's the Lord over all Creation who took on human flesh and came to earth and died on a cross to save you! That's the Jesus who lives inside of you to be the power out of which you live! *Dr. Paul Ferris remembers as a boy in 1952 how he watched in fascination as Elizabeth was crowned Queen of England. Even on black-and-white TV, the ceremony in Westminster Abbey was colorful. One intriguing aspect of the whole process came right before they placed the crown on the new queen's head. The Archbishop of Canterbury called out to the audience that was sitting north of the dais, "Sirs, I present to you the undoubted Queen of this realm. Are you willing to do her homage?" Their response was resounding. Then he turned around and faced those seated on the south and repeated the question, "Sirs, I present to you the undoubted Queen of this realm. Are you willing to do her homage?". Again there came a hearty affirmative response. Only after he had done the same thing in all four directions did they put the crown on the head of Queen Elizabeth II. [Servant, Winter 1997. Page 2.] Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you today, Jesus, the Eternal God and undoubted Supreme Lord of All Creation. And each of us must answer this question, "Are you willing to do Him homage? Are you willing to bow down and worship Him? Are you willing to submit your life to Him and place it at His feet, yourself at His disposal?"*

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

Jesus Christ: The Supreme Head of His Church - 1:18

In verses 15-19 Paul is declaring who Christ is. Last week we saw that He is God and that His is the Supreme Lord of all Creation, creating it, sustaining it, directing it, and owning it. Today we're going to single out one verse, verse 18, which tells us the third important fact about Him: He is the Supreme Head of the Church. You see, we've talked about His relationship to the Father; we've talked about His relationship to all created things; now we must look at His relationship to the church. But what is the church? Well, many times in the New Testament, the church means a local body of believers like us this morning who gather in a particular place to worship. But in Ephesians and Colossians Paul takes a higher and grander and broader point of view. Here the church is the sum total of all the redeemed, every person ransomed and rescued by Christ's work on the cross and indwelt by His Holy Presence. So that includes every true believer anywhere in the world. But it also includes those that have already lived and died and those who will yet be born and born again in the future. It is every person Jesus has ever saved or will save from the day of Pentecost to His return. And therefore, it is **YOU!** What Christ is to the whole, He is to the part; what He is to the Church; He is to the individual Christian. So, what we're talking about today really is His relationship to **YOU!** And Paul tries to help us understand that relationship by using the symbolic picture of:

I. The Relationship Of The Head To The Body, Christ being the head and the church being his body. Look with me at **Eph. 1:22-23** which gives a slightly fuller picture to us. Now let's see if we can understand this in human terms. First, we have:

1. the head is the foundation of the body That seems backward, doesn't it? You always thought your feet were the foundation of your body. But by foundation, I mean that on which the existence of the whole body rests. You can see it in the different ways we use the word head:

a. it sustains the body We talk for instance, just as the ancients did, about the headwaters of a river or the head of a canyon. And by that we mean the source or the place from which something begins or originates or continually flows. The head is like that because it sustains the body. Without the head it will die. Sever the spinal cord and the body just lies there. Take away the brain and the body has no life of its own. It draws its source, its life, its meaning, its existence from the head. You can cut off any limb and live; replace any organ with a machine and live. But not the head. The head is, in a real sense, the life of the body. Next:

b. it coordinates the body It brings unity to a bunch of vastly different parts and pieces and makes them function as a unit. The head of a committee, for instance, is what turns a room full of people into a group functioning with a purpose. Imagine if all the parts of your body just did their own thing whenever and wherever they wanted. You would have no life. The head coordinates and makes the pieces into a unified body. This concept of the head is not really in view in Colossians, but is more so in 1 Cor. 12. And it also:

c. it directs the body We talk about the head of an organization or the husband as the head of the home. Head implies authority, the one in charge. That's because the head is in charge of the body. All the senses report to it and all the organs and limbs respond to it. It makes decisions and evaluations and then directs the whole body. But there is a complement to these truths:

2. the body is the fullness of the head A head without a body is head over nothing. The body is the completion, the fullness of the head. So, in a special sense, Paul says that even though Christ is the absolute fullness of God and the one who fills everything in every way, yet we are His fullness, His completion. A head needs a body to carry out its purposes. And Christ needs us as the body to carry out His purpose in the world. So as a body part, here are some things to remember. First:

a. it lives out of the head If a body part loses its connection to the head, it dies. Or even if it doesn't die, it lies there having a kind of paralyzed life that is not life. And that's what Paul's telling us in this whole letter: Christ is our life; we must live out of Him. We can't live out of anything else; it doesn't work! Second:

b. it functions out of the head If a body part ignores the head, it disrupts the function of the whole body; it cannot function properly together with other body parts. The whole body is unable to fulfill the purpose which the head is laying out for it. Third:

c. it listens to the head If a body part refuses to listen to the head and takes control of its own movements, not only is the coordination of the body destroyed but it places itself in great danger and endangers the rest of the body. If the head says, "Hand, turn the wheel left", but the hand turns right... well, you get the picture. The body's role is to listen to the head. Now, before you think that this whole sermon is an anatomy lecture, let's go back to Col. 1:18 and apply these principles to:

II. The Relationship Of Christ To His Church Christ is the Head both to the whole Church and to me. What does that mean. Well, first of all it means this:

1. He is its Source: Verse 18 says He is *the Beginning* The Greek word is *arche*, the cause, the origin, the root, the spring, the source! Just as the head is the source of life to the body, so Christ is the very source and life of the church. First of all, He is:

a. the source of its existence He told Peter, "I will build My church". He in His own Person was literally its beginning. He brought it into being. It was His life, death, and resurrection that began it. It was His power that brought those first converts to faith on the day of Pentecost and that worked the miracles at the hands of the apostles. And He is the beginning of your spiritual existence too. You didn't find Him; He reached out and touched you and brought you to Himself. And by the entering of His person into you at that moment, He became the source of your life so that you no longer live but Christ lives in you. You as a believer in Christ at this very moment exist in the very life of Jesus Christ who is in you! Then as the Beginning, He is:

b. the source of its supply All the needs of the body are met in the head. If the back needs scratched, it sends word to the Head who supplies the hand to scratch it. That's our problem. In the flesh we are always trying to get our needs met some other way. We think that changing circumstances meets our needs or that another person can meet our needs. Just as Christ is both the initial Creator and continuing sustainer of the Universe, so He is the initial Savior and continuing supplier of all our needs. The head of a river keeps on gushing forth water and Paul wrote in Phil. 4:19 that God would supply all our needs according to His riches in glory HOW? IN CHRIST JESUS. Christ Jesus is the source and supply of all our needs and in having Him we have them! Look at **2:19a**. The most vital thing in life is our connection with the HEAD. Now individually, once Christ is in you, He never leaves. But if you don't rely upon that connection, there is no supply. *One night Canon Wilberforce of Southampton said to a gathering of believers, "We will sit around the fire and give our spiritual experiences." One by one they spoke. F. B. Meyer, who was a young convert, talked much of yielding all to Christ. An old clergyman at the other end of the circle rose and said, "I am very startled that Mr. Meyer has nothing better than that. You would suppose that all one must*

do is to give something up. Now, my religion is taking in first, and dropping and giving up afterwards. When you get gold, you part with dross. I came to the end of myself one afternoon when some children refused to listen to my teaching. I was on the point of losing my temper when I turned to Christ and said, 'Christ, be my sweet temper.'" Of that testimony, Meyer later commented, "From that moment on, I have tried to live that way, and whatever I have needed I have said, 'Christ, be this in me.'" Christ in you is the source and supply of all your needs. So, when you have a need, look to Him; PRAY! Then as the Beginning, He is also:

c. the source of its growth Look at **2:19b**. Funny how we've discovered that growth hormones come from the pituitary gland in the head, isn't it? God causes the church, his body to grow through its connection with the head. He forms His body the way He wants it. (Don't you wish you could?) Unlike you, He's not stuck with what He's got. He grows and shapes it as He wills. And that also makes Him the source and root of your spiritual growth. You won't get growth just by getting more education, more information, or going to more things. Growth comes from Him. Look to Him; go to Him. He is the church's Source! Secondly, we read:

2. He is its Life: Verse 18 calls Him ***the Firstborn from among the dead***. In verse 15 He was firstborn in relation to all creation. Here He is firstborn literally, *out from among* the dead. Now, that means obviously:

a. He is the first to be resurrected He is the first of all dead men to experience a resurrection (not a resuscitation like Lazarus, but a spiritual transformation). And that's what it means in Rev. 1:5, but here it means even more, it means:

b. He is the guarantee of its life He is FIRSTBORN out from among the dead, even from the realm of death. And since we are in His family, the rest of us will follow. So He, in the glory of His resurrection, is the source of the church's eternal life, of my eternal life. God gave me eternal life how? In the person of His Son. Do you see? He is my beginning; He is my middle; He is my forever; HE IS MY LIFE! That's what Head means! But also, to be Firstborn, means to be ruler. He is Sovereign God, sovereign over creation, sovereign over death itself, and sovereign over all those who will be raised as He was. And that's why Paul goes on to say that as Head of the Church:

3. He is its Lord: God appointed Him the Head, the Beginning, the Firstborn, so that He alone might be ***Supreme in everything***, in all things of first rank, of first importance, in first place. You see, as Head of the Church:

a. He decides its goal and purpose The head decides whether to go to work or go fishing. The head decides whether to stand and fight or run away. It is His position as Head to decide on the goal and purpose of our lives. It is not what we want in life that is important. We're feet and arms. It's the Head that ranks FIRST. And so, like the head and the body:

b. He directs its movements He directs us. He tells us what we are to do. He sends us here and there to do this or that. That's His function as our Head. But here's:

c. our responsibility To listen and obey! To submit to the Head. You see, He is Supreme Lord of the Church. That's His rightful position. It's an unalterable fact. But that also means that He must become Supreme Lord of our lives personally! Paul put it this way in **1 Cor. 11:3**, *Now I want you to realize that the Head of every man is Christ...* But realizing it is not enough. Over in **Eph. 5:23-24** he adds, *...Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* The church submits to Christ in all things; in all things He alone is to have the supremacy.

A few months ago, one of the men I pray with weekly asked prayer in tears for his daughter who was well into pregnancy, but was in grave danger of losing the baby. He begged and pled with God for the life of this little one. I didn't see him again until this past week when I asked him what had happened. He replied, "It was a tragic thing. She lost the baby. And I went into a state of depression for a while because God didn't answer my prayers, not the way that I wanted Him to, anyway. But now I'm back on track in my thinking and He's blessing me." That's kind of where the rubber meets the road, isn't it? In all things, even life and death and sickness and health, He alone must have the supremacy because He's our Head! It's what He wants, not what we want. *A young woman who was greatly troubled went to a Scottish preacher, asking how she could resolve the question of her own desires when they seemed to contradict the will of God. The minister took out a slip of paper and wrote two words on it. Then he handed it to her with the request that she sit down for 10 minutes, ponder the words, cross out one of them, and bring the slip back to him. The woman sat down and looked at the slip. It had two words on it, "No" and "Lord." Which should she cross out? It did not take her long to see that if she was saying no, she could not say "Lord", and if she wanted to call Christ "Lord", she could not say "No". Herein lies the secret of discerning God's will for our lives. From the limitless options before us, we cannot know God's choice until we put ourselves unconditionally at His disposal. We must turn over all our rights, saying, "Yes, Lord!" to anything He asks. He is the Supreme Head of the Church!*

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian: Reconciled in Christ - 1:20-23

At 1:20 we move into the third portion of the doctrinal section of this letter. To review, we've spent three messages looking at who the Father is and two messages looking at who the Son is. So, now Paul is going to show us who WE are as believers in Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal (Chs. 1-2):	I. God our Father	1:1-14
	II. Jesus Christ	1:15-19
	III. The Christian	1:20-2:23

Before you can really know how to live as a believer, you have to know who you are. *There is an ancient story about a Persian King named Astyages who determined to do away with a royal infant by the name of Cyrus. He summoned an officer of his court and told him to kill the baby prince. The officer in turn delivered the youngster to a herdsman with instructions that he should take him high up into the mountains where the baby would die from exposure. The herdsman and his wife, however, took the child and raised him as their own. Growing up in the home of those humble peasants, he naturally thought they were his real parents. He was ignorant of his royal birth and his kingly estate. Because he thought he was a peasant, he lived like one. Eventually though, he became the Persian King Cyrus mentioned in the Bible.* If you and I don't know who we are, if we fail to realize all that is ours in Christ, we will live like the rest of the world does. We will live as spiritual peasants, when we should be living as children of the King. And the first fact that Paul tells us about ourselves is this: **we are reconciled to God**. That is at once a very simple and a very complicated fact to understand, so let's begin by looking at:

I. The Meaning Of Reconciliation (20) God reconciled all things to Himself through the cross. Now here is a basic definition. **Reconciliation is a complete change in relationship between God and man**. And the Greek word is a special strengthened form, meaning, not just a change, but a complete change. Verse 20 describes that change as making peace. Apart from the cross, God and man were not at peace. Man was the enemy of God because of God's wrath toward sin which was in man. But now through the death of Christ, peace has been made and there is a complete change, an absolute removal of all the enmity that separated me from God. You see, God and man once had a relationship at the time of creation. But man chose to disobey God and in so doing turned his back on God through sin. Then God, because of His holiness, was forced to turn His back on man, to separate from him, making him the object of His holy wrath. But God did not want it that way; He loved man so He sent His own Son to die on the cross and take away man's sin. Now He could face man again with open arms. That's what it means to say, "God reconciled me to Himself by the death of His Son." Then, when I turn toward God by receiving Christ, I am fully and completely reconciled to God. There is complete peace between God and I. That's reconciliation. Now notice:

1. its only source: the blood of Christ on the cross This is not like two people making up after an argument or a fight. It's not like apologizing and bringing flowers or a gift to express your sorrow to your spouse. The division caused by sin was real and final. In fact, it was terminal! It was enough to put you and I into an eternity in hell. "Sorry" couldn't fix it. Bringing gifts to God couldn't fix it. An entire lifetime of penance and good deeds couldn't fix it. God could not overlook it and pardon it because He is just and holy. It took a death! And only the death of Jesus, the shedding of His blood and the giving of His life upon the cross, could do it! I am reconciled IN HIM. But then notice:

2. its universal extent Verse 20 says God reconciled "all things" to Himself through the death of Christ. What does that mean? In one sense:

a. it applies even to the whole universe, to things on earth and things in heaven (or literally the things in the heavens), the physical creation. Turn with me to **Rom. 8:19-23**. At the fall God's relationship to the whole world changed. Sin impacted the whole of the created order. The ground was cursed. There was animosity in the animal kingdom. Even our own bodies are impacted by sin and are in the dying process. But because of what Christ did at the cross, the whole universe will be set straight one day at His return. It is all looking forward and waiting for that day when the effect of Christ's victory can be applied to it and it will enter into the same glorious liberty from sin we will enjoy. All things in the universe will be brought back into their proper relationship with God through the death of Christ, but I believe there's another thought in view here. This reconciliation:

b. it applies to the whole world Turn with me to **2 Cor. 5:18-20**. Here's what I think that means. Reconciliation through Christ's death is for the whole world; John said that Christ died not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world. That doesn't mean that every human being is saved; it means that the death of Christ was sufficient in its power and effect for the whole race. Because of the death of Christ, God's face is now turned toward man. But reconciliation is only completed, or made effective, when man turns toward God in repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. That's why God has sent us out into the world with the message in verse 20, *Be reconciled to God!* Notice it is a passive command (if that makes sense). There's nothing you can DO to reconcile yourself; it is already DONE at the cross. Reconciliation with God has been provided; it's been paid for; it's been made possible for you, so BE reconciled, receive it, accept it!

But, back to Col. 1:20, the point is the amazing truth that God was pleased to use one and only one thing, the cross, for such a universal extent of reconciliation, to reconcile ALL things, the physical creation, the entire human race, and in particular you and I; all of that is wrapped up in His act of making peace by His blood shed on the cross. As we would say, "That's awesome!" Then, so we can appreciate fully how this applies to us personally, in verse 21 Paul goes on to remind me of:

II. My Former Need Of Reconciliation (21) Don't read this and think he means somebody else. "You" means ME and "You" means YOU! It includes every single person born into this world. The cold, hard truth is:

1. I was separated from God I was alienated from Him; I belonged to another tribe, another master; I was a foreigner, a stranger. Look with me at **Eph. 2:11-12**. That's us; that's our history, not just as ethnic non-Jewish peoples, but personally. I was separate from Christ, without hope and without God. I was not a Jew, so none of the covenant promises applied to me. I was born absolutely separated from God. Why? Because I was a child of my first parents, Adam and Eve. Lions are born with the nature of lions. Cows are born cows. And sinful human beings pass on their nature generation after generation the same way; I was born with a nature that was evil, depraved, wicked and hated God. Now, you can take the baby lion and raise him in your house as a pet, but in his nature he's still a lion and sooner or later he's going to act like a lion somehow. You can train me to behave better, but inside from birth I have that nature to sin and it will come out and it did! That's why Paul says:

2. I was evil in my behavior Right from the crib I began my self-centered behavior of taking what I wanted and pushing others away! **Eph. 2:1-3**. I may have been nice, moral, upright, a good student and even religious, but God says ALL OF US in our unsaved condition lived in slavery to our evil nature, following its desires and gratifying it. That doesn't mean I did every sinful thing a human being can possibly do; it means that sin was the ruling force and power in my life. I gratified those evil self-centered desires. And further, verse 21 says:

3. I was an enemy in my thinking Now, I may not have consciously thought about hating God or being His enemy, but **James 4:4** says, *...don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.* The nature that was in me chose the world constantly. It lived for the self-centered, self-gratifying things of this world. It was opposed to God and counted Him as the enemy.

People who don't know Christ have a hard time understanding that. They see themselves as nice and kind and friendly toward God. And that's to be expected because the natural man can't understand spiritual things; that requires the Holy Spirit! I used to think like that too. When I came to Christ, I was convicted of my sins, of course, but it is only now that I know Him that I can see how bad I really was! There was no way God and I could have a relationship. We were worlds apart! But look at what has happened to me. In verse 22 Paul states:

III. The Fact Of My Present Reconciliation (22) Wow, there has been a complete change, an absolute transformation in my adversarial relationship to God. I am now at total and complete peace because I have been once and for all reconciled to Him. How? Once again:

1. the means of it: by Christ's death Christ who was fully God came to earth and took a physical body. He became a real human being just like me so He could take my place and get what I deserve. The penalty of eternal separation from God that should have been mine was placed on Him and thereby totally removed. All my sin from first to last was removed from me and borne by Him in His own body on the tree. He also nailed that sinful nature of mine to the cross together with Christ, but that's not in this verse (it's coming up in another sermon). At any rate, here's:

2. the effect of it: I stand beside Him... That word *present* means literally *to set beside*, to place beside. And I don't believe it means "so that one day in the future He will place you beside Him". It means that right now I am in a new position. Once I was far off; now I am brought near. Once I was alienated; now I am standing right there beside Him; I am in His presence! And here's how I'm standing there. I am standing beside Him:

a. without a sin to separate me I am holy! Now let me clarify that. God is not stupid. He knows that as long as I'm in this world I will still sin at times. And I'm not stupid either; I know that too. For me, that problem will be taken care of one day. When I get out of this body and get to heaven, I'll be completely like Him and sin will be totally removed from me. But for God that is taken care of right now! He is not bound by time. The things that are to us future are already present and accomplished to Him. Christ didn't just remove my past sins and now it takes care of my current ones one at a time as they occur. It took care of them once and for all, forever, at the cross. My slate is clean from first to last. I stand holy and without sin beside God because I am in Jesus Christ. And I stand there:

b. without a blemish to be ashamed of I don't have to hang my head in shame when I come to Him as though there are still so many things wrong with me that I can hardly look at Him. I am not flawed. Those were nailed to the cross! I stand before God perfect and without blemish in Jesus Christ. And I stand there:

c. without an accusation to be brought Nobody, not even Satan himself, the ancient accuser of the brethren, can find anything of which to accuse me before God. Everything I ever did and ever will do that I could be accused of is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Now that doesn't sound like a lot of Christians I know. Some are worrying about whether they can lose their salvation, whether God is still going to accept them because of what they did last week. Others are groveling and ashamed, afraid to hardly even talk to God or they're worried about their secret sins which surely have to be there somewhere and someday will have to come out. Listen to me, if you are in Jesus Christ, right now you are reconciled to God. You have perfect peace with Him. There is not one iota of enmity or condemnation left. You are right now to God everything you're going to be in physical reality! You are reconciled and that is that! It's settled! How do you know that? In verse 23 Paul gives:

IV. The Evidence Of My Reconciliation (23): The evidence that I am reconciled is simply this: ***I continue in my faith!*** I continue to trust Christ, to rely on Him and nothing else. That word *if* in English makes it sound tentative; it makes it seem like I must do something to maintain my salvation, but actually it is saying the exact opposite of that:

1. I do not continue in order to be reconciled That would be saving myself, salvation by works. And the problem with that is that I can't do that, no matter how hard I try. In the Greek the word can equally well be translated *since*. You see:

2. the fact that I continue proves that I am reconciled! If Christ is really in me, if I am truly reconciled, the evidence of it is that I will continue firm, steadfast and unmoved to the end, until the day He calls me home. If I can quit and throw it away in the middle, it's only something I was doing in the first place. If it's something He's done, it will last. It's a permanent thing that can never change. That's Gospel; that's the good news that has been proclaimed for every creature under heaven. You are reconciled to God!

And you need to know it. *Fred Craddock, a well-known professor of preaching, was vacationing with his wife in the mountains. As they sat in a little restaurant, they saw a man going from table to table greeting diners as if they all knew who he was. Eventually, he made his way to the Craddock's table and, learning that Fred was a minister, he told them his story. The man said he had been born just a few miles from that spot, across the mountain. His mother had not been married when he was born, and the outspoken criticism directed at her over the years also hit him and hurt. His schoolmates learned from their parents to ridicule him so that the boy stayed to himself at lunch and recess, lest their insults strike too hard. Even more difficult were trips to town with his mother when he would feel the looks and shaking of heads, and he heard the question, "I wonder who his father is?" When he was about 12, a new pastor came to the little community church. People talked about his skill as a preacher, and the boy began to go hear for himself. He was fascinated by the preacher, but he was always careful to slip in late, sit in the back, and leave early, lest someone catch him and ask, "What's a boy like you doing here?" One Sunday, though, he was so caught up in the service that he forgot to slip out before it was over. Suddenly, he felt a big hand on his shoulder, and as he turned around, he saw the face of the preacher. The preacher said, "Who are you, son? Whose boy are you?" His young heart sank at the question, and his face must have shown it, for the preacher went on. "Wait a minute, I know who you are. The family resemblance is unmistakable. You are a child of God." With that he slapped the boy on the back and added, "Son, that's quite an inheritance. Go and claim it." As the boy grew to manhood, that biblical reflection affirming who he really was gave him confidence. The old man in the restaurant said to Fred and his wife, "That one statement literally changed my whole life." He explained that his name was Ben Hooper, and he had lived a successful and respected life and twice been elected governor of Tennessee. This was all made possible by a small-town preacher who cared enough to encourage a young boy and reflect to him whose he really was, a child of God. [Clergy Journal, Apr 1996. Pages 38-39.]* Knowing who you are is the first step to living like what you are. You are a child of God. You have been reconciled to Him. You are standing beside Him, holy, without blemish and without accusation. Go and claim it!

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian: Indwelt by Christ - 1:24-29

In this doctrinal section of the Colossian letter, we are now in the process of studying five major truths about who we are in Christ. The first truth was this: *I am reconciled to God through Christ*. Today we'll look at the second major truth: *I am indwelt by Christ*. Now, you won't find big sections on this in the theology books, but it is one of the most fundamental doctrines of our faith. Christianity is not just a religion, not just a set of teachings you embrace or a set of facts you believe. W.H. Griffith Thomas wrote a book called "Christianity is Christ". That says it all. It is the only faith in the world that is wrapped up in a personal relationship with its founder. Whether you are a Christian or not is not a matter of whether you believe the right things or whether you act the right way. At the bottom line a Christian is one who has Jesus Christ living in him! Christ in you is what makes you a Christian. So, let's read **Colossians 1:24-27** and examine:

I. The Fact Of Indwelling: Christ IN You (27) When I was in college, I had a professor who taught a course in Colossians and when he came to this verse, he said, "Paul never taught that Jesus comes into your heart like you always hear in the hymns. "IN" here means "among" and the mystery is that Christ would let even Gentiles believe in Him." Now, it is a wonderful thing that all the peoples of the world are included in salvation as part of the church of Christ, but when Paul says "Christ in you", he means Christ INSIDE of you, Christ INDWELLING you. That professor's problem was that he didn't believe in a literal resurrection and without a living Jesus, it's a little hard to believe in an indwelling Jesus! But let's take a quick overview of this whole fact of indwelling right from the beginning. First, I want you to notice that:

1. Jesus promised to dwell in us - John 14:23 It's the night before He goes to the cross. Jesus is laying out some future promises for His disciples to sustain them through the cross experience. The whole message of these Upper Room chapters is, "I'm going away. I'm going back to heaven, to the Father." But He makes this promise: "My Father and I will come to each individual who loves Me and will remain there, make a home there." How is this going to be possible? Well, compare **verse 17** and note the prepositions. "The Holy Spirit whom I will send will be no longer *with* or *among* you (yet outside); He will be *IN* you, inside you! God will personally indwell you; He will live inside your body. That is what Jesus promised His followers. Now, in his first letter John clearly tells us:

2. Jesus comes to live in us personally to save us - 1 John 3:24 What do you see again? "HE LIVES IN US" Compare **5:11-13**. Understand this: eternal life is not in a belief in a theology or in a creed. It is in a person, a living person, a living being who lives forever, Jesus Christ. God did not give you eternal life by a decree. He gave it to you by giving you a Person, Jesus Christ His Son, to live in you so that His life becomes your life. If you have Christ in you, you have God's life; if you don't, you don't and it's as simple as that! It is the personal indwelling of Christ in us that saves us and gives us eternal life! But let me clear something else up:

3. Jesus comes in the person of the Holy Spirit - Rom. 8:9-11 Most times when the Bible speaks about indwelling, it speaks about the Holy Spirit indwelling us. But notice how the Holy Spirit is identified here. He is the Spirit of Christ and then in verse 10, where you would expect to hear Paul say, "if the Spirit is in you", he says, "If Christ is in you". You are indwelt by the Triune God. The Father is in you, Christ is in you, and the Spirit is in you. Just as Christ could say, *If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father; I and the Father are one*, the Son and the Spirit are also One. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; He is the person of Christ indwelling you. Now, I don't pretend to understand that. But just don't think of Jesus being in heaven and sending His underling, the Holy Spirit, to live in you! He himself lives inside you in the person of the Holy Spirit. But where inside you does He live?

4. Jesus lives in our spirit *In a conversation with a nine-year-old boy, a youth worker told the boy that Jesus died to pay the penalty for his sins, and that if he would ask Him into his heart, He would come in. That night the boy invited Jesus to save Him. A few days later the youngster said, "I don't have to talk to God long distance anymore." "Why not?" the youth worker asked. The boy pointed to his heart and replied, "Because He's only ten inches away."* We often talk about Jesus coming to live in our hearts and even the Scripture mentions Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, but we're not talking about our physical heart, are we? **1 Cor. 6:19** tells us that the Holy Spirit lives inside your body. But where? The arm? The leg? The heart? Verse **17** is the clue. Man has a body, soul and spirit, or a body, mind and spirit or however you want to think of it. It is not simply that Jesus inhabits the flesh or that He possesses the mind. These things even a demonic spirit can do. But Jesus does more than that; He becomes one with your spirit, that part of you which you can't see or touch or cut out or lose, that eternal part of you which lives forever, which responds to God. According to Rom. 12:1-2, the body and the mind have to be voluntarily surrendered to His control. It is your spirit where He lives and is permanently joined to you, never to leave. Now let's go back to Colossians and think for a moment about this:

II. The Concept Of Indwelling (26-27) Paul notes two things about this wonderful fact:

1. it is a new truth It was a mystery, a sacred secret that God had kept hidden for ages and generations. Adam, even though he walked with God, never knew that one day God would dwell inside each and every human being who trusted in Him. Abraham, the friend of God, in all the promises God gave him, never understood that one day God would live inside those who are his children by faith. Moses, who wished that God would put His Spirit on everyone and that all the Lord's people would be prophets, never dreamed that one day God would do it and put His Spirit in every one of His people! God hid it for ages and ages. It's a brand-new concept that belongs only to the church of Jesus Christ! Sometimes we long for the old days, to see and experience the things David and Elijah saw. But what a better privilege we have as saints in the church age, the personal indwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ! And that's why Paul says:

2. it is a glorious truth He says this mystery is our *glorious riches*. This is *greater* than anything else that God could give you; it is *better* than anything else that God could give you, for when you have Him living inside you, you have everything, since 2:3 says in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You have wisdom, you have power, you have help, you have comfort, you have joy, you have everything you'll ever need for life and godliness. You have HIM and HE is your life and your eternity! Now let me show you what I mean by talking about:

III. The Effects Of Indwelling Paul mentions three of them:

1. it assures me of the future (27b) Christ in me is my *hope of glory*. Now, what does that mean? Well, as I say over and over, hope in the Bible is the present certainty of a future reality. If I have hope, then it means that I am absolutely sure of something that is yet future and am waiting for it. I have the hope of glory, the absolute certainty of the future that awaits me in glory with the Lord. And the basis of that hope is Christ in me. Compare **2 Cor. 5:5**, *Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*. Here you have the same concept expressed about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwelling us is our deposit, our down payment, our guarantee of our eternal future. And it's because of Him, Paul says in verse 8 that we are confident that

when we die, we will be with the Lord. Put simply, He is in us now so we'll be with Him then! Christ lives inside me now and that guarantees that I'll be with Him then. Simple as that. *In his book Divine Lord and Savior, theologian Dr. Pieters tells about a man who was known as "Old Pete." Although he had little education, he had a good grasp of God's Word. On one occasion when he was visiting Dr. Pieters, Old Pete made a simple yet profound observation. He said, "If God should take me to the very mouth of hell and say to me, 'Here you go, Pete; this is where you belong.' I would say to Him, 'That's true, Lord, I do belong there, but if You make me go to that place, Your dear Son Jesus Christ must go with me. He and I are one and we cannot be separated anymore.'* HE is my guarantee, my assurance of glory. If He didn't want me then, He wouldn't be living in me right now! His indwelling assures me of my future! *He that has the Son has eternal life...these things have I written that you may KNOW that you have eternal life!* That's what His indwelling does for me! Moreover:

2. it enables me for service (28-29) Paul is talking about his spiritual work, his service for the Lord, warning and teaching men, ministering to them for their own spiritual benefit. And how does he do it? Well, there is a beautiful paradox here. He says:

a. I labor in His service And the word *labor* means hard toil. And then he describes it as struggling, which is the Greek word *agonizomai*, which obviously means, *to agonize*! Paul says, "I serve and it's hard; it's a struggle. I don't serve the Lord a little bit now and then; I serve Him with every fiber of my being," but then he says:

b. He supplies the power He energizes me. Literally, He works in me in power. Over in Phil. 4, Paul talked about how he had learned the secret of enduring any kind of circumstance, of being hungry and in want, and so on. That secret was 4:13, *I have strength for all things through Christ who strengthens me.* I am never without power for service because the Omnipotent God of the Universe, the Lord Jesus who can still the storm and heal the sick and raise the dead, lives right inside of me! I am never left to do things on my own. All I need to do is learn to tap into His power and call to Him to empower me to do that which He's called me to do! His indwelling enables me to serve. And finally:

3. it cheers me in suffering Go back to verses (24-25) Now, remember where Paul was when he wrote this. He was sitting chained to a guard at Rome awaiting trial before Nero. He'd been through shipwreck on the way. His freedom was taken away. All that for the sake of building the church. And yet he writes, "I REJOICE IN WHAT I SUFFERED BECAUSE I AM FILLING UP THE MEASURE OF CHRIST'S AFFLICTIONS." Wow! What does that mean? Well:

a. Christ is not done suffering for His body Paul says there was something lacking in Christ's sufferings, something that is being completed by the sufferings that are happening in my life. What does that mean? Does it mean that we have to suffer in order to complete the process of providing salvation? No, His sacrifice is complete, once and for all. So, what does it mean? Well in **Phil. 2:30** Paul speaks about a messenger named Epaphroditus who was sent by the Philippians to deliver a monetary gift to him. But in the journey Epaphroditus fell sick and suffered greatly and Paul writes... *he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.* Now think about this: the gift of their love was complete. It had been made; it had been given. What was lacking was the presentation to Paul. The ideal would have been for the whole church to be there in person to hand it to him, but that wasn't possible. So, they sent a messenger to stand in for them and deliver that gift as a visible representation of their love. He did so by risking his life. Christ's gift of salvation to His people is absolutely complete. He suffered to provide it at infinite cost. Yet it lacks one thing. It has to be presented to the intended recipients, to the world and He can't be here visibly to do it. So, what does He do? He sends us as His messengers. But that task of taking the gospel to the whole world requires sacrifice and suffering, so Christ is doing that suffering in the person of us, his messengers, so that His church might be built all over the world. **2 Cor. 1:5** says the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives. You see, because of indwelling, Him living in us:

b. my suffering is His suffering When Jesus appeared to Saul on the Damascus Road, do you remember what He said? **Acts 9:4-5**, *Why do you persecute ME? I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!* In making Christians suffer, Saul was persecuting Christ. Their suffering was His. How can that be? Because He indwells each one of us, that's how! And by indwelling me, He's feeling what I feel, He's afflicted with my afflictions, and it is His presence that gives me joy as I suffer for the sake of building His body, the church! It's not meaningless! My suffering has meaning. I am finishing out what's left to be done of Christ's suffering so that His church will be built just the way He wants it. He's living in me and doing His eternal work; what a privilege I have to be part of it! I don't rejoice that the suffering hurts; I rejoice that Christ in me is completing His eternal purpose and touching the hearts and lives of others!

What a privilege, to be personally indwelt by the Lord Jesus Christ. It secures my future, it supplies my present, and it gives joy in the midst of my suffering. What glorious riches! I have Jesus living in me! *In an evangelistic meeting in Ireland the speaker was explaining [how to apply this]. Concluding his message, he repeated several times, "It means that in every circumstance you can keep on saying, 'For this I have Jesus.'" The meeting was then opened for testimonies. The young lady who had been at the piano stood up and said, "I have to leave shortly so I'd like to be the first to testify. Just a few minutes ago I was handed this telegram. It reads, 'Mother is very ill; take train home immediately.'* When I saw those

words, I knew that tonight's message was meant just for me. My heart looked up and said, 'For this I have Jesus.' Instantly a peace and strength flooded my soul." After pausing a moment, she continued, "I have never traveled very far alone, but for this I have Jesus. And for all the strain and suspense that goes with the thought of Mother's severe illness, I praise God that for this too I have Jesus." Three or four weeks later the evangelist received a letter from the same woman. It read, "Thank you again for the message you gave that day. Life has become an uninterrupted psalm of victory, for I have come to realize that no matter what life brings, for this I have Jesus." And, I might add, when I come to that final circumstance and the river of death lies before me and bids me cross, I can step boldly into the waters in complete confidence, because for this I have Jesus living in me!

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian: Wise in Christ - 2:1-10

Today we come to the third major truth that Paul tells us about who we are in Christ. First, we learned that we are reconciled to God in Christ. Second, we are indwelt by Christ. And now, Paul says, we are WISE in Christ. But before we get to that, we have to consider the context in which Paul was writing it. We begin with a look at:

I. The War In Which We Are Engaged (1, 4-5) Paul had a deep concern for these Christians at Colossae and those at Laodicea and I'm sure he would have the same for us. It is summed up in verse 4, *that no one may deceive you*. It's written again in verse 8, *that no one takes you captive...* and again in 18, *don't let anyone disqualify you...* Paul was strongly aware that in his day, as in ours:

1. there are many deceivers dispensing false "wisdom" There at Colossae there were false teachers. They would later be given the label *Gnostics* (silent G as in *gnu*) from the Greek word *gnosis* which means "knowledge". These teachers came in several varieties, but like any cult in any age, they had two distinctions. First, they claimed to have secret knowledge in the spiritual realm, a deeper knowledge that only they possessed and people outside their group didn't have. And second, they claimed that Christ was not fully God, but rather that He was simply the first among an order of created angelic beings who were mediators between God and man. Sounds strangely like the New Age movement, doesn't it! Secret knowledge and the worship of angels. Or how about Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons; they have their own writings with secret knowledge given only to their own prophets and Jesus is NOT fully God, but merely God's son, whatever that means to them. But they're not alone. You can turn on the television or the radio and find a speaker almost any day of the week who will ask you to follow him, to accept his teachings and if you listen closely and long enough, you'll find that Christ alone is not sufficient to save you; you must do something. What's even sadder is that you can walk into the sanctuary of church after church across the land, including some in our own community, and hear quite clearly that we have better knowledge than those first Christians, that the Bible is simply a human writing and subject to error and that Christ was not really, fully God, so we are saved by our own behavior. You can enroll in colleges and even in seminaries across this land and be taught that same thing; I was! False teachers are everywhere and they infiltrate the church! That's why Paul wrote to Timothy in **1 Tim. 6:20-21**, *Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith*. You see, those false teachers and teachings:

2. they are capable of leading us astray from our firm faith in Christ Paul delighted in how orderly and how firm the Colossians' faith in Christ was, but he was deeply concerned that what is falsely called knowledge being propagated by these deceitful people could impact them and draw them away from standing firmly on the Gospel he had brought to them. *Chuck Colson writes: "Several years ago a newly appointed Anglican bishop, David Jenkins, created a ruckus in England when he questioned the virgin birth of Christ. Jenkins evidently enjoyed the furor; in a second pronouncement he dismissed Christ's resurrection as a 'conjuring trick with bones.' That colorful phrase was widely reported by an amused secular press. A few days later a dramatic event turned the story into front page news: Yorkminster, the beautiful cathedral belonging to the diocese of Jenkins' archbishopric, was struck by a mysterious bolt of lightning that knocked its 13th-century oak ceiling beams to the flagstone floor. A flood of articles ensued, most provocatively headlined, 'Coincidence or the Wrath of God?' But the story soon faded. Just as well, I thought. It was, after all, merely the prattle of a heretical bishop, sensationalized by the media. (It was not all that startling either, considering the views of Jenkins' colleagues: a poll had just revealed that of the 31 Anglican bishops in England, 19 said that to be a Christian one need only believe that Jesus was God's supreme moral agent. Only 11 bishops said that one must accept Jesus as fully God and fully man!) But Jenkins' blasphemous statement did not just blow over, as I discovered during a subsequent visit to Sri Lanka. When I asked Desmond Goonasekera, an Anglican rector, about the growth of the Christian church in his country, he shook his head. 'We're losing badly to the Muslims,' he said. 'It all began with the Jenkins business.' He explained that aggressive Muslims were visiting Christian communities and using Bishop Jenkins' quote as authoritative proof that Christians need no longer believe in Christ's resurrection. Since Muslims and Christians now see Jesus as merely a prophet, they argued, why not worship together in the mosque? 'They are killing us with our bishop's own words,' Goonasekera concluded. What I had dismissed as one man's heresy had become a stumbling-block to Christian faith halfway around the world—a sobering reminder of the grave consequences of trifling with the truth.'* [The God of Stones and Spiders by Charles Colson. Crossway, 1990. Pages 128-129.] Some time ago,

my good friend who was an Episcopal rector that I prayed with (he is now with the Lord), asked prayer because he was going to a meeting with his bishop and was thinking about challenging him with the need to repent and receive Jesus Christ! He ended up telling him that he was in grave spiritual danger and that his decision to defrock another man who was an evangelical was ungodly! Harold Camping, the owner of the Family Radio network, began to teach that the church age is over and the church is apostate. He said God has abandoned it and you should flee it. According to him, you'd be sinning just by sitting here this morning. Never mind that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it to cleanse it and present it to Himself without any blemish or wrinkle one day! False teachers are everywhere and their influence is powerful. Therefore, Paul demonstrates for us the fact that:

3. their work must be battled intensely in prayer He began by saying, "I'm struggling for you...I'm, literally, agonizing for you..." How was he doing that there in prison at Rome? In prayer! He wrestled against Satan and his treacherous henchmen on behalf of the Colossians every day as he prayed on their behalf! Want to protect your kids from being led astray when they go off to school and sit under the influence of some unbelieving college philosophy professor? Pray! Want to see your neighbor set free from the deceptive brand of religiosity that binds him? Pray! Wrestle! Struggle! Agonize in your praying! We're in a war. Our adversary the devil is walking about like a roaring lion seeking people to devour, people to pick off, people to steal away. Resist him, standing firm in the faith! How? Stand in the gap between him and his victims in prayer. Now we're ready for Paul to tell us about:

II. The Wisdom Which We Have Been Given (2-3) Most of the time we think that wisdom is the accumulation of information, that there are all these facts out there in the universe waiting to be gathered and that the wise person is one who has gathered a substantial number of these facts. But the Bible says:

1. all wisdom is found in a person: Jesus Christ In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! The reason for that is simple: He is omniscient; he knows all things. He knows everything about everything. He made it, He sustains it and He's causing it all to work together for good according to His purpose. In **1 Cor. 1:24** Paul writes, *He is the wisdom of God* and in verse **30** he continues, *Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God!* You see, if all wisdom is in Him and He lives in us, then:

2. all wisdom is given to us in the person of Christ Now that doesn't suddenly make me a nuclear physicist because Christ lives in me. It is not raw information that God is primarily concerned to give me. In fact, He lets me actually have to glean most of that from the world around me by hard work (it's called studying!) Research and discovery are an integral part of His plan for the human race. The wisdom that is given to us is spiritual wisdom, wisdom about spiritual things, wisdom about God Himself and His relationship to the world and to human beings. For instance, Paul says that:

a. we understand the mystery of God, namely Christ. Turn with me over to **1 Cor. 2:6-8**. We know who Jesus is: the Lord of Glory! If Herod or Pilate or the Jewish leaders had known that, they wouldn't have crucified Him! If the leaders and the people of this world today knew that, they would fall down at His feet and worship Him. But we understand who He is. And we understand what He is doing in the world; He died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead and now He is calling out from among all nations a people for His name and when He's all done building His church, He'll come back again and set up His Kingdom and reign forever and ever as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! The world doesn't know that mystery; it's hidden from them; they're blinded to it. But we know it! We're the ones who have the true secret knowledge of God; we know who He is and what He's doing! But Paul says even more:

b. we have been given the mind of God - 1 Cor. 2:11-12, 16 The very Spirit of God lives in us. The Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, knows all things, all the thoughts of God, all the deep things of God. And He is placed inside us so that He can reveal them and show them to us as we need them by revealing them to our minds. In Him we have the very mind of Christ dwelling in us to be our wisdom! And that's why Paul explains that:

3. our growth in wisdom comes from a deepening knowledge of Him His purpose or goal in praying for them was that they would have the full riches of complete understanding of God's mystery in Christ. What that says to me is this: the closer and more intimate my relationship with Him, the more of Him that I know, the more of His wisdom I will appropriate, because it's all in Him! My growth in spiritual wisdom will be directly proportional to the depth of the relationship that I develop with Him.

Now back to that war we're engaged in with false teachers and teaching. Here's:

III. The Way In Which We Win The Battle for ourselves (6-8) There are two things we must do to keep from being led astray. The first is obvious:

1. we must continually walk in Christ (6-7) Those words *continue to live in* are literally, *walk in* in the Greek. Having received Christ, you've already been rooted in Him; the wisdom that you need is already there, planted in you. Now it is a matter of continuing to appropriate it by walking with Him on a daily basis. It's a matter of spending quality time with Him in His Word and prayer on a daily basis. It's a matter of moment by moment calling on Him for wisdom to

know what to do and then the power to do it. It means asking for His wisdom, His leading, His direction, every day, in every situation, in every choice. That's walking in Christ and here's what it does for us; Paul says:

a. it increasingly builds us up to maturity Receiving Him is only the foundation, the root. Walking in Him is building the house. As you seek His wisdom and He gives it, that wisdom accumulates and it translates into experience and maturity. At the same time Paul says:

b. it constantly confirms what we have believed Your faith is confirmed daily as you commune with the Lord and He leads and directs you and helps you to understand the things occurring in your life and the things you find in the Word. Your faith will be confirmed and strengthened over and over as you go to Him and watch Him answer and meet your needs with His wisdom. And ultimately, Paul says:

c. it causes us to overflow with thanksgiving The more you walk with Him, the more His wisdom will fill you and the more your joy in Him will spring up and overflow. But walking continually with Him is only half the battle. The other half is this:

2. we must continually watch for the snare of false teaching (8) *See to it* is literally, *Watch!* Watch out! Be on your guard that somebody doesn't come along and catch you in their snare, their trap, and lead you away as their captive, their spoil, their prisoner of war! That snare is hollow and deceptive philosophy, false ways of looking at the world. The culture you live in is constantly bombarding you with falsehoods, with lies like these:

- Human beings are basically good at their core; if you can change their environment, the good will come out. Discipline inhibits children.
- Man is a higher species of animal; if he's deformed before birth or if you simply don't want him to be born, you can terminate him.
- Right and wrong are always relative; they depend on the situation; there are no absolutes. What's right for you is what matters. In fact:
- You are the center of your world; what's good for you and what feels good to you is what really matters.
- Marriage is an outmoded, binding thing. People should be free to choose and change partners. Sex is a natural drive that people should be free to engage in as they choose. In fact, it is bigoted to limit sexual expression in whatever form it takes. Homosexual unions are just as valid as traditional marriages and should be legally recognized.
- Science has proven that the universe is the product of natural forces and the laws of cause and effect at work over billions of years. There is no God who created it.

These kinds of philosophies and hundreds more like them are thrust at us in our schools and in the media from every direction. They are false wisdom, and false wisdom, according to verse 8:

a. it is empty It's hollow. It has no true value to you and what's worse:

b. it is deceptive Verse 4 says it often comes in fine-sounding arguments that are promoted by people with lots of "credentials". But the truth is, it's a lie. Where do things like this come from?

c. it is rooted in human tradition Man thinks it up. And that's scary when you realize that in some centuries educated people believed the world was flat and had an edge. And for many centuries people thought you had to bleed a sick person to make him better. The false philosophies of our day are no less lies, human invented ideas that don't come from God. In fact, they are:

d. it is rooted in demonic revelation You'll find that same phrase, *the basic principles of the world*, in **Gal. 4:3, 8-9**, where it's clear that it refers to the idolatrous pagan worship that the Galatians and the Colossians had come out of. It has demonic roots. **1 Tim. 4:1**, *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons*. Satan has invented these lies. Do you know that in portions of Africa there is a widespread belief that having sex with a virgin cures the AIDS virus? Tell me who invented that lie to spread and multiply misery to children! All these lies are demonic ideas foisted on the human race to multiply our misery. They are all opposed to the truth God has given us in His Word and we must watch carefully to see that we don't get sucked into following them. Test the philosophies that you are taught out in the secular world against the Word of God. And when it comes to religious teachers, here is:

IV. The Test Of All True Teaching (9-10) When you hear a preacher or a priest or a religious leader teaching, here are the two things that identify genuine truth. First:

1. it affirms the complete Deity and humanity of Christ (9) True Christianity has always taught that Jesus Christ is fully and completely God and that He is fully and genuinely man in a real body. Any teaching that says He's less than God or is not fully man is error. And secondly, genuine truth:

2. it affirms our completeness in Christ (10) We have been given all fullness, everything we need, in Him. When someone tells you that you need to do this or you need to do that to be accepted by God, you know immediately it's a lie. "You must be baptized, you must take communion, you must join our organization, you must give something." Nonsense! I have been given all fullness in Christ. Just as all the fullness of the Godhead is in Him, so all the fullness of Him is in me. Don't let anyone drag you away from that.

When I was in college, I had a rude awakening. After about a year in this liberal arts college, it dawned on me that not everything I was being taught was truth, particularly in the religion department. I began to realize that there was great danger in accepting some of the false thinking that was there about God and the Bible and man, and so on. One semester I wound up in a sophomore philosophy class and as I sat there waiting for the professor to start, I looked across the aisle at the fellow next to me. He had his notebook lying closed on his desk and in big letters he had written these words from the King James: *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*" - Col. 2:8. It was like a message from the Lord. I took that verse home and I took it to heart. I memorized it. In fact, I think I wrote it on MY notebook, because it made something clear to me. I was not wise in the eyes of this world. I was a 19 year old kid, putty to be molded and shaped at the hands of the educators, in their eyes. But I had a wisdom that they had no idea of. I had Christ! So many of my fellow students who came there with some faith bought the lies and left it. But God warned me to beware. So He warns all of us. Christian, the world may think you're dumb; it will certainly tell you you're foolish. But if you have Christ and you're walking in Him day by day, then you have all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom there are and as you have the need to access them, He'll make them plain to you.

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian: Transformed by Christ - 2:11-12

Today we come to major truth #4 that Paul shares with the Colossians about who we are in Jesus Christ. Let's review. First, we are RECONCILED to God in Christ. Second, we are INDWELT by Christ. Third we are WISE in Christ. The fourth truth is this: we are TRANSFORMED by Christ. Now to understand that, let's use a crazy image like this: Many folks would think that Christ in me is like a perfect driver getting inside a car with a worn-out, oil-guzzling, malfunctioning engine and trying to drive it and make it perform. If you've ever owned one of those old worn out used cars, you know the kind of frustration I'm talking about. It'll never start when you want it to and when it does, it misses and carries on and doesn't have the power to make the hill or to accelerate suddenly when you need it to. So, in this view, Christ, the perfect driver, has come to live inside sinful old me, the car with the no-good powerplant, and He's trying to make me put out a perfect performance, which is impossible. But here's the true picture: Christ, the perfect driver, took out the old engine and put in a perfect brand new one the moment He got in the car! So now His car may have a "used car outside," but it's got a brand new inside, one that is capable of responding to the performance He demands. So Christ made a profound and deep transformation inside of me when He came to live there! And notice I chose the word *transformation* instead of *reformation*. He didn't just overhaul the engine or change the plugs and give it a tune-up. He put in a brand-new engine! There was a deep and permanent transformation that occurred inside of me at the moment of my salvation. God often uses analogies (maybe not as crazy as mine!) to communicate spiritual truth. The Scripture speaks about our transformation in several ways and each one emphasizes a slightly different aspect of this truth. For instance, one common description of it is being born again. He describes what happened inside us as a spiritual birth, because we can understand that from our experience of human birth. Well, here in Colossians Paul uses two more ways to describe our transformation. First, he says:

I. We Have Experienced Spiritual Circumcision (11) Circumcision might not be a common topic on our discussion list today, but in Colossae it was evidently a hot topic. Look over in Philippians where Paul gives:

1. a warning about physical circumcision - Phil. 3:2-3 Not only were there Gnostics at Colossae who denied the Deity of Christ, but there were other false teachers. The churches of Asia Minor had particular problems with those whom we'd call legalizers, those who wanted to make Jews out of Christians and get them to keep the Law. And the big tenet of these false teachers was circumcision. They taught that believing in Christ was not enough for salvation; a person must also be circumcised according to the Jewish law. Paul warns against them and says they are the *conci-sion*, the flesh cutters. WE are the true circumcision! And here in 2:11 he tells us we've BEEN circumcised. So, the circumcision he's talking about is not a physical one; it has nothing to do with the physical practice of circumcising male babies.

2. the type of circumcision that we have experienced is spiritual. He says it clearly in **Rom. 2:28-29**. Most of the Colossians, the Philippians, and the Romans were Gentiles. They were not circumcised in their flesh, either before or after their conversion. Yet Paul says that doesn't matter. True circumcision is not a matter of the physical body:

a. it is done in the human spirit The heart is a Biblical metaphor for the deepest, innermost part of man which determines his nature. Jesus said that the actions of a man proceed from his heart, from the nature that is his, deep inside. If you want to think in simple terms, think of man as a body, soul, and spirit, or a body, mind, and spirit. Our

heart is neither the body nor simply the mind. It is the spirit, the innermost core of what we are that contains our nature. It is there that we are spiritually circumcised and who does it?

b. it is done by the hand of Christ Romans says it is done by the Holy Spirit. Colossians says it is done by Christ. It is not something you make up your mind to do. In fact, that cannot be done. Jeremiah wrote in 13:23, *Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.* The spirit of man, the heart of man, is corrupted by the fall. We are born with a depraved, evil, wicked, unregenerate heart. We can't just decide to be good, any more than a lion can decide to eat grass. This circumcision can't be done by the hands of men. However, when we are saved, Christ circumcises our heart spiritually. Now, what does that mean?

3. the meaning of spiritual circumcision The word means "to cut around" or in a circle. When a baby boy is circumcised, his foreskin is cut off and discarded. It is put off from him or removed. And so, our spiritual circumcision:

a. it involves a complete removal The word translated *putting off* in verse 11 occurs only here in the New Testament in this strengthened form. Its root means to strip off clothes or arms and put them away from yourself. It is what you would do after playing football in the mud; you'd come inside and completely strip off every bit of your soiled clothing and cast it away from you. Just as in physical circumcision that bit of flesh is cut off and thrown away as unclean, so in spiritual circumcision something is completely removed from inside of us. What is it?

b. it involves our "old nature" or "old self" The NIV words *sinful nature* in this particular verse in the Greek is a difficult phrase. It is literally, *the body of the sins of the flesh*. It means something like "the whole of our evil nature". Compare **3:9-10** where Paul refers to that same part of us that is removed and calls it the *old self* or literally the *old man*. It is the innermost person that I was by birth with that nature that I inherited from my first parents. Now, the meaning of this is understood differently by different people, so let's just focus on what 3:9 clearly says:

(1) my corrupted human nature is "put off" I am not the same rotten, awful, sinful person deep down inside anymore. And, it's not just that I've changed in my behavior. My very nature, the very person that I used to be, is put off from me. And:

(2) a brand new nature is created in me - 2 Cor. 5:17 says, *...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* I am a brand new creation on the inside. The old me is gone, removed, put off, and there's a new me, a transformed me, a new man that God has put inside. 3:10 calls it a *new self*, a new me inside, and one that is like God, holy and righteous. When a Christian gets up to testify and says "I'm not the person I used to be," that's not just a metaphor! He's not kidding. The innermost core of his being has been transformed. He is a brand new person at the very depths of his being.

Now, before you go home and say, "The pastor is a heretic; he said I don't have sin in me anymore", let me clarify. Your spirit or nature was not the only thing corrupted by the fall. When Jesus got into the car, He put in a brand new engine, but the body still has 20 or 40 or 60 years of dents and scratches and is rusting away and the interior still shows significant signs of wear! You still have a corrupted mind and a decaying body. That's what the Bible calls *the flesh*. And because you still have it, you still sin; the principle of sin is still in you, that is, in your mind and your physical body. But at the core of your being, your very nature has been fundamentally changed. You have been transformed. *Oscar Cervantes is a dramatic example of Christ's power to transform lives. As a child, Oscar began to get into trouble. Then as he got older, he was jailed 17 times for brutal crimes. Prison psychiatrists said he was beyond help. But they were wrong! During a brief interval of freedom, Oscar met an elderly man who told him about Jesus. He placed his trust in the Lord and was changed into a kind, caring man. Shortly afterward he started a prison ministry. Chaplain H. C. Warwick describes it this way: "The third Saturday night of each month is 'Oscar Night' at Soledad Prison. Inmates come to hear Oscar and they sing gospel songs with fervor; they sit intently for over two hours; they come freely to the chapel altar... What professionals had failed to do for Oscar in years of counseling, Christ did in a moment of conversion." He is the Master Transformer.* You can see that transformation so clearly in a man like Oscar. You and I may not have become so notorious outwardly in our sins as he did, but that same fundamental change occurred in us when we received Jesus. The person we were, that old man, was removed from us and we were made brand new. Our hearts were circumcised. And now Paul moves on from the metaphor of circumcision to talk about the same thing using a different image. He says:

II. We Have Experienced Death And Resurrection (12) To understand this fact we have to understand:

1. the concept of identification as is expressed in the phrase **"with Him"** The word *identify* today has come to mean "to relate to or to understand by similar experience," as in, "I can identify with that". But it is not simply that my experience is "like that of Christ when He was buried and resurrected". The Biblical doctrine of identification is much more literal than that. Verse 12 in Greek actually says I was "with-buried of Him" and "with-resurrected" of Him. The prefix "co" works better in English to express the thought. I was co-buried and co-resurrected together with Him at the same time and in the same experience. You see:

a. at salvation I was placed IN Christ Not only was He literally placed inside of me, but spiritually I was placed in Him. My existence, my life, was joined inseparably to His, so that we literally co-exist. We exist together. I have been given His life and His life has become mine. So:

b. what happened to Him happened to me When He died, I died; when He was buried, I was buried; when He rose, I rose; when He ascended, I ascended; and now that He's seated on the throne, so am I! I'm seated in the heavenlies with Christ, because He's there and my spirit is joined to His. The only limitation is that due to the earthly phenomenon of time, my body simply hasn't caught up with that reality yet, but it will one day! Nevertheless, since God has placed me in Him, what is true of Him is true of me. So here Paul talks about just two of:

2. the facts of our identification First, he says:

a. I have been buried with Christ (12a) That's odd. He could have started by saying, "we died with Christ". Why burial? What's so important about burial? Paul even includes burial in 1 Cor. 15 as part of the Gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Death and Resurrection we easily see as important. But why burial?

(1) burial is the seal of death Burial signifies the absolute completeness and finality of death. To be dead is one thing, but to be "dead and buried," even in English slang, is a sure thing. There's no coming back from it. It is to be completely removed from this life. **3:3** describes this change that God made in our core as a death. You died. The old you died and further, it is buried and gone! When Christ was buried, the old me was buried with Him! It's gone forever! And, Paul adds:

(2) baptism is the symbol of that burial He doesn't mean that the act of water baptism is what actually transforms your heart. He means that the very first meaningful act of your Christian experience, baptism, is to be a reminder and a display of the death and burial of the old you. Look at **Rom. 6:3-6**. The old me, that old man, that old self, died with Christ and my baptism is a visual display of that; it is a way of telling all the world that the old me is dead and buried, once and for all, and:

b. I have been raised with Christ (12b) The very power of God that raised Christ from the dead did the same thing in me. I rose with Him and that's why Rom. 6 tells me that:

(1) I now live a new life The power of God worked in me. It put off the dead old me and buried it once and for all and made in me a new me, a transformed me, a resurrected me, that lives a brand-new kind of life! And that change from the inside out affects my whole life. That's why a genuine Christian cannot go on living a life of sin. He cannot, because, **1 Jn. 3:9** says God's seed remains in him and he cannot sin; he's been born of God; there's a new person planted in him that is like God. It HAS to change his life! And this transformation:

(2) it was done by the power of God when I believed The moment I placed my trust in the God who raised Jesus from the dead to save me, that very same thing happened to me! By faith I became a brand new resurrected, transformed creature in my innermost being.

My friend, if you're saved today and you know it, you're transformed at the very center of your being. You're not the person you used to be. You are brand new. Hallelujah! Praise God for it. Your heart's been circumcised. The old you is dead and buried and the new you is righteous and holy. You are a child of God, a citizen of heaven. You are not a reformed sinner; you have been transformed into a son or daughter of God by faith in Jesus Christ. *A woman was contacting her high school classmates about their 35th reunion. Many were excited about seeing their old friends. One man wrote back to the woman, "I have the 5 Bs--baldness, bifocals, bridgework, bulges, and bunions." A woman quipped, "I wasn't half the woman then that I am today" (referring to her weight). But another woman said, "I can't wait to see everyone. I've changed completely. In high school I was the class 'tramp.' I had no standards and everybody knew it. But a few years after high school I received the Lord Jesus as my Savior. My life was transformed. Because of Christ, I'm not the person I was, and I want my classmates to know about it."* How about you? Because of Christ you literally are not the person you were! You've been transformed. Do you want the world to know it?

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian: Made Alive With Christ - 2:13-15

Let me review briefly what we've learned in Colossians so far. The first two chapters are DOCTRINAL. Paul began in chapter 1 by talking about *who God the Father is*. Then he went over *who Jesus Christ is*. Now from 1:21 on, he's been telling us important facts about *who we are in Christ*:

1. we are reconciled to God in Christ
2. we are indwelt by Christ
3. we are wise in Christ
4. we are transformed by Christ

And today the fifth fact we'll study is this: *we are made alive with Christ*. The English language no longer has a good individual word that means "to bring to something to life". Old English used to have the word *quicken*, which meant "to give life to something", to make it live. It's hard for us to conceive of something dead that is brought to life. In fact, the reality of it is scary to us. *Bruce Larson in his book, Living Beyond Our Fears, tells a great story about a judge in Yugoslavia who had an unfortunate accident. He was electrocuted when he reached up to turn on the light while standing in the bathtub.*

His wife found his body sprawled on the bathroom floor. He was pronounced dead and, as was the custom in that particular town, he was placed in a room under a crypt in the town cemetery for 24 hours before burial. In the middle of the night, the judge came to, realized where he was, and rushed over to alert the guard, who promptly ran off terrified. Fortunately, he returned with a friend, and they released the newly revived judge, whose first thought was to phone his wife and reassure her. He got no farther than, "Darling, it's me—" when she screamed and fainted. Next, he went to the houses of several friends, who were sure he was a ghost. In a last desperate measure, he called a friend in a distant city, who had not heard of his death, and who interceded for him with his family and friends. [Dynamic Preaching, Mar 1991. Pages 41-42.] You see, we instinctively know that when a thing is dead, it's dead. It cannot come to life. Death is permanent. And therein lies the miracle of:

I. The Action Of God in our lives: He Made Us Alive (13a) Now, here's a good picture of:

1. our former state: we were spiritually dead This is talking about the state we were born in, the way we came into the world. We were physically alive, but we were spiritually dead. What does that mean? We were **completely separated from God**. God told Adam, "In the day you eat the fruit of that tree you will die!" and he actually did. He died spiritually. He was cut off and separated from the fellowship he had with God. That's why he was hiding in the bushes when God came walking in the garden. His sin had separated him from his God! And he had kids who were born just like him, who had kids born just like them, and so on, until you and I came along who were born the same way. Paul says in *Rom. 5:12*, *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned* [in him]. His death was transmitted to his descendants, so we were born dead, separated from God, spiritually stillborn. And there is something permanent and final about death. *Dead* is not the same as *asleep*; it is not the same as *unconscious* or "in a coma". Death carries no hope with it that there will ever be life. A dead thing cannot live again; it cannot change itself; it cannot help itself. We were in a spiritual state from which there was no return and that dead state manifested itself in that:

a. we committed sinful acts We were *dead in sins*, plural, individual acts of sin. Our deadness toward God moved us to commit sinful acts; we broke His laws and commands. And we had no power to stop doing it because:

b. we had a sinful nature "An uncircumcised heart" is not literal but it better gets the meaning across. We did not sin simply because we chose to, as Adam did originally. Lions kill prey and eat meat because the nature of a carnivore is in them; they'll never eat grass, no matter how well they're trained or how hard they try. They act like what they are. And so do human beings. We sin because we are born with a nature that is sinful, that is separated from God and given to evil and so we acted like what we were! And, over in Ephesians, Paul added:

c. we followed Satan's ways - Eph. 2:1-3 Satan had paths laid out for us to walk in. He had proven and tested patterns of evil waiting to ensnare and trap us and lead us on and we unknowingly followed those ways. They were built into the culture and the circumstances around us and we walked in them. We were under his influence and he led us on and if God had not intervened in our life, the end result of being spiritually dead in this world is the second death, to die after we die, to be separated from God eternally in hell after we leave this world! That was our destiny. But God did intervene. He did reach into our lives. As we studied in verses 11-12, He transformed us by a spiritual operation; He performed a spiritual circumcision on us. He took out that old nature; he removed it and threw it away and implanted a brand-new nature in us, a brand-new spirit, one that is like Him. Another way of describing this is verse 13, He quickened us; he made us live; He spoke to the spiritual corpse that we were just like He did to Lazarus' corpse that had been lying in the tomb four days, "Lazarus come forth!" And the dead corpse lived and got up and walked. So He said to us, "John, come forth; Sally come forth!" Put your name in there. And in that moment, we came to life! One moment we were like that judge lying dead in the crypt waiting only for burial of the remains; the next we were standing there alive and walking and talking. Now what does that mean? It means that in:

2. our present state: we are spiritually alive, which means we are **fully connected to God**. In fact, we are so connected that we are literally joined to Him. We are one with Him in our spirit, so that His life is now flowing through us. This new life we have is His life. This new nature we have is His nature. That's the point of verse 13:

a. it was done by God We couldn't do it. We couldn't make it happen. A dead thing can't decide to live; it can't give life to itself. Life has to be imparted from outside. That's what God did; He infused His life into us. It was an act of grace. It was an act of love. It was an act of mercy. He didn't have to do it but, because of the kind of God He is, He chose to do it! And then notice that Paul tells us how He did it:

b. it was done together with Christ When Christ's body was given life in the tomb that Easter Sunday morning, we were given life together with Him. Remember the truth of identification: I am placed into Christ and His life became mine, so what happened to Him happened to me! When He died, I died. The old me was crucified with Him and died with Him. I was buried with Him; the old me was laid to rest once and for all. And when He was given life, I was given life. Look with me at **Eph. 2:4-5**. We were made alive together with Christ, but look at verses **6-7**:

(1) we were also raised up together with Christ That's the word *to resurrect*, to cause a physically dead body to arise from sleep and stand up again. Christ was given life and then His body was raised up to walk in that newness of life. So, we were given life together with Him spiritually, but our bodies will also follow suit! They will

be raised to a brand new resurrection life one day at His coming, however, the truth is that this time thing we're stuck in clouds our perception. It is already done. We are already raised up together with Him. In the economy of God, it's not simply "as good as done"; it's done! And not only that, but:

(2) we are seated in the heavenly realms with Christ We're already seated there on high reigning with Him on His throne. How can that be? We're still here! That's only true in time, but the fact is that since we are truly joined to Him and He's there, we're there in Him! *Someone once asked a born-again Scotsman if he was on his way to Heaven. "On my way?" he replied, "Why man, I live there!"* Can you see it? I've already arrived, together with Him and in the ages to come when my body has finally caught up in time to reality, He's going to spend all the ages to come being worshipped for His grace which gave life to the dead and I'll be His living proof of it! So will you!

And the greatest irony of it all is that the instrument by which God gave this glorious life to me was man's cruelest instrument of death:

II. The Method Of God: was The Cross (13b-15) The cross means more than a piece of wood; the cross means the death of our precious Savior, Jesus Christ, who died upon that piece of wood in our place! The cross is an event; indeed, it is the central event, the pivotal event upon which everything about our salvation, upon which the very life that has been given to us, hinges. At the cross God did three things that allowed Him to call us out of spiritual death into life. First:

1. He graciously forgave ALL our sins (13b) There are two Greek words for forgiveness. This one has the word *grace* as its root. We didn't deserve it; we couldn't earn it. It came out of nothing in us but simply by His pure grace He pardoned all our sins. How? **1 Pet. 2:24**, *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree [on that piece of wood, that cross], so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness...* God took our sins and put them on Christ and they were nailed to that cross with him. His one act of dying paid for them all and therefore, they are gone. We are forgiven, once, for all, forever. And, if that's not enough, in the process He also did a second thing:

2. He completely removed the law (14) The Law, with its commandments, stood against us; it condemned us. It said that we were lawbreakers, that we had offended the holiness of God and deserved to die. It said, "You shall not steal" and we stole. It said, "You shall not lie" and we lied. And if you say, "Wait a minute, I'm not a Jew, the Law wasn't given to me!", Paul said in **Rom. 2:14-15**, *Indeed, when Gentiles [non-Jews], who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.* God wrote a portion of the law in our hearts; it's part of being made in His image. We inherently know it's wrong to kill, to steal, to lie, to commit adultery, and so on. So, the Law of God, both on paper and in our hearts, had lodged a set of Divine charges against us. We had a rap sheet, a criminal record. And God has only pronounced one sentence: the soul that sins must die! But when Christ was nailed on that cross, we were nailed there together with Him and two very wonderful things happened. First:

a. He removed its charges against us by taking the penalty upon Himself and meeting it. The law said we must die and so He died and took us there with Him. In the eyes of the law, justice was done; judgment was satisfied, the penalty had been meted out. As far as the Law is concerned, we are dead; we are already executed in Him. But do you know what that means? It means:

b. He removed its authority over us When we died with Christ, we died to the Law. Turn with me to **Rom. 7:1-6**. Did you hear that? When you die, the law has no authority over you. You don't have to pay taxes (although the IRS has found a way around that for at least a short time!); you don't have to pay bills; you can't get a speeding ticket. You're dead! You're not on the books of the law anymore! The same is true in the spiritual realm with God's law. If your husband dies, the law of marriage no longer applies. He's free from it and so are you. Death severs the authority of the Law. So, when Christ died and you died with Him on the cross, it's like the law was left there nailed to the cross. And you are free! Free for what? To sin? No. Free to serve God in a new way. Verse 6 says we are freed from serving God through the principle of law. That principle of law says, "I please God by keeping the law; my actions merit reward or condemnation." That way of relating to God was nailed to the cross; it's over. We died to it. We serve God in a new way. Instead of following rules, we act like God wants us to act because we've been changed on the inside by the Spirit. We're a brand-new person who is like God and wants to live like God wants. We end up doing the very things God requires in the Law because it's our nature. But the good news is that when we fail to live up to who we are, there is no remaining condemnation. The law has nothing to say against us; we're already dead! Hallelujah! At the cross we were set free from the Law so He could give us life! And here's the final piece of good news. At the cross:

3. He fully vanquished the Enemy (15) What powers and authorities is he talking about? Satan's demonic forces sought to control us. Remember we read in Ephesians that when we were dead in sins we walked in Satan's ways, His paths. He exercised control over us. But listen to **Heb. 2:14-15**, *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.* Satan holds us in slavery all our lives by keeping us

afraid of death and its penalty. As long as he keeps us afraid of dying and facing the penalty of our sins, he can get us to do anything! But at the cross Jesus

a. He stripped away the Enemy's power He "destroyed" him, that is, his work. He put him out of business. Colossians says He disarmed him! He stripped off all the enemy's weapons and took them for Himself. Just like when you defeat an enemy soldier and take all his armor and all his weapons so that all his power is gone and he has nothing left to fight you with. That's what Jesus did at the cross! By dying He said, "Here, Devil, take that! All your power over all my children is gone. They can't die anymore because they died in me. They are free and you can't scare them into following you anymore!" That's what Jesus did at the cross, but in the end:

b. He publicly displayed it in the Resurrection Just like a returning Roman general would come back into the city and display his victory by leading his triumphant army with a host of captives following behind him, so Jesus gave public proof to the world by walking out of that tomb! Satan held the keys, but when Jesus walked out alive and we walked out with Him, He was saying by that act "I HAVE THE KEYS! I am the Victor! I win! Satan is vanquished forever; his doom is sealed! And my people are FREE!"

In his book Forever Triumphant, F. J. Huegel told a story that came out of World War II. After General Jonathan Wainwright was captured by the Japanese, he was held prisoner in a Manchurian concentration camp. Cruelly treated, he became "a broken, crushed, hopeless, starving man." Finally, the Japanese surrendered and the war ended. A United States army colonel was sent to the camp to announce personally to the general that Japan had been defeated and that he was free and that he was in command. After Wainwright heard the news, he returned to his quarters and was confronted by some guards who began to mistreat him as they had done in the past. Wainwright, however, with the news of the allied victory still fresh in his mind, declared with authority, "No, I am in command here! These are my orders." From that moment on, General Wainwright was in control. Huegel made this application: "Have you been informed of the victory of your Savior in the greatest conflict of the ages?... Then rise up to assert your rights....Never again go under when the enemy comes to oppress. Claim the victory in Jesus' Name." Huegel observed, "We must learn to stand on resurrection ground, reckoning dead the old-creation life over which Satan has power, and living in the new creation over which Satan has no power whatever." You see, nobody has a claim on me, not my sins, not the Law, not the Devil. I was set free by dying with Him at the cross and as a free man, Jesus gave me life. In fact, that's what life means: freedom. Like the judge, I was dead but I came to life and Jesus opened the crypt and let me out. Now my task is to go back and convince those I love that I'm alive in Him and they can be too!

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian: Free in Christ - 2:16-23

With this message we complete our study of the first half or the first two chapters of Colossians which are DOCTRINAL. Today we consider the last of six important facts that Paul tells us about *who we are in Christ*. Let me review them one last time:

1. *we are reconciled to God in Christ*
2. *we are indwelt by Christ*
3. *we are wise in Christ*
4. *we are transformed by Christ*
5. *we are made alive with Christ*

Now the sixth fact, the one we'll study today, is this: *we are free in Christ*. Jesus gave a very important principle in John 8:32. *He said: "...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* Some years ago, a very bizarre incident was reported. A 16-year-old girl was kidnapped and held prisoner for four months. Where? In the attic of a church in Memphis, Tennessee. Week after week that congregation gathered to worship, to sing, to pray, to enjoy Christian fellowship--and for four months in that very same building there was a terrified human being needing to be rescued. Until she was discovered and released by two men on the church's maintenance staff, that girl was a helpless captive, a prisoner in church! But sadly, there are more people who are captives in church than we realize--people who are still living in bondage because of lies that Satan has perpetrated on them, people who have not fully experienced the true spiritual freedom that is theirs in Jesus Christ. Here in Colossians 2, Paul clarifies for us three specific areas in which we need to understand and use our freedom. He begins in verse 16 with the word *Therefore*, which ties what he's about to say with what he's just said. Because of what Christ did at the cross, because He hung us there in Him to die with Him, because He took the law, that rap sheet of charges which stood against us to condemn us, and nailed it to the cross so that we are dead to the law and we are free from it, therefore, he says:

I. We Are Free From The Judgment Of Legalism (16-17) There is always somebody waiting to judge us because we do a certain thing or we don't do a certain thing which they are convinced is a rule from God that we have to keep, isn't there? This was a particular problem in the early church in Jerusalem and Judea where most of the new Christians were from Jewish background and they had to wrestle with the question of the Old Testament. There were all these things given in the law like circumcision, feasts they were to keep, dietary laws they were to observe, resting on the Sabbath and a host more that they had always been following because they were from God. And they continued to follow many of them

after they were saved. But as the Gospel spread and Greeks and Romans and other peoples began to come to Christ, people who didn't know about and didn't do any of these kinds of things, great conflict arose. Don't they have to keep the Sabbath? Don't they have to eat kosher? The apostles and elders held a big conference to seek God about this issue in Acts 15 and decided once for all, "NO!" Non-Jews were free from the law. They didn't have to keep these things. In fact, neither did the Jewish believers! But legalism dies hard. It followed Paul around wherever he went. And it was there in Colossae. People were saying, "You have to do this to please God" or "You have to do that to please God" or "If you do this, you aren't pleasing God..." And that's what prompted Paul to give these:

1. Paul's illustrations of our freedom He says that:

a. we are free from the law of diet No one can judge you by what you eat or drink. If you eat pork, another believer can't criticize you for it, and, even if he doesn't, and you can't judge him for not eating it. That's probably not an issue for you, but what about a Muslim who comes to Jesus who's always been forbidden to eat pork all his life? If you drink a glass of wine, another believer can't judge you for it and you can't criticize him if he doesn't. Yet for how many years did many churches categorically teach that it was wrong to touch a drop of alcohol, even though Jesus Himself did! We are free from the law of diet. Why? **Rom. 14:17**, *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* Where do these ideas come from? Look at **1 Tim. 4:1, 3-4**. Satan wants to keep people in bondage to rules like this so that they won't experience the freedom that comes from knowing that God has created all food and drink to be enjoyed and to be received with thanksgiving to Him! He'd rather have them watching and condemning and criticizing one another and worrying about whether God will condemn them for what they eat or drink, when the truth is that we're free from that. And likewise, Paul says:

b. we are free from the law of days We don't have to keep the annual Jewish feasts like the Passover or the monthly New Moon festival or even the weekly Sabbath day. If you want to keep it, you can keep it and I can't judge you, but if I don't, you can't judge me. Yet whole branches of the church have tried to make Sunday into the New Testament Sabbath (which is actually Saturday!) by making rules saying you can't work on Sunday, you can't do homework on Sunday and you can't play sports on Sunday. The truth is you can't judge me if I do, and I can't judge you if you don't; neither of us is more spiritual. We are free from that law of days. And here's:

2. the reason we are free from these things (17)

a. these things were merely shadows of things that were to come **Heb. 10:1** says, *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.* Have you ever looked at your shadow? It looks like it's you, but it's not really you. It's a dim, shifting, temporary reflection of reality. That's what the Law was, but:

b. the reality is ours in Christ We don't need sacrifices; His one sacrifice was enough once for all. We don't need Sabbath days; they were to teach us to rest in His finished work! We don't need a Passover because Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. We don't need dietary laws to prove our obedience to God, because whatever we eat and drink, we regard as a gift from His hand and take it with thanksgiving! These rules and regulations were nailed to the cross and we are free from the judgment of legalism! Aren't you glad? Don't let anybody lead you back into bondage to it! Now, Paul says secondly:

II. We Are Free From The Snare Of Mysticism (18-19) What's that?

1. what it is: seeking spiritual experiences apart from Christ, you know, in visions and dreams and such. It's a common phenomenon in the world. The Muslims have their Sufis who seek mystical spiritual experiences; Native Americans went on "vision quests"; Buddhists meditate themselves into deep trances to find "spiritual truth".

a. it occurs outside the church The Gnostics were running around in Paul's day there at Colossae. They claimed to have secret deep spiritual knowledge that others didn't have. They believed God was unapproachable by man and that He related to man through a host of intermediary angelic type beings. And they wanted to include Paul's Jesus as one of those. Most of their so-called knowledge came from visions and dreams and the like which stood in contradiction to the Scriptures, but that didn't matter. Mormons owe their origin to the mystical experiences of Joseph Smith seeing an angelic vision and having revealed to him the things that became the Book of Mormon. The Swedenborgians owe their origin to the mystical experiences of Emmanuel Swedenborg and none of these acknowledge that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. The world is full of people pursuing mystical experiences to gain spiritual truth and that tendency:

b. it is mirrored even inside the church People who are truly Christians sometimes want to buy into these mystical tendencies. Their focus and their emphasis may be on, "I had a vision", "I had a dream", "I have a prophecy", "God told me to do this..." Now don't get me wrong. God does reveal Himself in visions and dreams, even today. Especially in the Muslim world, He is appearing commonly by these means and drawing people to Jesus. But when we seek a vision or a dream or a mystical experience for its own sake, instead of seeking to know Jesus Himself and to align our lives with the Word of God, something's wrong. Here's:

2. what's wrong with it Paul says first:

a. it leads to worshipping wrong things It led the Gnostics to worshipping angels. It leads the cults to preach a Jesus that is not truly God and to teach that salvation is actually by works. It can lead real Christians to seek an experience more than the Savior, to savor being caught up in beautiful worship music and never really connect their hearts with the Savior it was meant to praise. Second:

b. it breeds a false humility that is really pride The Gnostics saw themselves as merely humble human beings who couldn't dare to approach a transcendent God and had to approach him through intermediaries. But in reality, the Gnostics were quite proud of this secret knowledge they had. They would go into great detail about what they saw or thought they saw and get puffed up by it and look down on Christians who didn't know what they did. And the deathtrap of mysticism when it creeps into the church is pride also. "You didn't see what I saw!" "You didn't experience what I did!" "I'm more spiritual than you are!" In fact, Paul goes so far as to say in verse 19:

c. it indicates a lack of connection to Christ the Head He says the so-called "Gnostic Christian" of his day was no Christian at all, any more than the new-ager or the cultist of our day. He was never a true part of the body of Jesus Christ.

But I am! I am connected to Jesus Christ, my Head. I am in Him and He is in me and I am free from having to seek after mystical experiences to know Him. Nobody can judge me and say, "But you haven't had the experience I've had; you haven't spoken in tongues; you haven't seen what I've seen!" I'm free from that because I am in Jesus Christ and God is causing me to grow exactly the way He wants me to as a part of the body! Now, finally Paul says:

III. We Are Free From The Self-Denial Of Asceticism (20-23) Asceticism is a fancy word:

1. what it is: trying to please God by self-denial Man sort of has this inbred notion that repeatedly comes up that he can somehow please God by giving up legitimate things, by depriving himself, by abstaining and refraining and sometimes, even by hurting himself.

a. an ancient illustration would be: **the Pharisees** who were like this in some ways. They fasted twice a week, refusing their food and gave away a tithe of everything they possessed down to the herbs in their garden. They laid down rules all around the Scriptural commands to make sure they pleased God. They took "do not handle" and turned it into "do not even touch". They would never touch or eat with a Gentile, for instance. They had elaborate ceremonies for washing pots and pans and washing hands before eating. All of these were ways of trying to show how they carefully denied themselves in matters that others did by course. Centuries later, the Christian church itself developed monasticism. Whole orders of believers dedicated themselves to vows of poverty, to eating minimal food, speaking as little as possible and in general afflicting themselves, in the hope that it would draw them closer or make them more acceptable to God. The idea hasn't gone away either.

b. a modern illustration might be: **ultra-separatism** Some years ago I heard a preacher say something like this: "I am a fundamentalist. I don't smoke or drink or cuss or chew or sniff. I don't even take vitamins. My hair never touches my ears or my collar and my wife never wears slacks, jewelry or makeup. I only read one Bible, the God-given King James version. I don't go to movies, dances or the theater and I don't fellowship with those that do. I am a fundamentalist and I'm proud of it!" It seems funny now, but that kind of thinking permeated the evangelical church for the entire first half of the last century; it colored the lives of a lot of you older folks and it's still alive and well in some circles. You'd be surprised what people ask when they call to "check us out" as a church sometimes. Do we do this or do that? And much of it is a modern-day version of asceticism: I please God by self-denial, by how many things I don't do. And again here's:

2. what's wrong with it First, Paul says:

a. it is of wrong origin God didn't invent it. Asceticism is not His principle. He gives us all things richly to enjoy. It is one of the basic principles that belongs to this world system that is all around us and you know who invented that system and set up its basic ideas! God never said the way to please Him is to afflict yourself on earth. Second:

b. it concerns things with no eternal value Food and drink perish with the using. Hair length and dress styles have no eternal value. It's not that God doesn't care about your hair or how you dress, but those are small secondary issues in light of the things He's really concerned about. In a real sense focusing on these issues is much ado about nothing. Third, like mysticism:

c. it breeds a false humility which is really pride Again, the ascetic is trying to be humble toward God and show what a servile creature he is, but he inevitably ends up proud in heart and looking down his nose at other believers who don't do what he does. "I'm a fundamentalist and I'm proud of it!" Remember the Pharisee's prayer, "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are...especially this publican!" They feel other Christians can't be real because they do X, Y or Z. However, the real problem is that:

d. it inflames the flesh rather than restraining it The more you tell your flesh, "You can't have this!", the more it wants it. Trying to deny yourself to please God stirs up the sinful passions of your flesh; it Increases your temptation, but gives you no help against it. It says, "Don't," but can't help you not to! But look in verse 20. Here's:

3. why we are free from all these things, we died with Christ! And when I died with Christ, I died to the Law and I died to having to try to please God by making rules and by denying myself and by seeking after special spiritual experiences. I am dead to all that stuff because I am fully and completely in Jesus Christ and accepted in Him. Nobody can judge me on the basis of any of those things, I am free.

And all that remains is for me to go out and live like it! But that's so hard. So many forces try to keep me frozen in fear that I must keep rules, that I must seek after experiences, that I must deny myself and give up things, that somehow, I am not really and fully all that God says I am. *"The Desperate Hour" is a drama written by John Haye. In one very intense scene, a family is being held hostage at gunpoint. The climax of the scene is when Ralph, the young son, is targeted by the gunman, who tells the rest of the family that he will kill the boy if he moves. But the intruder is unaware of the fact that the father earlier managed to take all the ammunition out of the pistol. The tension builds as the man points the gun at little Ralph's head. Then the dad quietly speaks to the frightened boy and says, "Son, listen to me. I've never lied to you before, and I'm not lying now. That gun isn't loaded. I'm telling you the truth. The man can't hurt you. When I count to three, I'm going to open the door, and I want you to run out." One, two, three, and Ralph pulls away and runs out the door to freedom. The frustrated gunman stands there just clicking the trigger. There were no bullets. The boy was freed by the truth, and that's the same way we come to freedom. [Pulpit Digest, Sep/Oct 1996. Page 20.]* When we know the truth of who we are in Christ, that we are reconciled in Him, that we are indwelt by Him, that we are wise in Him, that we've been transformed by Him and made alive together with Him, then we can run out the door to freedom and live free and nobody can keep us in bondage. As Paul put it in Galatians, *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* - Gal. 5:1.

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian Life: Basic Understanding - 3:1-4

We spent several months looking at the first half of the book. Let me review the outline:

I. Doctrinal (What We Believe)	Chs. 1-2
1. who God our Father is	1:1-14
2. who Jesus Christ is	1:15-19
3. who we are in Christ	1:20-2:23
[because you live out of who you believe you are!]	
a. we are reconciled in Christ	1:20-23
b. we are indwelt by Christ	1:24-29
c. we are wise in Christ	2:1-10
d. we are transformed by Christ	2:11-12
e. we are made alive with Christ	2:13-15
f. we are free in Christ	2:16-23
II. Practical (How We Live)	3:1-4:6

Now, at the beginning of chapter 3, we come to a major turning point in the book. Here Paul is going to tell us how we live because of what we believe. He turns from the doctrinal to the practical aspect of our faith. He will tell us about what things we must put off from our old life and what things we must put on in our new one. He will give us specific guidelines for husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters. He'll talk to us about prayer and about how to relate to those outside the faith. However, before he gets that specific, he lays down in **3:1-4**:

I. The Basic Principle Of Christian Living Did you see the principle? The Christian Life Can Only Be Lived By God's Power! In other words: Only Christ can live the Christian life! When Ludwig Nommensen, a pioneer missionary, arrived among the Batak tribesmen of the Philippines, a village chief gave him only two years to learn the customs of the people and to convince them that he had a message worth hearing. At the end of that period, he was asked how the Christian religion differed in its moral rules from the traditions of the Batak. "We know what is right," said the tribal leader, "for we too have laws that say we must not steal, or take our neighbors' wives, or tell lies." "That's true," the missionary answered quietly, "but my Master supplies the power needed to keep these laws." The chief was startled. "Can you really teach my people to live better?" he inquired. "No, I can't, but if they receive Jesus Christ, God will give them the strength to do what's right." Being permitted to remain another six months, Nommensen preached the Gospel and taught the villagers how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers. At the end of that time, the chief said, "You may stay longer. Your religion is better than ours, for your God walks with men and gives them strength to do the good things He requires." Do you see the point? We know what to do! Yet we have no power to do it in ourselves! However, God gives us the very power

to do what He expects us to do! Look at our text and flip back a few pages to compare what it says with Ephesians. First, it says:

1. God's power raised me with Christ As a believer I have been raised together with Christ. When He was raised from the dead, I was raised together with Him to a brand-new life. And note the passive voice; I did not raise myself; I've been raised. How? Look at **Eph. 2:6a**. God raised me up with Christ! He did it by His mighty power. We learned this back in chapter 2; the power of God transformed the very core of my being so that I am a brand-new creation inside. But there's more:

2. God's power seated me with Christ in heaven Christ is now in heaven seated at the right hand of the Father. But look at **Eph. 2:6b**. God's power seated me there with Him! You see, it's not just that He's up there and I'm down here. He's up there and because my spirit and His Spirit are bound eternally in one, where He is, I am. I'm up there in Him, even though my body hasn't caught up to that destination just yet. Do you see what Paul's saying?

3. my life is Christ's life Look at verse 3 of Colossians. I died and my life is hid with Christ in God! The old me that was in Adam, my old self that was of the earth, died and I was given a brand-new life, the very life of Christ. The new me is in Christ and I am seated up there in Him. Paul wrote this same truth to all the churches. Flip over to **Gal. 2:20**, *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* There it is again:

a. my own old life died That person I was before I was saved, that old self dominated at the very core by sin and totally depraved, that person was crucified with Christ at the cross. When Jesus died there, I died with Him. Yes, He died there for me; that purchased forgiveness for my SINS. But I died there with Him and that gave me release from my SIN, from the power of sin which had long enslaved me through my old nature. When I died the power of the force of sin over me was broken. Yet even though I died, I still live, only now it's not me anymore. It's Christ living IN me. So, the Christian life is not the old me trying to live a new way. How do I live? The life I now live in this body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me. I live it by trusting in Him to do the living by His mighty power. What Paul's saying is that:

b. God's power lives my life Look at **Eph. 1:18-20**. Do you see what he's saying? Or rather what he's praying? That same power which raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in heaven and that raised me from the dead with Him and seated me up there with Him, that same incomparably great power now lives in me in the person of Christ and is flowing out through me, making me a person like Him, doing His will. The only one who can live a true Christian life is Christ and that's exactly what He is doing in me, living out His life through me. And so, in a very practical sense Col. 3:4 says:

4. Christ is my life (4) The words *who is* are not even in the Greek text. Literally it reads, *When Christ, the life of you, shall appear...* He is more than Savior; He is more than Lord; He is my very life, living His life out through me and producing all those wonderful symptoms and indications of His presence that we love to talk about such as love, joy, peace, and so on.

An elderly couple had no means of support except a weekly gift of money from a man in their church. One Sunday the church scheduled a special meeting in the afternoon. The couple's supporter, who lived quite far away, wanted to remain in the area for the afternoon service. So he said to the old couple, "Would you mind if I joined you for dinner after the morning service?" Immediately the couple thought of the half loaf of stale bread, a bit of butter, and some cheese that was the entire contents of their cupboard. How could this friend dine with them, they thought? But the man interrupted their worries by adding, "I have brought a basket of things with me and there will be plenty for the three of us." When he arrived at the poor, bare cottage, he unpacked the basket. Soon the three of them were gathered around a table that was spread with fried chicken, homemade bread, country butter, and apple pie. The man had not only come to dine with them, but he had also brought all that was needed for the feast. That's what Jesus did for us! When He came into our lives, He didn't just ask us to live a life like His; He brought everything we need to live it with Him and gave it to us. His mighty power is in us to do all that He wants done. So what's my part? What do I do? How do I engage in:

II. The Constant Practice Of Christian Living Well, there is another principle that is very important. When it comes to working IN me, God will not violate my will. Oh, He may send all kinds of things into my circumstances that are not what I want, but when it comes to doing His work in and through me, He will not do that without my permission. He will not save me, unless I want it and ask for it. He will not force me to obey His lordship; I must yield myself to Him. And He will not live out His life through me unless I choose to let Him; otherwise, I would be a puppet or a robot. So, in our text Paul reminds us that:

1. there are two contrasting realities First, there is:

a. that which is above and when we hear that phrase, we usually think about glorious mansions and heavenly music and all the other good stuff that God has prepared for us in the future. But look at what the text says. The word *things* isn't even in the original. It literally says *Seek the above!* What's above? Christ seated at the right hand of God and **me in Christ**. "The above" is me being in Christ and my life being totally consumed and hidden in His. But then there is:

b. that which is on earth and again we usually think of houses, lands, pleasure, and so on. But again, the Greek has no “things”, simply “Seek the above, not the on earth.” What’s on earth? **Me in the flesh**, my body which still has the force and power of sin living inside it and which would like very much to rule and reign over it.

So, on the one hand, the real me is the one in heaven with Christ, the new creation that I am in my spirit where Christ dwells with His mighty power to live out my life. But on the other hand, that real me is still in the flesh. As long as it’s in this world it has wrapped around it a body and mind which are heavily corrupted and tainted by sin. And these two things are in a constant state of tension. Listen to **Rom. 6:17-19**, *But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.* Do you see it? My part is simply to choose! Who do I let live through me? Do I give myself to the power of Jesus and let Him live through me or do I give myself to the power of sin and let it live through me? I have a choice! So:

2. there are two things I must do Paul says in verse 1 that I must:

a. seek the above: I must set my heart on it. I must yearn for it. I must want it, desire it. Do I want the pleasures of sin and all the misery that I know comes with it? Or do I want that “above kind of life,” that “Christ kind of life”. The choice is mine; God gives it to me. Moment by moment, hour by hour, situation by situation and circumstance by circumstance, I have a choice to make. Do I yield to Christ and let His power live out His life in that moment or do I yield to sin and let it do its work through me? **I must choose what I genuinely desire.** I have to stop and say, “Lord, I am a new creature in You; You are my life. Lord, here’s the situation. Now use my mind and my body; I give them to you. Live out your life through me!” I know that sounds really simple, but it is no small order. We have all these habits where we’re trained to act and react in an earthly way instead of in God’s way. That’s called our flesh. It’s so easy to just do what we’ve been patterned and trained to do by the world around us instead of stopping to yield ourselves to Him. We forget so easily. A situation comes up and “Boom”, we react instantly without thinking and yielding and we let our flesh do the acting instead of Christ. And Paul knew that, so in verse 2 he urges us to:

b. focus, to set our minds, to fix them. He says **I must concentrate on the “above” life**. I must focus my mind on the fact that I’m in Christ, that I’m a heavenly person, that the old me is dead. The more I focus on Jesus seated there at the right hand, far above all things, and me seated there in Him, the more likely I am to yield myself to him at a moment’s notice as difficulties arise.

*Located in the White Mountains of New Hampshire is a famous pass known as Franconia Notch. And high on one of its rocky walls protrudes a granite formation that resembles the profile of an old man peering intently over the valley. It’s called “The Old Man of the Mountain.” From that unusual rock formation Nathaniel Hawthorne drew his inspiration for “The Legend of the Great Stone Face”. The story goes like this: A boy by the name of Ernest lives in a valley from which he views daily a face fashioned in the mountain. His mother tells him that someday a venerable man who bears that image will visit the valley. Years go by. Great men from all walks of life come, but no one has the resemblance of the face. Ernest reaches old age, disappointed that he had not seen his mother’s prediction fulfilled. Finally, a renowned poet visits the area and listens to Ernest himself deliver a discourse to his neighbors. And what does the man notice? He sees in the face of Ernest the likeness of the great stone face on the mountain. Having gazed on that figure daily for many years, Ernest, now a venerable old man, has gradually come to bear its image. The lesson of the story? We take on the characteristics of the things we concentrate on. We become that on which we focus. That’s why Paul said, set your mind on “the above” not on “the earthly”. The writer of Hebrews said, *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...who sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Focus constantly on Him and you in Him and you’ll choose what you desire; you’ll yield to Him and He’ll live through you and that brings us to verse 4 and:*

III. The Glorious Promise Of The Christian Life (4) Right now Christ is hidden in heaven with God and my life in Him is hidden with Him up there, but:

1. one day Christ will appear He will show Himself to the world. He’ll return in all His power and glory and reveal Himself before the whole universe and you know what:

2. I will appear with Him in glory! He’s my life; I’m in Him. When He reveals Himself to the world, I’ll be revealed with Him in that same glory because He and I are one!

So what if yielding to Him means the way of the cross! So what if it means suffering and enduring hardship! So what if it means being misunderstood or mistreated or even hated and persecuted for His sake. Paul said, *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The [whole] creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.* – **Rom. 8:18-19.** One day you will be revealed with Him in all His glory as the universe shouts for joy. He will appear and you will appear with Him, for He is your life. So focus on Him and you’ll choose the desire of your heart and He’ll live out His life through you in mighty power.

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian Life: Putting Off The Old - 3:5-11

Having explained the basic principle of living the Christian life in verses 1-4 (which is that Christ has to live it through me!), Paul gets right down where the rubber meets the road to that issue we encounter every day of our lives: the issue of sin. Put simply, the question is like this: "OK, now I'm a believer. Jesus lives in me. But I still sin! How am I going to stop sinning?" Read with me Paul's answer to that in 3:5-11. Paul says, "Rid yourself of it!" in verse 8. Literally, "put it off" or "put it away from you". And the verb tense indicates that it's a finished action: "put away from yourself for good these things". Now let's look first at:

I. What I Must Put Off: Paul lists some things quite explicitly. And, if you compare the list in **Gal. 5:19-21** which is nearly the same, he calls them there **The Deeds Of The Flesh**. These are the sinful acts that result when your flesh is in control of you, instead of the Spirit of God being in control. First, he mentions:

1. sins of the body (5b) ...sexual immorality, impurity That first word in the Greek is *porneia* which covers the whole gamut, including sex before marriage, sex outside of marriage, sex with someone when you're married to someone else, getting money for sex or giving money for sex, pornography in all its forms (even on the internet, the fastest growing type), incest, rape, homosexual behavior and any of the other deviant ways we've invented to make God's holy gift of sex impure. That was Greek culture; that was how people lived; that was how the Colossians lived before salvation. Unfortunately, that's how too many Americans live! Now that I'm in Jesus, my body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit and I need to be rid of those things! Secondly he mentions:

2. sins of the desires (5c) ...lust, evil desires, greed (idolatry) These happen in the mind and the heart. Whether it's lusting sexually after a person, lusting selfishly after power or lusting greedily after money (which Paul says is idolatry, loving money more than God!), these things have no place in my life. They're all around me, but they have no place in my life now; I need to rid myself of them. Third, he goes on to:

3. sins of the attitude (8a) ...anger, rage, malice Quietly seething anger in my heart, sudden flare-ups of uncontrolled rage, or cold hatred of other people for whatever reason, these things have no place in my life in Jesus Christ. And now he really gets to meddling and talks about:

4. sins of the mouth (8b-9a) ...slander, filthy language, lying Talking bad about other people, telling dirty jokes, cursing and being vulgar in the way I talk and especially, intentionally lying to conceal the truth, these things have no place in my life in Jesus. I must be rid of them!

Of course this list was not meant to be exhaustive; it's only *some* of the types of sin that have occurred in our lives, but if we're honest, I don't think any of us have a perfect score so far, have we? We may not have done all of these, but we've all done some of these. In fact we likely still do some of these. But the point is that these types of things have to go, once and for all; they have to be decisively put away from my life and here's:

II. Why I Must Put These Things Off First:

1. these are the very things that bring God's wrath (6) They are why Jesus is coming back to judge the world. Listen to what John writes in his vision of the Tribulation period in *Rev. 9:20-21*, *The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood--idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.* Same basic list. Mankind won't stop doing these things, no matter what. That's why Jesus is coming back. They'll be destroyed in the winepress of His wrath at His coming for lives filled with these very things! So, do I want them in my life? The very things that sent Christ to the cross to take the full wrath of God upon Himself in my place, do I want these things back in my life? And what's more:

2. these things belong to my old self (7) If you remember from verse 1, the new me is seated in heaven with Christ. These things don't belong there; they don't belong to that person. They belong to the way I used to live before I came to Christ when my old sinful depraved self ran my life. For some of us this is real plain; before we were saved we did some awful things. Others may be thinking, "But I was saved at 5 or 6 years old; I never lived like that?" You were never angry or threw a temper fit or hated somebody or coveted what they had or took something from someone else? You still had the nature that did those things, even if you were too small for them to become full-blown! You and I were born with an old self, a sinful nature bent on doing those things; that's why we did them. I was saved at 15 but looking back on some of those early teen years, I knew how to cuss like the best of them and liked to see if I could get away with it. I remember lusting after girls; I remember stealing and lying to protect myself. Did you notice that's 90% of Paul's list and I was basically a "good" kid compared to others I knew! You see, it wasn't just somebody else; I used to walk in those ways in the life I once lived! So did you! But:

3. I have already put off my old self with its practices (9) I wish you could read Greek, because there's a beautiful point here you would see. That word *put off* here is a different word from *rid yourselves* in verse 8. It means to strip off

from yourself and throw away. It's what you do when you come in from mowing the lawn in 100 degree heat; you strip off all your smelly wet clothes and throw them away from you and hop in the shower to be clean. We saw that word back in 2:11. That's what God did with my old self, my sinful nature; He circumcised it; He cut it off and threw it away from me. These behaviors belong to the old me that is gone; when He put off the old me, they belong with it. They don't belong in my life anymore because:

4. I have put on a new self which is like God (10) You see:

a. my new self, the person that I am now in my spirit, **is already righteous and holy**. Eph. 4:24 says, *...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*. My spirit, my nature inside, is righteous and pure and holy; the Holy Spirit has joined His holy self to it forever! Those unholy behaviors don't belong in the life of a holy man or woman who is one with the Holy Spirit of Holy God! But notice carefully that Paul says that my new self:

b. it is being continually renewed in its knowledge Knowledge has to do with the mind, not the spirit. My spirit has been made righteous already, but you see, my mind is full of lies the enemy has planted there over the years, even from childhood. He has infected my thinking in all kinds of ways that I don't even realize. That's why over the course of my life God has to renew my mind, my thinking, to match His, to know the truth of who I really am and who He is. That's a gradual process and the more that I experience God's renewing of my mind, the less these sinful behaviors can have any place at all in my life. You see:

5. my only identity is in Christ; all earthly distinctions have ceased (11) I am seated up there in Him and He is in me; that's who I am. I am no longer a Jew or a Greek or a foreigner from some uncivilized culture or even a despised terrorist Scythian. I am no longer a slave or a free man or (Paul adds in Galatians) even a male or a female; those things are not my identity. I am in Jesus Christ and He is in me; I am a Christian, one who is made like Him on the inside, one who bears His very nature!

So, those old things have no place in Him and they have no place in me and in my life. They have to put away from me; I must rid myself of them. And yet it does not happen automatically. These habits and behaviors are not instantly gone from me the moment I receive Christ. So, the big question is:

III. How I Put These Things Off: Look what Paul says: ***I Must KILL Them (5a)***, Literally, I must *put to death [my] members which are on the earth*. You see, even though my spirit is made brand new and even seated in heaven with Christ, my members that are still on the earth; my mind and body are still plagued by the power of sin which is in them and has not been removed. So I still find the power of sin drawing my mind toward those unclean things and drawing my body toward unholy behavior. And to just say, "Stop doing this!" isn't enough. I can't just stop doing these things on my own. I can try until I'm blue in the face and it won't work. I will become miserable and cry out like Paul did in Rom. 7, "What a wretch I am... Help!" But remember the lesson last week? The basis of the Christian life is this: God's power lives my life. Christ is my life. I live by trusting Him to do the work. So, when Paul says, "Put to death your members on the earth", he doesn't mean to shoot yourself literally. He means to make a choice to allow Christ to kill those things out of your life and rid you of them. To understand what that means, let's go to another passage, **Rom. 6:6-13**. Putting my flesh to death involves a four step process. First:

1. I must KNOW: (6:6-10) Did you hear it? *We know...we know...* I have to KNOW, not just hope, suppose or think. I have to KNOW:

a. that I died with Christ and am free from the power of sin What does that mean? When Christ died, I died with Him and a person who's dead is free from the power of sin. There is no force or power in this world, not the Devil himself, not the power of sin that's in my body and mind, that can MAKE me sin. I'm free to choose not to. And I must know:

b. that I live with Christ a new life unto God The same power of God that raised Christ from the dead to a brand-new life is in me and is available to me to live my life. Without knowing these two facts, I'm sunk. So I must KNOW that I don't have to sin and that Christ is in me to empower me not to sin, yet it can't be merely academic knowledge:

2. I must COUNT these things as being true of myself (6:11) In other words, I must take a stand. I must say, "These things are true of me!" I must count on them as being true for me. I must count myself:

a. as being dead to sin and free from its power I am dead to sin; I am free; I don't have to sin; I can choose! And I must count myself:

b. as being alive to God and full of His power I am raised with Christ; I have a new life; His power is in ME! You see, this is where faith comes in. It's one thing to know the tensile strength of a piece of rope and know it will hold 200 pounds. But it's quite another thing to be willing to slide over the edge of a cliff holding onto that rope and counting on the fact that it will hold me! I have to make a decision; I have to choose to trust the rope. Now, it may not feel to me like I'm dead to sin and free from its power. I may feel compelled, even driven toward it. But the truth is I'm free and by

faith I must count it so! What's really true about me is that I am seated up there with Christ in the heavenlies above; I AM that person whose life is hidden with Christ in God's mighty power, not this earthly struggle I feel. Once I count that as being true, I'm ready for step 3:

3. I must REFUSE:

a. to let sin rule over me (6:12) I must stand up and say, "No, sin, you're not going to control me; you have no power over me!" And I must refuse:

b. to let sin use my body (6:13a) "Sin, I am not going to loan you my body to do the things you want to do. It's mine and I choose who rules over me!"

Make a choice; make a conscious decision. Exercise the freedom and authority you have. Decide, "I am NOT going to let sin use me like it used to; I am not going to let it rule my life and use my body for a playground to get what it wants!" But instead, here's what I'm going to do:

4. I must OFFER: (6:13b) myself to God. That word *offer* means "to place beside", to give something to someone and place it in their hands. It's the same word used in *Rom. 12:1*, *...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship*. It means offering:

a. myself to God's control, saying "Lord, here I am; I'm yours to control. Live through me!" And it means offering:

b. my body to God for His use "Lord, live out your life through me; use my body as a tool to do righteousness; carry out Your will through my body!"

And when you offer yourself to Him in that way, He does the very thing you're counting on! He lives through you. So, here I am and along comes a feeling of lust or a situation where intense anger is developing in me. What do I do? That's my flesh rising up in me. How do I kill it? How do I put it to death? I stop right there and pray in my mind and say, "Lord this thing does not belong in me; I am a new creation in Jesus Christ. I know your power is in me and I'm counting on it right now. I WILL NOT give myself over to this sin. I give myself to You and I ask that Your mighty power would flow through me and keep me from this sin. Live through me, Lord!" Now, I realize that's the longer, more theological version of the prayer. The short version is Peter's prayer when he felt himself sinking, "Lord, HELP!" It doesn't matter; God understands shorthand prayers! But that's how you put off sin; you count on Christ living in you to live through you and remove it. And it works. I KNOW it works. It may mean going through this process a dozen times a day. Those verbs in *Rom. 6* are all present tense...*keep on counting, keep on refusing...keep on yielding*. Moment by moment, day by day, keep on doing it and you will see those things put off from your life. It sure beats trying not to sin in your own strength and failing and repenting and trying harder and doing it all over again. Christ really IS your life! He is our victory over sin! *F. B. Meyer used this analogy to illustrate how it is possible to be victorious. He wrote, "When I was a boy, I'd go to the Polytechnic in London where my favorite diversion was a diving bell. It had seats all around the rim, and at a given time it was filled with people and lowered into a tank. We used to go down deeper and deeper into the water, but not a drop ever came into the diving bell, even though it had no bottom and the water was well within reach. You see, the bell was so full of air that though the water 'pushed against' the air and the air 'pushed against' the water, because air was being pumped in all the time from the top, the water could not do what it otherwise would; it could not flood in and fill the bell. Likewise," Meyer wrote, "if you are full of the Holy Spirit, the flesh- life is underneath you; and though it would surge up, it is kept out."* When Jesus is in control of you and living your life, His power keeps the power of sin under your feet. All you do is yield. If you think you can do it on your own, if you think you have strength and wisdom to live life, you'll soon find out otherwise. Alan Redpath the Bible teacher and commentator, talked about the lesson that God had to teach him through severe difficulty. He said: "The only good thing about Alan Redpath is Jesus." Paul said, *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh... – Rom. 7:18*. The only good thing in me is Jesus. When I realize that and learn to cry out to Him to live my life, then I walk in victory over sin.

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian Life: Putting On The New - 3:12-17

Let me review for you once again where we are in the book:

- *Chapter 3* begins the *practical portion* of the book which tells us how to live the Christian life.
- *Verses 1-4* gave us the *basic principle*: Christ is our life and our task is to recognize and realize that and let His power live His life out through us.
- *Verses 5-11* tell us about the negative side of what that means: *putting away from ourselves* things that are sinful by His power.
- The process was for doing that was this: I *stop* and *remember* who I am in Christ, *count* myself as being a brand-new creation in Christ, *refuse* to yield to sin, and *yield* or offer myself to the power of Christ to put sin away from me.

However, putting away the old sinful life is not enough. It's like emptying all the old, broken furniture out of a house and sweeping it clean. That's only half the task. Unless you fill the house up again with new things, it can't fulfill its purpose. The Christian life is not only putting away from me the things that characterize the old man, but it is also putting on or clothing myself or filling my life with the things that characterize the new one! Christ made me a brand-new person on the inside. And now I have to put on the new clothes that go with the new person that I am. I have to clothe my life with the characteristics that go with this brand-new Christ-like person that I have been made inside. So, in verses 12-14 Paul gives us a sampling of:

I. What I Must Put On (12b-14) This list is, of course, not meant to be exhaustive. It only has seven items. One could also include truthfulness, righteousness, honesty, and a host of other qualities. But these seven certainly form a core description of what Christ wants to produce in your life. Let's just briefly define them. First is:

1. compassion: deep caring about the ills of others Jesus looked on the multitude and had compassion on them; He was touched deep in his heart with their spiritual plight, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They had nobody to take care of them. Christ wants to build in us a caring about others' needs and problems; He desires that we are moved when we see them suffering or in trouble. And with that goes:

2. kindness: acting in a helpful fashion to others This is the action step. It is doing something about the needs of others, helping their plight. It is directing them if they're lost, feeding them if they're hungry, stopping to help them when their car breaks down, or taking the time to sit with them when they're lonely. A third thing is:

3. humility: valuing the needs of others above mine It does not mean thinking that everybody else is better than I am, that I am a worthless nothing. In a minute we'll see what you are. Rather, it means a conscious choice to be selfless, to place meeting the needs of others above my own needs, to choose caring about them over caring about me, just as Jesus did. Then there's a thing called:

4. gentleness: not contending with God or others Meekness is the older and perhaps better translation. It means accepting what comes my way without contention. It means not arguing with God or blaming Him about my circumstances and doing the same thing toward others. It means not arguing with others and blaming them or trying to push them down so I can climb up. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild; gentle me... Then comes:

5. patience: self-restraint when provoked by others This is the old word long-suffering which means exactly what it says. It is the ability to endure suffering or provocation a long time without striking back. It is being slow to anger, standing in the grocery line without muttering or sitting in the traffic jam without laying on the horn! Or more seriously, it is tolerating true wrongs without retaliating in kind. And along with that goes:

6. forgiveness: extending unreserved grace to others It means, not only that I choose not to retaliate, but that I actually, unreservedly forgive them as Christ forgave me, no strings attached. Not 7 times but 70 times 7. And finally, Paul mentions:

7. love: the goal which sums all these and binds them Jesus said that the entire law of the Old Testament was summed up in this, *love your neighbor as yourself*. The command He gave His disciples was to love one another, to have that self-sacrificing, *agape* love of God that He had for us in going to the cross. And that love produces all these other things. That is the goal, to love others the way God loves them, the way God loves us, to love them with the very love of God. And that is not natural. To love with God's selfless love is not in my flesh. I must make a deliberate choice; I must choose to clothe myself, to fill my life with these things. Now let's go back to the beginning of verse 12 and examine:

II. Why I Must Put Them On (12a) And listen, the reason is not because God said I must. This is not a "go out and do some things for God" list. I MUST put these things on because of who I am! Look at who God says I am! First of all:

1. I am chosen by God Do you remember that process of choosing up teams when you were a kid? To play baseball or football, two kids would be captains and choose their teams. I wasn't really athletic so I was always about last to get chosen. Can any of you relate to that? To knowing that you're no good, that you're a lousy player and nobody's going to pick you? Unfortunately, a lot of us feel that way about God. I have to be a good player for Him to pick me. I have to work really hard at humility and forgiving and so on. But look what it says, I am not some loser trying to do as good as I can to impress God. I am a person that Almighty God has chosen, a person He wanted on His team! I'm not trying to get God to choose me; He already has and because of that:

2. I am holy Did you hear that? This is not God standing here with His binoculars looking years into the future when I get to glory and saying "Oh yes, you'll be holy some day!" I am holy right now in Jesus Christ. God put a new person, a new nature inside me when I was born again and that new man, that new me, is absolutely pure and holy like God. Every religion in the world says, "Work to become something that you are not; become better". Christianity's message is exactly the opposite, "Become what you ARE! God made you something; He made you holy and pure, a brand-new

person. Now get the flesh out of the way and let it shine. Let what you really are inside come out!" And here's what else:

3. I am continually loved by God Dearly loved. I don't have to try and earn or merit that love; I already have it. I am God's own beloved child. You see, I must put on this new clothing in my life because it goes with the new me. The rags I wore before in my old life don't fit my new person. I am compelled to have a life full of love and compassion and kindness and forgiveness because that's who I am: a person made on the inside, at the deepest level, like Jesus Christ, who is seated in the heavenlies in Him! Now, of course, the big question is:

III. How I Must Put Them On (15-17) Well, verses 15-17 hold the key, but before we look at them, I want to show you:

1. the principle Do any of those things in that list we looked at sound familiar? If you'll look with me over in Galatians, you'll find:

a. these things are produced by the Spirit - Gal. 5:22-25 This term *fruit* is a bit meaningless to us because most of us are not agricultural types. We might picture the Spirit as some kind of fruit tree and all these qualities as the fruits hanging from His branches. But this is not a verse about Him; it is a verse about us. The term *produce* might help our thinking. These qualities are the *produce* of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person; they are what He produces, the fruit that His control in a life bears. So, if we want these things to appear in our lives, how do we get them? By just deciding, "Well now, I'm a Christian, I've got to be more compassionate?" No, the things in verse 19 are acts or works of the flesh; they are how people live when the flesh is in control. The things in verse 22 are how people live when the Spirit is in control. The key is in verse 25; did you see it?

b. I must be living by His power We live by Him. It is His power that produces these things in us, not our own strength. So, for our life to be clothed with these Christ-like things, we must somehow learn to live in the power of the Spirit who is in us and not in the mere human fleshly strength we can come up with. So, how do you do that? Well, let's go back to our text and look at:

2. the process: yielding and thanking Notice three things in verses 15-17. Each verse contains a passive command followed by an admonition to be thankful: "Let something happen or be...and then be thankful." It's not, "Go do something" (even though verse 17 seems that way at first glance). It's "Get out of the way and let Christ do something and then be thankful". It's a two-fold process of yielding and thanking; yielding to God for His power to work through you and thanking Him for doing it. Just like you have to yield yourself to Christ and count on His power to remove the negative things in your life, so you have to do the same thing in putting on the positive ones. You can't remove the old yourself and you can't put on the new yourself. But He can and He will, if you will choose to allow Him to do it. Now consider the first instruction:

a. let Christ's peace direct your heart (15) Christ has a peace, a personal peace that He gives inside every believer by means of the Holy Spirit who bears witness with our spirit. It is described in **Phil. 4:7**. It's not something the world can understand or describe. It is the peace that belongs to God, that sense of absolute calm no matter what is happening around you that God's power has everything under control. It is a personal peace and it is given to each believer to guard or protect our hearts and our minds from worry and doubt. Now, that peace is to rule. The word for *rule* here comes from an old Greek word that means to be the umpire or judge in a sporting event. It means to decide or to direct or be the judge of what goes on. We are to let that peace direct our hearts. As a believer, you can tell when Christ's peace is there in your heart about something and when it isn't. When you have Christ's peace about something, you yield to the urging of the Holy Spirit and do it; when you don't, you refrain. You say, "Isn't that kind of subjective?" It could be if it is not coupled with the constant practice of PRAYER, **Phil. 4:6**. I'm not saying, "Sit around and wait for a feeling to come". I'm saying, "Spend so much time asking, seeking and beseeching God to control your life and to give you wisdom that that sense of inner peace characterizes your daily life. Then when that peace fades or is missing, you'll notice it!" It's an experience that you were called to as part of the body of Christ. It's not just for someone else. If you learn what that experience of His peace is like, you can let the Holy Spirit direct your heart to the right thing to do in the given situation by it. Let me give you an example. There's a disabled lady in the community that we've helped several times on your behalf with rent or groceries. A couple months ago she learned that she would have to find another place to live, which is awfully hard on \$600 a month. We made a few efforts and looked up a couple agencies and so on. But soon the deadline was only a few days away and we had no answers, and the best we could do was say, "We don't know how to help you." I went home that night and I was just troubled. I had no peace; here was a disabled lady who was going to be on the street in a couple days. I couldn't just do nothing. My colleague came in the next morning with the same feeling. We began to brainstorm for alternatives and make calls and to really pray. At the last minute God granted her a 30 day extension! There's more to the story, but the point is that Christ will produce the right qualities in you when you let Him choose what you do by directing you with His peace. You won't have peace without compassion, without being kind, without being gentle, without forgiving. He will remind you in every situation who you are and what course a person like you should take by His peace in your heart and mind. Listen to that peace and then when He does move you, verse 15 concludes, learn to give thanks. That's the first thing but it must be coupled with a second thing:

b. let Christ's Word fill your mind (16) You know what it means to dwell in something richly; it means abundantly, to let the Word of God have a full, rich, abundant effect in us, to just be full of it, consumed with it. Christ will produce the things He wants you clothed with when your mind is filled with His Word. Now, how will that happen? We're told first, by the:

(1) constant exposure to teaching of the Word Like the experience of peace, it doesn't happen off by yourself. It happens in the context of the ministry of the body. It comes as you are continually taught and admonished by others and they in turn by you. God speaks to your heart through His Word and that's how it comes to dwell in you richly. And it is kept there by a most unusual thing, by the:

(2) constant expression of singing to the Lord Did you ever stop to think why we sing? It's not just because our forefathers did so since time immemorial. Singing is our worshipful response unto God based upon His Word. It is keeping His Word on our minds as we sing it back to Him in praise. So often I find myself when I'm in the car, when I'm in the shower, when I'm working alone, just singing the songs and hymns and spiritual songs that we sang on Sunday. They stick in my head. Music is important! It is a means of letting the Word of God dwell richly in my mind and have full effect. So, Christ will produce the things He wants in me when I let Him direct me by His peace and when I let His Word fill my mind. It will come alive to me and when it does, according to verse 16, my heart will well up in gratitude. And then there's one last thing:

c. let Christ's Name characterize your actions (17) Everything you do or say, every action is to be done in the Name of Christ. Now what does that mean? The apostles healed the lame man in the name of Christ, remember? Listen to **Acts 3:6,16; 4:7-12**. They made it quite clear what that meant. It was not them that did it; it was the power of Christ and so they also did not take any of the credit for it. Doing everything in the name of Christ means just that. It means:

(1) constantly depending on His power It means recognizing that in you there is no power to do that which pleases God unless He does it through you. So when you have let Him direct you to WHAT He wants you to do, then you call on Him to let the power to do it flow through you. "Jesus, I know what you want me to do; You want me to help; you want me to forgive; you want me to be gentle or patient. So YOU do it through me!" It is living in constant dependence upon Him to produce in you the fruit of the works that He desires and then:

(2) constantly giving Him the credit Not assuming any of it for yourself; always pointing back to Him, sharing with any who see it that it is not you, but Christ and meaning that.

So, here you are; a situation is in front of you. A person has a great need that has come to your attention or someone offends or hurts you. How do you react? Your mind is already full of the Word of God because you've been saturating yourself with the teaching of the Word and song and the Spirit is using it to make clear to you the right thing. He's also using the sense of internal peace to make the right choice clear to you because you've had a consistent daily walk of prayer. So you know what to do, both in your mind and your heart. Now, you simply tell the Lord, "OK I know what's right, now you have to do it through me. I yield myself to You to be your channel, your vessel." And what results in your life will be actions of compassion, longsuffering, forgiveness, and so on. The Holy Spirit will produce His fruit in your life. *In her book The Hiding Place, Corrie Ten Boom tells of her suffering in a German concentration camp during World War II. After her miraculous release, she traveled extensively, telling of God's grace through those horrible years. On one occasion in Munich, a man came up to her when she had finished speaking and she recognized him as a former prison guard. Not realizing that she had been one of his prisoners, the man said, "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein. To think that Jesus has washed my sins away!" As he extended his hand to her, vengeful thoughts boiled in Corrie's heart. Instantly she saw how sinful they were. "Forgive me, and help me forgive him," she prayed. She struggled to raise her hand, but it remained at her side. She felt not the slightest spark of warmth. Again she prayed, "Jesus, I cannot forgive him! Give Your forgiveness." Corrie wrote, "As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love...that almost overwhelmed me."* You see, she knew the right thing to do, first of all because she knew what the Word said about forgiving, and she had taught it to others! She also knew instantly that her vengeful unforgiving thoughts were wrong; God's peace disappeared in a moment. She knew what He wanted her to do, but she had no power to do it. So she called upon the Lord Jesus and He poured the fruit of His love into her and out through her to this man. That's how you clothe yourself with the character qualities of the new person you are. You learn to sense His desire and cry out to Him, moment by moment, situation by situation. You see, Christ really is your life. He is your putting off and He is your putting on! Will you let Him be what He is waiting to be in you?

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian Life: Family Relationships - 3:18-21

In Chapter 3 Paul is telling us how to live the Christian life. Verses 1-17 have been concerned with giving us the principles to do the job. We have seen that Christ is our life and that His power must live our life. We have learned how to PUT OFF

the things God wants eliminated from our lives by yielding to His power. And we have learned how to PUT ON the things God wants to grow in our lives by depending on His power. So now, Paul proceeds to give us some very practical guidelines that relate to specific life-situations. He begins in verses 18-22 by giving us:

I. Principles For Family Relationships I think it's obvious that in four verses Paul does not intend to paint for us a complete picture of family life. There is so much more to family relationships than the few principles mentioned here. However, one thing is for certain: God knows what is in man. And as you look around you at the families you know, you begin to realize that what God has done here through Paul is to put His finger right on the single most needy spot in each of these relational situations. He's picked out the key area in which each person in a family relationship is most prone to struggle. And if we look closely, we can see that for each person there is something to PUT OFF and something to PUT ON. He begins with:

1. husband - wife relationships (18-19) and he has a word for each. First:

a. wives (18) A key area where problems arise in marriage for the wife is often this area of authority. God has designated a leadership structure in the home. Eph. 5:3 says, *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.* The husband is in the leadership role and the wife is in the supportive role. Now, that has absolutely nothing to do with equality or worth for we just read back in verse 11 that in Christ there is neither male or female. He's all that matters. As far as our relationship with Him goes and our service for Him goes, there is no distinction. A woman is not in any sense a second-class Christian. Men are not better than women, either spiritually or in any other way. Yet within the structure of a family, there is a difference in function. The husband is to be the head, the leader under God, the one who constantly seeks God and provides continual direction, protection and provision for his family. The wife is to choose voluntarily to submit to and support him in that role of leadership. And therein lies the rub. It's not in our flesh to submit to anybody or anything. Our flesh is self-centered and self-serving and struggles to be in control, unless it is under the power and control of Jesus Christ. So that's why Paul implies that wives must:

(1) PUT OFF self-centeredness, or self-serving, that way of thinking that says, "What about what I want? What about my plans? I want it my way!" That way of thinking went with the old life, the person you used to be. It has to be put away. You are in Christ. And as believing wives, Paul says, you have to:

(2) PUT ON submission The term *submit* is a military term. It means to rank under, to voluntarily place yourself under the authority of a person serving in a superior position. *Did you hear about the man who was extremely intimidated by a bossy, domineering wife? During one argument, she began chasing him around the house with a broom. Finally, he dashed into the bedroom, dove underneath the bed, and slid back toward the wall as far as he could. Prodding him with the broom handle, his wife shouted, "George, you come out from under there!" Covering in the darkness, he cried out in a trembling voice, "I won't do it! I don't have to. I'm the head of this house!"* Now, none of us are that domineering, of course, but if you could get genuine honesty, you might be surprised at how many husbands have a sense that they find themselves doing what their wives want more than listening to God and leading them. And I don't think God is as much concerned with the outward action as the with inward attitude. Wives, He wants in you an attitude which gladly, and not grudgingly, acknowledges, "Husband, you're the leader here; I support you; I follow you". Of course, the first thing you may be thinking is, "Aren't there exceptions?" Sure, there are some exceptions, but exceptions are just that, abnormal cases. Paul's giving us a normal scenario. That kind of submission, the kind that Christ displayed toward His Father throughout His life is the kind He wants to produce in you as wives. Now Paul moves on to:

b. husbands (19) Men, you see, God knows you too. Here's where our key problem lies, in the abuse of that very position in which we're placed. Our flesh tends to be self-centered too and to forget about the feelings and the needs and the problems of our wives, to think about ourselves and act in our own interest. If I had a dollar for every wife who has told me in tears about a husband who either treats her in a harsh, uncaring fashion or simply operates with no real concern for his family, I'd be a rich man today! And if I had another dollar for every wife who doesn't say anything but I can see it happening on my own, I could retire in style. Husbands, here's what God says to us:

(1) PUT OFF harshness toward your wife. That went with the old life. And I'm not just talking about physical abuse. I'm talking about being inconsiderate, about just not being there when you're needed, about the way you talk to her, about anything that stings and hurts her! And instead, God says:

(2) PUT ON love And do note that the Greek word does not mean romance. It is *agape*, that sacrificial, self-sacrificing, putting the needs of the other first, kind of love Jesus displayed in going to the cross for us! **Eph. 5:25**, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* That's what God wants to produce in you, dying to self for the good of your wife. That's what characterizes a Christian husband, not how many meetings he attends nor the office he holds in the church nor how much Christian activity he is involved in, but the love he displays at home to his wife! *Ann Landers says that based on the mail she receives, 70 percent of the women who work outside the home still do 90 percent of the work around the house. They handle most of the shopping and almost all of the care of the children. Some men even refuse to pick up their own clothes. Others go so far as to insist that their wives change the oil in the car and fix a tire when it goes flat.*

Ephesians ... makes Christ's love for us the pattern of our love for our wives. Let's be sure we do not expect them to slave at tasks that we should share. Our role as leaders is to serve, not to be served.

Now Paul moves on to picture:

2. parent - child relationships (20-21) and he starts with:

a. children (20) Kids, you can wake up now! The key area of problems you face in your family probably have to do with the struggle between doing what you want to do and doing what your parents want you to do, don't they? Well, God knows that; He knows you struggle with that. The word *obey* means "to hear under", to listen to what the person who is over you says and to do it. That's hard, isn't it? Particularly when you don't feel like doing it. But God is wise and He put your parents in charge of you and He says that as children you have to:

(1) PUT OFF rebellion If you have Christ, rebelling against your parents doesn't go with your new life. Being disobedient to parents doesn't fit with having Jesus in your heart. God says you must take that off and:

(2) PUT ON obedience, not just because you have to, but because you really want to. I'm sure we've all heard the story about the little boy who was standing up at a time that was inappropriate and his parents told him to sit down. But he didn't want to and they told him again more sternly to sit down. Finally, he said, "All right, I'm sitting down, but I'm standing up on the inside!" That's not what God wants! He wants hearts in us that are willing to lovingly listen to our parents, even when we don't feel like it, because we know God has given them and their wisdom to guide us. But now let's turn to:

b. parents (21) Of course, I'm sure this would apply to mothers as well, but, again, God knows us, doesn't HE? If there is a problem in the home between parent and child, it is usually with the father and it is the father who is most prone to do what this verse talks about. Fathers, we need to:

(1) PUT OFF provocation and discouragement How many fathers think discipline means being demanding, setting up high standards of expectations that a kid can't achieve and always being critical, pointing out flaws, never giving out praise. These things do a great deal of damage in the hearts of our children. And in fact, the flesh in all of us fathers is prone to be that way. I know I'm like that! I want my kids to be like little adults and to always remember everything an adult would and think like an adult would. And sometimes it's just not fair and it makes them frustrated and angry with me and if I keep it up it will discourage them. It will make them give up and quit in life and take a "who cares" attitude. If I do it strongly enough it will drive them away or drive them to utter rebellion. No, this kind of thing has to go from my life. It belongs to the old life, not the one I have now. Instead, I must:

(2) PUT ON child-training Eph. 6:4 is the parallel to this verse and it adds that I am to raise my children in the nurture and admonition that comes from the Lord. There are God-given principles of both correction and instruction that I must follow and apply. I can't just react to my children; I have to raise them the way God is raising me! That's what God wants to produce in me, a loving, patient, encouraging, guiding, forgiving, continual influence toward godliness!

So that's the picture. For all of us, there are key things that must go from our lives as members of a family and key things that must come to characterize us. Of course, the problem is, "How will this come about?" Let's talk about:

II. Practicing Family Relationships, and before we talk about how, let's mention why. Again, this is not just another list of rules that God has set up for us to keep, another list of do's and don'ts that I have to pay attention to if I want God to be nice to me. Notice carefully how Paul mentions:

1. the reason for these changes He says:

a. these things are fitting to our nature (18b) We are in the Lord, in Christ. These things literally "measure up to" being in Christ. It is not congruent for a wife to be in the Lord and be in rebellion against her husband. It is a contradiction for a husband to be in Christ and be harsh and un-loving to his wife. These are not just things to do. These are changes God has made deep down inside of us and they must be coming out in our lives. And further Paul says:

b. these things please our Master (20b) The only way we can be in the Lord and not have these things being produced in our lives is that we are letting the wrong master run our lives. We are letting sin, which dwells in us, be our master; we are choosing to let it use and run us, to live in the flesh, instead of letting Christ be our Master and yielding ourselves to Him. You see, the putting on of these positive qualities is well-pleasing and acceptable to Christ. You can't be a disobedient child and be living under the Lordship of Christ. You can't be a provoking, discouraging parent and be living under His Lordship. If we are in Christ and have Him as our master, these things are not options. They **MUST BE** in our lives. But how? Well, simply mentally erase the break in your Bible between verses 17 and 18 and you'll see:

2. the method of making these changes (17) How do you stop being the wife or husband or child or father you used to be and become the one you are in Christ? We already know the answer. We saw two weeks ago that putting off things can only be done one way. I must:

a. yield to and depend on the power of Christ I can't just decide I've got to go out and be a better husband; I don't have the power. I have the desire and the nature but the power has to come from the Holy Spirit living inside of me. It has to be done by yielding myself to Christ my New Master and asking Him to put off these old behaviors from my life. Neither can I go out of here and say "I'm going to be more obedient or more loving." It's not in me to put ON any more than to put OFF. I must do it in the Name of Christ, depending on His power, calling upon Him and saying, "Lord, live out your life through me; be through me the father you want me to be or the wife you want me to be." I call out to Him every day and in every situation by His power to make me what I already am in Him. And then I must:

b. offer up all the praise to Christ Praise and thank Him. Give Him all the credit and the glory for the changes that come in my life.

In my opinion there has never been an hour in American history when the family has been in more danger than it is now. And I don't just mean out there somewhere. Christian families are in trouble. They are being shipwrecked by the multitudes and the children are paying the price. There is only one remedy for it. Family members, husbands, wives, children, parents need to do two things: 1) to place themselves under the absolute unconditional Lordship of Christ and 2) to learn the secret of not trying to live in their own strength but appropriating His, letting Him be their very life. *Dr. F. E. Marsh tells the story of a Christian lady who confessed to him that she found it impossible to show affection toward her daughter-in-law. "I've tried again and again to be different, but still my heart is cold," she wept. "You can't hope to succeed, so just give up," said Marsh, hoping to shock and test her. She cried, "But doesn't God expect me to love her?" "Yes, but you can't do it by yourself. You have tried in your own strength and have failed. The only thing you can do now is to surrender yourself to God and let Him fill your heart so completely that He will love your son's wife through you!" She yielded herself fully to the Holy Spirit and the daughter-in-law soon noticed a great change. The mother's sharp tongue was quieted, and she was full of courtesy and consideration. The girl was attracted by this new and appealing attitude, and soon the two were knit in the bonds of love. Says Dr. Marsh, "This principle always works, for when the Spirit dominates, He never divides but always brings about holy unity."* That's the message of Colossians for any family relationship, for husbands and wives, for mothers and fathers and children. You can't do it in yourself! But when you yield to Jesus and cry out for the power of His Spirit, He will make you that husband, that wife, that mother or father or son or daughter He has called you to be! You've heard of the rule when you're on fire, "Stop, drop and roll!" The rule for God's children in every situation is, "Stop! Refuse! and Yield!" Stop before you react, refuse to let sin control you and yield to Jesus in prayer. He will take over and make you what you could never be on your own!

Colossians: Christ Who Is Our Life

The Christian Life: Authority Relationships - 3:22-4:1

In this section of his letter Paul is giving practical guidelines for how we must live as believers in our day to day relationships. The first obvious area of concern was FAMILY relationships, which we talked about last week in verses 18-21. Husbands and wives, parents and children have things that by God's power they must put off and things they must put on. But the very first word in verse 22 brings us to another kind of relationship: *SLAVES*.... Yes, the institution of slavery was alive and well in Paul's day. In fact, many of the early believers were slaves and a not a few were slave owners. It was the situation they found themselves in in life. It seems strange to us, but Paul never attacked the institution of slavery itself. Instead, he just brought slaves and masters to Christ and a marvelous thing happened according to verse 11. In Christ slave and master became one; they were equal; they were changed in their relationship to each other. Paul wrote to Philemon that his returning slave Onesimus was now a brother in the Lord. Philemon was to treat him as a brother and he would serve Philemon as a brother. You can see how that would just about dissolve the institution of slavery altogether. At any rate, Paul was writing to these folks about a relationship which to them was a daily thing. We would probably consider this text irrelevant to us if we'd choose to concentrate on slavery itself. However, almost every one of us faces life every day in a similar relationship of some kind, in what I would call an **AUTHORITY** relationship. We may be in a situation where we are **UNDER** authority, for example, as a student under the authority of the teachers, an employee under the authority of various bosses, a soldier under authority of superiors, or something similar. Or we may be in a situation where we have authority **OVER** others, for example, where we are the teacher, the employer or boss or foreman, the officer. So, although it may not be as absolute in degree as slavery was, almost every one of us exists in some form of authority relationship day after day. So, I'm a Christian. How do I live as a student, as a teacher, an employee, a boss? Well, in our text Paul gives us:

I. The Picture Of Authority Relationships First let's talk about:

1. the person UNDER authority (3:22-24) The key thing to characterize a person under authority, whether they are a slave or a student or an employee is **OBEDIENCE**. So, any Christian who lives under authority has some:

a. things that must be PUT OFF There are things which are not congruent with his new life in Christ. They just do not fit and have to be put away for good. I see three of them here. First:

(1) disobedience: refusing to obey There is nothing more out of place than a student who refuses to do his assignment or an employee who refuses to do the work he's been given. Of course, to refuse is natural. The flesh in us doesn't like to submit to anything or anyone. It will oppose all authority, including God, just for the principle of it. But it is no longer natural for a believer. A believer does not rebel, whether it is against the teacher or the government. But sometimes disobedience takes subtler forms like:

(2) deception: pretending to obey Some people under authority obey *only when their eye is on you*, only when the police car is visible, only when the boss is watching, only when the teacher is looking. But just let that authority figure walk out of the room and its siesta time or party time! However, when the footsteps are heard, there's instant busyness. Know what I'm talking about? That's hypocrisy; that's deception; that's pretended obedience and it has no place in a Christian. It has to be put off. So does a third thing:

(3) selfishness: obeying only for reward It is obeying only *to win their favor*. There are those who do what they're told purely out of a selfish motive, purely to impress the teacher or the boss. They only do it to get ahead, to get a good grade or a promotion, while the whole time they despise it in their hearts. A Christian under authority must put off selfishness. Instead, Paul tells us there are some definite:

b. things that must be PUT ON, such as:

(1) obedience: obeying in everything Everything? No exceptions? Well, of course there are exceptions. If the boss orders you to steal or do something illegal, you certainly should disobey. But as I mentioned before, exceptions are just that, exceptional. Except for those rare instances, those under authority are to obey. Their only other option is to get out of the relationship. Quit the job. Change schools. Move to another country if you don't want to pay taxes! But as long as we're under someone's authority, a Christian must put on obedience in everything, and that with:

(2) sincerity: obeying trustworthily The obedience must not be feigned or pretended. It must be real. The teacher or the boss or whoever must be able to count on you. They must know that your bottom line is not to see what you can get away with, but rather to do what you're supposed to. That makes you trustworthy! But even that is not enough. The bottom line in obeying is:

(3) reverence: obeying spiritually Paul says literally, *fearing God*. That doesn't mean obeying because you're afraid God will zap you, but obeying out of a reverential motive of respect for and acknowledgement of the authority of God in your life. Put simply, you obey because that's what a person who has Christ does. And true obedience is characterized by:

(4) thoroughness: obeying well You know how you can be told to wash the dishes and just hit each one a lick? Or told to do a paper and write three sentences but make the type size really big? No, a Christian does what he does with all his heart. He does a good job, the kind of a job that Jesus would do, whether it's designing a building or sweeping a floor! So, when you function as a person under some kind of authority, that's what God wants to produce in your life. Now let's look at the other side of the relationship; how about:

2. the person WITH authority (4:1) The chief thing to characterize a person in authority is LOVE, whether it's the husband or the leader, the teacher, the boss, or the foreman. As a Christian, the person in authority also has some:

a. things that must be PUT OFF The primary problem of any person in authority is the fleshly tendency to abuse that authority. We've all seen videos of police beating a man on the news at one time or another. When we see it, we're horrified, but that tendency to abuse power is in our flesh and all it takes is the security of a little bit of authority to let it out. There are all sorts of ways to abuse authority but here are two that must be put away from us if we are Christians in authority over others. The first is:

(1) injustice: wrong treatment Sometimes a boss will use his employees; he'll demand of them to produce what they cannot produce or to do what they cannot do, for his own benefit. Sometimes a teacher will treat his students wrongly and demand work they cannot possibly complete. Or the teacher will be prejudiced in giving grades or form opinions about students that aren't fair and that they can't change. Sometimes a pastor will use his people to get rich! There's no room for an unfair grade because I don't like someone or the holding back of a bonus that was deserved. Injustice must go from my life and so must:

(2) unfairness: partiality in treatment, treating one person under my authority well and another poorly. Favoring one student over another or promoting one employee ahead of another, in spite of the facts of who deserves it is partiality. I'm a Christian. These things must go; they must be put off and here are the:

b. things that must be PUT ON if I'm in authority. The first thing is:

(1) love: concern to meet their needs The word here is *provide* for those under you. What does that mean? It means knowing what their needs are. It means being concerned for what their needs are, not just your own. *Larry Burkett tells the story of a girl named Sherri: "Sherri's father was a successful businessman and a Christian, but he had always used his position to rule rather than lead people. His attitude was bad enough, but one day he made a decision so unfair that it would have a lasting impact on Sherri. After returning home from work, he announced, 'I fired the whole office today. We had someone stealing,' he explained, 'and I offered them a chance to confess or it would cost everybody their jobs. No one confessed, so I fired them all!'"* From that point on, Sherri secretly harbored a fear that maybe God was like that too. She had decided that when she was on her own, she would stop going to church, and she did. But then she was hired by a Christian employer, a Mr. Rhone, who lived up to his claims. During the next three years, he had to correct her work often. The first few times she went home crying and worried about her job, but over the years Mr. Rhone proved his concern for her as a person. He corrected her, but he never humiliated or demeaned her. As a result, she eventually developed into a highly efficient, very confident secretary." [Money Matters, Sep 15, 1993. Page 6.] In short, providing for those under you means love for those under your authority, love for your employees, your students. It means caring whether they can live on what you pay them. It means the bottom line is not whether you get ahead, whether you get something from them, whether you make a huge profit. When you stand before God that's not what He's going to ask, is it? Jesus said the one who is first should make himself the servant of all! Try that and it'll revolutionize your business! Or your classroom! You're there for them, not for you! And the second thing that must be put on is:

(2) reverence: concern to please the Lord No matter how much authority you have, you've still got a greater Master. And He's not interested in how much money you make, in how much prowess you achieve. He's interested in such seemingly unimportant things as truth and justice and fairness and caring. So, we need to lead with a sense that we too are under authority and must exercise our own authority under His direction. Now let's sum up the key to this whole thing. Whether you are in authority or under authority, here is:

II. The Principle of Authority Relationships It is three fold. If we will just realize this and apply this, it will steer our course right. First, remember that:

1. our position is service to the Lord (23, 24b) From top to bottom it's the same. Every Christian is serving, not men but the Lord. The janitor serves God in his sweeping and the president in his far-reaching decisions. I must learn to see that I make shoes for God or I type letters for God or I run this department for God or I teach for God, even, that I do my homework for God! *Several years ago, the authorities in a small village gave an elderly man a summer job of keeping the streets free of litter. A visitor, observing that he obviously enjoyed his task, complimented him. In broken English, the worker replied, "You like de work I do? I too! Me--I help God keep things beautiful."* It is Christ we are serving. That will transform our daily life! Just think if He were sitting there supervising, how different would I be? Well, He is! Visible or not, we are serving Him and so:

2. our reward will be from the Lord (24a) Sometimes we think He doesn't see; we wonder whether anyone notices how we do our little part in life. But He does. He never forgets even a cup of cold water, a kind hug, a little bit of patience with someone, that extra effort beyond what was required, that time taken to do the job right. Nobody noticed but He did. It will be His "Well-done" that will delight our soul in eternity. But also remember this:

3. our discipline will be from the Lord (25) This isn't talking about losing your salvation and I don't know that it's talking about eternity particularly. The Bible says you reap what you sow. Any believer who chooses to continue to live like the kind of person he is not, will definitely find discipline. And it doesn't matter how great my position is, I'm not immune to God's chastening hand. I can't escape accountability to Him!

Well, once again we come to that tough question, "How am I going to do this? How am I going to put off these negative things and put on obedience and love?" Once again, let me go back to verse 17 and remind you of:

III. The Power for Authority Relationships (17) As I keep saying, you have no power to be the kind of servant God wants. You have no power in you to be the master God wants. Go out and try any of this on your own and you will fail miserably. Verse 17 tells us, "Do everything in the name of Christ." For wives, that means submitting, for husbands, loving, for children, obeying, for parents, training children. For those under authority it means obeying those over me with all my heart, serving them as unto the Lord, and for those in authority, it means loving those under me and caring about them as Christ would. How can I do this? I am to do this in the Name of Jesus Christ, by absolute, complete dependence on His power, by daily and moment by moment yielding my life to Christ as a vessel for His use and asking His power to flow through me, so that I serve or I lead the way He wants me to. *Leonard LeSourd writes about the great baritone Roland Hayes: "Before each concert, Roland Hayes would stand quietly in front of his audience, silently praying, 'Lord, You are my strength. You are my voice. Help me get Roland Hayes out of the way so that You can sing through me, so that Your music and words and can touch the hearts of these people.' 'If I forget to say this prayer,' Mr. Hayes said, 'then I tend to think of myself and how I'm doing. As a result, the concerts just don't seem to have the same power and impact. What God does through me is so much greater than what I can do on my own.' He told the story of the toughest audience he*

ever faced. It was in Germany before World War II at a time when racial hostility was rampant there. When he appeared on the stage, some of the people started to boo and hiss because he was black. Roland Hayes never faltered. He closed his eyes, folded his hands, and silently prayed: 'Lord, You sing through me and melt this hatred.' Minutes went by while the hissing continued. The quiet figure on the stage never moved. Finally, the huge hall was quiet. Then he began to sing very softly. For an hour and a half he sang, while the spectators sat there as if transfixed. At the end the audience rose as a body and gave him a tremendous ovation. 'The glory goes to God,' Mr. Hayes said. 'There's nothing He can't do through us if we would only get ourselves out of the way.'" [Strong Men Weak Men by Leonard LeSourd. Chosen Books, 1990. Pages 160-161.]

How can you serve or lead like Christ did? How can you obey with a willing heart when your boss is unreasonable or doesn't seem to care about you? How can you do the kind of job Jesus would be proud of when the conditions you work under discourage you all the time? How can you care about the students you teach when they have such a terrible, unmotivated attitude and they need disciplined constantly? The answer is, go out on that stage, school or work or wherever it is, and every time you arrive, stop and pray, "Lord, You are my Strength. Serve through me, learn through me, lead through me, react through me! Put off those things that need to go; put on those things I need to have. I ask for you to do it all through me today!" And then pray it again 5 minutes later when the boss snubs you and 5 minutes after that when the class is rowdy and keep on doing it all day long. And Jesus will do it through you! That's the secret of authority relationships; that's the secret of the Christian life. Practice it!

COLOSSIANS: CHRIST WHO IS OUR LIFE

The Christian Life: Prayer and Witness - 4:2-6

Before Paul closes his practical section on how to live as a Christian and then the whole letter, he pauses to give some guidelines on two areas which are CENTRAL and VITAL to the life of a Christian, prayer and witness. I say they are VITAL, because without them there is no truly Christian life. Without prayer I have no power to live from God; I am left to my own resources. Without witness I have no purpose to live, no reason to be here instead of in heaven; I'm useless. I call them CENTRAL, because they are not to be at the periphery of my life, not things that I do now and then. Rather they are to be integral parts of every day of my life, things that my life is full of, and if Christ truly is my life, then they will be. Paul begins by exhorting us about:

I. The Importance of Prayer (2-4) and the first thing he describes is:

1. the manner of prayer: I'm to be devoted (2a) Sometimes we stand in awe of the early church and what God did through them, with thousands of people converted, whole cities turned upside down for Christ. We wonder what their secret was. Well, it's not really a secret. Acts 2:42 says, *They devoted themselves to prayer!* In chapter 3, Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the regular time of PRAYER when they healed the lame man and a whole crowd was converted. In chapter 4 when they got arrested for it and then released, they hurried back to the brethren and they all raised their voices together in prayer! In chapter 12, Peter was arrested and sentenced to death, but the whole church was gathered together *praying* and an angel came to the prison, bailed him out, and he stood knocking at the door of the prayer meeting, a living answer. They devoted themselves to prayer. Prayer was their life. It was vital. It rated first place. Paul is not trying to tell me that I SHOULD pray. He's telling me that I MUST pray! It is my lifeline. It is my source of power. It is to my spiritual life what breathing is to my body. If I breathed like I pray, would I still be alive? The word *devote* here is a strong word in the Greek. It implies two things. First, to be devoted to prayer means:

a. praying continually God wants to build prayer into a constant and continual part of my life. He wants to make it as normal as eating and sleeping and breathing, intertwined through my days in a continuous stream of communication with Him. Sometimes having long talks in time set aside for Him, sometimes only fast chats in momentary circumstances, so that, as Paul put it in another of his letters, I pray *without ceasing*. That doesn't mean I do nothing but pray. It means that I pray in all I do, in private, at work, at school, when driving, when talking to someone, when tempted, when I see a need, when I have a problem, when I'm writing a letter or seeing a client. *The famous Civil War General "Stonewall" Jackson apparently had learned this lesson well. The great military leader said, "I have so fixed the habit of prayer in my mind that I never raise a glass of water to my lips without asking God's blessing, never send a letter without putting a word of prayer under the seal, never take a letter from the mailbox without a brief lifting of my thoughts heavenward, never change my classes in the lecture room without a minute's petition for the cadets who go out and for those who come in."* God's design is, in all things by prayer and supplication... And secondly, being devoted to prayer means:

b. praying intensely Now we're talking about the quality of our praying, not simply the quantity. There is a phrase I have heard from little on up about this subject that bothers me greatly when I hear it. It is the phrase "to say a prayer" or "say your prayers," as though prayers were things, pieces of poetry or prose to be recited to God. And that's exactly how some people conceive of prayer. Prayer is the reciting of our meal prayer or our bedtime prayer or our daily prayer list. And many people have built a habit of praying that is nothing more than repeating a set of things they think they are supposed to say to God. I did that as a child, but I also listened to a lot of grown-up adults do it in church! *Thomas Brooks, said, "Cold prayers are as arrows without heads, as swords without edges, as birds*

without wings; they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Cold prayers always freeze before they reach heaven." ... Bishop Hall said: "It is not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they may be; nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they may be; nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be; nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be; nor even the theology of our prayers, how good the doctrine may be--which God cares for. Fervency of spirit is that which availeth much." Real prayer is talking to God from the heart! It is the communication of the soul with Almighty God. Prayer has to be sincere, genuine, intense. Now, in the rest of verse 2 we are given:

2. the parameters of prayer (2b) There are two more elements that must characterize all our praying. The first is:
a. watchfulness The root of this word means to stay awake, which for many of us is a very literal problem when we pray, isn't it? But I don't think he's talking about the physical here. He's talking about being spiritually alert. Like 1 Pet. 5:8 which says *Be alert! Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* In one dimension, prayer is worship. But in another, it is also warfare! It is a battle being waged on spiritual ground against the forces of the enemy. We must stay watchful, alert for what the enemy is trying to do in our life or the lives of others, whether we sense him trying to bring discouragement or to destroy opportunity or to deceive or whatever his tactic may be. And we must come against him with the weapon of prayer. That should be a normal part of our praying, as should:

b. thankfulness If we're praying about everything, then we pretty much have to be seeing answers almost daily, don't we? We pray for God to help us with a job interview and He does. Then we have something to be thankful for. I ask Him to give me the words for a sermon like this and He does, so I thank Him. Every day there is something new to be thankful for, in addition to all the stuff that's unchanging, like our salvation. Thankfulness should be woven through all our praying. Then Paul actually gives to the Colossians a prayer request for himself and asks them to pray together with him about it. For us this request reveals:

3. the focus of prayer: witness (3-4) Let's think a moment. Where is Paul? In jail! Verse 3 says he's in chains. He was chained at the wrist to a Roman soldier 24 hours a day. He had not yet stood trial and his life was still hanging in the balance. What would your request be? Freedom? Protection? Paul's wasn't! He prayed to be a witness where he was! Oh, that speaks volumes to me! How much of our praying is concerned only with changing our physical circumstances to meet our liking, healing our sicknesses, getting our needs met, making things better for us. And how little of our praying is concerned with what we are really here on earth for, to be a witness of Jesus Christ! That's convicting. Not that we shouldn't pray about all those other personal needs. We should. But far and away the focus of our praying should be that we would fulfill God's purpose for us in the world, that God would use us as a witness in the specific circumstance in which we are! In verse 3 Paul asked prayer for:

a. the opportunity to witness (3) Paul says, "Ask God to open a door for me, some way that I can be a witness here. God has me here for a reason but I'm not seeing much opportunity to do what I was saved for, to declare Christ. Ask God to make a way." That's one prayer God ALWAYS answers positively! Focus prayer on asking God to open doors of witness for you at work, at school, in your neighborhood, on your sports team, in your coaching. And pray also for opportunities for others, for your brothers and sisters at church in their situations, for your missionaries where they are, and so on. Then in verse 4 Paul asks prayer for:

b. the clarity of witness (4) He wanted to say the right thing. He wanted to have the Spirit's guidance and wisdom, so that when the door opened, he could communicate Christ in an understandable and clear fashion whether it was to a Jew or a Roman, to an educated person or a fellow prisoner in chains. And we need to pray for the same thing as we'll see in the verses to come. But before we move to them, let's take a moment to look at:

4. the answer to Paul's prayer - Phil. 1:12-14, 4:22 Philippians was also written from that Roman imprisonment, but slightly later than Colossians. And look at the door of opportunity God opened! They prayed and God began to use Paul right where he was, to be a witness to the very soldiers of the palace guard which guarded him. Some came to Christ. It even spread into those who served as part of Caesar's own household! What a wonderful God we have! Just focus your prayer on witness and see what He will do! And while Paul is asking prayer for his witness, he gives some guidance to the Colossians about their own. So, after the importance of prayer we have:

II. The Imperative Of Witness (5-6) Now please note that I've chosen the word WITNESS, not EVANGELISM. That's because I don't want you to think of something you go out and do like passing out tracts or visiting door-to-door or teaching a Good News Club for kids. Those things are great, but not everyone is gifted or led into them. Yet every believer is a witness for Jesus Christ (either good or bad) by what he does and says. We communicate Christ to others; it is the very function and purpose of our life! It is imperative! First Paul mentions our:

1. witness in actions (5) Actions speak very loudly, often much louder than our words. Ten thousand good words may never correct the impression left by one wrong action, either toward someone or seen by someone who is not a believer. So, I need wisdom to know how to act and that is:

a. God's part: to give me wisdom which is **knowing the right thing to do**. It is not in me to be able to act right or even to always know the right thing to do. That has to come from God. How do I get it? James wrote, *If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ASK of God*. Prayer! That's why Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for his witness! Unless we are walking in a life saturated with prayer, focusing on our witness, we are not going to know what is right in God's eyes. So, I must depend completely on God for wisdom and yet I must do:

b. my part: which is to be in readiness to use every opportunity When God opens that door to act, to help, to give, to share, to talk, whatever it may be, I have to be willing to go through it. I have to make the most of that opportunity. I have to literally "buy up" that moment, redeem it and use it before it passes and is gone. *William F. Taylor writes, "We travel through this world only once; so let us live to some purpose. The day that dawned this morning will never come again. The opportunities it brought will never return. If we fail to fill our measure of time with the service it requires of us, there will be no possibility of returning to this day to repair the mischief. The wheels of time's chariot have ratchets on them--they move only forward!"* So, when that moment of action comes, I must be ready to seize it. And then Paul has something specific to say about our:

2. witness in words (6) The way we talk to unbelievers is important. Our conversation either wins them or drives them away and that's why we need:

a. God's part: grace seasoned with salt, that is, **the right thing to say**. Our speech has to be gracious and pleasing but it has to have the salt of actual witness in it. It cannot be harsh or cutting or demeaning; we can't "beat 'em over the head with the Gospel". But neither can it simply be nice pleasant conversation. Our conversation has to be gracious and yet mention the Lord in just the right way. And there's no memorizable plan for that. Rather, it means depending upon the Holy Spirit to speak through you and to give you the right thing to say in the very moment you need it. It means breathing a silent prayer, "Lord, guide my words" as you go to talk. And God will do just that. But again, here is:

b. my part: I must be in readiness to answer everyone. Just as I have to be willing to act, I also have to be willing to speak, ready to share as God opens opportunities. *Robert Morgan was on vacation in a quiet resort town when he found the window of his van smashed by an unknown vandal for no good reason. He writes: "I reluctantly called a glass company, and soon a young man arrived. I watched with admiration as Jim systematically disassembled the van door, removed the splinters, and slipped a new window into place. His young assistant resembled him, and I asked if they were related. 'He's my little brother,' Jim said. 'He's filling in till I can find someone to replace my co-worker who died last week.' 'Died?' 'Yeah,' said Jim, growing quiet. 'He had a wife and two kids. Just 42.' 'How'd he die?' 'Heart attack,' Jim said softly. Nothing more was said for a moment, then I replied, 'We never know if we'll be here tomorrow, do we?' 'No. Sure don't.' 'That's why we always need to be ready to meet the Lord...' I said, taking a deep breath. 'Life's too uncertain without Christ.' He nodded, continuing his work and listening quietly as I sought to share with him a simple witness of the gospel, the hope of a Savior who had died to free us from death. Then I knew why the Lord had allowed an unknown hoodlum to shatter a tiny piece of our world." [Moody, Jul/Aug 1995. Page 44.]* Robert was ready. He breathed a quiet prayer and seized the obvious opportunity and began to talk. His speech was gracious, but seasoned with the truth. Opportunities like his abound if we'll stand in readiness to take advantage of them. But how can we do that? How can we be a genuine witness to our faith in Jesus?

Well, at the bottom line, it's back to verse 17. Do everything and say everything in the name of Jesus Christ in absolute dependence on Him and His power. Fill your life with prayer and focus it on witness and let Him be your life. That's the normal Christian life!

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Conclusion: Complete In Christ 4:7-18

This morning we come at last to the end of Paul's letter to the Colossian Church. And like any letter that you or I would write, it contains a list of greetings and salutations *to* different folks who are at Colossae and *from* different folks who are with Paul in Rome. We might write, "Say hi to Sue and the kids and her sister...Joe and Jane told me to say hi for them too." We do that all the time. The difference is that Paul took his letter writing more seriously than we usually do and so, instead of the light kind of "Hi, how are you, what's happening" kinds of things we might write, he actually teaches in his greetings and salutations! Now, if you're like me, I bet you find it very tempting to read over the endings of New Testament epistles like this very quickly and forget them. A bunch of names...so what! DON'T EVER DO THAT! If you stop for a minute and think about some of these people and look closely at what Paul says and look up some of the cross references, you'll be amazed at the golden truths you can mine out of what looks like a useless pile of rocks. So let's do it together, shall we? We begin by looking at:

I. Paul's Personal Companions (7-17) In this closing Paul names 10 people individually, 10 persons that were companions of his either currently or previously. All of them are believers, mature believers, people who were either co-workers with Paul at some point or were involved in their own ministry. And about each one or to each one of them he has some-

thing different to say. Each one, except one, has an outstanding characteristic that God has produced in their lives. And when you take them all together you have a pretty complete picture of the kind of maturity that God wants to produce in us as we live according to the principles of the last section in chapter 3, putting off the old things in our lives and putting on the new things, all by absolute dependence on His power. Here's what God produces in us as He brings us along to maturity. First:

1. God makes us dependable: Tychicus (7-8) Tychicus was the person who was going to carry this letter from Rome to Colossae in Asia Minor along with the letters to Ephesus and Philemon. Tychicus was from Asia Minor and joined Paul at Ephesus on his third missionary journey. He accompanied Paul all the way back to Jerusalem and saw his arrest and imprisonment there. Now he has come to Paul at Rome and Paul counts him "a faithful servant", someone he can really depend on. In Timothy and Titus, we read of Paul sending Tychicus twice more on later occasions. The flavor of what Paul says about him here is, "He will tell you the real scoop of what's going on; trust him; he's dependable." Wouldn't you love to have people say that about you? To have the Lord say that about you?! When we live and walk in the power of Christ, God makes us dependable. The up-and-down-ness, the inconsistency, goes from our life. We are no longer unstable and blown about by the winds of what somebody says or the waves of our circumstances. God makes us to be like Him, dependable, faithful, the same yesterday, today, and in the future. Now, the second person in Paul's list shows us that:

2. God transforms our lives: Onesimus (9) It may not seem so at first glance, but this is really remarkable. Onesimus was a runaway slave. He belonged to a friend of Paul's who lived at Colossae whose name was Philemon. And somehow Onesimus came to Paul at Rome and in the process, he met Jesus Christ. So now Paul is sending him back with Tychicus as a different man, a transformed man. Look with me at **Philemon 10-11, 15-16**. Paul sends this letter along with Onesimus to clear him with his owner and to testify of the transformation in him, that the old has passed away. Verse 18 implies that Onesimus did wrong to his owner and stole from him. He was a useless and rebellious servant. But now he is a brand-new person, one who will serve and be useful, a "faithful and dear brother". That's what God does in you and I through the power of His Spirit. He doesn't just want to give us fire insurance by accepting Jesus and let us go on being the same old person we were. He has made us brand new on the inside and by exercising the putting off and putting on principles he wrote about, He wants to totally transform our lives into something new, changed, different, to make them in the image of Jesus. Then:

3. God uses us as fellows: Aristarchus (10a) Aristarchus was from Thessalonica and evidently had joined Paul on his second missionary journey. He was with him on the third journey and even on the voyage to Rome. He rode with Paul on the ship with the load of prisoners being taken to Rome and endured the shipwreck on Malta with him. And now Paul calls him a *fellow-prisoner*. Somehow, he seems to be sharing the Apostle's imprisonment even as he had been sharing his life for several years earlier. You know, it's hard to endure any difficulty alone whether it's going to a strange place on the mission field or suffering in a jail. Aristarchus was Paul's "fellow", his companion in the same situation, who was there and who was feeling and experiencing everything he was. One whom he could talk to freely and expect understanding, one whom he could pray with and share the same intensity. That's what God wants to do with us. He wants to make us fellows to somebody, companions to those who are going through the experiences of life with us and sharing them. He wants to build, not the surface relationships of immaturity, but the deep support of "fellowship" where our hearts become united as one and we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Some years ago I got a prayer letter from a lady who was a missionary physician in Kyrgyzstan for 8 years. Her husband decided that he wanted out of the marriage, so she was now back in England with her two teenage boys, devastated and trying to figure out how to adjust to this life change. She planned to go back to Kyrgyzstan for two weeks to pack up the family home, sell off or ship her possessions and say goodbyes. She wrote this: *It has been recommended to me to try to find someone outside of the situation to come with me. A woman with two small children who had to return to Kyrgyzstan to pack up after her husband had died of cancer said that bringing someone with her was the best thing she did. Here's what she wrote: 'She was there to talk to at night after the crowds left. I'm so happy she came with me. If you can get such a friend, bring them.' At first, I didn't think this was possible and when a Canadian friend from my course in Wales (who is now living in Sweden) spontaneously said on the phone that she had such an urge to come with me to Kyrgyzstan, I didn't think further about it. But now I am thinking that this would be a good idea. This past week we discussed it and since then I have received the following from her: 'I am completely in awe of how God has sorted some major things out over the last 48 hours to make this possible.'* She needed a "fellow", a companion, someone to share the agony of the path she had to walk and thank God for this female Aristarchus who rose to the occasion. God wants to do that with me, with you, to put us into someone's life to be their "fellow-whatever". Then here's a fourth lesson:

4. God uses us after failure: Mark (10b) Mark is there in Rome. You remember him, don't you? Mark deserted Paul on his first missionary journey. He caked out and went home instead of continuing on in the work. And you remember how Barnabas and Paul argued over taking him along on the second journey and they even parted company over it. In Paul's eyes, Mark was a failure, a deserter, one who could not be trusted for the long haul, but look, here he is restored. In fact, in **2 Tim. 4:11** Paul later writes during the second time he is in prison, "Bring Mark, he is helpful in the ministry!" Oh, there is great hope in this character, isn't there? We don't have to be perfect; in fact, none of us are per-

fect. We fail God; we fail each other; we fail to put off what we ought to put off and we fail to put on what we ought to put on, but God wants to use us after failure. If you're discouraged today, know this: no matter how we've failed, how we've fallen, God is not done with us. He's not through. He wants to use us again. He wants to produce usefulness and service in our lives even after we fall. Now here's a fifth thing:

5. God comforts through us: Jesus (Justus) (11) You understand, of course, that the name Jesus was not given only to our Savior. Many others also had it, including this man who is unknown apart from this verse. All we know is that he was a Christian from Jewish background like Paul, that he was serving in ministry with Paul and this one key thing, that he, along with Aristarchus and Mark, was a comfort to Paul. The Greek word is *paregoria* which is a medical term from which we get our medicinal word "paregoric" which means "that which soothes irritation and brings relief." And the source of this comfort seems tied to the fact of his Jewishness. Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews; his life had been consumed with Jewish culture and religion for many years. Culture shock is not something that was invented in our day; for years Paul had found himself living in a Gentile world among people who did not and could not think like he did, people who came from a life of empty idolatry, had Roman and Greek customs, were used to Roman and Greek justice. Remember when Paul was at Athens how he was so greatly distressed to see the whole city so full of idols? To an Athenian believer that might have been par for the course, something he was used to and could live in the midst of. But among Paul's fellows there were Jesus and his two friends who were Jews. They understood; they were what Paul was; they felt what Paul felt. And when Paul became vexed and irritated and the circumstances of life around him got him down and he longed for home, Jesus the Just was a soothing relief to Paul. God used him to bring great comfort to Paul and that's what God will do with us too. He will comfort and relieve others through us. As we learn to yield to Him and let His life flow through us, we will become a soothing relief to those who are hurting or suffering. Number six:

6. God makes us people of prayer: Epaphras (12-13) According to 1:7-8 Epaphras was the one who had brought the Gospel to Colossae and started the church during the time Paul was at Ephesus for three years. Now Epaphras had come to Rome and told Paul about how the church was doing. Philemon 23 says he is Paul's fellow-prisoner. Somehow, he too seems to have gotten jailed with Paul. But he remembered all the false teachers and the problems back in Colossae. And God made him a real man of prayer. Paul says he agonized, he wrestled with God in prayer for them. He worked hard for them in prayer, along with other neighboring churches. He prayed they would stand firm in Christ and be mature and not be swayed by the Gnostics and the Judaizers, the false teachers who were trying to lead them astray. He realized he could not assure that but God could and so he prayed. He became what verse 2 says, *devoted to prayer*. I never knew a really mature Christian yet who wasn't. That's what God wants to build into our lives. If you will walk with Him and draw on His life, He will make you a man or woman of prayer. You will learn to wrestle and agonize and work hard in praying. Here's a seventh thing:

7. God produces loyalty in us: Luke (14a) Luke traveled with Paul on his second journey and rejoined him later on his third and on his voyage to Rome. He was a doctor and possibly tended to Paul's infirmities, but most importantly Paul calls him a "dear friend". In fact, in **2 Tim. 4:10** In his final imprisonment when he is at the end, facing death, Paul writes, *Only Luke is with me...* Luke was loyal to the end. Everybody else was gone but not him. He was the friend that stuck closer than a brother. That's the kind of loyalty God will build into our relationships as we mature. They will not be come and go, on and off friendships. He will build deep unconditional loyalty and friendship where we will never desert or forsake the ones we love, even if it means endangering our own life in the process. But in contrast to this, through Demas:

8. God warns us that we can fall: Demas (14b) About Demas Paul says at this writing nothing, other than he is obviously with Paul in Rome. Philemon 24 mentions him as a fellow-worker like the others. But the real lesson from his life is this, compare **2 Tim. 4:10**. In Paul's last imprisonment Demas is in contrast to Luke. Luke stayed even when his life was in danger. Demas fled, because he loved this world; he wanted to stay alive physically in this world, rather than go on to glory with Paul. He would not risk laying down his own life for his friend like Luke would. He did not love that much. In Demas there is a warning. No matter who I am, I can still fall. I am not beyond it. No matter how mature I may think I am and how much ministry I have been involved in, if I do not lean on God and His life and power in me, then I, like Demas or like bold Peter in the garden, can also fall. The warning of Scripture is, *Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!* Let that thought drive you to the Savior and His keeping power. The ninth lesson is:

9. God involves us in a body: Nympha "et al" (15-16) Here Paul mentions three local church bodies, one at nearby Laodicea, one meeting in the home of a person named Nympha and, of course, the one he is writing to at Colossae (*you*). But do you see the point? God involved Nympha in a local body. He involved the Laodicean believers in a body; the Colossians were a body, a whole, not a bunch of pieces. That's what God does with mature believers. He involves them deeply in the life of a body, a local assembly, a church. That is God's normal plan for all believers; God knows that we need the functions of a whole body, a whole group to mature and grow us and, if we walk close to Him, that's where we'll end up. How involved are you in the life of this body? Does it matter to you whether you're here or not? Is it vital in your life or just something you go to when it's convenient? Finally:

10. God makes us persevere: Archippus (17) Archippus lived in Colossae. Compare **Philemon 1-2**. From this personal letter it sounds like Philemon was the father, Apphia, the mother, and Archippus the son in the same home. Since Philemon was an old friend saved under Paul's ministry, he may have known Archippus as a young boy or youth and now he was grown up and serving side-by-side with his father in ministry. To him Paul says, "You have received your ministry not by your own doing. You received it in the Lord. It is His. Watch carefully so that you may fulfill or complete it." *In his book The Best Is Yet to Be, Henry Durbanville issues this pointed warning: "With the mind at rest regarding the past, and the heart reveling in the consciousness of being at peace with God, you may have entertained the thought that all dangers are over, and that you will have no more problems as you journey to the Better Land. But that is not so.... Noah, after long years of faithful walking with God, failed ignominiously. Moses, near close of his career, lost his temper. Samuel, the man of prayer and the prophet of God, put family interests before loyalty to God and His people. Solomon began magnificently, but ended disastrously. Uzziah, after a glorious reign, deliberately transgressed the ordinance of God, finishing his days as a leper. The records of all these good men, temporarily drawn aside from the path of fellowship with God, point to the fact that youth, adulthood, and old age--each period of life--has its own temptations and hazards."* We need to finish well and when we walk with Him, God makes us to persevere, to complete the work He has given us to do, to be the faithful servant to whom He can say, "Well done!"

The point is this, friends: everything we need is in Jesus Christ and we have Him, so we have it. If we will only learn to draw on what we already have, God will make us into a complete, well-rounded, mature servant of His, one who is gloriously changed, dependable, comforting, loving, loyal, persevering to the end, and all the rest. In short, He will make us everything that He is. And finally, at the very end of the letter we come to:

II. Paul's Personal Closing (18) Here we have:

1. his closing assurance: his own hand Paul dictated this letter as he did all his others. But he signed it with his own signature for the same reason that we do. That personal signature is our assurance, our guarantee that the document really came from the author's hand. Paul's signature on Colossians is our guarantee that this letter is from God. It is not some cunningly devised fable or falsehood. These truths we've studied come to us from the hand of God through the pen of his apostle, Paul. We must listen! Then we have:

2. his closing request: remembrance *Remember my chains.* Why? So I have your sympathy? So you'll send a gift? So you'll pray me out of this? No, look at verse 3. Paul says, "Pray God will give me a ministry here in these chains" and as he closes, he's saying, "Don't forget to pray that request for me". So many times we hear the request of a brother and don't pray. Paul begs us to remember! And finally, we have:

3. his closing wish: grace *Grace be with you.* Not "good luck" or "I hope you stay well and healthy" or "I hope something good will happen to you real soon". That's not what people need. They need grace, the grace of God, the undeserved, unmerited power of God to flow into and through their lives.

And as we leave the book of Colossians, that is my wish for you, that God's grace will fill each of you and flow through you. That's the real need in your life, whether you know it or not.

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This One Thing: The Keys To Relationship Col. 3:18-4:1 Wives: The Key Of Submission

Every time I buy a new electronic or computer gadget of some sort, it almost always comes with two things anymore. The first is some sort of instruction manual that may be 20 pages or a hundred pages. It tells the user in detail how to go about using that piece of equipment, how to set it up and adjust it and troubleshoot if there are problems with it. But if you're anything like me, you're pretty much 100% likely to turn the thing on without ever reading the manual. Am I right? So that's why manufacturers have gotten smart and they have started including something else, a Quick Start card, a one-page set of 5 or 6 simple key instructions, many times drawn out in picture form, that will tell you the absolute most important facts you have to know to turn the thing on and use it, because they know that's what you're going to do anyway! And they figure you'll read a one pager, even if you don't touch the manual! Well, the core of our lives revolves, not around gadgets, but around relationships, around marriage relationships, parent-child relationships and even work relationships and it is extremely important that we know as believers how to make those relationships work, isn't it? And, of course, the Bible is our instruction manual for living. It has an awful lot to teach us about parenting, for instance. There is story after story showing examples of parenting, both good and bad. There is lots of good advice through Moses in the law and from Solomon in Proverbs. There is New Testament teaching in several books, but to form a complete picture you have to seek out all of these passages and put them together and because God knows that not all of us are going to take the time to read the index and search out all of the information, He has given us our own sort of "Quick Start Card" in Colossians 3:18-4:1. Nine short verses that, in my opinion, give us what I'm going to call in this series:

I. The Keys To Relationship Just read **3:18-21** with me for a moment. Do you see what I mean? It's just like a "Quick Start Card". *Wives, do this! Husbands, do this! Children, do this! Parents, do this!* Simple, straight forward, one step in-

structions. Now, what's the point of Paul doing that? You can't possibly tell wives what they need to know about being a wife in one phrase! You can't even tell them half or a fourth or a tenth of what they need to know! But you can tell them, one thing, can't you? You see:

1. this passage is a focused summary It is an intentionally incomplete picture. It is not meant to tell everything there is to be said in one place. It is intended to do exactly the opposite, of all the things that could be said, to boil them down to the one most important thing that could be said and say that. *I love the story of Sir Winston Churchill who, near the end of his life, was invited back to his prep school alma mater to address the students. The headmaster announced his coming by saying, "In a few days our Prime Minister will be here. He's one of the greatest orators of all times, so listen carefully and take plenty of notes!" The morning came, and the 5-foot 5-inch, 230- pound leader was enthusiastically presented. Sir Winston graciously acknowledged his introduction and then said, "Young gentlemen, never give up! Never give up! NEVER GIVE UP! Never! Never! Never! NEVER!" And with that, he sat down. That one point comprised the sum total of his speech, but none of the students ever forgot the point he made that day.* That's what God is doing in our text. Of all the things He could tell wives, He's boiling them all down to this one thing. Of all the things He could tell husbands, He's boiling them all down to this one thing. And what that means is that:

2. for each relationship role, ONE THING is key I am a husband and I know I have many roles. I am to be a provider. I am to be a protector. I am to be a leader. I am to be an example, and so on. There are a dozen things I'm supposed to be doing in my role, but when you boil them all down, if I do THIS ONE THING, if I love my wife, all the rest will fall into place. You see:

a. that key point is our most important responsibility There are plenty of husbands who are great providers but they're really self-centered and when the relationship gets rocky and the wife expresses her needs and what's lacking, they justify themselves by saying, "Look how I provide for you!" My point is that when we stand before Jesus what's going to matter in that day is now how well I provided but whether I loved my wife. It's my chief assignment; it's the one thing above all that He wants me to do. But the bad news is that:

b. that key point is often our most intense struggle What do men struggle with most? Loving their wives like Christ loved the church and sacrificing their own self-interest for them! What do children struggle with the most? Obeying their parents! This ONE THING is also likely where your greatest struggle is in your relationships.

So over the next 6 weeks we're going to take Paul's set of mini-instructions here in Colossians 3 apart and look at the six keys that he has given us to the various relationships we have in life. And we start today in verse 18 where Paul starts with this:

II. The Key Thing Commanded For Wives Is Submission (3:18a) Now that's not a very popular message today; you don't hear anyone dare to speak that out loud much anymore! In our society's quest to correct the horrible injustices that have been perpetrated upon women throughout the centuries, we have nearly thrown out the baby with the bathwater. But no matter how you twist it, you can't get around the fact that the Bible teaches clearly that God commands wives to submit to their husbands. However, when I say that, we need be certain we're all on the same page in our understanding, so let me explain:

1. what submission does NOT mean First of all:

a. it does not mean a wife is inferior to her husband or that women are inferior to men in general. This is not a statement about value, worth or ability. Women are people. Men are people. Children are people. Every single one of us is worth more than all the world to God and we are all the same. In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female; we are all one in Him. Spiritually, I hate to say it, but I've found that women are often more responsive, more on the ball and more mature than men. Think about this. **1 Cor. 11:3** says, *Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man [that is, her husband], and the head of Christ is God.* Those relationships are parallel. If a wife is inferior to her husband that would have to mean that Christ is inferior to God the Father, but the whole teaching of Scripture is that He is coequal, coeternal and of one essence with the Father. He is not inferior. Rather, He chose to submit Himself to His Father. Everybody submits to somebody; it is about order and position, not value, worth or ability. Then while we're at it, let me also say that this verse:

b. it does not mean that women should generically submit to all men A wife is to submit to her own husband. Hey, this is good news for all you single ladies out there. Sure, you may have to submit to your parents as a daughter or to submit to your government as a citizen or to your boss as an employee, but you don't have to submit to your male friends or to your boyfriend. If he wants to go to the ball game and you want to go to the mall, you can say, "See ya!" and do whatever you and God want with your life! You are as free to make decisions or choose things as any man. But when you sign up by saying, "I do", you're placing yourself under the leadership of your husband, so you'd better think long and hard about WHO you want to be led by the rest of your life! Thirdly, men:

c. it does not mean a husband can demand obedience This instruction is given to wives. Nowhere in Scripture are husbands told that they have any right to force it upon their wives. Look with me at **1 Pet. 5:3**. The instruction to leaders is NEVER to "lord it over" those entrusted to your care. You are never to use your position to demand your own rights as an entitlement and force your own will, not in the church and certainly not in marriage. God's instruc-

tion is exactly the opposite. Look back to **3:7**. Husbands NEVER get to say, "I'm the husband and you have to do what I want!" Husbands are always to be considerate and to treat their wives with respect; they are not bosses and lords demanding their own way. That is not what submission means. And it certainly:

d. it does not mean a wife should disobey God or suffer abuse This command is assuming a normal marriage situation. If your husband is trying to make you do something immoral or illegal then, of course, **Acts 5:29** applies, *...we must obey God rather than men*. If he wants you to lie for him or cheat on your taxes or to play "wife swap" with some other man, he's lost all right to your submission; turn him in! If he beats you or cheats on you or abuses you in some other way that violates his marriage vow, this verse is not telling you to stay there and take it! Tell someone, get free, be safe! Again, this command to submit assumes a "normal" marriage situation and finally, please understand that:

e. it does not exclude mutuality It does not mean you have no input, that you must be quiet and have no say in what happens. Every issue and decision made should come out of discussion together; you are heirs together of the grace of life. Marriage is a true partnership, not a dictatorship, and any husband worth his salt understands that and acts accordingly.

So, now having gotten all the disclaimers out of the way, let's talk about:

2. what submission DOES mean The Greek word means "to place yourself under". It is a military term. It means to voluntarily place yourself under the authority of a person serving in a superior position. God has created everything with order; He establishes positions of leadership within every institution. Within society we're told that the "powers that be", the ruling authorities are ordained of God and serve His purpose and we're to submit to their leadership. In the church God has ordained the leadership of overseers or elders and we're to submit to their leadership. In the home parents occupy that position of leadership and children are to submit to it and between the husband and wife in marriage, the husband is invested by God's authority as the leader. Now, the Greek word *submit* is NOT the simple word for *obey*. Wives are not instructed to simply obey their husbands. It is rather a term that has more to do with respect and honor for who they are than simply doing what they say. Submitting to your husband means two things. First, it means that:

a. you must enable your husband's leadership The saying goes, "If you want to know whether you're a leader, turn around and see whether anyone is following!" If nobody follows you, you can't be a leader, no matter how wonderful you are! Wives, your husband can't be a leader unless you follow his leading! Your husband is supposed to be walking with God and seeking His direction and wisdom for you and your family. He is supposed lead you on into good decisions and into maturity in attitude and action. And you must enable him to do that **by voluntarily choosing to follow as he leads**. When I was a kid, we had ponies and I remember trying to load a year old unbroken colt onto a truck one day. We had a lead rope on his halter and two guys pulling forward trying to lead or drag him up onto that truck and he just sat down on his behind and dug his feet in and they couldn't budge him! He would not be led! If your husband says, "Honey, I think the Lord is calling us to be involved with the youth ministry" or "I think the Lord is directing us to put our kids into a Christian school", you have a choice. You can dig your heels in and pull backwards and insist on what you'd rather do, or you can trust your husband and let him lead as God has called him. Now, of course, God will likely also be moving you to the exact same conclusions and you'll be praying together and hearing from Him together, but the point is that your husband is to be one indicator of the direction God is moving in and that you're to recognize that and be willing to follow. However, as I said, it is about more than action. It is about your attitude in the process. So secondly, I think this command to submit means that:

b. you must encourage your husband's leadership How? **By genuinely respecting his role as your leader.** By looking to him in that role. By asking him what he thinks the Lord wants, by seeking and valuing his advice and opinion and by telling him you trust his judgment and his walk with the Lord and that you're willing to go with him in to anything, if he's convinced it's right. *Bruce Larson, in his book Wind and Fire, wrote about sandhill cranes. He said, "These large birds, who fly great distances across continents, have three remarkable qualities. First, they rotate leadership. No one bird stays out in front all the time. Second, they choose leaders who can handle turbulence. And then, all during the time one bird is leading, the rest are honking their affirmation."* He cites this as a good model for church leadership, but I just want you to hear the last point. Wives, while your husband is leading, God wants you to be "honking your affirmation" the whole time.

Now, out of all the things Paul could have told you, THIS is the one thing Paul chose. Why? Because God wants us to understand:

III. The Tremendous Importance Of Submission He wants you to understand that:

1. it is the MOST important of all your responsibilities When you stand before Him the issue for your reward is not going to be how great you always looked. It's not going to be how great you always cooked or how faithfully you always ran the kids to all their appointments. There are a thousand things a wife has to be; you all know those better than I. But of them all, THIS ONE THING is really all you need to do. Respect your husband by following and encouraging his leadership. I already told you that:

2. it enables your husband to fulfill his God-given responsibility He can't lead unless you follow. He can't be all that he could be without you. But on top of that:

3. it models for your children how to relate to those over them The way they see you relate to your husband's leadership is the way that they're going to learn to relate to leadership in their lives. If they see you pull back and press for your own way all the time, guess what they're going to do in school! Guess what they're going to do toward you as a parent eventually! Guess how they're going to relate to their bosses at work and their leaders at church! They will learn from what YOU model. It is SO important, but here is the bottom line:

IV. The Reason Wives Must Submit To Their Husbands is not because of any of that. Read the second half of verse 18 (3:18b) You see, this thing of leadership and submission:

1. it is the way that God has decided to structure the family It is the way that HE set things up. So:

a. it is not based on the husband's personality or performance Sure, you could probably do a better job than your husband; sure, you're smarter or more capable; sure, you're more on the ball than he is, but it doesn't matter. Sure, he has failed you a hundred times, he's made mistakes. He's pursued selfish ends sometimes. You know, in the army they have a saying, "You salute the uniform, not the person". It doesn't matter who's wearing it; their position demands the respect of following. And in the home the leadership of the husband:

b. it is based on the husband's God-assigned position You have to trust that God knows what He's doing. He set things up this way for His reason and purpose. It is what He wants. So submitting to your husband's leadership:

2. it is the key thing that will glorify God Here's what God wants you to know. Go back to 1 Peter and look with me at **1 Pet. 3:3-5**. Wives, that's what God wants. That quiet spirit of willing submission is a beautiful thing and it is of great worth in God's sight. It makes you beautiful to Him because it makes you look just like His Son, who said, "Yes, Father" and went to the cross and saved the world.

The greatly loved Bible teacher Henrietta Mears taught this, *A bird is free in the air. Place a bird in the water and he has lost his liberty. A fish is free in the water, but leave him on the sand and he perishes. He is out of his realm. So, young people, the Christian is free when he does the will of God and is obedient to God's command. This is as natural a realm for God's child as the water is for the fish, or the air for the bird.* Wives, real freedom in the realm of marriage does not come through taking over, through getting your way, through domination and control. It comes from submitting to the will of God by submitting to the leadership of your husband. It is fitting in the Lord. It is what He wants. It is what He can use. Will you give it to Him?

This One Thing: The Keys To Relationship

Col. 3:18-4:1 Husbands: The Key Of Love

In order to refresh our memories and catch up those who may have missed last week's message, we've begun a new series called:

I. This One Thing: The Keys To Relationship In the end of Colossians 3 Paul gives us a simple one-phrase command for each of the primary relationship roles that we find ourselves living in as wives, husbands, children, parents, servants and masters. And I've suggested to you that this implies that:

1. each relationship role has ONE primary responsibility, one thing that is the key to making relationship work when you're in that role, one thing that God cares that you do in that role more than anything else. For wives that key most important thing in verse 18 was submission, enabling and encouraging their husband's leadership. That is the key most important thing a wife can ever do out of all the things she does. But I also suggested that in each of these cases:

2. that key point is often our most intense struggle If you're only going to say one thing, you choose the thing that the person needs to hear most, the thing that will help them the most, the thing that addresses their deepest need. Many times, the toughest thing a wife does is to keep herself from taking over the leadership role and dominating her husband and choosing to enable him instead. Now today we'll move on to husbands. And we read in verse 19 that:

II. The Key Thing Commanded For Husbands Is Love (3:19a) Of all the things the Holy Spirit could have moved Paul to write, He did not say "Husbands, protect your wives!" or "Husbands, provide for your wives!" He has only one thing to say, *Husbands, LOVE your wives*, because it's the most important thing. And when you stand before Him to receive your reward for what you've done in this life, His one criterion is going to be, "How well did you love your wife?" So, we had better begin by talking about:

1. what the word love means As I'm sure you've heard many times by now, the Greek language has three words that can all be translated by our English word *love*, or to put it another way, we use the English word *love* to mean three dif-

ferent things. The Greek word *eros* (from which we get the word *erotic*) refers to romantic love or passion. And we often hold this concept up as being the chief factor in a marriage. We say, "Do you love each other?" and we mean "Are you romantically attracted by each other? Do your glasses steam up and does your heart race at the thought of being with her?" We often call it, "being IN love". But Paul does not use this word; when he says, *love your wives*. This command:

a. it does not refer to romantic love The second Greek word is *phileo* and it refers to the kind of deep attachment that we would call family love or friendship. It's reflected in our idiom, "I loved him like a brother!" It's that deep attachment that we have to our parents, our siblings and our children and even our good friends, that natural human caring that causes us to take care of one another and enjoy one another's company and walk through life together sharing experiences. But this command does not refer to family love. The word used here is a third Greek word: **agape**. It is a word that was hardly even used in the common Greek of the day, but the Holy Spirit latched onto it and gave it to the New Testament writers like John and Paul to use. It has pretty much become a "Christian" word, because *agape*:

b. it is love defined by the sacrifice of self for the good of the other Even though a husband should certainly show and express romantic attraction toward his wife and he should certainly express his attachment to her and care for her as a family member, when Paul says, *Husbands, love your wives...* he is saying, *Husbands, sacrifice yourselves for the good of your wives*. He's not telling us how to feel; he's telling us how to look at and regard our wives and how to act toward them. And this word *agape*:

c. it is forever defined by Christ's love for us on the cross Turn with me to that familiar verse **Eph. 5:25**, and look at the explanation that Paul puts with it there. *...as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*. He literally gave up His own right to have and to live His own life; He died to that and chose to allow Himself to be sacrificed for us, His Bride, on the cross. Romans 5:8 explains that *God ...demonstrated His own agape for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us*. And we husbands are to die for our wives, to give up our own right to have and to live our own life for ourselves the way we want and sacrifice that for the well-being of our wives. Husbands, the moment you said, "I do", you were saying, "She comes first; I give up all rights to use her to my own advantage, to force my own way on her, to live with ME at the center of my life. Next to Jesus Himself, I make her the center of my life. I am here to serve her." Didn't know you were signing up for that, did you? Look with me at **1 Cor. 7:33**. Now don't read that as a bad or wrong thing. If you're single you have only one concern, how you can please the Lord! You are free to do whatever He and you choose. If the Lord doesn't care about you picking up your dirty clothes, you can leave them lay and spend more time in devotions! If He wants to send you on a 3 month mission trip to Zimbabwe, you can sign up without hesitation. But the moment you say "I do", you have a new responsibility right next to the Lord; when it comes to what you choose in this world you HAVE to consider your wife and what will please her, not in the simple sense of what will make her happy, but in the deeper sense of what will be good for her, help her and meet her needs. To put it another way, to love her is to die to what you want and continually choose what is best for her.

Now right off the bat, let me again make a couple of disclaimers about:

2. what sacrificial love does NOT mean First of all:

a. it does not mean a husband must do everything his wife wants or says, any more than submission means that for the wife. The expression on a coffee mug I saw for sale reads like this, "The only words a husband needs are "Yes Dear", "You're Right" and "I'm Sorry!" Loving your wife is not a sentence to an endless round of satisfying her every whim. Do you love your children? Of course! Do you give them everything they want or do everything they ask you to do? Of course NOT! Your love means that you give your children only what is good for them and do only what is good for them. You love them enough to choose their welfare from a perspective of genuine understanding and that's what you must also do with your wife. Second, loving your wife:

b. it does not mean a husband must relinquish everything he enjoys You don't have to live the life of an ascetic, denying yourself every possible comfort and joy and doing only things that she enjoys. You can still play golf! You can still go to the races. You can still watch TV! But loving her means you must do those things taking into consideration the effect and the impact it has on her and choosing to do them in a way that is good for her and not simply for you. Her well-being is part of the equation of everything you do and every choice you have. Thirdly, loving your wife:

c. it does not mean a wife can demand sacrifice of her husband This verse is not a license for a wife to get whatever she wants from her husband. A wife cannot say, "The Bible says you have to love me" and that means you have to give up what you want and do what I want so we're doing this!" Just as the Bible never gives husbands the right to demand submission from their wives, it also never gives wives a right to demand sacrificial love from their husbands. It is all voluntary! A wife must choose to submit and a husband must choose to love and sacrifice because he wants to. Without that either concept is meaningless! And finally, loving your wife:

d. it does not mean a husband should disobey God to please his wife If your wife wants you to do something that is wrong, that is immoral or illegal or absolutely out of the will of God, she may say, "If you love me, you'll do this!", but that's not true and you'd better not. Abraham should never have yielded to Sarah's idea to take Hagar as his second wife in order to have a child! Any more than Sarah should ever have agreed to Abraham's selfish plan for her to say she was his sister! If you love your wife, you will always give her the example of obeying God no matter what.

So, with those disclaimers out of the way, let's think together about:

3. what sacrificial love DOES mean It's very simply, really. It means that in every situation and circumstance in your life:

a. you must consistently choose your wife's well-being over your own For instance, let's just talk about daily life in your house and who does what. *Ann Landers wrote a syndicated advice column in American newspapers for some 45 years until her death in 2002. She once said that based on the mail she received, 70 percent of the women who work outside the home still do 90 percent of the work around the house. They handle most of the shopping and almost all of the care of the children. Some men even refuse to pick up their own clothes. Others go so far as to insist that their wives change the oil in the car and fix a tire when it goes flat.* Based on my experience with young couples, this attitude is changing more and more today, but think about it. Husband, you work long and hard all day at your job. You come home and you want a nice dinner and time to rest. But for many of you, your wife works too, at least part of the time. I bet she'd like a nice dinner and time to rest too! Everything you don't do or help with, she has to do. When I get out of bed in the morning, LuAnn is usually already up. I am tempted to just leave that bed unmade, but in my mind this little voice whispers, "If you don't do it, LuAnn will." I think it's the Holy Spirit. So making your bed or picking up your clothes or doing a load of laundry or sweeping the carpet or fixing a dinner becomes an act of love, of thinking about the load she carries and sacrificing your own rest and pleasure for her well-being, so that she can have the rest she needs too. The same thing is true with the kids. She's had them all day (and that's a full-time job), so when you get home or on the weekend, it's an act of love to relieve her and give her a break because she needs it! Think about your work life. You may climb the business ladder well if you work tons and tons of hours, but would that be good for her? Would that bless her and help her to grow and make her a happy and satisfied person? You may need to deliberately choose to be with her and sacrifice opportunities you might otherwise have because she needs you home! The same would be true of your recreational life or even your church life. Some men have become so involved in ministry itself that their wives suffer all the time for it. Paul wrote to all of us in *Phil. 2:3-4, Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* That applies double for wives! Husbands, do nothing out of self-centered, self-serving motives. Choose to consider your wife's needs as more important than your own. In every choice you make, every activity you pursue, every part of your life, consider what stake she has in it, how it impacts her and choose what is best for her over what is best for you! That is what you are commanded to do! But for it to be true *agape* love there is a further test:

b. you must do it unconditionally, that is, **expecting nothing in return** It's easy to meet her needs and give up your own when she sees that and is appreciative, when she thanks you and encourages you and builds you up and brags on you. But what about when she doesn't? What if she is a complainer and a nag and is never satisfied with anything you do? What if she criticizes you and yells at you and is a demanding, bossy thing? Do you still sacrifice yourself for her? The world's answer would be "NO! If she isn't living up to her half of the deal, dump her!" God's answer is, "Love her all the more!" Genuine love is without any condition, without any expectation. You do not love your wife to get something in return, as wonderful as that would be; you simply love your wife because that is what God has called you to do by being her husband and a husband always loves unselfishly and sacrificially! But here's the real rub. To be true *agape* love, you can't just do this because you HAVE to:

c. you must do it willingly, that is, **because you want to** Jesus laid down His life on the cross to save us, not simply because it was the Father's will, because He had to. He wanted to. He laid down His life freely and voluntarily and that's how we are to love our wives. Look with me again at **Eph. 5:28-29**. Husbands ought to love their own wives the way they love their own bodies. So how do you love your own body? Well, unless you have some type of psychological disorder where you hate your body, basically you very carefully meet its needs every day. You make sure that it has enough food if at all possible. And you meticulously care for it. You wash it and groom it and trim it and make it smell good and look pretty. You figure out what it needs and lavish your care on it. Why do you do that? Grudgingly because you have to? No, you just naturally love your body! You seek its well-being and you want to do it! Well, your wife is now ONE flesh with you; she IS an extension of your own body. When you love her, you are in a sense loving yourself and loving her should be as natural and as free and willing as loving your own body! Then finally, if you are to genuinely love your wife:

d. you must do it sensitively, that is, **you must do it understanding her needs** Look at **1 Pet. 3:7**. That phrase is literally *live with them according to knowledge*. To love your wife, you have to truly know her, to know what she likes and what she values and what she needs from you to feel secure and significant. She is NOT you! She proba-

bly has a weaker body than you (but also probably prettier!) She has more sensitive emotions than you. What you need is not what she needs and you can't love her properly by sacrificing yourself to give her what YOU need or what you THINK she needs. You have to ask her; you have to find out what is really going on inside her and be sensitive to what her true needs are.

Well husband, what do you think? It's a tall order, isn't it? And, you know what? This primary responsibility we have is also:

III. The Primary Struggle That Husbands Have In Loving Their Wives Look at the warning Paul gives in the second half of our text (3:19b). Now if you're reading something other than the NIV, your Bible probably says *do not be embittered against them*, which is a more literal translation. Husbands, here's what happens to us if we're not careful. First:

1. we develop a wrong attitude toward them Often:

a. we become frustrated with them when they don't respond the way we think they ought to. We think we're doing our best and loving them all we know how and some days they still kick and scream at us and it hurts. And over time we take that frustration and that hurt to heart and:

b. we allow ourselves to become embittered toward them We begin to give back a bitter and a nasty attitude because we're holding that grudge of how they've hurt us after all we've done. We make a conscious decision to stop trying to win them with love and take a defensive posture and then:

2. we begin to act wrongly toward them out of the bitterness that we hold inside. We begin to **treat them harshly** to make them taste the bitterness. And they react in kind and the cycle of "You hurt me so I hurt you" spirals around and around and down and down until it ends in divorce. I've seen it repeated many times. That's why God says, *Husbands LOVE your wives and DO NOT [under any circumstances, no matter how they treat you] let yourself become bitter toward them* and begin to treat them harshly and make their lives bitter.

Your call is to love your wife like Christ loved you, for better or for worse! And to do it all your days, from the day you first stand at the altar until the day that death parts you. You put her well-being first on your mind and heart. *Dr. Carroll B. Freeman was at his father's bedside as he lay dying when his father looked up at his three sons and whispered quietly, "Do you remember what our Lord said as He hung on the cross? It was, 'Behold thy mother!'" He writes, "No elaboration was necessary, and I do not remember that any further word was spoken. It was a sacred moment as the deepest concern of a great Christian father was indelibly etched in our minds and hearts."* Even in death he was loving her, putting her before himself. What a thing to model before your children! Husbands, love your wives the way Christ loved the church. Love them to the uttermost, to the very end, and never ever let yourself give up and become bitter and treat them harshly.

This One Thing: The Keys To Relationship

Col. 3:18-4:1 Children: The Key Of Obedience

In our text at the end of Colossians 3, Paul is giving us six very simple, straightforward keys to the primary relationships we find ourselves in in life. In verse 18 he told wives that the single most important thing for them to practice is submitting to their husbands, encouraging their godly leadership. In verse 19 he told husbands that the single most important thing for them to practice is loving their wives, continually giving up their own desires to care for the needs of their wives. Now in verse 20, Paul addresses children, so today I'm going to talk to kids, to young people. I know you all like to tune out during the sermon because you think it's for the adults, but this one is for you. And you adults can listen in and learn something if you like, because you just might have opportunity to teach this to a kid someday. OK? Kids, if you look with me at Col. 3:20, I want you to read it out loud with me right now. Will you do that? Now what that means is that:

I. The Key Thing God Wants Children To Do Is OBEY Parents (3:20) During this stage of your life, that is your most important job. Oh, I know you have to go to school and all, but Paul doesn't say, "Kids, get good grades and God will be happy with you!" And I know many of you play sports or learn musical instruments or take dance, but Paul doesn't say, "Kids, be great athletes! Be real musicians!" Or "Be marvelous dancers and God will be pleased!" He doesn't say, "Kids, be popular! Find a great boyfriend or girlfriend! Look beautiful or handsome; God thinks that's important!" I know all those things are on your minds and hearts at different stages, but Paul only says one thing, *Children, OBEY your parents!* Believe it or not, that is your most important assignment, to obey your parents! If God were to take you to heaven for a moment right now and sit down to talk with you about your young life, His first question would not be, "Hey, how are you doing in school? Did you do your homework? Are you popular; do the kids like you?" No, it would most likely be, "Are you obeying your parents?" Because that's what's on His heart for you to do. Now I know you don't want to hear that, do you? You'd rather hear, "Children, do whatever you want!" So, to ease your pain a bit, I'm going to start by telling you exactly:

1. when you DO NOT have to obey your parents OK? There are three times I can think of when you absolutely don't have to do what your parents say. You might want to write these down! First, you don't have to obey your parents:

a. when they tell you to disobey God If they tell you to lie about something or they tell you to cheat on a test or to steal, to take something that doesn't belong to you, you absolutely don't have to do it! In fact, you shouldn't do it, because you should obey God first! If they tell you to hate somebody or to put somebody down or to get even with

someone because they hurt you, they aren't being godly parents and you don't have to do that thing. Of course, I don't think your parents would probably tell you those things, but you'd be surprised what some parents tell their kids to do. Second, you don't have to obey your parents:

b. when they expect you to do something you literally can't do If your dad is at your game and gets all excited and yells, "Go out there and hit a home run!" and you are the kind of player who strikes out a lot like I did or you typically hit singles and you simply CAN'T hit a home run, you don't have to! If your parents tell you that you have to get an A in math, but you just don't understand it and you simply can't get all the questions right, that's OK. You don't have to do it. God won't mind a bit. You just do the best you can at whatever you do and He'll be happy, even if your parents aren't. You might not know this, but some parents really load their kids down with unrealistic expectations. That means they expect them to do more than they themselves could do or sometimes they want to live out all their dreams through their kids and expect their kids to be something they're not. But when they do those things, they're not being very godly parents and if you just do the best you can do, God will be happy. Now thirdly, you don't have to obey your parents:

c. when you move out of their home and don't depend on them When you have your own place to live and you pay your own bills and Mom and Dad aren't the ones who are feeding you and clothing you and buying the gas for your car and paying so you can watch cable or have internet, then you absolutely don't have to obey them. You might want to listen to their advice, but you don't have to obey them anymore; you're free to make your own mistakes and learn the hard way. But until that time, I don't care if you're 18 or 20 and fully grown up physically, as long as they take care of you, you're still in the position of a child and God wants you to obey them.

Now in these three cases, when they tell you to disobey God, when they tell you to do something you can't do or when you move out and take care of yourself, you don't have to obey your parents, but in every other case, I'm sorry, but God says, *Children, OBEY your parents!* So, I guess we'd better talk about:

2. what it really means to obey your parents You're smart enough to know that Paul didn't write in English, did he? He wrote in Greek. And the Greek word he used in this command has two parts. One part means "to hear" and the other is a preposition that means "under". "To hear under". It comes from the army. When an officer is in charge and giving orders, the rest of the men, because they are "under" him, hear what he says and they do it. That's kind of how God has created your family to work. He has placed you under your parents' authority for your own good. And because you are under them, He expects you to do three things. First:

a. you must HEAR them, that is, **you must give them your ATTENTION**. Now let's teach your parents something, OK? How many of you know how to "tune your parents out"? You can act like you're listening to them but your mind is really a million miles away and you're not really listening to a thing they're saying. Do you ever do that? See, parents, you thought they were such smiling innocent children, didn't you? But kids, did you ever think that might be the reason your parents always say things like, "Did you HEAR me?" "Don't you ever listen to what I say" "Didn't I tell you?" God wants you to stop tuning your parents out and:

(1) genuinely listen to what they have to say - Prov. 1:8-9 says, *My child, pay attention to what your father and mother tell you. Their teaching will improve your character as a handsome turban or a necklace improves your appearance. (TEV)* If you take the time to really listen to them and understand what they're telling you, it will really improve and better your life and make you a better person, even though you might not be able to see how that could be right now. So much of the stuff they tell you to do is kind of like work, isn't it? "Brush your teeth. Take a bath. You need to go to bed now. Mow the lawn. Make your bed. Do your homework." But they really don't just want to make your life miserable; they know doing those things is good for YOU. So listen to what they say and, by the way, you:

(2) parents can promote this by listening in return If you give your kids an "I'm the parent here and you're the dumb kid, so what I say goes" attitude, you're modeling for them exactly how they're going to learn to act. But if you sincerely take the time to listen to them and let them tell you how they feel about things and explain their viewpoint and be respectful about that, it'll certainly make it easier for them to listen to you! But kids, obeying means more than HEARING your parents; it means:

b. you must HEED them, that is, **you must do the ACTION they require**. Mom says, "Jeffrey, please clean up your room!" And you say, "I will Mom!" An hour later Mom comes by the door and you're still playing on your PlayStation and clothing is still all over the floor. Sound familiar? Let me read you a story that Jesus told: *"But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work on the farm today.' 'I won't,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father told the youngest, 'You go!' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't. Which of the two was obeying his father?" What do you think they said? They replied, "The first, of course." (Mat. 21:28-31TLB)* You see:

(1) obedience is shown by doing, not promising, isn't it? Just saying you'll do what your parents ask isn't really obeying. To heed them means that you actually have to DO what they ask, even if it may be unpleasant or

you really don't feel like it. You have to be honest and mean it when you say, "Yes Mom," by carrying it out. But, of course, you:

(2) parents can promote this by modeling truthfulness in return, can't you? It would really help if whenever you make a promise to your kids, that you actually do it! They learn from you; they imitate you. If they see you tell them, "We'll do this" and hours go by or it doesn't happen altogether, you're setting them up to do the same. You should be modeling for them that what you say, you mean. What you say is true. It will teach them to live by the same value. OK kids, I'm sorry, but there is still one more thing. God not only expects you to HEAR your parents and to HEED your parents but thirdly:

c. you must HONOR them, that is, **you must do it in a respectful ATTITUDE**. You remember the 5th of the 10 commandments, don't you? **Ex. 20:12 (TLB)** *"Honor your father and mother, that you may have a long, good life in the land the Lord your God will give you.* Honor means respect. It means treating them respectfully because they are your parents. And that means:

(1) obedience should be a willing choice, even if you don't like it I'm sure you've heard this story before. A mom was disciplining her little son for something he'd done one day and she told him to go sit in the corner. When she came by a few minutes later to check on him, he said to her, "Mom, I'm sitting down on the outside but I'm standing up on the inside!" That's what I'm talking about. Inside we can be all mad and angry and thinking bad things about our parents, even while we're doing what they've told us. We can say disrespectful things about them to our friends like, "Yeah, my old man says I gotta be home at 10. He's such a pain." God wants you to do what your parents say willingly, just because they're your parents, even if you don't understand why or disagree and I know that's tough, but you:

(2) parents can promote this by modeling a respectful attitude When they ask "Why?", instead of giving them the, "because I said so" or "because I'm your father," you might try speaking to them in a respectful way and being kind and patient. Parents are big on, "That's the way it is, like it or not" speeches, but all that models for your kids is that when you're in charge of something you get to do whatever you want and nobody else matters. If you want your kids to treat you with respect, try going first and treating them that way. What you model is what they will learn!

Now kids, can we go back to that verse in Col. 3:20 for a moment? I'm afraid I have to tell you another thing you probably don't want to hear. Do you see what it says?

II. God Wants You To Obey Your Parents in what? **IN EVERYTHING!** In all things. Now what does that mean? First:

1. it means every time, not just the times when you feel like it or when you're in a good mood or when it fits in with your plans. Every time they tell you to do something, God's instruction is for you to do it. Second:

2. it means right away, not 10 hours later or next week when you feel like doing it. If they ask you to take out the trash, it means get up from your TV show and take out the trash or set the table or whatever. Doing what they tell you, but only long after the fact, is really you trying to assert your control and doing what you want and God's not happy with that. Third:

3. it means whether or not you agree with them And no, you don't have to agree with them. You are entitled to your feelings and opinions. You don't have to say, "Yes, you are right and all knowing and I am wrong." But you still have to do what they tell you out of respect for who God has made them to be in your life. They are your parents. And fourth:

4. it means whether or not they are being reasonable or understanding You are entitled to think they're wrong or unreasonable or they're not seeing your side of the issue. In fact, they may BE wrong. They may NOT understand. Your mind is your own. You can choose what to think. Of course, don't be surprised if you start to think a bit differently when you grow up and you're a parent! But you still have to respectfully do what they say and if they're wrong, let the Lord handle it between Him and them!

Now, I'm sure by this point some of you young people are asking, "Why? This is really a raw deal! Why do I have to do this? I have to listen to my parents and do what they tell me and do it with a respectful attitude and I have to do it every time and right away and I have to do it even if I think they're wrong; what a bum deal! Why should I do that?" Well, the answer is in the last part of Col. 3:20:

III. You Should Obey Your Parents Because This Pleases The Lord You see:

1. it is not because your parents deserve it; quite honestly, **they may not!** We parents are people with problems. We sometimes take out our frustrations on you. We yell at you sometimes when we have no right to. We are impatient with you and make you feel bad about yourselves sometimes. We often hurt your feelings by the things we say to you that we would never say to an adult. You don't obey us because we are so great and wonderful; of course, sometimes we are, but many times we're not. And you don't obey your parents:

2. it is not because they are always right; in point of fact, **they are not!** We make mistakes! We don't always take time to listen to you and understand what you're faced with. We make you do things sometimes simply because that's the way we did them and that may not even make sense. Of course, sometimes we really do know what we're talking about and do know more than you do, but that's not why you're supposed to obey us. What did that verse say?

3. it is because this is the right thing to God and pleases Him - Eph. 6:1 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* This is the way God has made the world to work. Parents have authority over children for their own good to teach them and protect them and train them. And when you cooperate with His plan and obey them simply because you love HIM and you want to do what HE says, that really pleases Him!

*I read a little story about a father who had to punish his little daughter for something she had done. She was very upset about it at first, but later on that day she came to her daddy who was sitting in a chair and climbed up onto his lap. She hugged him tightly around his neck and she said, "Daddy, I do love you." He was a little surprised because he knew how upset she was and he asked, "Why do you love me, honey?" And she said, "Cause you try to make me good." [Louis Albert Banks, in his book *Windows for Sermons*] You see, that's what we parents do. We try to help you become the person God wants you to be. It's not an easy job, even if it looks like it to you. But you can make it a whole lot easier for us if you can realize what that little girl realized, that God put us as parents in your lives and we're trying our best. It really helps us if you love us and try to please God by doing what we tell you. *Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord.**

This One Thing: The Keys To Relationship

Col. 3:18-4:1 Parents: The Key Of Encouragement

We've been studying together the end of Colossians 3 where Paul gives us six very simple, straightforward keys to our primary relationships in life. We began in verse 18 where he told wives that the single most important thing for them to practice is submitting to their husbands, encouraging their godly leadership. Then in verse 19 he told husbands that the single most important thing for them to practice is loving their wives, continually giving up their own desires to care for the needs of their wives. In verse 20 he told children that their most important assignment in life is to obey their parents by hearing them, heeding them in doing what they say and honoring them with a willing attitude. So, of course, in verse 21 Paul turns to address parents. But before we get into the text, there is a big disclaimer that I want to make. One preacher said, "When I was 20, I had five theories about raising children and no children; now I've got 5 children and no theories!" That's pretty much my own testimony! Parents are always looking for some kind of guarantee that if they will do all the right things, their children will grow up to be everything they're supposed to be. So we read all the latest parenting books; we watch videos and attend seminars. We try to squeeze guarantees out of verses like Prov. 22:6 to somehow say that if we just do it right when they're little, that when they're big God will somehow make sure they follow what we've taught them. We're desperate for our children to turn out right because we love them and if they don't, we blame ourselves and live with shame and guilt because somehow, we live under the delusion that there is some magical recipe out there for raising children that if we follow it will give guaranteed results. But here is the painful truth; in the end our children have freedom to choose how they will live and what they will believe. The fact that there is a powerful force called sin living inside their bodies and the fact that they are surrounded by many powerful forces in the world which influence their choices means there can be no guarantees. We've all seen children with the best of homes and parents make terribly wrong choices. Some of us have BEEN those children. None of us can live life for another person; each one ultimately makes their own choices. All we can do as parents is be the best influence we can possibly be. My theories have been reduced to this: the best thing you can do for your kids is to model in front of them consistently what it means to be in love with Jesus and encourage them to join you. Then, put them in God's hands and trust that He loves them enough to work in their lives the way He did in yours. So, Paul is not giving us parents a formula in verse 21. He's giving us a warning! He has just told children that their responsibility before God is to obey their parents in everything. That puts parents in a really powerful place. So now he's warning us about:

I. The Potential Effects Of Wielding Parental Authority (21) The way that you use your position of authority and control over your children produces a tremendous impact upon them. Paul doesn't mention it here, but the:

1. underuse of it tends to produce a spoiled child unprepared for life There used to be an old cultural proverb, "Spare the rod and spoil the child," which is essentially biblical. If a parent does not discipline and correct a child and provide the healthy limits and boundaries he needs, he will be spoiled. The generation that my parents were in believed that strongly. Unfortunately, the philosophy that prevailed in the last couple decades of parents is that children are basically good. They need to be free to make all their own choices in life and they will become the best they can be. That's a lie from the pit! Sin is bound up in the heart of a child and if parents don't use their authority and guide and train and limit, sin will drag that kid straight away from God and into all kinds of evil! And there's another lie we've got, "I want my kids to have it better than I had." So, today we give our kids everything and don't make them work for it. We give them a car, pay their insurance, pay for their college in full, give them a credit card and don't make them get a job. That's not how the world works and that produces a child who thinks the world owes him a living, that he can do what-

ever he wants, and who is unprepared for the struggles and disappointments and plain hard work that is the reality of life. But Paul's warning about authority here is just the opposite:

2. overuse of it tends to produce a bitter, angry child You've seen parents who use their position of authority to overlimit and restrict too tightly, parents who give their kids NO freedom, no choice, restrict their every activity and dominate every moment and every area of their lives. Some of you LIVED under parents like that! Maybe some of you've BEEN parents like that! Over-restriction and control, especially if there is no emotional bonding, builds a tremendous amount of frustration in a child. God has created each of us in His image. He has given us, not merely the freedom to choose, but the very need to be able to make choices. And when that is taken away from us, we grow more and more frustrated. We grow angry inside; we grow bitter against those who control us. And in a child that:

a. it may result in rebellion. Rebellion is simply **the determination to gain control**, to get out of the prison he's forced to live in. Many kids who are raised in overly strict homes go off the deep end as soon as they grow up and can get free to choose. They make a decision that as soon as they can, they will get free and do what they want. And the parents who think they were protecting them all those years by limiting their choices, end up driving them to the very things they were trying to keep them from! Paul warns, *Parents, do NOT embitter your children*. In Eph. 6:4 he says, *Parents, do not EXASPERATE your children*. Do not demand more of them than they can do. Do not limit them so much that they feel like slaves living under your control. Do not make them feel like they are living in a prison from which they must escape. Do not build that anger and bitterness in them by overusing your authority. It may not only cause them to rebel later and reject everything you've stood for, but even worse, Paul warns:

b. it may result in discouragement The Greek word means to lose heart, to become without passion, to lose the will to try. It may cause them to make **the decision to give up**, to just check out. Checking out can take many forms. In the extreme it may mean suicide. It may mean escaping into music or drugs or whatever allows them a way out of the pain of their situation. Or it may just mean a listlessness, a floating through life, exerting as little effort as possible, existing rather than living, with no goals and dreams and desire to accomplish anything.

You see, to turn this warning around and state it positively, as Paul did in **Eph. 6:4**:

II. God's Primary Goal For Parents Is To Encourage Their Children, *to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*. To clarify this, let me tell you a story I heard: *A company wanted to motivate their sales force, so at the end of the year they had a banquet and honored their two top salesmen. But to make a point they sent both out of the room and had everyone get up and arrange the tables in a simple maze. Then they brought the first man back into the room with a blindfold and the others were told to help him negotiate the maze in this way. Every time he made a wrong turn, they would hit his leg or his arm with a spoon, kind of like smacking his hands. Every time he made a right turn, they did nothing. Every time he took a wrong step, Whap! Whap! Soon, every step was taken with timid caution and he walked in fear of the next step. It took him 7 1/2 minutes to navigate that room and when they took the blindfold off, he was furious. The second man came back in with his blindfold and this time they did things differently. Every time he took a wrong step the crowd did nothing. Every time he made a right step they applauded. He made it through the maze in 90 seconds and felt wonderfully affirmed!* What's the lesson? Positive reinforcement and encouragement works a whole lot better on human beings than continual negative correction! I bet that's why the warning about the negative comes first in this verse. **INSTEAD**, Paul says use encouragement! Now, in our case:

1. the direction of encouragement is toward the Lord It is the training of the Lord and the instruction of the Lord. The direction that we are influencing our children in is toward the Lord, toward His Word, toward His heart, toward relationship with Him. That's what matters. That's our goal, not material success or a great job or an important position. Not success in sports or in school or academics or popularity. We are to bring every resource we have to bear upon influencing our children toward Jesus. And our tools are two-fold. First, this:

2. it involves the positive pressure of instruction They need taught about the Lord. They need to learn about Him and His heart and His ways. And you can't say, "Well, that's why I send them to Sunday School!" That may help, but they need it from you. They need it from you, not so much in a classroom-like setting of sitting them down and "instructing" them, but in walking them through the daily experiences of their lives, showing them how to consider Jesus and what He wants and what He would have them to do in each thing they encounter. In other words, it is "on the job training" that really makes the difference more than "book learning". If you can show them step by step how to live a godly life as they encounter bullies at school or deal with difficult teachers or see bad content on TV, that will train them how to put all the facts that they learn from teaching into practice. This positive encouragement toward the Lord is an extremely powerful influence. However, your responsibility also:

3. it involves the negative pressure of correction That word *training* means discipline, correcting when they make a misstep, when they choose wrongly. You **MUST** correct them, but **HOW** you do that is all important. You can use those wrong steps as a training, teaching, learning experience to correct their path, to get them back on track and help them know that you love them enough to stop them from a wrong path. Or you can use those occasions to build frustration and anger in their hearts. It all depends on how you react. Now remember, from Col. 3:21:

III. God's Primary Command To Parents Is Do NOT Embitter Your Children It's the only one of Paul's six commands that is a negative rather than a positive command. Your chief responsibility is to NOT DO something, to make sure that you DO NOT build anger and bitterness in your children. So, let me give you six positive suggestions that come to mind as to how to encourage them instead of embittering them.

1. accept them for who they are not for what they do Every child, every person, needs to experience unconditional love and acceptance. And children need to get this from you first, so that they will later be able to accept it directly from God. If you shower them with attention and acceptance when they excel and put them down and criticize them when they fail, you teach them a lie, that acceptance is based on your performance! So many of us believe that! Your child needs to hear, "I love you just because you are my son, my daughter. I'm proud of you for who you are!" When they come home with a D or an F, your question ought to be, "Did you honestly do your best?" and if they did, reward it. If they didn't, say, "I love you anyway and I love you enough to want to help you change this, so what can we do together?" Cheer when they win the game; but tell them they did a great job even when they lose! Make them know that nothing they do will ever affect your love and acceptance of them and they will bloom in that security. Take that away and you'll embitter them. Next:

2. show them physical affection Hug them! Touch them! Hold them! Even as they get older. Human beings need physical affection to know that they are loved; that's how they experience it. And if you don't give it to them in that healthy and secure way, eventually they will seek it from someone else in a wrong way. And I don't care if you weren't raised that way or it's just not who you are. Do it anyway! Loving on your kids is one of the best ways not to embitter them. Third:

3. listen to them with undivided attention *A little boy at the supper table suddenly shouted, "Pass the potatoes!" His mother indignantly insisted that he go to his room for behaving so rudely. Later that evening, the father disclosed that he had bought a new cassette recorder that day and had secretly taped the family chatter at suppertime. As everyone listened eagerly, they heard loud laughter and excited talking. But in the background, they detected a tiny boyish voice saying, "May I please have some potatoes?" A bit later the same voice said, "Please, somebody, will you let me have some potatoes?" The chatter continued, and then it came, the great shout, "Pass the potatoes!"* When you don't listen to your children, when you don't give them your attention and let them express themselves and their needs to you, you build anger and frustration. Love to kids is spelled T-I-M-E. If you are always too busy, too involved with something else, if you keep brushing them aside, they will resent it and it will embitter them as they grow older. Next:

4. give them responsibility that fits their maturity in life Don't expect a 5 year old to carry a heavy load of chores every day. Don't expect your kid to come home from 7 hours at school and then immediately spend 4 more hours doing homework before they can play. Would you live like that? Let them have the time and opportunity and the freedom to be a child and enjoy things. If you don't, it will embitter them as they grow older. On the other hand, if your 17 year old is laying around playing video games all the time, never helping with a thing, not working and expecting you to do everything for them, there's something wrong! Much less if they're 30 and living at home and doing the same thing! As they grow older, give them more and more responsibility for their own lives and well-being; prepare them for life. It will build confidence and assurance. You can embitter them by expecting too much and by expecting too little, by not having confidence to expect enough. Fifth:

5. discipline them instead of punishing them Punishment is never your job; it is God's. You are not His agent to punish the evil of their sins. You are a parent. When they do something wrong you don't simply beat their butt because they've been bad. That will build frustration and anger. Instead, you discipline them; you correct them in love by taking the kind of action that will help them to learn from what they've done. Now, that action will still likely be painful and it may even involve a tap on the backside if that is the appropriate correction. But it can NEVER be simply you taking out your frustration and anger on them physically. If you do that, they will learn to obey you because they'll learn to fear you, but inside there will be anger and bitterness because it's not right. Discipline, don't punish. And finally:

6. model consistently for them the life you want them to live Your greatest influence is your life, the way you live. And kids can smell hypocrisy easier than you can smell a skunk. If you say one thing and do another it will make your kids angry. If you make them be honest and then they see you cheat, if you push them to always tell the truth and they see you lie, and if that is a consistent pattern, they'll become angry and bitter. If you want to encourage them, model for them genuinely what you want them to be.

Then, in closing, let me remind you that the fact that Paul chose this one thing to mention, not only means that it is our primary responsibility, but that:

IV. Our Greatest Struggle As Parents Is To Keep From Embittering Our Children It's a tough line to walk and we fail a lot. Instead of providing true encouragement through teaching and correcting in love we flip out and take out our frustrations in ungodly ways. And you'll note that this is addressed particularly to fathers. Why? Not that mothers never have a problem with this, but we fathers are the greatest offenders. We are the ones who are prone to take this precious authority

that we've been given over our children and beat them over the head with it in an insensitive fashion, because after all, we're tough and we're in charge!

Ken Blanchard writes: "When my son Scott was a senior in high school, he used to cause problems by parking his truck in the driveway. Nobody could get in or out because his truck was big enough to go to war. I always told him to park it out in the street. One day I came home to find he'd not only blocked the driveway with his truck but had gone away and taken his keys with him. I was furious. Three hours later he showed up, and I was waiting for him. I stormed out of the house and let him have it. I didn't leave him in doubt about what he'd done wrong and how I felt about it. As I was walking back to the house, Scott raced after me. He followed me into the kitchen. 'Dad,' he said, 'you forgot the last part of the reprimand--you know, the part about 'You're a good kid, I love you, and this is so unlike you.' I cracked up laughing. We hugged. Scott never left his truck in the driveway again. And I got better at reaffirming at the end of a reprimand. [Every-one's a Coach by Don Shula and Ken Blanchard. Zondervan, 1995.] Parents, particularly fathers, DON'T embitter your children. You might kill the precious seed of a life that God is nurturing inside them. Always encourage your children toward Jesus Christ in all that you do.

This One Thing: The Keys To Relationship

Col. 3:18-4:1 Servants: The Key Of Obedience

We've been studying together the end of Colossians 3 where Paul gives us six very simple, straightforward keys to the primary relationships that we function in throughout life. His first obvious area of concern was family relationships which we have been looking at in the last four messages. Beginning in verse 18 and continuing through 21, wives and husbands, children and parents are each commanded one key thing that by God's power they must practice. Wives are to submit; husbands are to love. Children are to obey and parents are to not embitter them, but rather encourage them. However, the very first word in verse 22 gives a command to people who were in a very different kind of relationship:

I. This Command Is For People Who Are UNDER Authority (3:22) SLAVES, obey your earthly masters.... Yes, the institution of slavery was not only alive and well in Paul's day; it was a common, ordinary part of life and society. The system of slave labor was a basis of much of the prosperity of the Roman Empire. We have no idea just how prevalent this was. One source I read estimated that fully one third of the population of Rome and of Italy itself were slaves. Another source guessed that as many as half of the Empire's population were in that situation, though that seems questionable to me. Slaves came from the many nations that the Roman legions conquered as prisoners of war and they were bought in quantity from nations outside the empire. They were not all one particular race and they functioned in every area of life from household servants to teachers, accountants, craftsmen, all the way down to field laborers. They often married and had families within their households, another source of new slaves. So the hard truth is that:

1. many of the early believers lived in slavery and not a few were slave owners. It was the situation they found themselves in in life. It seems strange to us, but Paul never attacked the institution of slavery itself. He wrote in 1 Cor. 7:21-22, *Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you--although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave.* Paul did not fight the institution of slavery, instead he just brought slaves and masters to Christ and a marvelous thing happened. Look at verse 11. In Christ and in the church, slave and master became one; they were equal; they were changed in their relationship to each other. Paul wrote to Philemon that his returning slave Onesimus was now a brother in the Lord. Philemon was to treat him as a brother and he would serve Philemon as a brother. You can see how if that was practiced it would just about dissolve the institution of slavery altogether. At any rate, Paul was writing to these folks about a relationship which to them was a daily thing. But we would probably consider this text irrelevant to us if we choose to concentrate on slavery itself. However:

2. all of us live in relationships under authority today Almost every one of us faces life every day in a similar relationship of some kind, in what I would call an AUTHORITY relationship. We all live in situations where we are UNDER authority. For example, at school you may be a student who is under the authority of the teachers. At work you are probably an employee who is under the authority of various bosses and supervisors. If you're in the military, you are obviously a soldier under the authority of superiors in the chain of command. As citizens we all fall under the authority of police and judges and officials and they law which they are to uphold and enforce. So, although it may not be as absolute in degree as slavery was, literally every one of us lives under some form of authority relationship day after day. Now, I'm a Christian, so how do I live as a student, as an employee, as a soldier, as a citizen? Well in our text Paul seems to spell out for us that:

II. The Greatest Struggle We Have With Authority Is Obeying (3:22-24) The key thing which is to characterize ANY person who is under authority is obedience. But there is something inside of us that has a tremendous struggle with that. There's a power or a force called sin that lives in our members and it influences us to steadfastly resist the idea of laying down control and submitting to people who are in authority over us. Then there's our self-centered flesh, that old way that we learned to live where WE are at the center of our own universe and always ask, "What's in it for ME?" That's why, even though our new nature wants to obey God, we still struggle to do it, because our flesh continually wars against what our

spirit truly wants. So, whenever the teacher or the boss or the captain over me says, "Do this!", I have an instant and immediate urge not to and that may be expressed in three forms, as Paul points out here. First, it may come out as actual:

1. rebellion: we refuse to obey The teacher gives us an assignment and we simply don't do it. The boss gives us a project and we do something else we'd rather do instead. Our taxes are due and we don't pay them. Of course, there are consequences associated with doing this, like failing the course or losing the job or being court-martialed. And if we're grown up and wise enough to know and fear these consequences, we make take a different course. We might opt for:

2. deception: we pretend to obey Paul says some people under authority obey, *only when their eye is on you*. Only when the police car is visible. Only when the boss is on site. Only when the teacher is in the room. But just let that authority figure walk out of the room and it's siesta time or party time. Then, when footsteps are heard, everyone is instantly busy. We give the appearance of obeying, but we disobey every time that we can get away with it. Do you know what I'm talking about? Our fleshly tendency is to obey only when we have to in order to avoid the consequences. Or just the opposite, we may be driven by:

3. selfishness: we obey only for reward We obey, *to win their favor*. We do it to make a good impression on the teacher in the hopes of improving our grade or gaining some privilege. We obey to impress the boss so we'll be in line for a raise or a promotion. We don't obey for God's sake or because it's right; we do it merely to get something out of it for ourselves.

And, of course, any kind of feigned obedience is really flawed obedience. It's not really what God intends for us at all. You see, what Paul's telling us here is that:

III. The One Key Thing God Wants People Under Authority To Do Is Obey Now, that word *obey* means the same thing in this verse that it meant for children back in verse 20, as they relate to their parents. It means that we are to HEAR what those in authority over us tell us, to HEED by doing what they say, and to HONOR their position of authority by doing it with a willing spirit from the heart. And Paul pretty much spells out for us in these verses what God expects from us, the manner in which He wants us to obey those who are in authority. First of all:

1. He wants us to obey continually Verse 22 says, ***obey your earthly masters in everything***. Everything? Are there no exceptions? Well, of course there are exceptions. If the teacher demands that you do something that denies your faith, you refuse. If the boss orders you to falsify records or do something illegal for the company, you certainly should disobey. But as I mentioned in previous messages, exceptions are just that, exceptional. Except for those rare instances, those who are under authority are to obey those whom God has put in charge of us on earth as a continual habit, a way of life. Our only other option is to get out of the relationship if we have opportunity. A slave could save money and eventually buy his way out. You can quit the job. Change schools. Move to another country if you don't want to pay taxes! But as long as we're under someone's authority, a Christian is commanded to exercise obedience in everything. *John Kenneth Galbraith, in his autobiography, A Life in Our Times, illustrates the devotion of Emily Gloria Wilson, his family's housekeeper: It had been a wearying day, and I asked Emily to hold all telephone calls while I had a nap. Shortly thereafter the phone rang. Lyndon Johnson was calling from the White House. "Get me Ken Galbraith. This is Lyndon Johnson." "He is sleeping, Mr. President. He said not to disturb him." "Well, wake him up. I want to talk to him." "No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you. When I called the President back, he could scarcely control his pleasure. "Tell that woman I want her here in the White House." [Houghton Mifflin in Reader's Digest, December, 1981].* Emily illustrates what we're talking about here, continual obedience IN EVERYTHING. And that also means that:

2. He wants us to obey faithfully Paul says, ***do it, not only when their eye is on you***, but do it whether their eye is on you or not. The obedience must not be feigned or pretended. It must be real. The teacher or the boss or the person in charge must be able to count on you carrying out the responsibility you've been given, even in their absence. They must know that your bottom line is not to see what you can get away with but rather to do what you're supposed to. That makes you trustworthy! Joseph was sold into slavery against his will in Potiphar's house. He didn't want to be there, but he obeyed his master faithfully. He proved trustworthy and was eventually put in charge of everything. He was so faithful that when Potiphar's wife wanted an affair with him, he would not betray his master's trust; he was faithful to him. Then he got thrown in jail. He didn't deserve it; he could have been bitter and angry, but again he demonstrated faithful obedience to the chief jailer and wound up being entrusted with care of the whole prison. That's what God wants in us, that we obey, that we carry out the responsibilities that those in charge have given us, in a trustworthy fashion always. But even that is not enough:

3. He wants us to obey thoroughly Paul says, ***do it with sincerity of heart...whatever you do, work at it with all your heart***. You know how you can be told to wash the dishes and just kind of hit each one a lick? Or told to do a paper and write one page but make the type size really big to expand it to two? No, a Christian does what he does with all his heart. He does a good job, the kind of a job that Jesus would do whether it's designing a building or sweeping a floor! So, when you function as a person under some kind of authority, you obey thoroughly. God wants us to carry out fully what we know the person in authority wants done. And finally, the bottom line in obeying is that:

4. He wants us to obey spiritually Paul says, *work at it as working for the Lord, not for men...it is the Lord Christ you are serving*. Put simply, you are not obeying a human being; you are obeying Jesus. You are not serving a human being; you are serving Jesus. In doing what they want, you are doing what HE wants and that's what He rewards! *A missionary to India told about an army officer who stopped to have his shoes shined by a poor Indian boy on the street. The lad launched into his task with such enthusiasm and vigor that the man was utterly amazed. Instead of an ordinary, slipshod performance with an eager hand outstretched for a tip, the boy worked diligently until the leather sparkled with a brilliant luster. The officer asked, "Why are you taking so much time to polish my boots?" "Well, sir," was the reply, "last week Jesus came into my heart and now I belong to Him. Since then, every time I shine somebody's shoes, I keep thinking they're His, so I do the very best I can. I want Him to be pleased!"* That's our motive! We obey authority because we want HIM to be pleased! *Many years ago, a Boston newspaper printed an article about a cleaning lady who for 40 years did the same humdrum tasks in the same office building. She was interviewed one day by a reporter who asked her how she could stand the monotony and boredom of doing the same thing day in and day out. The woman gave this reply: "Oh, I don't get bored. I use cleaning materials that God made; I clean objects that belong to people God made, and I make life more comfortable for them. My mop is the hand of God!"* John Oxenham wrote in his old hymn, *No work is commonplace, if all be done as unto him alone; life's simplest toil to him is known who knoweth all. His service is life's highest joy, it yields fair fruit a hundred-fold: be this our prayer--"Not fame, nor gold, but--thine employ!"* If you obey because you are doing it for Him, that truly is obedience; that is what He wants to produce in you.

And, of course, Paul says if you do it that way, ***you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward!*** God will reward your faithful obedience to HIM expressed in obeying THEM! In Ephesians 6:8 Paul tells servants, *you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free!* Good is good and evil is evil whether you're a servant or a master. You don't obey those in authority over you for a pat on the back or to get ahead somehow; you do it so that one day when you stand before Jesus Christ, HE will say, "Well done! You did that just the way I wanted you to!" That's all that ultimately matters! However, the opposite is also true and as we come to verse 25, we see:

IV. The Warning God Gives To Those Under Authority (3:25) I see three things in that warning. First of all:

1. when we disobey, we will receive the consequences of it and much of the time, they will be right here and now. God spelled out His view of how authority works in **Rom. 13:1-6**. God uses authority to keep the world in order and He puts people in places of authority, whether that is political authority or at work or school or parents at home. And authorities do hand out consequences for wrong-doing. If we choose to disobey, we will pay a price. A slave in that day might be whipped. We may lose our job or get suspended or be fined or even jailed. So, a healthy fear of doing wrong because we'll pay a price is actually a good thing. And while we're talking about this, please understand that:

2. God will not excuse evil because you suffer under someone's authority If the person over you is abusing their authority and it is causing you pain, as wrong as that may be, it does not give you the right to do wrong in return. You can't say, "My employer pays me shoddy wages; I'm going to do a shoddy job!" Right is right and wrong is always wrong. God does not play favorites. He does not say, "There you poor suffering child, it's OK for you to lie and cheat and steal; they're doing those things to you!" The life of many of those early Christian slaves was not pleasant! Probably much more unpleasant than it is for you in whatever you might have to suffer at the hands of those in charge of you. The temptation to spit in their master's food or to use the sword they carried to carve him up instead of protect him was likely strong for many of them. But two wrongs never did make a right; evil still does not justify evil. His will is for you to obey just the same, even those who may be causing you suffering. But do remember this. Because you are doing it for Him:

3. God will reward you because you suffer for His sake Look with me at **1 Pet. 2:18-25**. I bet you didn't notice that that beautiful truth, *He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree*, was written first to slaves, to those who are suffering unjustly and wrongfully under those in authority over them. Christ gave us an example. He suffered for us, He endured the pain of unjust suffering on the cross at the hands of those in authority over him and that's what saved us. And He calls us to do the very same for His sake, trusting that the real reward comes later. And it will because God wants to use your faithfulness, your selfless true obedience, even in the face of suffering, to shine His grace as a beacon into the lives of others, perhaps the very ones who are mistreating you now.

I think that God has a special spot in His heart for servants. When His Son came into the world, He took the form of a Servant. He is spoken of prophetically through Isaiah as the Servant of the Lord. And He knows that being a servant and obeying is often a drag. It is long and difficult and hard and often painful. *Thomas a Kempis wrote these words back before the reformation in the first person as though God Himself were speaking, just to encourage faithful servants. He said: "Do not be worn out by the labors which you have undertaken for My sake, and do not let tribulations ever cast you down. Instead, let My promise strengthen and comfort you under every circumstance. I am well able to reward you above all measure and degree. You shall not toil here long nor always be oppressed with griefs. A time will come when all labor and trouble will cease. Labor faithfully in My vineyard; I will be thy recompense. Life everlasting is worth all these conflicts, and greater than these. Are not all plentiful labors to be endured for the sake of life eternal? Lift your face therefore to heaven;*

behold I and all My saints with me--who in this world had great conflicts--are now comforted, now rejoicing, now secure, now at rest, and shall remain with Me everlastingly in the kingdom of My father.

Servants, you who are under authority, obey your earthly masters in everything... with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord... since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

This One Thing: The Keys To Relationship

Col. 3:18-4:1 Masters: The Key Of Justice

Today we come to the conclusion of our study of the end of Colossians 3 where Paul gives us six very simple, straightforward keys to the primary relationships that we function in throughout life. In verses 18-21 we have commands that relate to family relationships: the key thing for wives is to submit; the key for husbands is to love. The key thing for children is to obey; the key for parents is to not embitter them but rather encourage. In verse 22 Paul addressed slaves and told them their key thing is to obey and we were able to apply that to ourselves whenever we find ourselves UNDER any kind of authority, whether at school, at work, in the military or under our own government. In closing, Paul now turns the tables and gives a:

I. This Command Is For People Who Are IN Authority (4:1) The word *masters* is literally the word *lords* and it indicates a person in charge, a person in ownership or authority who has the power of control over others. It may surprise you to think about the fact that:

1. some of the early believers were owners of slaves - 1 Tim. 6:1-2 *All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.* There were believing masters in the church. As I explained to you last week, the practice of slavery was tremendously prevalent in the Roman Empire of Paul's day and many, many of the early believers were slaves. But not a few of them were owners of slaves! And Paul didn't simply tell them to set their slaves free. Rather, he taught believing slaves to see their believing masters as brothers and love them and believing masters to see their believing slaves as brothers and love them, so that in their new life in Jesus Christ they became one and entered into a whole new relationship that would not be unlike that of boss and employer today. In fact:

2. many of us live in relationships where we are IN authority today A good many of us are parents, of course, and exercise authority and control over our kids. Some of us are teachers and in that classroom, we are lord; we're in control. Others of us are bosses or supervisors or foremen or even employers or owners of businesses where we have people under us, people who answer to us and whom we direct. Some may be in the military and rise to authority over whole squadrons or platoons of soldiers; others are police officers or judges or officials who are given authority over ordinary citizens. Some of us have even been placed in positions of authority within the church as elders or pastors or leaders and I would dare to say that every one of us at one time or another ends up in some position where we have authority over others so Paul's words do apply to us. Now the very fact that Paul commands masters and people in authority not to do wrong tells us that:

II. The Greatest Struggle We Have When In Authority Is Abusing It *You've heard the saying, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely!" It was written by Lord Acton in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887. He said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."* History has proved that and scripture testifies to it as well. The cruelty of kings like Pharaoh who abused his power to oppress the Israelites into slavery and Herod who slaughtered all the infants of Bethlehem to protect himself is legendary, but right up there with them are the Hitlers and the Stalins and the Mao Tse Tung's of our own day. Power creates the opportunity and the temptation to abuse it. We know the history of the church has its Inquisition and its persecution of the reformers and the anabaptists and many others but it's easy to think that, after all, we are above that. We would do well to remember that even David, the man after God's own heart, once he had power, used that power to steal the wife of another man and to commit murder to cover it up. Paul warns masters about three temptations that come to masters, to those who are in authority. The first is:

1. selfishness: When we are in authority, we are prone to **consider our own needs instead of those under us.** A master tends to think about how little he can get away with giving his servant, rather than about how much he can afford to give him. How many times in recent years have you heard of businesses closing down whole divisions or plants, ruining the lives of hundreds of their employees and disrupting local economies because they can make more money having their products made or their service departments located in China or India. For many in charge, profit is the bottom line, not people. Power breeds self-centeredness; it focuses our eyes on us and our own needs and desires and away from caring about the needs of those who are below us. And it also breeds:

2. injustice: we do things that are wrong because we can get away with it. When we're the boss, if we want to steal company property and use it for ourselves, who's going to stop us! When we're important, we can get our traffic tickets fixed and our infractions dismissed and that makes us prone to commit more of them. When somebody answers to us, we can make them do things we'd never expect of ourselves, just because we have the power to do it and we want to. We can demand unreal hours of our employees or load unbearable work on our students and make their lives miserable, as any med student will testify. As parents we can break promise after promise or speak to our kids in abusive language or vent our anger on them and who's going to stop us? Power breeds injustice! And power also breeds:

3. unfairness: we do what we prefer instead of what is fair to others. When we're in charge and we like somebody, we give them time and attention, but if there's somebody we don't like for whatever reason, we tend to ignore them or make things hard for them. If we're in charge we can help when we want to and refuse when we don't, whether it's fair or not, whether that person has been in line for 4 hours already or not. We can punish the whole class for the offense of 1 student, even though it's not fair, just because we can and we want to demonstrate our superiority. Power breeds unfairness.

But by now you're saying, "What is he talking about? I'd never do things like that!" *Chuck Colson, wrote an article entitled "The Problem of Power" in which he said, "Christians need to hold one another accountable. Though I know intellectually how vulnerable I am to pride and power, I am the last one to know when I succumb to their seduction. That's why spiritual Lone Rangers are so dangerous--and why we must depend on trusted brothers and sisters who love us enough to tell us the truth."* Power also breeds blindness! And that's why Paul wrote this challenge to Masters in Scripture! Don't see it as for someone else; see it as God speaking to YOU! Whether you're the CEO of a company or an elder or a Sunday School teacher or a doctor or the guy at the service counter helping a line of people or simply a mom or dad, listen, this command is for YOU and you need it:

III. The One Key Thing God Wants People In Authority To Do Is To Be Just Whenever you are in ANY situation where you exercise some degree of control over somebody else's life, God has put you in that place as His representative and He wants you to act like He acts! He wants you to be just! Now what does that mean? Well, from our text, it means three things. First:

1. He wants us to willingly meet the needs of those under us That word *provide* means *to reach forth, to offer*. It has the sense of willingness in it. Masters ought to willingly and freely supply their servants with the things they need to have a decent life. Employers ought to pay their employees wages and provide other benefits that allow them to live decently to whatever extent they can and they should WANT to do it! Teachers should WANT to give their students a good educational experience every day, one that thinks about what they really need in order to understand and grow. The person at the counter should really WANT to help the people in the line with their problems and any parent should every day WANT what is best in the long run for their children and not for themselves and mirror our Heavenly Father. That attitude of willing service to those under our care should pervade our lives. Secondly, Paul says:

2. He wants us to treat those under us rightly There should be **NO injustice**. Look with me at **1 Tim. 5:21**. The context is about how to deal with an elder who is accused of sin and it spells out what true justice means. When you deal with people under you, you should do it:

a. without prejudice That word *partiality* means *prejudice*, which is **making up your mind before the facts are known**. *Rom Eaton spent 16 years in prison even though he was innocent. At the end of that time behind bars, he made this observation: "I didn't have a dime in my pocket or a friend in the world when they put me on trial for armed robbery. That's why I spent 16 years in prison for a crime committed by two other men while I was 1,700 miles away. I am free now, completely vindicated. Life played a dirty trick on me in Circuit Court."* Somebody, a prosecutor and a jury, obviously made up their minds based on limited information before all the facts were known. You cannot let your treatment of a person be influenced by their appearance or race or by things that are purely circumstantial. You can't make up your mind ahead of time. By wrongly blaming your child or your student, you can make an impact every bit as devastating emotionally as what happened to Rom Eaton. Then, verse 21 adds that our treatment of those under us should be:

b. without partiality That word *favoritism* means *a prior inclination*; it means **bias based upon your own preference**. You may not like men to have long hair and earrings and dress in black leather or teenagers with an "in your face" attitude and torn blue jeans, but if you're in charge of them, you treat them the same as people who dress more "normal" in your eyes or who treat you more respectfully.

Doing what is right toward a person cannot be affected by your own feelings and must be based upon all the facts; it must not be about YOU but about them! And the third thing God tells us in Col. 4:1 is that:

3. He wants us to treat those under us equally That word *fair* is literally *equal*. Everyone under our charge gets treated alike; there is **NO favoritism**. James had a lot to say about that; look at **James 2:1-9**. Can't you just see that playing out on Sunday morning here at GBC? Some new visitor shows up in a three piece suit, kids all dressed spiffy and carrying their Bibles and we say, "Yes sir, sit right up here, let me escort you, we're so glad to have you!" And then

some homeless guy wanders in and he's dirty and doesn't smell good and we kind of hide him in a back corner somewhere and make sure he leaves quick! Oh, we'd never do that! Or would we? Or DO we? God wants us to treat every human being, especially those who are under us:

a. without discriminating because of appearance or economic status and we literally do this all the time, at least in our minds. But the real point was in verse 8, *Love your neighbor as yourself*. God expects us to:

b. have a genuine love for them as a fellow human being Your *neighbor* is anybody you run across who needs help, anybody you find lying in a ditch or who wanders in or who sits in your classroom or stands in line at your counter. God loves them simply because He made them and He expects us to love them as human beings just like ourselves, equally, regardless of how they look or their intelligence or how much money they seem to have or how well they speak our language! No discrimination! God wants us to serve those under us willingly, justly and equally, but there is one thing more:

4. He wants us to treat those under us kindly Turn with me to **Eph. 6:9**. In what *same way*? It refers back to the context of verses 5-8 where God tells servants how to act. It means:

a. we are to treat them the same way God wants them to treat us This is almost Jesus' Golden Rule, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!* Treat them with the same respect that God wants them to have for you, even though they're under your charge. Serve them and meet their needs genuinely; do it from your heart. Model it for them! Lead them by your example. Treat them with true kindness and gentleness and **SHOW** them the way God wants them to relate. And Paul makes a particular point here. He says, *Do not threaten them!* In other words:

b. we are not to use the fear of our authority to take advantage of them Of course, there is a day to tell the student that if he does not do his homework, he's going to fail the class. Sure, there's a day to tell the employee that if he keeps on goofing off, he's going to lose his job. Obviously, there's a moment to tell your child that if he lies to you, you are going to discipline him. Those are not threats; they're just being honest, telling the truth and stating facts, with the good of the person in mind. Threatening is, "Do what I want or I'm going to fire you." "Do this or I'm going to flunk you." Threatening is using your authority to make that person afraid of you in order to get what you want and Paul says, "Put it away!" Treat those under you kindly, not harshly. And that's tied right in with:

IV. The Warning God Gives To Those Who Have Authority Why should you do all this? *Col.4:1b ...because you know that you also have a Master in heaven*. Think about that! No matter how important you are. No matter how powerful you are. No matter if you're President of the United States or Chairman of the Board or Warden of the prison:

1. you have a Master in heaven, which means that **you are also a servant**. People may serve you; they may be under you, but you're also under Somebody and serving Somebody they way that they're under you and may be serving you. And guess what? **Eph. 6:9** says that:

2. He is your Master and also theirs You both serve the same Master and **you stand equal before Him!** Judge and convict, foreman and laborer, distinguished professor and freshman, elder and visitor, parent and child, ALL are servants of One and the same Master and answer to Him. And:

3. He does not discriminate! He has no favorites! He judges rightly between us and treats everyone with equal love. So, **your position will not afford you privilege!** You will have no license to mistreat those under your charge! If you abuse it, don't expect Him to overlook it!

The attitude God wants to build into us is the one displayed by a young man named Ross who had an interesting experience while working as a waiter during his college days: "I didn't know the couple who'd come into the restaurant. They were maybe in their mid-50s. Seemed like nice enough folks. I soon saw, though, that Kim, a new employee, was having a hard time with their order. She brought them the wrong entree, forgot their drinks, and was on the verge of tears because she believed the entree mix-up was their mistake, not hers. I saw she was upset, so I went over to offer my assistance. Kim pulled me aside and asked if I'd please take over waiting that table. She just couldn't work with this couple. I agreed. After I assured the couple that their order was coming and quickly brought them their drinks, they thanked me warmly. After their dinner arrived, I went to the manager and told him the story. I asked if we could give them their meals for free since there had been such a mix-up. The manager agreed. When I told the couple their dinners would be 'on the house,' they thanked me profusely. 'You've given us fine, fine service,' the man kept saying to me. As they were getting their coats, I went to say good-bye and thanked them again for coming. The man was removing his coat from the coatrack, and as he did, I saw the name of our restaurant chain on the back of his jacket. 'Oh, do you work for our chain?' I asked. 'No,' the man responded, 'I'm the owner of the chain.'" Ruth Senter, Ross' mother-in-law, comments: "I was proud of my son-in-law. He's not only a man of faith, but also one of integrity. By tending to the couple's needs as he did, without knowing who they were, Ross treated them as we should treat each other--and as Christ treats us." [Power for Living, Jan 21, 1996. Page 8.] Jesus said, *inasmuch as you did it to the least of these, my brethren, you did it unto Me.*

The way you treat those under your charge is the way you are treating the "Owner of Your Chain". *Masters, provide [those under your authority] with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.*

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

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1 Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming! **Three Tenses Of Our Christian Life - 1 Thess. 1**

In my devotional reading some weeks ago I came to the Thessalonian epistles and at the same time I was asking the Lord what we should study together next. It occurred to me (and I later double checked my files) that I had never preached a series on these books in my entire ministry and I took that as a nudge from the Holy Spirit that this was my answer. So here we go! Let me begin with a brief:

I. Introduction To 1 and 2 Thessalonians (1:1) Both letters begin with the exact same words. Paul wrote them to the believers in the city of Thessalonica and here's the background story as to how he came to write. On his second missionary journey, Paul and his missionary partner Silvanus (or Silas as he is called in Acts) and their young helper Timothy crossed from Asia Minor into Greece and the two were eventually imprisoned in the city of Philippi after planting the church there. Then God bailed them out with an earthquake and they all left town headed west along the main road to Rome, the Via Ignatia, which people still walk on today. 100 miles later they stopped at Thessalonica, the capital city of the Roman Province of Macedonia, a thriving commercial port with a population of about 200,000 in that day. Let's read the story of how:

1. Paul and Silas planted the church in Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-4 In those three weeks a good number of people already came to Christ, but his letters seem to indicate that Paul stayed on there a while longer, making tents and discipling these new converts, even though Acts does not mention it. However, ultimately:

2. they were torn away from these new believers after only several months by persecution which evidently continued after they left - Acts 17:5, 10 The mob did not find Paul, but the disturbance was great enough that these new brothers sent them all out of town for their own protection. Paul's description and reaction to this is in **(2:17)**. He was worried how they would survive in such a hostile environment. He desperately wanted to go back and make sure they were OK, but he couldn't. They went on 50 miles to Berea, but were run out of there in short order by angry Jews who had followed them from Thessalonica. So, leaving Silas and Timothy there to disciple these new believers, Paul caught a ship and sailed on 300 miles south to the city of Athens in the province of Achaia. Silas and Timothy caught up with him there, perhaps three months later, but he still could not get the Thessalonians out of his mind, so:

3. from Athens Paul sent Timothy back to encourage them and probably sent Silas back to Philippi **(3:1-2, 5)**. Paul was desperate to get news and find out whether these new believers were weathering the storm of persecution and wanted to send them someone to help and encourage them. So, they went off and after a difficult solo ministry there, Paul moved on to Corinth, where he continued for a year and a half. It was early in his ministry there, probably some 10 months after they had all left Thessalonica, when in **Acts 18:5**:

4. Timothy arrived and brought a good report to Paul at Corinth (3:6-7). So now Paul's heart was comforted at long last and immediately:

5. Paul wrote the first of these two letters, followed fairly shortly by the second letter. They are very personal letters, filled with Paul's own concern, joy and thanksgiving, unlike his more teaching-oriented letters like Romans or Ephesians. He wrote them for three reasons. First of all, like a good father he wanted:

a. to further encourage his spiritual children to persevere in persecution, to shore up their faith and help them to stand firm. Second, He wrote:

b. to refute some false charges that had been made to them by enemies against him and his associates in the time since he left. They were accusing him of seeking personal gain and other things that might lower the Thessalonians' trust in him and what he taught them. And most importantly, he wrote:

c. to deepen their understanding of proper behavior and the Lord's return Each of the five chapters of the first letter end by talking about the coming of the Lord and the second letter is just filled with it. It's as if in these letters Paul is saying, "Remember: Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming!" They show us how to live life in light of the powerful truth that Jesus IS coming!

So, let's embark on the study of Chapter 1 which is really an expression of how thankful Paul was for these dear folks he had left at Thessalonica, now that he knew at last just how well they were doing. Let's read **(2-10)**. See, Jesus is coming! But, going back to verse 2, Paul prayed for these dear folks all the time because they were on his heart. He prayed for *all of them*, and I'm sure that means he prayed for all those he knew personally by name, the way that we should. And as he thought of them and prayed, he was always filled with thankfulness to God for them. He was continually thanking God for them, and notice that:

II. Paul's Thankfulness For The Thessalonians Involved Three Tenses, past, present and future, and all three tenses are summed up in verse 3. First of all:

1. he prayerfully remembered their past "work of faith" (3a) He remembered the brief months he had spent with them and how they had come to believe in Jesus and how that faith had transformed and changed their lives, just as it had his own. Throughout the chapter he gives us more pieces of exactly what he remembered and it might do us good to look back at our own lives from time to time and be thankful for the transformation that our faith in Jesus has made in us. Look at verse (9a). The NET says, *...people everywhere report how you welcomed us...* Many of the people of Thessalonica were pretty hostile to Paul and his companions but, for some reason, these who believed had:

a. they welcomed the messengers and the message with openness Paul remembered how warmly he was received by them, how they were gracious to him and came to hear him time and time again and said, "Yes, we want to hear this; tell us more!" And they believed what they were being told as truth instead of dismissing it. THAT was the Holy Spirit! Most of us are not brought to faith like Paul was, knocked down, blinded and forcefully told to believe. Rather, somebody came to tell us and God moved in our hearts to receive that person warmly and to trust what they had to say to us, even though we might not have naturally been inclined to do that. Paul remembered that about the Thessalonians and also how, as they listened to him and the others:

b. they fell under deep conviction by the power of the Holy Spirit (5a) The Holy Spirit did His convicting work and they realized the awful situation they were in before God because of their many sins. They came to see that only Jesus could save them and their hearts turned to Him. I still remember the deep conviction I felt for some time before I received Christ, even at the age of 15. I was now listening to the preaching and the Holy Spirit made it real to me how lost I was, how my sins were separating me from God and how much I needed Jesus. Paul remembered that about the Thessalonians and then how, in the end:

c. they turned from false idols to serve the true and living God (9b) A great many of them were not Jews, but pagan Greeks and even Romans, who worshipped a whole pantheon of gods and goddesses, whose statues and temples were everywhere. But God enabled them to understand that there is only one true God and He's a living God; their gods were just dead lifeless idols! What a powerful thing that they would give up the false things they had worshipped all their lives and give themselves wholeheartedly to serve the real God, Jesus! We see it in India today when we go, how God moves these dear people when they hear the truth to realize that Jesus is alive and their statues and pictures that they have worshipped from infancy are lifeless nothings and they throw them away! What a miracle! Most of us, of course, didn't come from that kind of background but we still worshipped our own false idols; we were still serving the things that were our "gods", whether it was pleasure or personal advancement or acquiring material things. Whatever we lived for, whatever we pursued or served, God moved us to lay that down and serve Jesus with all of our hearts.

God's work to bring us to Christ was truly a miracle of grace and, like Paul, we should often pause to remember how He did that for us and thank Him for it. But as Paul thought about the Thessalonian believers, he also:

2. he prayerfully rejoiced in their present "labor of love" (3b) From that time when they had first turned to Christ, they had thrown themselves into vigorously laboring for Him out of the love they had for Him. In these intervening months they had been working hard for Jesus. To begin with:

a. they became imitators of Paul, and then ultimately of the Lord (5b-6a) Instead of living like pagans lived, a lifestyle where sexual immorality and drunkenness and dishonesty and revenge were prevalent, they did what we all did in our early days; they started to live like the person who brought them to Jesus. They imitated Paul and ultimately realized that it wasn't about living like Paul, but about living like Jesus. And so, our lives began to change; more and more we began to put away unholy things, things that displeased God, and began living a life that was increasingly holy, modeled after Jesus and His purity of thought and deed. As Paul prayed, he rejoiced over this change in their lives but also over the fact that:

b. their joy was not hindered by the persecution they encountered (6b) The same angry people that called the mob together and dragged some of the believers before the authorities and caused Paul to leave town were still there and you can imagine that they were not making life easy for these new believers after he left. But that never stopped them from continuing to serve Jesus and it didn't dampen their joy. We get so little of this here, but some of us really were given a hard time. We live in an environment or work or study in an environment where people are angry and upset that we believe in Jesus and serve Him. Maybe our own family members were upset with us. But, like the Thessalonians, that didn't stop us because we had found a joy in our hearts in what Jesus did for us, a joy that the world never gave us and that the world could never take away from us! Paul rejoiced in how they had joyfully stood firm in their faith, refusing to give it up, but even more than that, in how:

c. they "radiated" the Gospel throughout their region (8a) They became evangelists like Paul! They zealously shared the Gospel which had changed their lives with their friends and neighbors and relatives and, like a stone thrown into a puddle, it began to ripple outward in rings throughout their own province of Macedonia and the south-

ern state of Achaia. It rang out from them like an echo in the mountains repeated over and over as it bounces on out of hearing. As Silas and Timothy returned to Paul in Corinth overland, they found people who had heard the Gospel and believed because of what started in Thessalonica when Paul was there 10 months earlier! I remember when I first really got serious about surrendering my life to the Lord at 19, I wanted to share about Him. I looked for opportunities among my college classmates. I prayed for opportunities with the people I knew and I saw several people come to Jesus in those early days. I remember what a thrill that was to see God work and arrange Divine appointments and change hearts. Paul rejoiced over how these folks had so passionately shared the Good News about the Lord and were continuing to do so. But that was not the only thing that had become known:

d. the testimony of their lives also “radiated” everywhere (7, 8b-9) Throughout the whole region everybody was talking about the tremendous change that had come over this group in Thessalonica, how they had thrown away their idols and were serving Jesus and living morally clean lives. The whole story of how Paul had come and they had believed was already being told and retold all over the place, so much so that Paul didn't need to add anything to what people already knew! When Paul was transformed by Jesus, his reputation spread all over his home region. He says, *I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”* The testimony of the tremendous change in him spread widely even to those who didn't know him. The same happened to the Thessalonians and the same will be true of us. The testimony of the change in our lives will radiate far and wide; our love for Christ will become widely known and impact and encourage others.

Paul truly rejoiced to see his beloved children in the faith having a love for Jesus that was so zealous that the message and their reputation had spread far and wide in such a short time. But his thanksgiving was not done:

3. he prayerfully reveled in their future focus, in their “steadfastness of hope” (3c) When he was with them, he had taught them the simple basic truths of the faith and one of those is this: Jesus IS coming again. And Timothy must have reported to Paul how everyone knew that the Thessalonians were:

a. they were waiting patiently, expecting Jesus to come again (10) These crazy people were living in hope; they were staking their all on something that they were absolutely certain was going to happen in the future. And none of the difficulties and pressures that they were enduring was enough to shake that hope. You see, they believed that:

(1) Jesus is God's living Son, as was proved by His resurrection We celebrate that at Easter, but I sometimes wonder whether we really get the message. If Jesus is risen then He's ALIVE right now! He's not just a historical person who came and died for our sins and rose long ago, He's alive right now. We can talk to Him; He can talk to us! And one day:

(2) He will literally come down “from the heavens” just as He left When God's plan for this age is all wrapped up and finished, He will get up off His throne in heaven and come back for us! Oh, hardly nobody believes that any more. Large segments of the Christian church have virtually abandoned the concept for all practical purposes. Jesus is only there for us after we die “spiritually” - maybe; the world will just go on and on as it is. No, no, no, He's living, in a glorious, real, resurrected body and one day He is going to rend the heavens and come down. In fact, He's going to come with all the armies of heaven and set up His Kingdom and rule on the earth! How's that for alive and real! Our Jesus is real enough that He's going to show up in person and we, like the Thessalonians, are just crazy enough to believe He's coming and be waiting expectantly for it to happen! But there's more; Paul says:

b. they were confident that He will deliver us from the “coming wrath” Now what does that mean? Well, Paul taught clearly, John taught clearly, in fact JESUS taught clearly that:

(1) a time is coming when God will pour out His wrath on the human race for their utter rebellion against Him. We call it the Tribulation Period or the **Great Tribulation**, as Jesus described it. From Revelation and Daniel, we know that this awful time of trouble will last for 7 years and that it will immediately precede Jesus' return to the earth to set up His thousand year reign which we call the Millennium. It will be an awful time, Jesus taught, unlike anything the world has ever seen before or since - and the world has already seen some awful stuff! It will be so bad, He said, that if God had not limited it and cut it short, the entire human race would be destroyed. However, the Thessalonians were not looking to enter and go through that horrible time. Rather, Paul had taught them to believe that:

(2) by His coming Jesus will rescue us “away from” that awful period. The Greek uses a special preposition. Jesus is coming *from* (the ordinary word, *from*) heaven, but He is coming to deliver us, to rescue us *away from* (a different preposition) that time of wrath. He's not going to protect and preserve us to live through it; He's going to come and lift us out of this world to Himself before it ever starts. We call that the Rapture of the Church. Like the Thessalonians, we're not only crazy enough to believe Jesus will come again, but to believe that He will take us all up into the air to meet Him and go safely to heaven with Him, while the unbelieving world endures the

awful wrath of God! Why? Because ...*God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ -5:9!* Hallelujah! Jesus is coming for us!

Oh, how glad Paul was that they got that and they believed that and they were living like they believed that. He rejoiced every time he prayed for them because of all these things, so in his letter:

III. Paul Assured Them These Responses Prove God Has Chosen Them to belong to Him **(4)**. Because of their work of faith, their labor of love and their endurance of hope, because everybody knew these things about them, Paul says, "I KNOW that you are genuine, that you are real, that you are actually among the elect, the ones God has chosen to belong to Him forever. Their transformed lives were the evidence of their tremendous privilege of belonging to Jesus for real. His heart was settled and assured concerning them at last.

Let me ask you a question. If Paul knew you and was remembering you and was getting news about you, would he have that same assurance? Is there in your life a deep faith that produces works? Is there a fervent love that serves Christ with joy and spreads the word concerning Him and your own testimony everywhere you go? And is there a steadfast looking for Jesus to come again from heaven and take you to be with Him? *A. B. Simpson says Christ's return can be viewed by believers in at least two ways. He writes, "There is a looking FOR it and a looking AT it. We may regard it with a keen intellectual interest and yet have it mean nothing to us personally. On the other hand, we may know little about the theology involved in the subject and still enjoy a deep longing for the Lord's appearing. Let me illustrate. When a wedding occurs, the public looks AT it, but the bride has been looking FOR it. May the theme of the return of Christ not only be our study but also our personal hope, for 'unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.'"* An unknown poet has written:

*"What would He find, should He come just now;
A faded leaf or a fruitless bough;
A servant sleeping, an idle plow;
What would He find should He come just now?
What would He find should He come tonight,
Your garment soiled or a spotless white;
Your lamps all burning or with no light;
What would He find should He come tonight?"*

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Effectively Making Disciples - 1 Thess. 2:1-12

I shared with you last week as we began our study of 1 Thessalonians that these two letters are very personal in nature, that Paul was constantly praying for these dear new believers in Thessalonica and remembering the special time he had with them there as they first came to faith in Jesus. I mentioned that one of the concerns Paul had was that evidently some enemies were trying to discredit him so that the believers would be tempted to think less of him and of the message that he had brought to them, which they had believed. That's what prompts Paul to begin the second chapter with this thought in verse **(1)**. The NET translates more clearly: *For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, about our coming to you – it has not proven to be purposeless.* "You know that it was effective because it changed your lives!" To the Corinthians Paul wrote something similar, *If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.* - 1 Cor. 9:2. In other words, "YOU, the fact that YOU have become what you are, fervent followers of Jesus with transformed lives, YOU are the proof, the seal, the guaranteeing evidence that I am a genuine servant of Christ and that my coming to you was effective!" Paul's brief ministry to the Thessalonians was indeed powerfully effective, as we saw in chapter 1, so, as he goes on to review in more detail what his time among them was like, we can apply that to our own lives. As he reviews in verses **(2-6)** the way in which he came to Thessalonica and shared the Gospel with those who were interested, we can see:

I. The Qualities That Make Us Effective In Sharing With Non-believers Let's read **(2)**. First of all, to be effective:

1. our sharing must be bold, undaunted by fear of consequences As I told you last time, Paul came to Thessalonica from Philippi. If you remember the story, Paul and Silas cast a demon out of a slave woman and her owners dragged them into the marketplace to the magistrates who literally tore their clothes off of them and had them beaten with rods as a punishment. This was a Roman form of punishment but it could not be applied to Roman citizens, as it was considered degrading. One source says: *The rods were usually made of birch wood, and the Roman soldiers would beat their victims mercilessly all over their entire body.* [<http://jerichoventures.com/beaten-with-rods/>]. Acts says they were beaten with MANY blows and then, cut and bleeding, severely bruised and in terrible agony, they dragged them into the town prison and fastened their feet in wooden stocks so that they couldn't move or stand up and left them there to spend the night in the cold! That's what Paul means when he says, *we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi!* Now, if that had just happened to you, and you walked 100 miles down the road to the next town, do you think you would be a little more hesitant to get up in public and preach? I probably would, but Paul wasn't; he immediately got up three sabbath days in a row and preached Jesus in the synagogue and kept on going afterward! The fear that suffering might come (again) didn't hinder him at all! Of course, here we're not so much afraid

of physical suffering if we share, yet often things like embarrassment, rejection, discrimination or something like that make us afraid to share with others. And that is Satan's tool to stop us from sharing our life-giving message. Now, I'm not saying that you have to accost everyone you meet wherever you go and obnoxiously foist yourself upon them as some believers do. I'm just saying that if we want to be effective in sharing, we have to be unafraid to take risks, to not live in fear of what might happen. Then Paul says this **(3)**. Second principle:

2. our sharing must never come out of wrong motives, just like Paul. He mentions three of them:

a. we must be sure our message contains no error, that all of what we are communicating about Jesus is true and that we do our best to make sure our listeners don't misunderstand what we're saying. When we stand up and say, "Come to Jesus and He will absolutely heal you if you only have enough faith" or "Jesus will give you absolutely anything you pray for because He wants His children to be materially prosperous", we misrepresent Jesus. And there are believers all over the world doing irreparable damage to hearts and lives because they are bent on spreading their pet error along with the truth! You may not realize how I try to make sure that everything I say to you is true; I try to even verify every illustration I use as much as possible, to double check any statistics I share, to dig deeply to be certain of what a word or a verse really means, to make sure that I'm not spreading error along with the truth because truth matters very much to God. We must be sure we're not promoting error. Next:

b. we must be sure our lives contain no impurity That is, we must be people who have integrity, who live the way that we SAY people should live. Our walk must match our talk. If there is a hint of immoral desire or of dishonesty or of hot temper or any other unholy quality, it will invalidate our message. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." And not only will it keep people from hearing, it will dishonor the reputation of the Lord Jesus whom we are trying to share with them! And finally:

c. we must be sure our methods contain no deception, no trickery. All the time in Kyrgyzstan new believers are accused of "selling their religion"; the culture assumes they must have been paid to convert. Among poor cultures like those in India or Africa we must beware of making "rice Christians", people who choose to believe what we say and join us because we feed them or give some other personal advantage. Jungle villages in the Amazon want their own missionary couple to come because they get machetes and axes and trade goods. Like Paul, we must be careful never to lure people toward believing with false promises or improper expectations. Third, look at verse **(4)**. Paul says that:

3. our sharing must come from an overwhelming drive to please God That must be our deepest and most profound motive. We share the Good News with others, not even as much out of concern for them and their eternal destiny, as out of an overpowering desire to do what God has asked us to do. Notice it says:

a. He entrusted us with delivering the Gospel message That is a sacred trust. It's on the order of knowing the cure for cancer or aids, something that could save millions of lives. We can't fail to deliver the news of something so vital and God put the responsibility for delivering His Good News to the world squarely in our hands. He signed off on choosing us to do it and left it with us, so:

b. our first concern must be to please Him who knows our very hearts by sharing it with the people who so desperately need it. Then Paul mentions three things, things that are really issues of the heart, that cannot be part of our sharing. The first is in **(5a)**:

(1) we cannot share because we seek acceptance by people What is flattery? It's when you praise somebody insincerely for your own interests, to ingratiate yourself with them and be accepted by them. Our first concern for nonbelieving people can never be that we want them to like us and accept us and stop rejecting us or being offended by our message. It can't be that in our hearts we really want them to like us and that's why we want to see them believe. It's about them liking Jesus. Secondly, look at **(5b)**:

(2) we cannot share because we seek gain from people, because we want something from them in some fashion, because we hope that if they believe they'll be a help to us in some way. It can't be that in our hearts we really want them to do something for us; it's about them serving Jesus. And thirdly, look at **(6a)**. Paul says:

(3) we cannot share because we seek praise from people, because when we do, they complement us or say nice things about us that make us feel good. It can't be so that we'll be thought to be religious or pious or godly by them; it's about them giving praise to Jesus, not us.

It can be such a subtle thing that creeps in. Pride and self-centeredness are never far from us, even when we are doing something so important, something that is not about us, because sin still lives in our flesh.

Well, now Paul moves on to remind the Thessalonians about the way in which he lived among them once they had come to faith, so as we look at verses **(6b-12)** we can learn from him:

II. The Qualities That Make Us Effective In Discipling New Believers, in helping them grow and mature and gradually change into the image of Christ. I should point out that since there are neither verse numbers nor punctuation in the

Greek, there is some debate as to whether the thought in the end of verse 6 really belongs with the first part of the verse or with the first part of verse 7, so I'm going to read it that way **(6b-7)**. The first principle Paul gives us for growing new believers is that:

1. we must become gentle with them And he describes what he means by using a wonderful image. He says:

a. we must nourish them with tender patience like a nursing mother caring for her own baby. Parents don't get angry at their baby when he messes his diaper or when he throws up on their shoulder. They don't treat him roughly when he cries because he disturbs their sleep or wants them to feed him. We're always tender, we're always soft and gentle with an infant and careful to do for him all the things that nourish him so that he will grow. And that's how we should be with people who are infants in the faith. That gentle, loving, tender treatment is what will help them mature and grow in Jesus, whether we're talking about discipling our own children or others that have recently come to faith. That's why Paul chose not to do the opposite, to demand that they now stop everything they were doing and immediately do everything in a new and different way. He's showing us that:

b. we ought not demand behavior in an authoritarian manner We can't use our authority as those who gave them the message to order them about and tell them that now they must do this and that. It is so easy for them to learn to perceive their new faith as a religion of do's and don'ts, to make it about rules instead of a loving relationship with Jesus in which we seek to please Him in all things. When you demand things in an authoritarian fashion, you may get obedience for a time, but eventually you'll get rebellion or create frustration. Gentle, patient love is what really bears fruit. Second, let's read verse **(8)**. Paul admonishes us that:

2. we must share our lives with them, not just the message Chuck Swindoll writes, *"For a number of years after I became a Christian, I messed around with spiritual things... I ran around with church folks, I learned the God-talk, I sang the hymns, I even memorized the verses. I prayed pretty good prayers, I carried my Bible to church Sunday after Sunday, I sang in the choir... But my life was MY life... I was a Christian, but certainly not a disciple." Then he joined the Marines and he testifies, "While overseas I met a man who saw behind my tough mask and was determined to help me come to terms with the Christ I claimed as my Savior. He disciplined me. Month after month, we met together, talked together, played ball together, laughed together, wept and prayed together, studied the Scriptures and witnessed for Christ together. Like Jesus with His men, this man took the time to help me peel off my mask of religion and absorb the authentic message of Christ. I found myself slowly changing down deep inside. I got to the place where I hated the hypocrisy of my former religious lifestyle. I got into the Scriptures on my own, and they became my bread and meat. I even addressed the priorities, the goals, and the objectives of my life. I opened each door of my inner house to let Christ in, room after room. Not suddenly, but slowly. Quietly."* [Strengthening Your Grip by Charles Swindoll. Word, 1982. Pages 123-125.] That's what I think Paul is talking about. It's not enough to simply teach people what Jesus wants; we must live life together with them under all kinds of circumstances so that our lives literally "rub off" on theirs! And as we're doing it:

a. we must long for their growth to maturity That's what Paul means when he says he was *affectionately desirous* of them. He longed for them to grow up in their salvation, to change, to mature, to bloom to become all that Jesus wanted them to be. And that longing is a longing based on love for them. That's what Paul means when he says *...you became very dear to us...*

b. we must come to love them unconditionally They must literally become beloved. That word *dear* has the word *agape* in it; we must love them more dearly than ourselves, sacrificially, putting them first, the way Jesus loves us! That's what will really rub off on them and mature them! Then look at verse **(9)**. There's another principle:

3. we must not become dependent on them as we're teaching them How was Paul going to survive as he came to Thessalonica? He certainly didn't have much money with him and there was no "support structure" for his missionary endeavors. He either had to depend on the hospitality of those who believed or to work and earn money. So he chose to work and to work hard at his craft, which was making tents. Everybody needs a tent, don't you know? Why did he do this? He didn't want to burden the new believers with supporting him, even though that would have been entirely proper. He didn't want them to have even the opportunity to get the idea that he was profiting by their faith, that he had come to them to "get something" from them. So, he taught them even as he worked night and day! We must be careful in the same way to be sure that we are not a burden on those we are discipling in the faith, that we are not depending on them to help us or meet our needs, whether physical or emotional, in a way that they could misconstrue. And of course:

4. we must be an example of holy, righteous and blameless conduct (10) The word *holy* here refers to the fact that we must be an example in our devotedness to God. *Righteous* refers to our right and just conduct toward other people and *blameless* means that we live so that no one can point a finger at us and charge us with doing something wrong. If we want them to grow to exhibit the character of Christ and the fruits of the Spirit, we have to model that kind of godly behavior in front of them and together with them, on an ongoing basis. And finally, look at **(11-12)**. Paul says:

5. we must train them as a good father does his children We must be tender with them like a mother but at the same time train them and shape them like a father, and Paul spells out three aspects of that. First, *exhorting* means:

a. we must passionately urge them to live in a manner worthy of God, like a father continually urges his children to remember what God wants of them. That phrase *worthy of God* is worth pausing to ponder. Since we belong to God and we represent God, we must always live in a way that not only pleases Him, but represents Him well. He has called us to belong to His Kingdom. He has called us to share in His glory. He is coming to take us to be with Him and experience it. We should live in a manner befitting all that God has done and will do with us! What a great principle to instill in your kids as you have opportunity in every teaching moment God gives you, as well as in new believers! Second, like a father:

b. we must tenderly comfort and encourage them in their trials They will fail; they will mess up. They will fall back into old ways and habits at first. They will yield to temptation. And a good father, instead of condemning them, will encourage them to do better next time, to lean on the Holy Spirit instead of their own strength. Failures will become teaching moments. They will also endure painful suffering in life, maybe even persecution, and a good father is there to put his arms around them and comfort them and console them, urging them to hold to the faith and keep on. And lastly, like a good father:

c. we must testify to them of our personal experience with God That word *charge* is literally to *testify to*. We have to tell them what we have seen and heard and learned of God. We have to tell them the great things God has done for us, how He saved us, how He answered our prayers, how He rescued us and healed us and protected us. Any good father is a story teller and his children love it. So do young believers. We must tell them of the great works of God that we have seen to build up their own faith!

Yes, it seems that effectively making disciples is a lot like raising children! And conversely, raising children actually IS making disciples of them! An unknown author describes the role of a good father like this:

He teaches kindness by being thoughtful and gracious even at home.

He teaches patience by being gentle and understanding over and over.

He teaches honesty by keeping his promises to his family even when it costs. He teaches courage by living unafraid with faith, in all circumstances.

He teaches justice by being fair and dealing equally with everyone.

He teaches obedience to God's Word by precept and example as he reads and prays daily with his family.

He teaches love for God and His Church as he takes his family regularly to all the services.

His steps are important because others follow.

I think that's essentially what Paul is trying to say to us about being effective in making disciples, whether they are our own children or others we have brought to Christ. We teach with our lives even more than our words and each step we take is important because others follow. It's a huge responsibility to say as he did: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* - 1 Cor. 11:1. Are we willing to truthfully say that?

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Enduring In The Face Of Persecution - 1 Thess. 2:13-20, 3:3-4

As we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians in chapter 2, Paul is continuing to look back at the brief time he spent with them there in Thessalonica and remembering the persecution that erupted there. Acts 17 tells us that after only three weeks, so many people had believed Paul and joined in meeting with him that the Jews became so jealous and angry about his message that he was forced to quit speaking in the synagogue and only meet with the new disciples in their homes. Then, after only a few weeks more, the Jews became so upset that they gathered some troublemakers and formed a mob, attacking one of the house meetings in Jason's house, obviously looking for Paul. They had hoped to drag him out and let the mob deal with him physically, but since he wasn't there, they dragged Jason and some others of the group before the authorities, creating an uproar in the whole city in the process. The magistrates fined them and released them, but now the whole city was set against them and that's the hostile environment in which this fledgling church was left to grow when Paul left town. And that didn't go away, yet still the church grew and multiplied and its influence was felt throughout two whole provinces. So how is that possible? How do we endure persecution when it comes, as the Thessalonians did, despite the fact that they were so young in the faith? Paul gives them and us several very important truths in his letter and the first one is in verse (13).

I. Our Foundation: The Message We Believed Is The Very Word of God When Paul preached at Athens later on, the Athenians responded by saying, ...*"May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean."* - Acts 17:19-20. To them the Gospel was just some new idea, some "strange things" they had never heard before, some "new teaching" that somebody dreamed up. When the Thessalonians heard Paul's message, in their hearts they said, "This is God's message; this is HIS word. It is truth." And they believed it! That is the fundamental issue that every one of us has to face before anything else. Is the

message which is now written down for us and contained in this Book, actually the Word of God, the very WORDS of God Himself or not?

1. it is vital that we grasp that it is not merely the words of men Now, you have to realize that for many centuries most people who knew about it, thought it WAS the Word of God; some simply chose to defy it anyway! But about 1900 a movement arose in Europe which is known as the "Higher Criticism" of the Bible. Its basic premise was that the Bible is a human book written by fallible human authors and, while they might have some good things to say, ultimately, WE must decide what parts of it are truly from God and what parts can be disregarded because we now know better. That movement spread like wildfire. The college I went to taught the Bible like that. The seminary I attended taught it like that. The majority of colleges and a good number of seminaries in the US today teach it like that. In pulpit after pulpit across our land and even in other regions of the world, that's the way it is presented. It is "inspiring" but we only believe those parts that "inspire" us! Each one of us has to choose for ourselves. Is this the actual Word of God Himself or is it merely some good human words? If that's all we believe it is, it will have little effect and little impact on our lives and it surely will not sustain us when somebody says they're going to kill us if we don't stop believing it. But if we believe this Word truly is from God, as the Thessalonians did:

2. because it is God's word, it works powerfully in our lives Knowing what GOD says is powerful and when we yield to it, it transforms us. It changes our lives and our behavior. It sustains us when we face trouble and suffering. If we are convinced that what God says is true, then we live in that as our reality and that gives us power to stand firm when others try to dissuade us or even harm us and hate us. If we are right with God and know what He says about us, His love for us, our salvation and our eternal future, then nothing else in the world matters as much as that and we are able to stand firm and endure, even when persecution comes. Paul was so thankful to know that the Thessalonians were standing on the Word as he went on to verse (14). Here we see:

II. Our Heritage: The Suffering Of Persecution The early believers in Jerusalem and Judea were the first to experience persecution. It began with the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, arresting the apostles, but soon Stephen was stoned and at that point serious persecution broke out. Believers fled out of the city into the Judean towns to escape it. And at the root of it was Saul (now Paul) himself in those early days, leading the charge, pursuing them everywhere to drag them off to jail and worse. Paul knew firsthand what he had done. And now, he says, the same thing had happened to the Thessalonians. In the same way, their own countrymen were now making life hard for them and persecuting them and, like the Jewish believers before them, they were also standing firm. Now I'd like to skip ahead to the third chapter and look at just two verses, because in them Paul explains what he had already taught the Thessalonians and from it we can learn:

1. what is true about us - 3:3-4 Read those words carefully. Paul says:

a. we are destined to suffer persecution It is not simply that it is inevitable; we are destined to suffer it; we are appointed to have to face it by God Himself. It is our lot, our very heritage as Christians. All genuine believers face persecution for their faith at some level. Look with me at **2 Tim. 3:12**. It is not just for believers who live in certain parts of the world; it is for all of us. Open Doors says, *Christian Persecution is any hostility experienced from the world as a result of one's identification with Jesus Christ... Jesus also defines the word for us in Luke 6:22 using four verbs. He says, "Blessed are you when men HATE you, when they EXCLUDE you and INSULT you and REJECT YOUR NAME as evil, because of the Son of Man."* So, when someone holds animosity toward you because of your faith, when they discriminate against you and refuse to help you, when they insult you and call you names, or when they count you as being evil and wrong, all of those things that we might experience here are persecution, as well as the torture, murder, rape, and imprisonment that our brothers and sisters suffer in some places around the world. Never assume that severe persecution cannot happen here; it easily can. and maybe will, depending on the direction our country takes. But regardless, all of us will experience persecution to some degree or other in our lives. Therefore, just as Paul had taught this to the Thessalonians very early on:

b. we have been taught this and must expect it The New Testament teaches this everywhere. After Paul had been stoned earlier at Lystra, he got up and went back into the city and, in fact, to the last three cities where he had been run out of town, *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.* - **Acts 14:22**. He taught these new believers to expect troubles and persecutions like the ones he had just experienced, that it is our lot and our destiny to experience these things before we finally enter our home in God's Kingdom at last. That was a large part of Paul's discipleship course! In the Upper Room before He died, Jesus taught His disciples the same thing. Look at **Jn. 15:18-20**. You don't find that in many of the study helps for new believers! I don't ever remember hearing a Sunday School teacher give a lesson on it or even a pastor preach it. Yet Jesus and Paul taught it as basic information, "If you sign up to follow Jesus, you sign up to fight in a war and the enemy WILL throw everything he has at you including persecution; expect it!" It is natural; it is normal. It is the way things are. And:

c. this knowledge keeps us from being shaken by it The Scripture tells us this ahead of time so that we will expect it before it happens, recognize it when it occurs and our faith won't be shaken by it. Peter said, *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to*

you. - **1 Pet. 4:12.** Persecution is not strange; it is normal! And through it God will prove both to you and to the world that your faith is the genuine article. He will get glory through your testimony! That's what's true about us. Now let's return to chapter 2 where we can see:

2. what is true about those who persecute us (14b-16) Here Paul is continuing to spell out what the Jews did in their persecution and I'd like to apply it by saying that what was true of them is true of everyone who persecutes us believers in any time and place. First of all:

a. their kind killed and persecuted those who went before us Those who went before us endured the same thing. The Old Testament prophets experienced it. Persecutors sawed Isaiah in half; they threw Jeremiah into a cistern to die. Zechariah (not the author of the Old Testament book) was slain in the Temple itself. Others they persecuted and drove out. Our Lord Jesus Himself they crucified! And people like that drove Paul out of Thessalonica and a great majority of the other places he ever visited for very long! Down through the ages they have thrown us to lions and burned us at the stake and beheaded us on the shores of Libya. When we endure persecution of whatever sort, we stand in a long line of the faithful who have endured for Jesus' sake. Jesus said, *Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* In other words, you're in good company, the best company, the company of all the faithful witnesses that have gone before and stood the test. You are one of them and great will be your reward! Second our persecutors:

b. they displease God even though they think they are pleasing Him Jesus said, *...in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.* - *Jn. 16:2.* That time has already come many times in history and you're seeing it again now. Terrorists fly planes into buildings thinking they are pleasing God and slit the throats of believers to shock the world because they believe Allah is thrilled! But God is NOT pleased when people like this harm His children! He is GREATLY displeased and what makes it worse is:

c. they are enemies of all men because they hinder our saving efforts Their hostility keeps the Gospel from being preached and in essence, sends people to an eternity without Christ. If government and religious leaders would just get out of the way in places like the Middle East and China and Central Asia and a host of other lands, literally millions could be swept into the Kingdom! Persecutors of Christians are in reality enemies to all of mankind, but Paul says:

d. their sins are piling up and up and up, however, God has a limit and when their sins have expanded to their fullness, to all that God will tolerate, **God's wrath will fall upon them.** That's true of particular individuals and groups. God only tolerates their persecuting of His children so long before they meet their doom. That phrase points especially to that end time period we call the tribulation when God will pour out His wrath powerfully on a world that has rejected His message of salvation and persecuted His children, piling up their sins to the limit so that He cannot wait in mercy any longer. And the Scripture says, *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* - *Heb. 10:31.* They may be free to make us suffer today, but unless they repent, their doom is coming, because Jesus is coming! And still we're called to love our enemies, to pray for them and to seek their salvation in spite of all they do to us!

Now Paul shifts gears in our text. He begins to talk about the thing that broke his heart in it all. And in that we are able to see:

III. Our Heartache: The Enduring Of Separation (17-18) That persecution in Thessalonica had forced Paul to be separated from those he loved:

1. persecution often separates us from one another Millions of us around the world have literally been driven away from our towns, our homes and our loved ones as refugees. Hostile governments and officials keep us from being near those we love in Jesus. Paul uses a special word in (17a) where he says he was *torn away* from them. The Greek term contains the word *orphan* in the middle of it. They were literally *orphaned*, left without a parent when he was driven out. So, when persecution comes and we are driven apart, in one sense:

a. it is actually a form of bereavement The pain of being cut off is like losing someone altogether in death. There is a deep grieving that we experience, as Paul did, and yet:

b. it does not quench the love that we have for one another Our hearts are still bound as one, even though we can't be with each other or communicate with each other. And on top of the separation:

2. our desire for reunion may be repeatedly thwarted Paul says he deeply wanted to come back to them, that he tried for months to make a way to return to them, not just once, but again and again, yet through one circumstance or another he was just never able to do it. And he describes this frustrating process by saying at the end of verse 18 that:

a. Satan is the immediate cause of hindering us I personally wish Paul had explained exactly how Satan hindered him, but I'm sure that he used both hostile people and adverse circumstances to do it. Satan is at the root of driving people to try to stop our ministry and lining up circumstances to stop us from serving Christ or from being

reunited with those we love in the Lord. He does everything he can possibly do to hurt us and thwart the work of God from going forward, but:

b. ultimately God chooses to allow these hindrances to happen Satan is not in control. God limits what he can do to serve His greater purpose. Therefore, God allowed Paul to be hindered from going back to Thessalonica for reasons and purposes known only to Him and Paul had to accept that. So must we. When persecution, hostility and adverse circumstances keep us from ministering and serving and being joined to people we love in the Lord, it has not taken God by surprise; He may have let Satan do these things, but ultimately, He has a plan and a purpose and we must trust Him to fulfill it, regardless of whether our earthly longings ever get satisfied or not. And we can do that for the reason expressed in **(19-20)**. Didn't I tell you? Jesus is coming! And:

3. our great longing for each other will be fulfilled at Jesus' coming When we stand reunited with one another before His throne, that will be our joy; that will be our glory, the thing that makes us shout praise to God; that will be our great reward, our crown that makes us boast, "See, it was worth it all!" That is our hope, the thing we have fixed our eyes upon with absolute certainty and the thing we are willing to endure torments of the enemy to reach. We will stand together around His throne, forever reunited, never to part again.

So don't lose hope! Don't give up! Keep standing firm on God's Word! Jesus is coming and when He does, it will be worth it all! On Feb. 15 the world watched in horror as ISIS militants lined up 21 captured believers on the seashore in Libya and tortured and beheaded them. It was intended to strike fear into the hearts of the whole world, but especially of Christians. It was to send the powerful message, "We are coming for YOU!" But Sam Solomon, himself a convert from Islam, writes this: *Unbeknownst to the executioners, this apocalyptic moment-by-moment staged filming of the process of torture and beheading of these 20 Christian workers from Egypt and one from Africa accomplished what for ISIS was an unwanted and unforeseen result—as it echoed in living color the prophecy in Revelation that foretold this event as recorded in the vision by the Apostle John from his captivity on the island of Patmos, "... and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus, and because of the word of God..." (Rev. 20:4). Thus, the intended "victory" proclaimed by their executioners was instantly and permanently nullified by the steadfast voices of the 21 -- putting their trust in Christ to sustain them, not in whispers but in shouts, "Yasouh, Yasouh, Jesus, Jesus", even as the deed was being done—literally for the world to see and hear!! And we know this was not the end of the story, according to the promise of our Lord in Rev. 2:10, "...Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."* <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/international-persecution/victory-over-isis-found-in-last-words-uttered-by-christians>. Like the great company of witnesses that had gone before them, from the apostles and the Thessalonians down through history, they stood firm and would not deny the Lord who bought them, staking their eternity on being with Jesus and the fact that one day Jesus is coming in glorious victory to set up His Kingdom. Oh, all that we have seen this morning should encourage us to stand firmly for Him wherever He puts us in life and share His message!

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Encouraging Those Who Face Persecution - 1 Thess. 3

As Paul was laboring diligently for the Lord in Corinth, his mind was continually on those dear new believers 300 miles to the north in Thessalonica that he had been so suddenly torn away from 10 months earlier. His mind was in agony over them because of the serious persecution which had driven him away and which he knew they had to live with all this time. Had they stood firm in their faith in Jesus and what could he do to help them? These questions plagued him. Earlier, from Athens, he had sent Timothy back to do whatever he could to help them and to bring him back a report of how they were doing to calm his own fears. And sure enough, Timothy arrived where Paul was at Corinth and brought him just a glowing report and out of the joy of that arrival comes this first letter that he wrote them and particularly this third chapter of it. Paul's words in this chapter are tender and personal, written as it seems by a father for his children, but, as with everything in Scripture, it was also written for our edification. We can learn from it. So, as we see Paul's care for these dear believers who faced persecution, we can learn a great deal about:

I. The Deep Concern We Should Have For Those Who Face Persecution I'm afraid that we here think that there are very few who face it, but the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention shares the following five facts about Christian persecution. 1) *Christians are the most persecuted religious group worldwide. An average of 180 Christians around the world are killed each month for their faith.* 2) *According to the U.S. Department of State, in more than 60 countries Christians face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors because of their faith in Christ.* 3) *One of the worst countries in the world for the persecution of Christians is North Korea. ...Christians in North Korea face the risk of detention in the prison camps, severe torture and, in some cases, execution for practicing their religious beliefs.* 4) *In 41 of the 50 worst nations for persecution, Christians are being persecuted by Islamic extremists.* 5) *Christians face persecution even in countries with a large Christian population. For instance, in Colombia Christian political rebels specifically target leaders because many people have left the rebel groups after coming to Christ.* As of last November, according to Fox News, a total of 3.2 MILLION Christians and other religious minorities had fled their homes in Syria and Iraq, driven out by ISIS militants, and are living in refugee camps in surrounding nations! We cringe at statistics

like those and think, "But what can we do, besides give money to relief organizations? How can we even pray effectively for such massive things?" So, think about those who are persecuted that we know. Our partner David Dayasagar in South India found this posted note recently, *"Your Christianity is a 'PROBLEM', so our mission is 'RECONVERSION'. Now onwards NO CHRISTIANITY... NO BIBLE... Either convert or leave our 'HINDU NATION' soon. Will erase Christianity by 2021... We are ready to die for 'Hindu Nationalism'.* David and all the HBA evangelists and the new believers in the villages live constantly be under the threat of violence. Our partner Pari lived under constant surveillance when she was in NW China and fear of deportation and had to meet in secret with any new believers. Our many friends in Kyrgyzstan, like my friend Almaz, are often threatened in the villages and not allowed to bury their dead in the cemeteries. Our partners Lamin and Nene Kante in Guinea have lived with threats from Muslim Fulani for years. For years David and Angela Morris helped believers who escaped from Iran to the island of Cyprus to find a new life. Persecution is closer to us than we think; it affects people that we know and love and when we realize that it moves us, the same way that it did Paul **(1-2a)** Just as Paul could not bear not knowing about the Thessalonians and not helping them any longer:

1. we ought to feel a strong internal compulsion to help those who face persecution We ought to be deeply moved, to the point where we can't resist doing something because we can't get their plight out of our minds and hearts. And if we have that genuine compassion:

2. we ought to be willing to endure personal sacrifice to help them Paul was willing to send Timothy back to Thessalonica (and Silas probably to Philippi) and to be left to share the Gospel alone in the big city of Athens. I would say that meant a willingness to face danger alone, considering how he'd been treated everywhere else. Helping them meant a personal sacrifice of his own comfort, help and probably, safety. And if we really care about those we know who face persecution, we will be willing to put them above ourselves and endure sacrifices of our own to help them. Now here's why this is so important. We need to understand:

II. The Grave Danger Of Those Who Face Persecution which Paul spells out for us in verses **(2-5)**. Paul's great fear for them is the same for anyone in their shoes today. It is that:

1. Satan could shake the faith of some through their suffering Persecution is the work of Satan, but the real issue in it is not as much the actual things he does to people, as the way that he tempts them to think while they are enduring it. He wants to "shake" their faith the way a dog shakes his tail; he wants them to waver in their trust in Jesus Christ and to throw it away and here are some of the ways he does that. Obviously:

a. he tempts them to believe that the reward is not worth the pain When someone puts a gun to your head and says, "Convert to Islam or I kill you!" there is a great temptation to believe that faith in Jesus is not worth dying for. Through the centuries it has always been, "Deny Jesus and we won't throw you to the lions, we won't put you in the prison, we won't burn you at the stake, we won't shoot you or drive you out of your home." To stand firm they must continue to believe that the eternal reward is worth the pain they are experiencing here, whether that's the danger of loss of life, being shunned by the community, loss of job or whatever. In some people:

b. he tempts them to believe Jesus is too weak to help them "If Jesus is really God and really has all power, why doesn't He rescue me from this? Why did He let my husband die? Why does He let us be driven from our homes?" They are tempted to believe Jesus can't really help them and to go back to the gods of their persecutors who appear to be helping them! In other people:

c. he tempts them to believe Jesus doesn't care enough to help them "If Jesus really loved me, He would not let me endure this. He would not let me lose my child to a land mine or let my daughter be raped by the soldiers who came." In any suffering it is easy to become angry at God, rather than letting yourself experience His deep love in the midst of the pain. And then in a few people:

d. he tempts them to believe they somehow deserve the suffering, that somehow it is their fault, that if they had just been stronger or had more faith that their persecutors would not have the upper hand. He tries to get them to blame themselves.

This list of the ways that Satan tempts people who face persecution is not exhaustive, of course. He may tempt them to do or to believe all kinds of things in their suffering; he'll do anything to drag them away from trusting completely in Jesus and continuing to follow Him. The real issue is how we help them face this serious danger and one way is in verses 3-4:

2. teaching or reminding them that we are destined for suffering helps greatly We studied the truth in these verses last week, that persecution is actually something God has appointed us to experience and is a normal part of following Christ. Paul had taught the Thessalonians this back when he was among them and disciplining them; now he was reminding them of what they already knew. Being certain that the fiery ordeal is a part of God's plan for us and that He will walk through it with us and that it is designed for His glory and greater good is what sustains us during any suffering. So, helping people to really grasp and hang on to this truth, as Paul was trying to do here, is one way to help. But it takes more than teaching; when we suffer, we need people to stand alongside us and bear the burden with us. So, since Paul couldn't go, he sent Timothy to them in his place. That tells me that:

3. we are God's means to come alongside persecuted people as they are suffering Notice why Paul says he sent Timothy at the end of verse 2; the NIV says *to strengthen and to encourage you in your faith*. When we come into the picture alongside them, we do these two things. First:

a. we confirm their faith and steady them as they endure it We affirm together with them the truths they know, that Jesus DOES love them, that He IS powerful, that He uses our sufferings for His greater good in His plan. We strengthen them and help them to stand firm so that they don't listen to the tempter and waver. And second:

b. we comfort and console them in their pain and grief Suffering for Jesus hurts and it hurts severely. My friend Aziz found his young son hanging dead on a barn post one morning because he was the only believer in his village years ago. 20 years later there are still only 2 believing families there. Our brothers who suffer hurt deeply and they need encouragement and comforting and consoling. They need to be loved on by us, just as any of us do when we suffer. Now, how are we going to accomplish these two things for them? How can we strengthen them and also encourage them? Well:

c. we may do it by personally going to them like Timothy did Timothy went to Thessalonica in person and hugged and loved on and prayed with and taught and stood with these dear folks for a time and then went back to join Paul. We can do some of that today. When we go to India in the summer it is a tremendous encouragement to the HBA evangelists who suffer greatly in the work among the Yenadi in the villages and to the 50 or 60 faithful pastors of struggling little churches in the slums of the city of Hyderabad. When we go to Kyrgyzstan and spend time with dear believers there it is a tremendous encouragement to them to stand firm in their faith. Today there are ways we can actually make a hands-on difference personally, but more often:

d. we may do it by praying and writing from a distance like Paul did As we'll see a few verses later, the one thing Paul did to help them every day was to pray. That is tremendously important and we'll spend time on it in a few moments. But this very letter which Paul wrote must have been a tremendous means of confirmation and consolation to them when they got it. And today we are not only confined to paper letters. We have instant electronic communication all over the globe by email and skype and text and telephone. I talk with David Dayasagar by phone every two weeks or so at great length, thanks to Magic Jack; I write Pari pretty much weekly and she counts on that. I talk and pray with brothers in Kyrgyzstan by WhatsApp nearly every week and especially when they suffer. We can even send monetary gifts to help in emergencies by MoneyGram or Western Union as and have done so a number of times.

Of course, we can't personally encourage 3 million refugees, but we can certainly pray and we can give as God leads us to organizations like Voice of the Martyrs or Samaritan's purse who will actually go there in our place and bring real tangible help. They need us, but here's something we seldom think about: we also need them! Why? Because:

III. The Strong Faith Of Those Who Face Persecution Encourages Us (6-9) The wonderful report that Timothy brought back to Paul thrilled his heart and blessed him. And likewise:

1. we receive good reports about those who face persecution, reports **of their firm faith**, of their **love** and of their **warmth toward us** who care about them. You can find many of them on the internet, but I'll share just one: *In Uganda a 14 year old girl named Susan believed in Christ when an evangelist came to her school. A month later, when her Muslim father found out that she had become a Christian, he locked her in a small room with no windows. Though he commanded her brother not to feed her, he tried to help his sister by roasting bananas when their father was away. He also dug a hole under the door where he could pour water through. "My sister could drink water using her tongue. But most days she could only feed on mud," he said. She was locked in that room for 6 months until finally the brother feared she would die and told a neighbor who called police who rescued her. She had lost use of her legs and spent 10 months in a hospital; today she lives with a family of Christian workers in Kenya and when asked how she is feeling, she confidently responds, "I am happy and not in pain. I would never leave my Jesus who died for me."* [\[http://www.onewiththem.com/stories-of-persecution/susan/\]](http://www.onewiththem.com/stories-of-persecution/susan/) What do the many testimonies like Susan's do for us?

2. it encourages us to endure our own experiences of suffering Paul himself was comforted and encouraged to go and endure just as they had! So are we. Their faith in facing dreadful suffering shows us who have never been put to such a severe test that our Jesus really is real and that He is enough and that He will be with us and carry us through any suffering that we might have to endure for His sake. It confirms us and comforts us and helps us to stand firm and unshaken! And:

3. it fills us with joy and thanksgiving to God We read reports like this a lot of Wednesday nights in our World Watchers prayer group. And every time we hear one, it thrills our hearts and fills us with joy and we end up thanking God for all the wonderful, marvelous things He is doing in so many places around the world, just as Timothy's report about the Thessalonians thrilled Paul. It refreshes our own faith; it infuses fresh life into our own walk with Christ. But as we said earlier, one of the most important things we can do is to pray. And now in the end of the chapter Paul tells us:

IV. How We Should Pray For Those Who Face Persecution in verses (10-13). To begin with:

1. we should pray for them fervently and continually as Paul did (10a) "God, please bless our persecuted brothers" just won't cut it. As we hear news and reports of those who suffer for Christ, it should touch our hearts to pray for them with passion and earnestness and not just to pray once and then forget them. Especially for those we know, we should pray continually, that is frequently, whenever God brings them to mind. When Paul listed the long litany of all his sufferings for the Gospel in 2 Cor. 11, he ended by saying in verse 28, *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches*. Even in the midst of his own suffering, he was praying continually for the believers in all the churches he had planted, many of whom were suffering just as he was. That should be a model for us. Secondly:

2. we should pray for ways to encourage them personally (10b-11) Paul still prayed that he could go back and encourage them personally, and indeed, God did give him that privilege to visit several years later on his third missionary journey. It might not be appropriate for us to pray to visit personally, but we sure could pray for other ways that we can be personally involved. "God what would you have me to do, how would you have me involved, what do you want of me that would help and encourage these suffering folks?" Thirdly:

3. we should pray for them to increase and abound in love (12) Suffering can make you bitter and angry. You can still love Jesus, but it's easy to learn to hate the people who have hurt you or to learn to hurt others because you were hurt. Satan tries to use suffering to produce the opposite of what God wants, so it's important that we pray for brothers and sisters who have been badly hurt to be filled with love and to abound in it, both love for the others around them and even love for their very enemies. Fourth:

4. we should pray for them to remain holy and blameless (13a) Suffering can also drive you to sin. Hunger can make you steal; fear can make you lie. Being pursued could make you willing to murder someone, as it did David's men hiding in the cave with him who urged him, "Kill Saul, now's your chance!" Two wrongs never did make a right and being evil treated never justifies evil treatment. So, we need to pray for those who suffer that they will remain holy before God and not choose an evil path that men will bring blame against them for. And lastly, as we pray for that:

5. we should pray with a view to the coming of Jesus with all His saints (13) To remain firm means we need to fix our eyes on this one thing: Jesus is coming! That's what really matters. We may hurt and be in agony now, but Jesus is coming! We want Him to be pleased with us when He comes. So, we should pray that our suffering brothers and sisters will keep their eyes fixed on that grand day when all the saints of God, both they who have suffered and we who have supported them, will be together in Jesus' presence and what a joy that will be!

In a village in Ethiopia, a believer named Tamirat had a disagreement with a Muslim friend over money. That man assaulted him and accused him of insulting Islam so he cried out for help and people from a nearby village came to his rescue, however after learning the grounds for the assault, they turned on him as well. The local police arrested Tamirat and put him into a 13x13 foot cell with 40 other inmates. Inmates had to take turns to simply lie down. Tamirat felt alone and wondered whether God had forsaken him. He says, "The police wanted me to confess that I insulted Islam. The interrogator explained that if I confessed to the charges, he would let me go." Refusing to do this, Tamirat was given a form to sign, but the content was in Somali which he did not understand. Unaware of what it said, he went ahead and signed it. The next day in court Tamirat realized that he had signed a confession. Desperately pleading his innocence, the judge ordered him to be silent and gave his verdict; Tamirat was sentenced to three years in prison. "The first year in prison was the hardest," Tamirat says. "Sharing the cramped cell with fierce Muslim criminals I feared the reaction if my faith was exposed. But it was impossible to hide it for too long." Once it was discovered, a group beat him so severely he struggled to walk and eat for seven days afterwards. Isolated, he received no news and felt forgotten; he had no idea that his lawyer and friends were fighting for his appeal. "For many months I didn't know that Christians were praying for me," Tamirat said. Finally, his appeal went through. While in court, when the judge called Tamirat's name, out of the corner of his eye he saw men bowing their heads; he knew they were praying for him. For the first time in months an indescribable joy came over him. The judge changed his verdict saying that they could not find enough evidence to prove his guilt, but instead of releasing him, his sentence was reduced to two years... Five months later, after almost two years in prison, Tamirat was finally released to his wife and two daughters. He rejoiced saying, "May all glory be unto Him who has sustained and kept me through the dark hours. He has made me stronger and has built my faith. Thank you for your ongoing support, concern and prayers." <http://www.onewiththem.com/stories-of-persecution/tamirat-woldegorgis/> Tamirat's faith was sorely tested, but he was not shaken. His story encourages our faith. But above all, we can see the value of those who stood with him in fervent prayer and worked for his release. Let us be like them.

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Living To Please God (Part 1) - 1 Thess. 4:1-12

With the words *Finally, then...* at the beginning of chapter 4, Paul moves from the personal section of his letter to the teaching and instructional content that he wants to give to the Thessalonian believers, and through them to us. These first 12 verses contain practical instructions for our daily living. I am calling these "Part 1" because when we reach the end of this letter, there are additional and similar instructions that we will call "Part 2". But they all fall under the same heading of "Living To Please God" and the reason is in verses (1-2). Paul had taught them a lot of things, given them a lot of instructions while he was with them, but he summed all of them up by saying this:

I. Our Primary Motivation In Daily Living Should Be To Please God Now, please note that it is one thing to know how we ought to live, to have a list of rules that tell us what is right and what is wrong; it is an entirely different thing to realize why those things on the list really matter. Our goal is not legalism; it is not to keep a list of rules, to behave in a certain way so as to get into heaven or to get brownie reward points with God or to avoid being punished. The point is that we WANT to please God! God has saved us; He has rescued us from the penalty of our sins by the blood of His own Son, Jesus. More than that, He has taken us and made us His own children who will live with Him forever and He has transformed us by placing His very Spirit inside of us to empower us. He's given us a new nature that wants to please Him and we should WANT to please Him! The strongest desire at the core of our being should be to please the One who died for us! Paul told the Corinthians, *So whether we are at home [in the body] or away, we make it our aim to please him.* - 2 Cor. 5:9. In light of all that God has done for us, our gratitude should be so great that pleasing Him is our very reason for living and we want everything we do in our lives to do just that. Now, coming from that viewpoint, we KNOW what pleases Him because:

1. we have instructions from the Lord Jesus through the Scripture Paul had those instructions from Jesus directly and also from the apostles who had lived with Him. He passed them on to the Thessalonians orally by teaching. Fortunately for us, godly men moved by the Spirit wrote them down and preserved them in a book, so that even today, 2,000 years later, we KNOW what pleases God and there can be no mistake about it. We know exactly what pleases God and what displeases Him about the way we live because He has told us, so if we truly WANT to please Him:

2. we should be growing in obedience to what we already know As we grow up and mature in our faith, we ought to be bringing our lives more and more into line with the things that we know please God. Granted, it's a process and it doesn't happen all at once. There are a lot of things about ourselves that we don't really see and it takes God a whole lifetime to reveal some of them so that we can really please Him in those areas. But then there are some things that are obvious and up front and in our faces that we recognize immediately. Paul goes on to spell out two areas in which we really need to please God and this first one is that sort of thing. In verses (3-8) Paul makes it very clear that:

II. God Has Told Us To Maintain Sexual Purity That is what pleases Him! Look at verse (3). Paul makes it very plain:

1. to live a holy life, a life that is set apart to God and pleases God, **means to abstain from sexual immorality**. That word in the Greek language is the word *porneia* (sound familiar?) and it refers to every form of sexual activity other than the legitimate union of a husband and wife. Now, it used to be here in the US that everyone knew what immorality is, but that is not true in this generation, so I hope you'll pardon me for being so specific, but I want to explain it in no uncertain terms. When God says He wants us to abstain from sexual immorality:

a. this means abstaining from all sex apart from marriage The King James had a good word that covered it all; it used to be called *fornication*. That means not having sex *before* you are married. It means not living together with someone without being married. It means no casual one night stands with strangers. It means not engaging in prostitution. Think of it this way. Marriage is like a box with a husband and wife inside it. All sexual activity belongs inside that box. Any sexual activity that is outside that box of a husband and wife in a marital relationship is illegitimate, wrong, sinful and utterly displeasing to God. Pleasing God means you stay sexually pure until you are married and if the marriage ends you remain pure afterward unless you should get married once again. Sexual activity is only to be done with your husband or wife, period, and if you don't have one of those, it is not to be done at all. Now, of course:

b. this includes not violating the marriage vow by engaging in sexual activity with someone other than your spouse while you are married. That's called *adultery* in Scripture and it is just another form of *porneia*. And the very sound of that word should remind us that immorality also:

c. this includes pornography, whether it's watching X rated videos or looking at pictures on the internet or in a magazine or going to this sort of a club. It is all outside of marriage and involves doing the act in your mind with some other person, even if you never touch them. Married men often try to justify this because, "Its only pictures!" No, it is lusting after and committing mental adultery with someone other than your wife and it is adultery just as much as the physical act and God is utterly repulsed by it just the same. And I have to mention that abstaining from immorality also:

d. this includes deviant sexual behaviors like homosexuality and some other repulsive sexual practices which are inappropriate to mention with young people present. I just want to reiterate again that homosexuals are not “born” that way; that is a lie our society has invented to justify behavior that God says is wrong. *Porneia* includes all of these behaviors, but the reason Paul had to talk about abstaining from them and that we also need to talk about it is that:

2. all of these are common practice in the culture surrounding us (4-5) The Greek and Roman culture of Paul's day was saturated with sexual activity. What God calls immorality was not only normal practice, but was encouraged behavior. Sacred prostitution was part of the worship of their pagan gods in their temples; that is, sex was a part of pleasing the gods! Men openly had mistresses and even homosexual lovers in Roman society. Parties became orgies and nobody saw anything wrong with it. That is how the Thessalonian believers themselves used to live before they came to Jesus. They were part of all those practices. So, when Christians abstained from all of these things and were pure, everyone around them saw them as different and strange. Peter wrote, *For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.* - 1 Pet. 4:3-4. Doesn't that sound like our own culture? Sex is everywhere, all over the media, even in so many of the commercials. It is lauded and encouraged on every hand. We are bombarded with suggestive images all the time. This generation of which we are a part has grown up being taught by everything around them that these things are NOT immoral, that they are normal and desirable and we have absorbed the message and are paying a dear price for it! Why? Because, Paul says in verse 5:

a. those who don't know God strive to fulfill the lusts of their bodies They don't know God so they don't have a frame of reference for right and wrong. They simply want to fulfill the drives that are in their own bodies, to maximize their own pleasure and satiate the rush that it gives them. They act much like the animals do by instinct. Just watch any stallion or bull around a herd of females, especially if any are in a condition of receptivity, and the females when they know their time is right go looking for the male. If you think about it, humans without the knowledge of God to restrain them often act no differently; they simply seek to fulfill the drive to mate as often and in any way they can! That's where our society is going more and more as we erase the Judeo-Christian moral foundation that it was built on. But we can't fall into that trap. Paul says in verse 4 that we must live differently:

b. we must learn to control our own bodies in holiness and honor By relying on the power of the Spirit of God who lives within us, we must learn to exercise the fruit of self-control, of choosing to fulfill the drives that God has placed within us only in the way that He intended, so that we live in a holy fashion and one that will bring honor to Him. Without going into it, you'll notice that the ESV and NIV have footnotes on verse 4 with an alternate reading suggesting that the Greek word translated *body* is also sometimes used to refer to a *wife* and if it does, it means that:

c. we men, particularly, must learn to live with our own wives in holiness and honor by keeping ourselves sexually pure, which is in reality saying the same thing. Now Paul gives us:

3. the reasons we must maintain sexual purity in the next 3 verses. First look at **(6a)**:

a. sexual immorality wrongs the other people involved It takes something from the other person that does not belong to you. It steals something from the other person's husband or wife or even from their future husband or wife that they may have some day. It wrongs them. It also wounds them emotionally and creates scars they deal with for life rather than good memories that last a lifetime. Immorality hurts people even though they don't realize it at the moment. Second, **(6b)**:

b. sexual immorality is sin and must be judged by God He is the *avenger*, the one who hands out the just punishment for evil deeds. He is the one who declares that those who do such things as sexual immorality and impurity and orgies and the like shall NOT inherit the Kingdom of God (2 Cor. 5:21) and that the sexually immoral will never be allowed into the Holy City (Rev. 22:15). So why would we even consider doing things that are sin against God, when Jesus Himself died for those very sins? Third, **(7)**:

c. by saving us, God has called us to holiness, not impurity We are called to live a pure life. He didn't save us to live the way we always lived or to live the way everyone else lives. He saved us to live holy lives. And finally, **(8)**:

d. rejecting this is rejecting God and it is violating His Spirit Look with me at **1 Cor. 6:13b-20**. When believers sin sexually, we drag the Holy Spirit with us into that very evil He detests. We violate His temple, our body, which is supposed to be holy.

Why spend so much time emphasizing this? Because immorality is all around us; immorality is in the church, among believers; it is among US. It is in the lives of people that we know and love, among our friends and in our families. It needs to be proclaimed, not just by me, but by all of us, over and over; the will of God is for us to abstain from sexual immorality

and be pure and if we really love Him with our hearts and want to please Him, that's how we will strive to live. Now in the next 4 verses Paul focuses on a second thing that pleases God. He says:

III. God Has Taught Us To Love One Another (9-10) Even though the command to love one another is found all over the place in the New Testament, what Paul is saying is that it is more than a mere command:

1. love for our brothers is an inborn trait God births in us - 1 John 3:14 says, *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.* Love for each other is the very evidence that we are saved, that God has regenerated us and given us life. He plants it in us; indeed, it is the very first fruit of the Spirit's work in us. We love our brothers and sisters. The Thessalonians did and so do we here today. The loving actions that people in this body display toward one another every week, every day even, are too numerous to even begin to mention. My family and I have been perpetual recipients of that love and so have any of you who have been here for even a short while. But Paul says:

2. we must choose to cultivate it and to exercise it more and more A lot of times loving one another comes easy, especially when we feel love back in return as we're doing it. But there are lots of times when love is a choice, when it's hard, when it's difficult, when it involves sacrifice and doing the right thing for someone else, even though they don't appreciate it or maybe get angry about it! Love is more than a feeling; it is a commitment. The *philadelphia* brotherly love in the beginning of verse 9 is *agape* sacrificial love at the end of the verse. We must choose to love each other with the selfless love of Christ and to do it more and more. That pleases God because we are reflecting His own nature! Now in the next phrase Paul seems to be moving on to some different things that please God, but in reality, they are also ways that we love one another.

3. we choose to exercise love in practical ways of living like those in verse (11). Why did Paul choose those three things to mention? Flip over with me to **2 Thes. 3:11**. The Thessalonian believers were not perfect and the report that Paul got must have mentioned that these three things were issues among them. Some of the believers were not working, but living on the generosity of others, maybe because they expected Jesus would arrive any moment. Because they were idle, they became busybodies, gossipers involved in the personal affairs of others and stirring up trouble by it. So, going back to our text, Paul admonishes them that if we really want to please God:

a. we aspire to live a peace-filled life, not one that is frantic every time something happens, or always running here and there having to do this and that or always stirring up others about things, but a life that is characterized by an inner tranquility, a peace that comes from God. As Paul put it to the Colossians *...let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.* - **Col. 3:15**. It pleases God when we let His Spirit control us as we endure the challenges of our daily life, as well as the suffering that comes, in an attitude of peace, trusting that He is in control. That is a way of loving our brothers! Then if we want to please God:

b. we aspire to mind our own affairs instead of always putting our nose into everyone else's business and spreading it everywhere. **1 Tim. 5:13** says that people who aren't occupied in meaningful labor *...learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.* And now we have electronic media that makes it 10 times easier to do and 1,000 times wider to spread. One off-color Facebook post that takes a second from the phone in your hand can be seen by dozens, even hundreds, of people and replicated to others through their accounts. It can be like gossip on steroids! If we love our brothers, we are careful to protect them and to exercise good stewardship of the information we become privy to. And finally, if we want to please God:

c. we work diligently with our own hands instead of being lazy and expecting others to do for us what we could easily do. Paul made tents to support himself while he was in Thessalonica instead of depending on the generosity of the new believers. He did it to set them and us an example. Willingness to work hard and use our abilities pleases God. Of course, there are those in genuine need of help, those who work as hard as they can but still can't make it because of the circumstances life has thrown at them, and those who are actually unable to work. Love means sacrificially helping people in those kinds of circumstances, but love also means working hard to sustain ourselves so that we don't take advantage of the hard work and generosity of others unnecessarily. Now:

4. this loving behavior has a two-fold effect (12) Living a peace-filled life, minding our own business and working hard:

a. it wins the respect of outsiders It actually attracts people to Jesus and lends credibility to what we share about Him. It makes them willing to listen to us because they respect the way we live. And translations vary on the last phrase of the verse, but I think it means that living this way:

b. it is taking personal responsibility for ourselves Dependence is not a bad thing in itself; we're supposed to live in dependence on God and on one another in many ways. But letting God supply our needs by our own hard work is taking our God-given personal responsibility seriously. It pleases Him and it blesses our brothers.

I've told you this story before, but its point makes it worth hearing again: *A ragged boy with a violin under his arm roamed the streets of a great European city. Because he had no home or family, he wandered around for food and shelter. He had a strange gift for music and had somehow gotten hold of a violin, and would stand on the corners and play for the crowd. When he finished, they would toss some coins and this is how he lived. In the same city there lived a famous musician. One day he happened to hear the boy playing and was impressed by the quality of music. "Son, to whom do you belong?" he said. "I don't belong to anybody," the boy answered. "Well, where do you live?" was the next question. "I don't have any place to live. I just sleep on the streets or wherever I can." The man thought for a moment and then asked, "How would you like to be my boy and come to live with me? I'll teach you all I know about how to play the violin." The boy's eyes sparkled, and he said, "Mister, "I'd love it." So the great musician took the poor boy to his own home, had him cleaned and dressed up, and the man became like a father to him. For several years he poured into the eager young mind and heart all he knew about the violin. Finally, the boy was ready to appear on the concert stage for his first public recital. The house was filled to capacity. At last the boy came out, put the violin beneath his chin and began his concert. He played beautifully and there was much applause but the boy paid no attention to it. He kept his eyes constantly turned upward and continued to play. The audience was mystified by his behavior until someone said, "I don't understand why he is so insensible to all this thunderous applause. He keeps looking up all the time. I'm going to find out what is attracting his attention!" Moving about in the concert hall, the observer found the answer. There in the topmost balcony was the old music master, peering over the banister toward his young pupil. He was nodding his head and smiling, as if to say, "You are doing well, my boy; play on! And the boy did play on, not seeming to care whether the audience laughed or applauded. He kept his gaze upward. For you see, he was playing to please the master only. That boy is us! After all that our Father has done for us, rescuing us from the pit, adopting us as His sons and daughters, lovingly pouring Himself into us to make us all that He has planned, how can we do anything less than devote our lives completely to pleasing Him and Him alone?*

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Grieving With Hope - 1 Thess. 4:13-18

At the middle of Chapter 4 we come to THE classic passage concerning the coming of Christ for His church, for us. We all know it and have probably read it many times in this context, without realizing why Paul actually wrote it. You see, Paul had taught the Thessalonian believers to very literally look for and expect Jesus to come again. As they faced suffering and persecution, they were living daily with a very real expectation that Jesus was going to come and rescue them. But as time passed, some of the older believers began to die and it raised the question in their minds, "But what about them? How can they be part of this great hope? Will they miss out on that grand event of Jesus' coming because they died?" And since Paul had only been with them a couple of months, he hadn't had time to teach them everything they needed to know or to answer every important question, so now he explains this concern for them in the first letter he wrote back to them. This passage is actually about:

I. The Certainty With Which We Face Death (13-15) Do you hear it? They are concerned about brothers and sisters who have died and what's going to happen to them. They are uninformed; they simply don't have the knowledge they need concerning this issue and Paul is writing this to fill them in with this very important information about what happens to believers who die. First of all, notice that:

1. we do grieve when a fellow believer dies Paul does not say, "Do not grieve". He is not telling us that we are not to be sad when someone we love passes away. Being sad and missing the person is a normal thing. When Paul wrote the Philippians, he mentioned that his dear friend and theirs, Ephaphroditus, had nearly died and said, *indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.* - **Phil. 2:27**. Paul admits that the death of a dear friend would be a tremendous sorrow to him and it is. The removal of a person from our lives in such a final way is a huge loss and that loss hurts deeply. Death may be the doorway to heaven, but the Bible says it is still an enemy that must be destroyed one day. It causes us tremendous pain and it is not good to stuff that pain and deny it. Rather, we do need to grieve, to cry, to mourn and be sad when we lose someone. What Paul says is that:

2. we do NOT grieve as the rest of the world does because of what we know People who are not believers don't have any certainty about what has happened to that person who is gone. They theorize; they decide they want to believe this or that, but they don't KNOW. They can only wish and "hope against hope" that what they think is real or maybe they just think there is nothing at all after death, that we simply cease to exist like any other animal. What sorrow death brings to nonbelievers! It's the sorrow of hopelessness, of knowing or fearing you'll never see that person again and the same thing will happen to you. It's a sorrow born of genuine despair. But our sorrow is nothing like that because:

a. we have an absolute certainty that deceased believers are with Jesus Paul doesn't even use the word *dead* to describe them; he says they have *fallen asleep* and most Bible versions translate the Greek of verse 14 to say they have, *fallen asleep in Him, or in Jesus*. You see, Jesus changed the very nature of death by His own death. It is no longer a final separation for believers. It is simply a "falling asleep" in Jesus. If you want a good picture of that to remember, think about Stephen on his knees being stoned by his enemies. He lifted up his eyes and saw Jesus in heaven standing with the Father, waiting to receive him. So he called out in prayer, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!*

...And when he had said this, he fell asleep. - Acts 7:59-60. Do you see the contrast? Jesus received His spirit; his spirit left his body and went to be with Jesus and his body instantly quit living, like a robot whose power source has been turned off and it crumbles to the ground. He *fell asleep in Jesus* and that's what happens to all believers who die. Now be careful to understand that:

b. only their bodies "sleep", not their souls There are groups, most notably the Seventh Day Adventists as well as some others, who teach that when our body dies, our soul goes into a state of unconsciousness or sleep until Jesus comes. That is simply not true. Paul said very clearly in **2 Cor. 5:6-8**, *...We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.* It is plain and simple; the *we* he is talking about is our spirit, our soul. It lives or dwells in our body. When it is at home in the body, it is away from the Lord; it is not present with Him where He is in heaven. But when *we*, that is our soul, leaves our body, we are at home with Jesus where He is in heaven. Paul spoke of the possibility of his own death with these words in **Phil. 1:23**, *I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.* Paul expected to be with Jesus the moment he died, just like Stephen. So the term *sleep* is a gentle way of referring to the fact that our bodies die, but they only continue in that state of death temporarily. One day they will "wake up" again. They will be raised or resurrected when Jesus comes. So, the point Paul is really making in our text is that:

c. all believers, whether alive or "asleep", will participate equally in Jesus' coming It doesn't matter whether we die before Jesus comes again or whether we are still alive when He arrives. In either case, our looking forward to His coming is not in vain because we all participate together in it equally and we'll see the specifics of that in the next verses. But as far as those who have died, verse 14 says that:

(1) God will bring the spirits of deceased believers with Christ when He comes. They fell asleep in Him, so they have been with Him in heaven ever since and they will come with Him when He appears. But the text is also implying what Paul is about to say next, that:

(2) God will bring away the sleeping bodies of believers with Christ Just as He will take living believers away with Him at His coming, He will also take with him the sleeping bodies of those who have died to join Him. So, He will come for ALL of us and for ALL of each one of us, soul and body, when He returns. Yet this whole idea that our bodies will be resurrected, even though they have lain in a grave and deteriorated, perhaps to nothing, or even have been cremated, seems so unreal, so impossible. How can we be so sure of it? Paul says:

d. our certain hope is based on Christ's own death and resurrection When Jesus died, He rose again on the third day. He proved to us that God is not content to have only our souls, but that He plans to raise our bodies also. The central confession of our faith is that Christ rose from the dead; therefore, it is no stretch to believe that we will also. He is the living proof on which we base our faith and that is why we grieve in hope, with the certainty of what has happened to the person we miss. But:

e. it is also based on a direct revelation of Jesus to Paul In verse 15 Paul says, "Jesus Himself told me this!" Evidently this is part of the revelation that Jesus explained directly to Paul, perhaps during his alone time with the Lord in Arabia that he mentions in Galatians 1. Leave a hand in Thessalonians, but please turn with me to the other key passage on this subject in 1 Corinthians 15. Look at the first phrase of **1 Cor. 15:51**. When Paul says, *Behold, I show you a mystery...* he means, "I am revealing to you something that has been hidden until this time; I reveal to you something that God has shown me, a sacred secret, if you will, something that He has not chosen to reveal until now." The information contained in these two verses, which is the same as that in the next two verses in Thessalonians, is not something that God chose to reveal anywhere else in the Scriptures until this point. It is new information, intended to bring us great comfort. Go back to our text. Paul says:

II. We Will Be Caught Up At His Coming (16-17) Those words *caught up* in verse 17 in Latin are *raptura*, from which we get the name by which we popularly call this event, **The Rapture Of The Church**. All through the Bible we see it written that God will come or Christ will come to earth and set up His Kingdom and rule it. But here it is given to us to know that we are actually looking forward to something different that occurs *before* He descends to reign. We are waiting for Him to come and catch us all away to be with Him; what we are expecting and longing and looking for is the Rapture, being taken up to heaven with Christ, and here Paul explains exactly what Jesus told Him is going to happen. First:

1. Christ will descend into earth's atmosphere, not to the earth itself as He will eventually, but down from heaven into the *air*. He will leave His throne in heaven, in the spiritual dimension of reality, and appear in His physical body in the physical dimension of the sky above us. And as He descends:

2. there will be a grand announcement of His arrival. He will not just show up visibly; there will be a three-fold sound that is heard at the same moment round the earth. First, we are told that He will descend with:

a. a shout of command, a loud cry issuing from His own lips. He will give a command, and what will that command be? Well, let's look at what Jesus Himself said - **Jn. 5:25, 28-29**. Jesus said that one day He Himself will issue a

command with His own voice to the dead and that when He does, the dead shall live, that is, their bodies will be raised. The best picture we have of that is when Jesus stood at the tomb of his friend Lazarus and shouted the command, *Lazarus, come out!*, and instantly Lazarus' body stood up again and was raised to life. Some have commented that it's a good thing that He specified Lazarus' name individually when He gave the command; if He had just said, "Come out!" all those who were in their graves would have been raised! I don't know about that, but that IS exactly what will happen when He comes again. He'll shout something like, "Come out!" to those whose bodies are in their graves. And at the same moment, there will be another loud voice:

b. the voice of the archangel, the chief of the angels, and the only one ever named is Michael. He will shout also. But what? Well, we have a hint of it in Scripture. In his vision in **Rev. 1:10** the Apostle John says, *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet*. And that voice commanded him to write down a message to the seven churches. But then in **4:1** he says, *After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."* And suddenly he found himself in heaven and living ahead of time all the events that would take place during the awful time of tribulation that is to occur on earth. I think that loud trumpet-like command *Come up here!* could be what the archangel shouts to all believers who are on the earth. "Come up! Come up to Jesus! Come to heaven with Him!" And notice that Paul mentions that same trumpet sound in our text; He says Jesus will descend with:

c. the trumpet call of God At Mount Sinai Israel heard the sound of a trumpet blast that grew louder and louder and called them to assemble in the presence of God before the mountain as they trembled with fear. Throughout their history God had them use the blowing of trumpets to assemble the people for important occasions or to assemble the army for battle. And on that day when Jesus shouts and the archangel cries, the very trumpet call of God will ring out once again for the last time to call all of us, His people, to assemble in His presence! Look back to **1 Cor. 15:52**. Oh Hallelujah, Jesus shouts "Come out!", the archangel cries "Come up!", the trumpet sounds and up we all go in the blink of an eye! Glory to God!

But wait, we're not done with that blink yet! That's what happens in the air; here's what happens on the ground. Verse 16 in our text said, *the dead in Christ shall rise first*. The word *rise* there doesn't mean to rise up into the air. The word means *to stand up again*, that is, *to be raised from the dead, resurrected*. So:

3. the dead in Christ will be given their resurrection bodies first Look again at Cor. 15:52; it says that when the trumpet sounds the dead are *raised*; that Greek word means *to be roused from sleep, awakened*. Those bodies lying in the grave are woken up to life! Now, how on earth is that going to be? Some of us believers will have been dead now for 2,000 years. Some of the atoms that made up our bodies have long since been integrated into the soil or the water and absorbed by plants and even later eaten by animals or even other people. Maybe our ashes were scattered in the river or the ocean. How can God possibly reassemble the molecules of our bodies once again? The answer is that He doesn't have to and isn't going to; 1 Cor. 15 says that God will GIVE us a body as He has chosen! He will create for us in that moment a brand new spiritual body, a resurrection body made of new heavenly materials. Verse 52 says the dead are raised *imperishable*, that is, with a new body that cannot be corrupted or die ever again, a resurrection body like that of Jesus Himself! So, the spirits of believers who have died return with Jesus, descend and are given their new bodies first. But then we read that:

4. living believers will be transformed at the same time, in that same blink of an eye. Now read the whole of **1 Cor. 15:51-52**. Paul says twice that those who happen to be alive at that moment will be *changed*. That word literally means *made into something other, something different*. Our bodies will be *transformed* immediately into new resurrection bodies at the same time as our departed brothers and sisters receive their new bodies. We are all "resurrected" together at the same moment and given our new, glorious, non-dying, non-aging, non-tiring, pain-free, spiritual bodies, even though some will not have to die first! Won't that be a wonderful privilege! And then, according to verse 17 of our Thessalonian text, in that same moment when the Lord shouts, the archangel cries, the trumpet sounds, the dead believers are raised first and the living believers are transformed:

5. we shall all be caught up together to meet Jesus in the air Raptured! We'll be seized by His power and snatched up into the sky thousands of feet above the earth at cloud height. Why? Well one reason that occurred to me is that there is no assembling place on the ground anywhere on earth that is big enough for all the millions and millions of us believers from all the ages to be brought together at one time! He has to gather us in the air where space is unlimited! But the main reason is that that's where He will be at that moment! We're *being gathered together to Him*, 2 Thes. 2:1 says, and that's where He'll *meet* us to take us back to heaven to live with Him in His home and our home. I think the ascension of Jesus that last day on the Mount of Olives is a wonderful picture of what will happen to us, but done in slow motion so we could see it. When Jesus finished giving His last command, He suddenly began to rise up into the air higher and higher until He was as high as the clouds and then a cloud, the cloud of the Father's glory, hid Him from their sight. The two angels standing by said, and said, *Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you INTO HEAVEN will come back in the same way you saw*

him go into heaven. From the sky, Jesus crossed over out of this physical realm into heaven, and so will we. As we arrive in the clouds with Jesus, we will immediately cross over and be in heaven. And then come those last wonderful words of verse 17 which are really the point of everything we've said:

6. we will all be together with the Lord forever Those who've died, those who are alive, it doesn't matter; we will all be together with Jesus when He comes and we will STAY together with Him in heaven for all eternity. We'll see all of those who have gone before us again and we'll never be parted from them. We'll never grieve over losing each other again. God will wipe away all the tears from our eyes, as John put it in Revelation. It is permanent, eternal, without end.

And then in verse 18 we have the reason that Paul shared all of this information about the Lord's coming with us:

III. We Are To Comfort One Another With This Knowledge (18) We are to encourage one another to remember these things when we are sad, when we are grieving the loss of someone we love, when we are mourning because someone dear to us has been taken out of our lives. We're to help each other not to grieve as the rest of the world does. In our sadness and in our mourning, we encourage each other to hold on to this blessed hope that we know we will all be together again with Jesus forever when He comes.

And just as these words have brought comfort to grieving believers generation after generation for 2,000 years, they will bring comfort and encouragement to us also when we need it. *In 1934 a young man named Carl Burnham preached his first sermon to a little crowd of about 40 people in Akron Ohio and a little church was born. By the time of his death in 1962 the church had been through two moves and the Chapel On Fir Hill had more than 1,000 worshippers. Today, out of his godly heritage, The Chapel has 3 campuses and probably some 10,000 who attend. But just prior to his death, Carl Burnham penned these poetic words, "When I die, if my family wishes to inscribe anything on my gravestone, I would like it to be the promise of Jesus Christ in Hebrews 13:5, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' For in due season the springtime will arrive... Then, when the resurrection sings itself in the robin's glad song, and bursting buds defy the death grip of winter, and you walk upon the yielding earth near my grave--remember that my soul is not there, but rather it is absent from the body, present with the Lord. And somewhere, the atoms that made up my brain, my heart--my body--will be sending out resurrection radiations of a frequency too high for any earthly Geiger counter to record. But if you place the meter of God's Word alongside that cemetery plot and adjust the settings to Hebrews 13:5, you will receive this reading: 'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'"* Today if you go to Rose Hill Burial Park in Fairlawn, Summit County, Ohio, or find the picture of it on the internet, there you'll see a large tombstone with the name Burnham at the top and square in the middle the words, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." He never will. When we die, our soul is with Him. When He comes, our bodies will be with Him. So, whether we live or whether we die, we belong to Him; He is with us and we are with Him. That certainty is what takes the pain out of all our sorrow.

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

The Day Of The Lord - 1 Thess. 5:1-11

As you remember, in our last study of the end of chapter 4, we rejoiced together in the new information about God's plan for the future that Paul revealed, namely that Jesus is coming to catch up His church to be with Him in heaven. The Rapture is what we now have our eyes set on, what we look forward to and are waiting for. But there is another aspect of God's future plan, one that I've never really taught you about under this name, but one that Paul had evidently already taught the Thessalonians about very clearly in the few short weeks he lived among them. It is called the *Day of the Lord*. Look at verses (1-2). He says in verse 2:

I. The Day Of The Lord Will Come Now what exactly is that? The Day of the Lord is a term that God gave the Old Testament prophets to describe the events He has planned for the future, for the final era of this world. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of it and so did Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah and Malachi. The New Testament writers, Luke and Paul and Peter picked it up from the Old Testament Scriptures. First, we must understand that:

1. it is NOT the same as the coming of the Lord for His people revealed in 4:15-18. That was something hidden and secret, information not revealed until God gave it to Paul. The Day of the Lord is *not* the Rapture of the Church. Secondly:

2. it is not a literal 24 hr. day but a period of time when God intervenes in the world In 2 Cor. 6:2 Paul writes, *...Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* He obviously doesn't mean a 24 hour day; he means a period of time, an era. That *day of salvation* is already 2,000 years long! We live in a day when the Good News of salvation is being proclaimed to the ends of the earth, when people anywhere and everywhere can choose to be saved from their sins and be rescued from the wrath of God which would rightfully be coming upon them. In this day God has basically left His work in the hands of the church to carry out. But there is coming another day, the day when the Lord Himself will step into history and reveal Himself, a day when He will openly intervene supernaturally in the affairs of men and give them what they deserve. So, in actuality, the Day of the Lord:

3. it is a collective term for an entire series of future events, the events which John saw in his vision and described for us in **Rev. 6-20**. There we see how:

a. God pours out His wrath on man in the Tribulation period. For seven years God will pour out a series of plagues upon the human race, plagues much worse than those He sent upon Egypt in Moses' day, judgments that will decimate the earth and destroy more than half of its population. Jesus Himself said that if God had not limited this awful time of tribulation that no flesh would survive. Those who survive will endure incredible suffering and yet the majority of survivors will not repent of their sins and cry out to Him for mercy. Turn with me to God's description in the prophet Zephaniah (fourth last book of the Old Testament, between Habakkuk and Haggai), **Zeph. 1:14-18**. That wasn't a very popular message back then and you don't hear it preached much today, do you? There is coming a time on this planet when the Lord will no longer hold back because of His mercy, but will pour out His judgment upon the human race for what they have become, just as He did with the generation that had become thoroughly and completely evil in Noah's day. It will be a day of awful suffering that most won't survive and at its conclusion:

b. Christ returns to earth and destroys His enemies We see Him coming on a white horse in **Rev. 19**, followed by the armies of heaven and, with a word from His mouth, all the gathered armies of earth that have turned to oppose Him will be destroyed *en masse*. The angels will gather His remaining enemies from all over the earth and they will stand before Him like a flock of goats to be destroyed and sent into everlasting fire. The blood will run as deep as the horses' bridles. Only the small flock of sheep who have repented and believed and survived that awful time will live to repopulate the earth. When the Lord steps in at last, it is not some fairy tale; it is a day that should cause fear and trembling to everyone who knows it is coming. And yet the Day of the Lord does have a positive side; when Christ returns:

c. Israel is delivered and rules the earth for a Millennium - Zeph. 3:14-20 The remnant of Israel who have believed in Christ as their Messiah and have been preserved alive will become the center of the earth. The remnant from all the nations that have believed will repopulate the earth and Israel will be the capital of the world and the Lord will rule it from there for a thousand years, as **Rev. 20** tells us. In that day, the Lord will run the earth HIS way, instead of letting humans have it their way. But the Day of the Lord is still not done. At its very end:

d. God destroys the present earth and recreates it Look with me at **2 Pet. 3:10**. That's what is ultimately awaiting this entire creation that has been ruined by our sin. It will be vaporized, burned up and dissolved, yet God will remake it. Look down to **3:13**. That's our ultimate future home, new heavens and a new earth, filled with righteousness, the new heavens and new earth which John actually saw in **Rev. 21:1**.

So, the term *Day of the Lord* encompasses the whole time from the beginning of the tribulation to the end of the Millennium. But, going back to our text, here's an important thing:

4. the coming of Christ for His church will begin the Day of the Lord That's why Paul spoke about the two things back to back. The last half of chapter 4 describes what will happen when Jesus comes for us; He'll catch us *out* of this world to be with Him in heaven. The first half of chapter 5 describes what happens immediately afterward; the Day of the Lord begins and God pours out His wrath on those who are left. The Rapture *precedes* the Tribulation. We will not BE HERE to experience it! But oh, the rest of the world will! Now let's read **(1-3)**. You see:

II. The Day of The Lord Will Surprise The Human Race Their view about God stepping into history and intervening in the world is expressed by Peter who says, *...that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."* That's pretty much the attitude all around us. The world has been the way it is for thousands, they say billions, of years. The idea that there is a God out there who will step in and punish human beings and destroy the world is an ancient fable, a myth held by misguided religions. Christians are like Chicken Little running around yelling, "The sky is falling!" It can't be real. That's why when it happens:

1. it will come unexpectedly. Nobody will be looking for it. Everyone will be saying, *there is peace and security...*

Even though groups like ISIS and Boko Haram and Al Shabab try to terrorize us into thinking differently by their bombs and guns, most people still labor under the false illusion that their world is always going to be the same, that tomorrow will be like today, that there is peace and security in some measure. Nobody lives expecting that to be changed. That's why the Day of the Lord comes **like a thief at night**, when everyone is sleeping, when they are completely oblivious, never expecting the thief to come and steal away their precious goods. If they were, they would have stayed awake and watched for the thief. Then Paul says:

2. it will come suddenly like labor pains come upon a pregnant woman who is ready to deliver. Many of you know how it is. Months go by and there is some growing discomfort but then one day, seemingly always at the most inconvenient time when you're not expecting it, boom! Labor begins and in a short while the agony is indescribable. Sorry to remind you all of that, but that's Paul's point. All of a sudden, without warning, on a day when nobody expects it and life is going on as normal, when people are buying and selling and marrying and giving in marriage and mowing their

lawns and driving their cars and thinking everything is perfectly normal, the Lord will break in and begin the great day of His wrath! And, Paul adds:

3. when it comes it will be inescapable There will be no avoiding it or getting out of it. There will be no safe place to run and hide and be protected. It won't matter who a person knows or how much money they have or what kind of a survival bunker they've built or how far away they live from everyone else. When labor starts, the baby is coming, one way or another. There's no getting around it, no canceling the order and sending it back. When the Day of the Lord comes at last, there is no way to escape it, to get away from it and avoid its plagues. They are world-wide. And even if some repent and believe because they remember what their believing friends taught them or they find a Bible or whatever, they still have to experience this awful day and most will die during it. Now, the coming of:

III. The Day Of The Lord Should Not Surprise Us Believers (4-7) You see:

1. the rest of mankind live unaware that the Day of the Lord is coming. They are unaware of the reality of the events around them **like those who are asleep or those who get drunk and lie in a drunken stupor**, oblivious to what anyone is doing to or around them. As far as God breaking into this world and changing things, people are totally oblivious. They don't know about it, don't believe it if they have heard about it and, quite frankly, don't care! *Years ago, Ford ran an advertisement in the form of a cartoon. Two men on a street corner were holding large signs in front of them. The one, with a somber face, carried this message: "The world will end tomorrow." The other, who stood just around the corner of a building, held a sign that read: "That still gives you all day today to shop your Ford dealer's year-end clearance."* That says it all! People only care about the things they're obsessed with today, even though the world is going to end tomorrow! It's their nature, but Paul's point is that:

2. we should not live in the same manner as the unbelieving world We should not live as though we we're too soundly asleep or too drunk to realize what God is going to do. Why not? Because:

a. we know that this Day is coming God has told us so in His Word and, believe me, whatever God says, He will do. He will never, ever violate His word. The Lord told Jeremiah, *...I am watching over my word to perform it. -1:12.* We KNOW this Day is coming; it's a sure thing. But Paul is saying more than that:

b. we do not belong to the kingdom of darkness like they do, so we should not act like them! They live as though they don't care about what God says and do whatever they want, oblivious to the fact that they will be judged for it. But we're not of their order; we don't live in that murky darkness. We are children of the Day, not children of the night; our eyes have been opened to see spiritual realities. We don't live in the realm of darkness any longer. We KNOW Christ. We know the penalty of sin that was laid upon Him and how serious it is. We KNOW He has redeemed and changed us. In fact, *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. - Col. 1:13.* Darkness doesn't rule our lives; Jesus does! We are a different order of human beings from the rest of the world and we should live differently, not doing whatever we please like we're asleep or drunk and don't know any better, but fervently doing His will because our eyes are wide open and we see the reality of spiritual things and we know what lies ahead! Now, as he closes this section Paul gets more specific in verses (8-11). He tells us:

IV. How We Should Live Knowing The Day Of The Lord Is Coming First, he says this (8a):

1. we should live with a sober awareness of the coming destruction A person in a stupor may be driving, but he doesn't see the accident coming; he's not aware that he's headed for an intersection and needs to stop. But a sober person is looking ahead, alert, watching for danger, ready to respond. That's a picture of how we are to live. If you still have a hand in **2 Pet. 3**, look at verses **11-12** which we skipped. Since we know this Day is coming, what sort of people should we be?! Shouldn't it impact our lives? Shouldn't it make us live lives of fervent holiness and godliness? Shouldn't it make us want to see the people around us get saved and all the peoples on earth be reached with the Gospel? Shouldn't it be a force that drives us to be obedient and passionate about things of God? And yet somehow, we gradually get lulled to sleep where this is concerned. It's like death. We all know we're going to die one day (unless the Rapture happens), but for much of our lives we get lulled into this false sense of security like it is just some far off event that will never really happen and we live as though we'll be around forever. But if you knew you were going to die tomorrow or next month or next year, would that not wake you up and cause you to live differently? That awareness would sober you quickly and that's how the knowledge that the Day of the Lord is coming should impact us; it should have a sobering effect on our lives. So how do we keep ourselves sober; how do we keep ourselves from being lulled into spiritual unconsciousness like everybody else? Paul says:

2. we should shield our lives by practicing faith and love (8b) A Roman soldier wore a breastplate, a piece of body armor made of leather or bronze, that protected his torso from his neck to his waist, front and back. It was designed to guard his vital organs in battle, particularly the heart. Paul says our breastplate, the thing that protects our heart from spiritual danger is continuing to wear, that is to continually practice, both faith toward God and love toward people. If we continually trust God by always doing what He tells us to do and sacrificially love other people by putting their well-being ahead of our own, we will never go to sleep spiritually. If we make those two things the central focus of our lives,

they will guard our hearts from every attempt of the enemy to lead us wandering astray back into darkness. And then Paul adds that:

3. we should shield our minds with the sure hope of our salvation (8c) A Roman soldier also wore a helmet, literally a “head-encirclement” made of metal, to protect his head from harm. Paul says that likewise, we are to protect our minds from spiritual harm by encircling them with this particular “helmet”, the hope of our salvation. Again, in the Bible hope is not a wish, but a certainty; it is looking forward to something we are absolutely certain is going to happen in the future. And here, the term *salvation* is not referring to believing in Jesus and having our sins forgiven; Paul means that we will be literally rescued or delivered from the coming awful events of the Day of the Lord. How do I know that? Look at verse (9).

a. we are not destined to endure the coming wrath that God will pour out upon the earth in the Day of the Lord, **but to be rescued from it by Jesus coming for us!** We have a God-decreed destiny and our destiny is that we will never have to endure the wrath of God, not in hell and not when He pours it out on earth in the Tribulation period! We will be rescued out of it! How? By what we just saw in chapter 4; Jesus will appear in the heavens and catch us all up to Himself in heaven before the wrath ever begins! We simply will not be here! As Jesus promised the Church at Philadelphia, *...I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.* - Rev. 3:10. Literally, *I will keep you OUT OF it!* That's what He's saying here to us all, “You won't be here to endure it; you'll be with Me!” And then Paul adds that:

b. our rescue is not dependent upon our awareness or performance (10) He's not talking about whether we're dead or alive. He's saying it doesn't matter whether we're sober and watchful or whether we actually do doze and slumber and become lethargic; we will still live with Him in heaven forever simply because He died for us. We don't have to worry, “But what if I'm not good enough? What if I don't deserve to be raptured out? What if I am left to endure this awful time?” Listen, it doesn't depend on you! You ought to be awake and practicing faith and love, but even if you're not, when Jesus calls, you're going UP! Hallelujah!

Now wrap your mind in that and you won't live in fear of the awful Day of the Lord. It will protect your mind. Rather, if we're sober, we will live in fear of that Day for others, not ourselves! And finally, Paul says this (11):

4. we should constantly encourage and build up one another Why? Because we need each other. God's greatest protection against spiritual lethargy is that he has given us to each other. As the writer of Hebrews says, *...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* - Heb. 10:24-25. We stir each other up more and more and encourage each other on more and more as we see that great Day drawing closer and closer. And to do that we need to be together, a lot, often!

On September 21, 1938, a hurricane of monstrous proportions struck the East Coast of the United States. William Manchester, writing about it his book The Glory and the Dream, says that "the great wall of brine struck the beach between Babylon and Patchogue (Long Island, New York) at 2:30 p.m. So mighty was the power of that first storm wave that its impact registered on a seismograph in Sitka, Alaska, while the spray, carried northward at well over a hundred miles an hour, whitened windows in Montpelier, Vermont." Winds reached 150 miles per hour and the wave height of the storm surge reached a high of 35 feet. The storm killed 682 people, destroyed 57,000 homes and remains the most powerful and deadliest hurricane in recent New England history. Sadly, the meteorologists--who should have known what was coming and should have warned the public--seemed strangely blind to the impending disaster. Either they ignored their instruments or simply couldn't believe them, so the public was not properly warned. Manchester continues, "Among the striking stories which later came to light, was the experience of a Long Islander who had bought a barometer a few days earlier in a New York store. It arrived in the morning post September 21, and to his annoyance the needle pointed below 29, where the dial read, 'Hurricanes and Tornadoes.' He shook it and banged it against the wall; the needle wouldn't budge. Indignant, he repacked it, drove to the post office, and mailed it back. While he was gone, his house blew away." Dear friends, the greatest impending disaster of all the ages is going to come upon the whole world. We know it because we've been assured by the One who's going to send the storm! So, we are the meteorologists, or in spiritual terms, the prophets, who know what's going to happen and we have a responsibility to warn the world. There is only one way of escaping this impending doom and His Name is Jesus. Sharing Him is people's only hope. To the world, we are the barometer that says, “A great hurricane is coming!” but people don't want to hear our forecast. So they blame the barometer as being wrong. Or they ignore its warning. Or they get rid of it altogether! But regardless of how people respond, the Day of the Lord is still coming. Our responsibility is to keep on declaring the truth and to not to let ourselves fall into their state of lethargy and uncaring.

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Living To Please God (Part 2) - 1 Thess. 5:12-28

We're going to conclude our study of 1 Thessalonians today. In the first half of chapter 4, Paul began to give the Thessalonians, and us, a series of practical instructions for daily living, but then he interrupted those and spent the second half of

chapter 4 and the first half of chapter 5 explaining future events, both the coming of Christ for His people at the Rapture and the awful events of the coming Day of the Lord. Now at verse 12, he turns again to continue that series of practical instructions that show us how to live in a manner that pleases God. And the first instruction he gives us is that:

I. We Should Have A Godly Attitude Toward Our Leaders (12-13) To preach this always seems a bit self-serving because basically, it sounds like I'm telling you how to treat ME. Maybe that's why Paul said, *I ask you...* instead of the *I urge you [literally, I call on you...]* that he used in verse 14. So please understand that I'm not trying to elevate myself in saying this, but simply to teach you what God says. There are those whom God has placed over us in the church, elders and pastors and teachers and Bible study leaders and it is important that we have a godly attitude toward them. What does that look like? Well, Paul says:

1. we should respect them because God has made them responsible for us That word *respect* is literally, *see*. We should see them rightly and pay attention to them. God has placed us under their care and made them responsible to care for us. In fact, the first half of Heb. 13:17 says, *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.* That's a heavy statement. Our leaders aren't put there because they get to be in charge and they get the privilege of telling us what to do. Our leaders are shepherds whose responsibility is for the very lives of the sheep. That's why they teach us; that's why they encourage and exhort us to do certain things. That's why they sometimes admonish and correct us, not to make themselves feel good or superior, but because they are trying to care for our souls! And therefore:

2. we should love and value them highly because of what they do We should treasure them and thank God for them. I certainly thank you for the way that you do that for me; I have a very thick folder full of loving notes and cards that I've saved through the years in which so many of you have expressed your love and appreciation. Many of you actually say those kinds of things personally or do wonderful things that express your care and I'm very thankful. But I'm not just talking about me, but about all our leaders. God wants us to love them; He wants us to hold them in high esteem as they mirror Him to us. And then Paul adds this:

3. we should be at peace among ourselves Why? Because nothing hurts the heart of the shepherd more and makes his job more difficult than the sheep being in an uproar. Listen to the last part of **Heb. 13:17**, *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.* It's tough trying to shepherd stubborn sheep who run this way and that and won't listen to the shepherd and run off and get themselves in all kinds of trouble or head butt and push each other around. It makes the shepherd groan. But what joy he has when his sheep safely graze in peace and harmony with one another and with him. It not only makes the leaders' responsibility easier but it helps them do what they do for us better, so it's to our advantage! Well, now Paul moves on to some:

II. Admonitions That Concern Our Personal Lives in (14-19) First of all, to please God:

1. we must be patient with everyone, especially the idle, timid and weak (14) The idle, those who don't seem to do anything, need a kick in the pants; they need to be admonished, but how? With patience, gently, over and over again. The fainthearted and fearful need to be encouraged, but how? Not with impatience and yelling when they're afraid to try what we know they can do, but with patient, gentle coaxing over and over. The weak who just can't seem to do it for themselves need help. How? Not impatiently because they're interrupting our important plans, but patiently, over and over again. I'll confess this is one of my greatest weaknesses; it's hard for me to be patient with idle and timid and weak people. I think they ought to want to do it and be eager to do it and be able to do it, like I am, but when they don't and they aren't and they can't, I tend to get frustrated and angry. But that doesn't please God! Second:

2. we must always do good to others, even when evil is done to us (15) Oh, that goes against our flesh, doesn't it? When someone hurts us, we want to hurt them back. When someone speaks nastily to us or yells at us, we want to yell nasty things back. But that goes against everything Jesus taught us, doesn't it? Anyone can act like that, but Rom. 12:17 says, *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.* In other words, their doing evil to you is no excuse for you to do evil to them; no matter WHAT they do, we must always do what is good and right and honorable! That's what pleases God because it is like Him; He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good and sends His rain on just and the unjust. He does good all the time, to everyone, whether they do or not! Third:

3. we must react to our circumstances according to God's will (16-18) Most interpreters think that last phrase doesn't just relate grammatically to verse 18 but that all three of the short phrases that go before it are linked together. The will of God for us in Christ is to have the same threefold reaction all the time, in every situation, in every circumstance in life that we encounter. It's not so hard to rejoice, to pray and to give thanks when God sends something good our way, but when God allows adversity and difficulty, our flesh would rather mourn, blame Him for sending it and complain about it! Pleasing God requires asking the Holy Spirit help us react in the exact opposite fashion. God's will is that:

a. we must rejoice continually and not just when it's natural. Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten with rods and put in prison with their feet in the stocks, yet at midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God. They

were rejoicing! In all that pain and suffering, they were rejoicing. How is that even possible? Well, it happens to be to the Philippian church that Paul explained the secret, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* - **Phil. 4:4**. He is what we rejoice in! He is with us; He is in us; He is giving us strength; He is for us and no circumstance can ever separate us from His love, so we can always rejoice in Him! And, of course, God's will is that:

b. we must pray constantly and talk to Him about everything in our lives and minds! I am always baffled by the fact that when something bad happens, so often people stop praying, stop reading the Word and stop coming to church. I just don't get that; when bad stuff happens to me, that's when I want to RUN to my Heavenly Father and talk to Him. It's when I go to the Word and beg Him to speak to me! My problem with praying constantly is when everything is going well! Either way, God's will is that we pray constantly, ALL the time, in every circumstance of life. *The great confederate General "Stonewall" Jackson said, "I have so fixed the habit of prayer in my mind that I never raise a glass of water to my lips without asking God's blessing, never send a letter without putting a word of prayer under the seal, never take a letter from the mailbox without a brief lifting of my thoughts heavenward, never change my classes in the lecture room without a minute's petition for the cadets who go out and for those who come in."* [from *Purpose in Prayer*, E. M. Bounds]. That is God's will for us and here's what might be toughest:

c. we must give thanks in everything, and lest we are tempted to think that simply means "focus on things you are thankful for instead of the bad things that are happening", Paul made it explicitly clear in Eph. 5:20, *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Getting cancer, losing your job, being sick, having a flat tire? All things? Really? Yes, because ...*we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* - **Rom. 8:28**. We have no idea how God is going to do it, but whatever "this thing" is that has come into my life, God intends to use it to serve His good purpose and for that I can thank Him, even though I can't understand how He will ever do it! Well, quickly we must move on because Paul has some:

III. Admonitions That Concern Our Assembling Together in verse (19-22) Those things are really all tied together as part of one thought and it has to do with what happens when we gather together to meet for worship and teaching, whether in homes or in bigger meetings like this one. In verse 19 he literally says, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire." He means:

1. we must be careful not to oppose what the Holy Spirit is doing It is always our tendency to institutionalize our routines, to do everything the same, the way we've always done it, to make what we're comfortable with the norm. And then someone comes along and says, "I think God wants us to start a ministry to drug addicts and alcoholics" and the red flags go up and we automatically oppose it. *At a meeting of Baptist leaders in the late 1700s, a young minister named William Carey stood up to argue for the need to send missionaries overseas. He was abruptly interrupted by an older minister who said, "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me."* But he didn't sit down and the era of modern missions was born and millions have been swept into the Kingdom. We must always be careful that our flesh is not trying to put out a fire that the Holy Spirit is lighting, lest in the words of Gamaliel, we ...*might even be found to be opposing God*, as the Jewish leaders were in trying to crush the early church! - **Acts 5:39**. We must be open and listening to the Holy Spirit's leading for us, and along that line, Paul says in verse 20 that:

2. we must not treat prophecies with contempt Now that's a word we never use any more, but it's in Scripture. What is it? Put simply:

a. prophecy is speaking to others on behalf of God for their benefit It is when God gives a person a message to deliver to others on His behalf and they share it. Now:

b. it can be predictive. God often revealed things to come through prophets; for instance, in **Acts 11:27-28** a prophet named Agabus predicted a great famine that happened in the days of Emperor Claudius. **Or it can be personal**, just as in **Acts 21:10-12**, the same Agabus declared that Paul would be arrested by the Romans when he went to Jerusalem, and he was. But I don't think that kind of direct, I-have-a-message-from-God-for-you declaration is what Paul has in mind here. In the New Testament context, **prophecy usually refers to preaching or sharing a message with the body**. Turn with me to **1 Cor. 14:1-4**. In these early church gatherings, just as in ours, somebody (or more than one) would stand up and preach or share a message with the others, a message that they felt God had given them to encourage and build up the group. Prophecy was a spiritual gift, not a gift of declaring the future, but a gift of sensing what was on God's heart, putting it into words and sharing it with God's people to build them up in the faith. It was a normal experience every time they gathered for worship, just as it is for us. And Paul says:

We are not to despise the prophecies that people share. We're not to treat the messages that are being given to us by godly people as of little value and refuse to listen to them. When God speaks a message to us for our good through someone, we're to listen and take it to heart and do whatever God might be urging us to do. We're not to walk away and go, "Who cares? That person doesn't know what they're talking about!" Again, this may sound self-serving, but I spend at least a day and a half of every week putting together what I sense God wants me to share with you during these 30 minutes on Sunday. Your Sunday School teachers and Bible Study leaders invest hours into discerning

God's truths to share with you to build you up. We're not to despise that and treat it as boring and unimportant; we're to soak it up and grow through it! However, this ongoing every day exercise of the prophetic gift is not infallible; it is not without the possibility of having human error introduced into it. In other words, some of the things that some of us sense that God wants us to say aren't really 100% from Him. For instance, there are a few things that I used to declare pretty strongly in my younger days that I have since come to believe aren't really true. I was wrong at the time and didn't know it. And you don't have to turn your dial very far today to hear people sharing messages that they believe are from God that have some glaring untruths in them, yet they don't see it. That's why Paul said in verse 21 that:

3. we must test everything we hear and retain the good If you're still in **1 Cor. 14**, look at verse **29**. The listeners are to weigh, to evaluate, to judge with discrimination what is shared, to test it to see whether it really is from God or just human sentiment. Paul assumes that the sharing of prophecy is a partial thing, that it comes as a mixture of the Spirit's truth with flawed human understanding. Not everything I say, no matter how hard I try, will be right! Test everything, I say, everything you hear, everything you are taught, everything that claims to be from God. Test it against God's written Word. Does God really say that in the Bible or is part of what I heard man's opinion? Retain, cling to, hang on to that which is good and from God and discard the rest. "Eat the meat and spit out the bones!", as the saying goes. We should test everything we hear that claims to be from God and hang onto it dearly if it is, but Paul goes on in verse 22 to say:

4. we must refrain from evil of any sort, even if it seems "spiritual" If we want to please God, we must be sure to listen to what He's saying, yet we must also be sure not to swallow the bones but rather to spit them out and reject them because they're wrong. They're a form of evil, no matter how "godly" they may sound.

Just last week I listened to a video of a well-respected Christian leader teaching on prevailing prayer and his three major points were very good in laying out the way we ought to pray: 1) specifically, 2) with urgency and 3) expecting God to answer. But some of the comments he made didn't sit well with my spirit and it dawned on me that he was really saying, "The test of whether we're praying rightly is whether we see God do what we ask." Wow, what about all the godly people like Paul who have prayed specifically, with urgency, expecting God to do something and He hasn't done it but rather has said, "No, I'm going to do something different! I want you to keep your thorn in the flesh!" I sensed there was some false mixed in with the true in that message so I kept what was good and refused the rest, even though it all sounded really good. That's what Paul is admonishing us to do every time someone speaks in God's name - even if it's me! Now, how are we going to be able to do this, to live in these ways that please God, respecting our leaders, always being patient with everybody, returning good for evil, rejoicing and thanking God in difficult circumstances, listening to truth but discerning error? We say, "That's a tall order; only God Almighty could truly live like that!" That's absolutely true and that's why Paul concludes by saying:

IV. Only God Himself Can Enable Us To Live His Way (23-24) Who is going to make you live a holy, sanctified life? Who is going to keep you from sin in the way that you think and feel and act all the time so that you're blameless when Jesus comes? And Jesus IS coming, did you notice that? Listen, He who has called us to live in the way that pleases Him is faithful and HE will surely do it. The key is that:

1. we must depend upon His power and not our own strength It's not about trying harder and failing less. It's about learning to turn to Him in every situation, stopping and praying and calling upon Him to shape our thoughts and our words and our actions, to live out the life that only He can live through us. And Paul assures us that:

2. He is faithful and WILL empower us to live holy lives He'll do it. He'll never fail to be there in the moment we need Him and to infuse us with Divine energy to please Him. All we have to do is learn to stop and ask, and ask, and ask, and ask, and ask.

Paul closes his letter with a:

V. Paul's Personal Farewell To The Thessalonians (25-28) These Thessalonian believers were dear to Paul, just as you are to me.

1. he deeply loved them and counted on them praying for him, just as I love you and count on you praying for me, because we who teach and share what God wants you to do are frail, fallible people who struggle in the process just as much as you do. But also notice that Paul:

2. he strongly desired the instructions in this letter to be known by all He didn't want them read just by the few who received them from the delivery messenger, but read to the whole church, in all the little house churches that met in the city, so that all the believers would hear. He intended it for that church and even for other churches and, I think, even for us now. What a great encouragement His letter has been to us. Let's do our best to take it to heart.

James Hudson Taylor felt God's call to become a missionary to China and founded the China Inland Mission (now OMF International). He spent 51 years in China. The society that he began was responsible for bringing over 800 missionaries to the country who began 125 schools and directly resulted in 18,000 Christian conversions, as well as the establishment of more than 300 stations of work with more than 500 local helpers in all eighteen provinces. Primarily because of the

CIM's campaign against the Opium trade, Taylor has been referred to as one of the most significant Europeans to visit China in the 19th Century. Historian Ruth Tucker says: No other missionary in the nineteen centuries since the Apostle Paul has had a wider vision and has carried out a more systematized plan of evangelizing a broad geographical area than Hudson Taylor. [Wikipedia] How did he do all of that? What was his secret? He himself described it by saying, "I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked that I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me." That is how God intended us to live the Christian life, a life that pleases Him, whatever He calls us to do.

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2 Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Worthy Of His Calling - 2 Thess. 1

(GBC 29th Anniversary - June 7, 2015)

Twenty nine years ago on June 1, 1986, Glenside Bible Church was formed by the consolidation of Ardsley Community Chapel and Wharton Baptist Church and we held our first worship service as a new body. I was there and so were a number of you. We stood right here and pledged ourselves to a new covenant of membership to be one body, one family in Christ. Through the years we have added a number of new folks into our family but we've also lost quite a few who have graduated on to glory. On days like this it is fitting to think back and fondly remember dear ones with names like Mason and Wiley and Ostheimer and Sleep and Hunsicker and Schubert and Rufino and Morris and literally dozens more who have all helped make us the body of believers that we are today. And, of course, there are lots of dear faithful ones still living that have been called away to other places for various reasons over the years with whom we still connect fondly and wish they were here, but they can't be. We are not the same church that we were 29 years ago and we don't live in the same world anymore either. Back then we thought our society was rapidly deteriorating but we'd never even heard of AIDS and would never have dreamed that our government would be considering the legalization of same sex marriage. We couldn't have imagined how far our moral climate would sink. On the other hand, we also would never have dreamed that in the next 25 years from that time more people would come to Christ than in all of history up until then! Much less could we conceive that we would talk and text regularly to extensions of our church family at the ends of the earth with devices we carry in our pockets. No, we are not the same body, nor are we living in the same world. But we are still bound together as one family and we are still pursuing the same age-old calling, as Paul put it earlier in 1 Thes. 2:12, *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.* God has called all of us who have believed in Jesus to belong to His Kingdom and to share in His glory! Paul told Timothy that we have a *holy calling* (2 Tim. 1:9), so the lives we live on earth should be worthy of those who belong to a holy kingdom. And the writer of Hebrews says that we share in a *heavenly calling* (3:1), an amazing future in heaven joined to the very presence of God, so the lives we live on earth should be worthy of those who experience the glory of God. Together we are pursuing that calling, encouraging and exhorting one another, growing together into the likeness of Christ Himself. One comes, another goes, the world around us changes, yet through it all we press on together to be like Jesus.

Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians not very long after he wrote the first one. He was still miles away from them down in Corinth in southern Greece and still hadn't seen them in more than a year now, but he writes them once again very tenderly to encourage them and I would like to use His words in this first chapter to encourage you on our anniversary. Let's read verses (1-4). First of all, as Paul says about this beloved church in verses 3-4:

I. I Must Thank God For You My Dear Brothers And Sisters of Glenside Bible Church. As he put it, I ought to do it; it's right to do it; I have an obligation to continually thank God for you. You have been our spiritual family for all of these 29 years and for some of you even longer because it will soon be 36 years since LuAnn and I actually arrived here. We have basically spent the whole of our lives as part of this body; we have had and raised our family here and we have never regretted it. Over and over again your lives have blessed ours in so many ways that we can't help but give thanks for you. But Paul specifically mentioned three things that he thanked God for and I'll echo them. First:

1. I thank Him because your faith is growing abundantly Now right off let me make a disclaimer: neither this nor any of the other statements is 100% true of every individual who is part of this body, nor was it in Paul's day, I'm sure. Not every single person who claims GBC as their spiritual family is growing abundantly in faith; there are always some who are stagnant and stuck in the mud spiritually. There are always others who are in a stage where they are even rebelling against God in certain areas of their lives. But taken as a whole, as a body together, our faith is growing. For instance, in 1986 we were trusting the Lord to supply \$114,000 for our ministries; this year we're trusting Him for \$315,000 with fewer people. Back then we were trusting God for \$34,000 to support missions; now we're trusting Him for \$62,000 plus another \$23,000 or so for our short-term teams. In several of our recent years we've seen Him provide over \$100,000 for missions as we needed it. In 1986 we "supported missions"; we would never have dreamed that it would become normal for ordinary GBC members to get on airplanes every year and go to places like Kyrgyzstan and India and Guatemala and China and to be deeply involved in encouraging Muslims and Hindus and secular atheists come to Christ! We would never have dreamed that our little church would be deeply involved in encouraging partnerships in significant ways, personally communicating constantly, from the steaming jungles of Indonesia to the frigid mountains of Northwest China to the poverty-stricken villages and a burgeoning major city of India to an inaccessible village in the Amazon rainforest. We've trusted God and He's let us touch the world! But your faith has abounded right

here in Glenside too. It has touched the lives of literally many hundreds of community children from many dozens of families through our Pioneer Club Program that we've grown and our Nursery School and Playgroup programs. We have people who were preschoolers 29 years ago now sending us their preschoolers! Through the years literally hundreds of people from our Community have been blessed in one way or another by the myriad activities of our Community Outreach Team and all of you who assist them and we've boldly gone into Philadelphia year after year serving various agencies who help the poor and homeless and even helped single moms right here in Glenside. Your faith has grown abundantly as you've followed the Lord Jesus into opportunity after opportunity, being stretched further and further, and I thank Him for that. Second:

2. I thank Him because your love for each other is ever increasing The acts of sacrificial love that I've seen emanate from members of this body through the years are too many to mention. You've obviously given many thousands of dollars to help others in need. On many occasions I've found envelopes with \$1,000 in them left under my office door to help one or the other of our folks who is out of work and sometimes gifts given have been multiple thousands. Through the years you have taken people into your homes to live when they needed it both long term and temporarily. You've taken in young children who needed a refuge or college students who needed a place to stay. Meals too many to mention have graced the tables of those who are sick or weak and when someone is ill or has a need you are there to visit and comfort before I am. And it never seems to get old; you never get tired of loving. It just goes on and on and grows as it extends itself to newer parts of the family and I thank God for that! Third:

3. I thank Him for your steadfastness and faithfulness amid difficulties The Thessalonians had definitely been victims of persecution in a way that we don't experience, but they also faced many afflictions that are common to us. These have not been 29 easy years. So many of us have lost loved ones; in fact, our records have the names of 106 people who have died since mid-1985, and so many times we have stood at gravesides with you. And not all of those deaths were simple and natural; many of you have faced the ravages of disease in yourself or cared fiercely for a suffering loved one. You have found yourselves out of work or laid up with an injury, sometimes for a year or two or longer. Yet I have never seen one of you deny the faith and walk away. You have trusted God through pain and suffering of all types and come out stronger. As a body we have endured the burning of our building and survived the effects of serious sins upon our fellowship repeatedly, yet here we stand united together, still steadfastly and faithfully following after Jesus and that high calling He has given us, even if some of us are limping along at times! And I thank God for that! Like Paul in verse 4, when I am elsewhere, I boast about you to others; I tell them about your faith and your love and your faithfulness through the years! In speaking opportunities, I often use you as an example to encourage others, even when I am literally on the other side of the earth.

But is it worth it? Is it worth continuing to reach out and trust and love in the midst of all the suffering that comes our way? Paul wanted to encourage the Thessalonians that it is! And just as he encouraged them:

II. I Want To Encourage You To Look To The Future (5-10) Listen, here's what you need to remember: Jesus is coming! Don't forget that, ever, even though it's easy to because:

1. we are living in an increasingly hostile world Here in America where we live, we have been blessed with a wonderful lull of 250 years where believers have enjoyed full freedom and for most of it a positive public opinion. But that is now rapidly changing; don't count on it forever. The generations from WWII on have known a time of peace and prosperity unparalleled in the history of the world. We've been blessed to live at a standard no other generation has ever known and it has lulled us into unconsciousness of the fact that around the world believers regularly suffer hostility that ranges from mild discrimination to outright extermination. Jesus warned us that the world will hate us and we are seeing that more and more in this new century. The world is not getting better and becoming more utopian. It is getting more violent and that is coming closer and closer to home. Just as Paul told Timothy, *...understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God [and so on]... Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Tim. 3:1-5,12-13).* We are living in an increasingly hostile world; what can keep us faithful? Paul says this:

2. when Jesus comes our enemies will be justly repaid for all that they have done. I don't want to dwell on it long, but he says some very strong things in what we read. He says that God has an awful future that lies ahead for those who do not know Him, who refuse to obey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even before His arrival:

a. they will be afflicted with a time of suffering on earth beforehand, a time Jesus Himself called the Great Tribulation, a time when God pours out His wrath on unbelieving mankind to such a degree that if it wasn't limited the entire human race would be wiped out. But just when it seems that things can't get worse, Jesus will appear with the armies of heaven and that will be the end of all His enemies. According to verse (9):

b. they will be eternally destroyed at His arrival, separated from God forever, and cast into a lake of fire that burns forever and ever. Dear friends, the world will not always be like this; it will not always be full of wars and slav-

ery and human trafficking and cruelty and poverty. Jesus is coming and He will put an end to it all one day. But the really encouraging part is this; Paul says that:

3. when Jesus comes, we have an amazing future to look forward to. He is coming to take us out BEFORE the world descends into its final awful state. As Paul wrote in the first letter, God has not destined us to endure that awful time of God's wrath, but to be delivered out of it by the coming of Jesus for His saints. And when He is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, according to verse (7):

a. we will be granted rest and relief Hallelujah! Our struggles, our afflictions will all be over! We will rest from all our labors; we will be relieved from all pain and suffering and sorrow. We will be with Him in His heavenly Kingdom forever and:

b. He will be glorified in us and marveled at by us according to verse (10) We will be made to shine with His glory, perfected, holy, pure, in glowing white garments, trophies of His grace for all of heaven to see and rejoice in, and while the creation is marveling at us, we will be marveling at Him when we see Him in all the fullness of His glory at last! And our rest and our relief and our glorifying and our marveling will go on forever; there will be no end!

Dear brothers and sisters, it is this hope, this heavenly calling that keeps us true and steadfast. In every generation it has been the great hope of the church that Jesus is coming and if we can get our heads pried loose from our technology-filled, earth-centered, rationalistic ways of thinking, it will be our sustaining hope too. Jesus is coming! *Greg Fisher was teaching Thessalonians to a classroom full of West African Bible College Students when one of them asked, "What will he say when he shouts?" He says, "The question took me by surprise... 'Reverend, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that Christ will descend from heaven with a loud command. I would like to know what that command will be.' I wanted to leave the question unanswered, to tell him that we must not go past what Scripture has revealed, but my mind wandered to an encounter I had earlier in the day with a refugee from the Liberian civil war. The man, a high school principal, told me how he was apprehended by a two-man death squad. After several hours of terror, as the men described how they would torture and kill him, he narrowly escaped. After hiding in the bush for two days, he was able to find his family and escape to a neighboring country. The escape cost him dearly: two of his children lost their lives. The stark cruelty unleashed on an unsuspecting, undeserving population had touched me deeply. I also saw flashbacks of the beggars that I pass each morning on my way to the office. Every day I see how poverty destroys dignity, robs men of the best of what it means to be human, and sometimes substitutes the worst of what it means to be an animal. I am haunted by the vacant eyes of people who have lost all hope. "Reverend, you have not given me an answer. What will he say?" The question hadn't gone away. "Enough," "I said "He will shout, 'Enough!' when he returns." A look of surprise came on the face of the student. "What do you mean, enough?" "Enough suffering. Enough starvation. Enough terror. Enough death. Enough indignity. Enough lives trapped in hopelessness. Enough sickness and disease. Enough time. Enough!" [Gregory L. Fisher in Leadership-Vol. 12, #4]. One day soon Jesus will say, "Enough!" and come to deliver us from this hostile world! And since Jesus is coming, we can keep on trusting, keep on loving, keep on faithfully and steadfastly enduring persecution and affliction because one day soon He will be here and we will know rest and relief forever! It is only this hope that will sustain us through the days to come! But in the meantime, we can pray for one another. That's why Paul told the Thessalonians:*

III. I Always Pray For You (11-12) I always pray for you too, but I don't always pray like Paul prayed; I get too wrapped up in asking for the things people need to fix their earthly problems. He prayed three things that I must learn to pray for you too, things that we should learn to pray for one another. So, like Paul, I pray:

1. that God may make you worthy of His calling Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. - Eph. 4:1.* We have this holy, heavenly calling to belong to His Kingdom and enter His glory forever, so Paul prayed we would live it out every day in our home, where we work, where we go to school, among our neighbors, in a manner that is worthy of what we've been called to! But how can we? In our own strength we try and fail over and over again. Well, here Paul says God Himself can MAKE us worthy; He can impart that worthiness to us by His own Divine energy that dwells inside us. We need to pray that God Himself would so fill and control our lives that they would be filled with abounding faith and increasing love and steadfast faithfulness and be worthy of the Kingdom to which we are looking forward. Then Paul goes on, in my opinion, in his second request to spell out what he really means by the first one. We pray:

2. that God may fulfill your every good desire and work of faith by His power. That is, that every good thing you desire to do for Him, He will enable you to do by His Divine power, that every act you want to see Him do, He will do it through you by His power. I pray that for you; I pray that for me too, that all of us will learn to simply stop and call on Him and invite Him to live through us every day in every situation, so that He will live out this Kingdom-worthy way of living through us! And the third thing Paul prays spells out the point of it all. We pray:

3. that Jesus' name may be glorified in you and you in Him through His grace, that by His power placed in you as an act of grace, He will act through you in such a way that you will act like Him and He will get all the glory. Or as we read in 2 Corinthians, *...men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ... - 9:13.* As He empowers us to live a worthy life, He'll get the praise; He will be glorified in your life as He gives you power to live it in a worthy manner.

You may be a doctor or a janitor, a sales clerk or a mechanic, a student or a housewife taking care of kids. Your daily life is where this this worthiness is lived out. *Johann Sebastian Bach was obviously one of the world's most brilliant composers. He spent his life writing music and here's what he said, "All music should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the soul's refreshment; where this is not remembered there is no real music but only a devilish hub-bub."* [Kingdom Conflict, J. Stowell, Victor, 1985, p. 77ff.] That is true, not only of music, but of whatever we do. *Whenever Bach began to write a new piece of music, he bowed his head and prayed. "Jesus, help me show your glory through the music I write. May it bring you joy even as it brings joy to your people."* Without Jesus' help, Johann knew he'd never be able to complete the task. Before writing a note, he carefully formed the letters J.J. at the top of the page, the abbreviation for the Latin phrase "Jesu Juva", which means "Jesus help me!" With that, the music began to pour from his soul and onto the page. When he was finally satisfied and it was completed, he wrote the letters S.D.G. at the bottom of the page - Soli Deo Gloria - For the Glory of God Alone. His deepest desire was that when his music was played, God would receive all the credit and the praise and the glory for it, that it would point people to God. [<http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/j-s-bach-soli-deo-gloria-to-the-glory-of-god-alone-11635057.html>] That's how you live a life worthy of your calling. You begin every day with that prayer, "Jesus help me", and you ask Him the same way over and over again in every situation you encounter throughout the day. Then when the day is done, you close it with a prayer of thanksgiving, "Lord, to you alone be the glory!" So, let's keep on as we have for 29 years, let's keep on pursuing our high calling together, encouraging one another to live worthy lives, and all the more as we see that Day approaching. Jesus is coming!

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Understanding Christ's Return - 2 Thess. 2:1-12

The second chapter of 2 Thessalonians is both unique and important, because in it, Paul reveals details about the second coming of Christ to these dear brothers and sisters, and also to us, that are found nowhere else in Scripture. And he does that because of:

I. A False Teaching that he had heard a report about that made him deeply concerned. Someone was teaching them that: **We Are Experiencing The Day Of The Lord Right Now (1-2)**. Now let me briefly review the information that we studied back in 1 Thes. 5.

1. the term *Day of the Lord* means all the events revealed to us in **Rev. 6-20**. It is the day, the era, when God will intervene directly in human history. It begins in Rev. 6 with a 7 year long period we call the *Tribulation* where God pours out His great wrath on humanity in plague after plague. And at the end of that time, *Christ returns* with the armies of heaven, as described in Rev. 19 and destroys all His enemies. Then He establishes His *Millennial Kingdom* on earth with those who survive and reigns for 1,000 years and it all ends with the *Great White Throne* judgment in Rev. 20, where all the unbelieving dead are resurrected, sentenced and sent into everlasting fire. That whole thing from beginning to end is what the Scripture describes as the *Day of the Lord*, but most often when that phrase is used it is pointing to the first part of that time, to the events of those awful Tribulation years. Now:

2. someone was circulating this false teaching in Thessalonica, that we are already living IN the Day of the Lord, that the Day of the Lord has already started and the events that we are experiencing now are the beginning of the awful judgments that will soon come! Paul didn't know exactly where the teaching had originated. He says it might have been started by a spirit, that is, an evil spirit, and it certainly was; Satan himself invented this lie. But it might have been a human word from somebody that they themselves had thought up. Certainly, people do that today. Just google "tribulation now" and you'll find a host of people who look at the world events around us, the rise of Isis, the famines and tsunamis and earthquakes, the clash of nations and armies and conclude, "This is it. We're living IN the tribulation right now!" They're looking to identify an Antichrist, warning about how bad things will soon get and setting dates by which Jesus should arrive on the scene. That is EXACTLY what was happening in Thessalonica! Paul even seems to infer that maybe someone had forged a letter that was supposed to be from him, claiming to teach this doctrine in order to give it greater authority! But however it got started, it was being widely spread among the believers and having a devastating effect:

3. it created fear that they would soon experience horrible suffering, instead of Jesus coming and gathering believers up to Himself before that time began. To use our terms, they were afraid the Rapture of the church was not going to happen and that in reality they were going to have to live through the awful events of the Tribulation period. Paul says, "That is what I want to set you straight on! Don't believe the lie. Don't be shaken from what I've taught you! Don't let yourselves become filled with alarm and fear! Jesus IS coming to gather us to Himself before the Day of the Lord happens!" Now I want you to realize that what I'm about to say is meant in genuine love. There are large sections of the evangelical church today, respected brothers and sisters whom we love and maybe even some sitting here today, who may not go so far as to teach or believe that we are actually living in the Tribulation right now, yet who strongly believe and teach that we, the Church, WILL go through the Tribulation, that we WILL experience the awful suffering Jesus spoke about and those who survive to the end of it will be caught up to Jesus at the very same moment that He

returns to earth. For you theologians, that's called belief in a *post-tribulation rapture*. Down through history many respected Christians have held and taught this doctrine, some beginning as early as 200 AD. However, with all due respect for their genuine love of Jesus, that teaching can have the same effect that Paul wrote about here; if we take the events of the Tribulation predicted by Jesus, Paul and John as being literal and real and then seriously ponder the idea that if it should begin during our lifetime, we are going to experience unimaginable pain and suffering and probably die under the awful persecution that is part of it, that's enough to make one live in tremendous fear of the future! It is easy to see how the Thessalonians who were already being persecuted severely were living in growing fear because of this, or even how believers living in the path of Isis or in North Korea, could live in that same awful alarm, "What if this is now the Tribulation? What if it's beginning?" That's why it's important that we understand:

II. The Identifying Marks That The Day Of The Lord Has Begun which Paul reveals to us in verses (3-5). There are two things that Paul reminds them of here, things that he had already taught them in the few weeks that he was with them a year earlier. These two things are unmistakable, recognizable signs and it is very important to recognize that they are tied together as one. He says that when the Day of the Lord arrives:

1. there will come a rebellion The Greek word is *apostasy* which means **a defection from the truth**. It does not refer to unbelievers who deny the truth but to those who have held the truth and deliberately abandon it and renounce it. Once official persecution by the Roman Empire began a decade or two after this, arrested Christians were offered a choice: renounce Christ and offer sacrifice to the Emperor; otherwise face prison and death. Some complied with the demand and became known as *apostates* and later on during intermittent times of peace, there was real debate in the church as to whether apostates who had renounced the faith, could repent and be readmitted. Today there is a different form of widespread apostasy that exists within the professing church itself; there are millions who still retain the name "Christian" but deny that Christ is God, that He rose bodily from the dead, that salvation is ONLY through Him and that He is coming again. They have departed from God's saving truth. But when the Day of the Lord arrives a widespread apostasy will occur in the classic sense. It will be something that can be recognized without any mistake because it is *THE* apostasy, *THE* great falling away, *THE* rebellion. Millions will renounce and reject whatever belief they had in the true God or in Jesus Christ. And they will do it, Paul says, in conjunction with the second part of this sign:

2. an evil world leader will be revealed in an unmistakable way. Here he is called the **man of lawlessness** (in some translations the *man of sin*). In other places in Scripture he is called *the Beast* or *the Antichrist*. He will be a world leader far greater than any Napoleon or Hitler who has tried to conquer the world in the past. He will actually succeed in garnering the allegiance of the nations of the earth through force and deception. But when this man is finally revealed, Paul implies that the whole world will be able to recognize him for who he is because of this:

a. he will actually proclaim himself to BE God Sure, Egyptian Pharaohs and Roman Emperors and even several modern-day dictators and cult leaders have called themselves god and demanded worship, but this man will be different from all the rest. He will proclaim to the whole world that he is God and here's the unmistakable part:

b. he will do it in the Temple of God in Jerusalem, the place chosen by Jehovah, the True God, for His Name to dwell forever! It will be a direct act of defiance, an impersonation of God Almighty Himself, complete with a demand that the whole world worship him or die. Of course, the Temple was destroyed in AD 70 and is not standing today, so obviously it will be rebuilt at some point yet future because the Word of God must be fulfilled. Look with me at what Jesus said in **Mt. 24:15-21**. Jesus said that when you see this Abomination of Desolation standing in the Holy Place, placing his statue there permanently, declaring himself to be the true god and demanding that the whole world worship him under pain of death, THAT is the unmistakable sign that the worst of the Great Tribulation will immediately begin! In fact, that is the ONLY sign that Jesus gave that could be looked for, recognized, and people could regard with assurance that the Great Tribulation had arrived. And the great Apostasy is simply multitudes of people renouncing any faith in God or Christ and declaring their new worship of this false god when he demands it!

Paul said, "When you see THAT happening, you know you are smack in the middle of the Day of the Lord and destruction is upon you! Until you see THAT, no matter how bad the earthquakes or the famines or the persecution you are experiencing, IT is not here; you're NOT in the Day of the Lord; it is NOT the end time. *The end is not yet!* These unmistakable signs must happen first!" How I wish people could somehow understand and grasp that simple statement! Through the centuries, people have railed against this Roman Emperor or that Pope or some other tyrant, claiming they are the Antichrist. Robert Fuller writes: *Back in 1925, the threat of Russia loomed sufficiently to set prophecy writers working overtime in their efforts to identify just who would soon emerge to fill the role of the Antichrist and oppose Russia (Gog) in the final days. The chief contender for the role [was] the fascist Italian leader [Benito] Mussolini... Mussolini was suggested principally because of his association with Rome, the center of the Antichrist confederation that will rise to dominate the world in the end times. As early as 1925... publications such as Prophetic News and Evangel alerted their readers that they should be on the lookout for the revival of the old Roman Empire. "Mussolini", Evangel warned, "was the strongest character in world politics today" and his rise to power could mean nothing else than that "the climax is near." Gerald Winrod's Mussolini's Place in Prophecy (1933) reviewed all the biblical clues concerning the identity of the Antichrist and concluded that they "all point to Mussolini."* [Naming The Antichrist, Robert C. Fuller, p. 161.] Twelve years later Mussolini was caught fleeing Italy, summarily shot and his body hanged upside down in a public square! He was NOT the Antichrist! Jesus said

there is only one sign, THIS sign, the world leader proclaiming himself to be god IN the Temple, and those who are alive at that time and see it will be able to know the end time is actually upon them and they are living in it. But now Paul backs up to explain something else. He tells us:

III. What Is Preventing The Day Of The Lord From Beginning (6-8) The reason that the Day of the Lord, the end time, has not begun is this:

1. there is a powerful restraining force that must be taken out of the way first, according to verse 6. The powerful force of evil and lawlessness has been at work in the world all along, but through the centuries there has been some force, some unseen mighty power, restraining it, holding it back, keeping it from becoming as bad as it could possibly be. And in verse 7 this force is grammatically personal and masculine, a HE, a Person, One who has been at work to keep the whole world from descending into the pit of evil and falling under God's judgment. Now, what Person, what force could do such a huge thing? Only God Himself has such power! Therefore, most interpreters believe that:

a. this force is the Holy Spirit Himself! Remember, He was sent into the world at Pentecost and He was **sent to give power to build the Church**. He came to dwell in believers and filled them with God's mighty power so they would become witnesses unto Christ all the way to the uttermost parts of the earth. From that day to this He has been at work in and through believers all over the world and bringing conviction upon nonbelievers continually growing that mighty body, the Church. But in order for the world to descend into complete evil and follow after the Antichrist, the Spirit must be taken out of the way. And:

b. since the Spirit indwells believers, it follows that the Church must be taken away or He would still be here! For Him to be gone, WE must be gone. So what Paul is really saying is that:

2. after the Church is raptured out, the man of lawlessness will be revealed Only after Christ has appeared in the air and taken us all up to be with Him, only THEN will the Day of Grace be over and the Day of the Lord begin and the Lawless One will come on the scene! The Spirit came to indwell and empower the church and when the Gospel has been preached to all the peoples, He will be taken out and the end will come. So we will not BE here when all the wrath of God falls upon the earth! We will be in heaven with Jesus! Hallelujah! Now, after the church is taken up there will still be many who will come to believe through our lasting influence, a great innumerable multitude of them, Revelation says. But when the Antichrist demands the worship of the world, a great many of those will fall away after him and a great many will also be killed. Yet in the end, Paul says:

3. Jesus will utterly destroy him with a word and the glory of His coming That's all it will take! The most powerful man on the earth with all his armies, at a simple command from Jesus' lips, will be thrown alive into the fire of hell and all those with him die instantly according to Rev. 19. One scholar says, "The very breathing of the glorified Jesus will slay the lawless one like the blast of a fiery furnace!" [D.E. Hiebert, *Thessalonian Epistles*, p. 315] Thank God that we know how this all ends and that it ends for good!

But after assuring us of his end, Paul goes back to give us more details about:

IV. The Reign Of The Man Of Lawlessness (9-12) First of all, notice that this man:

1. he will be empowered by Satan. Rev. 13:4 says that the great red dragon, Satan himself, gave his authority to this beast. Remember how he boasted to Jesus as he tempted Him, showing him all the kingdoms of the world and saying, *To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.* - Lk. 4:6. He wasn't lying. He will give all that authority, all that power to rule the nations of the earth to this one man. He will be Satan's man, Satan's messiah, if you will, empowered and driven by him, truly THE Anti-Christ! And because of that great power:

2. he will produce many false signs and wonders - Rev. 13:13-14 says that his religious sidekick, the False Prophet, *...performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth....* These will not be some kind of trickery but genuinely impossible things that can only be done by supernatural power in the spiritual realm. They are false signs only in that he uses them to "prove" to the world that he really IS God, yet they are real and will have a tremendously powerful effect. The world will believe him! But Paul says it like this:

3. he will deceive those who refused to love the truth and be saved, not those who never heard it! What does he mean? Well, think about it. We know that:

a. the church will take the Gospel to the entire world before the end comes Mat. 24:14 guarantees us by Jesus' own statement that the Gospel WILL be preached to all the nations, all the peoples of the earth and then the end will come. Some from every people in every place on the planet will be saved. The Gospel will be known in every culture and then suddenly the church will be raptured out. The ones who are left here on earth will be those who refused to believe the truth and be saved! It isn't that they didn't have opportunity, but that they rejected the message. And then this man of lawlessness will come upon the scene and become more and more prominent until

only 3 ½ years later he proclaims himself God and most of them will flock after him and worship him. In other words:

b. those who reject the Gospel will miss the Rapture and fall prey to the deception What if the job of reaching the nations gets finished and Jesus comes and catches us out? What about those we leave behind? Will they still have opportunity to be saved, even if we are gone? Yes, they surely will, however, it is much, much more likely that they will fall prey to the deception of the Antichrist and worship him, as most of the world will. In fact, Paul says that:

4. God will aid this process by sending a powerful deluding influence Just as there is a blinding influence, a veil, a hardening in part, that God has brought upon the Jews all these centuries because of their rejection of His Son and of His church sent to them 2000 years ago, in like manner He will send a blinding, deluding influence upon those who have rejected His message and His Son. He will actually help the man of lawlessness accomplish his goal. Why? Because:

5. through this God will justly condemn those who rejected His truth and chose to love unrighteous, sinful behavior instead. Now, this doesn't sit well with us because our culture has given us a man-centered view of the universe. Deep down we tend to believe that God exists to save us, that everybody has a right to unlimited chances to be re-deemed, but the truth is that this is God's world and nobody has a right to anything except Him. Out of His undeserved grace and mercy He will send the gospel to all nations and give the whole world the opportunity to be saved, but if they reject it and refuse to worship the true and living God, He is absolutely just to condemn them to suffer His wrath on earth and beyond. Rejecting the truth is treason against the God of the universe; it is choosing to serve the Enemy instead of the rightful Ruler and it is punishable by death.

Those who refuse the warning, rightfully suffer the consequences. *Around 1900, the French island of Martinique was a prosperous colony in the Caribbean and was known as the Paris of the West Indies. The capital, St. Pierre, lay at the foot of Mount Pelée, an old dormant volcano. During 1902, boiling water and steam were seen erupting from the crater and on April 25th, a scientific expedition was sent up to investigate. The island's newspaper, Les Colonies published the findings and told the inhabitants that there was no reason to be afraid. Day by day, life became unbearable on the island. A hideous odor of sulfur filled the air and birds dropped out of the air asphyxiated by the ash and sulfur. By May 3rd businessmen and prudent individuals moved to the Southern part of the Island. However, the newspaper continued to mock, and on May 7th it published an interview with Professor M. Landes which read, "Mont Pelee presents no more danger to the inhabitants of St. Pierre than does Vesuvius to those of Naples." The Newspaper added, "We confess we cannot understand this panic. Where could one be better off than in St. Pierre?" On the morning of May 8th, at 7:52 AM exactly, the Volcano erupted and exploded. There was no warning as the side of the mountain ripped out. Super-heated steam at a temperature of 1000 degrees Centigrade blasted out at hurricane speed obliterating the whole town and incinerating 30,000 people. Only two men survived the destruction, a prisoner, who was in the town dungeon and a cobbler who hid in his cellar. [<http://tim-shey.blogspot.com/2011/12/eruption-of-mount-pelee-st-pierre.html>]* Through the church, God will give the entire human race fair warning that the volcano of His wrath is one day going to erupt. The awful, terrible Day of the Lord WILL come. Those who are wise heed the warning and run to Jesus and are rescued from it. Those who scoff and mock and refuse it are rightfully left to endure the horrible consequences of their choice. For us who believe, it simply emphasizes over again the absolute urgency of seeing that as many possible hear the news that can deliver them and of making that our life's purpose.

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Standing Firm In The Faith - 2 Thess. 2:13-3:5

From the very beginning of this series, we have mentioned time and again the fact that the believers in Thessalonica, to whom Paul is writing, were suffering a great deal of persecution for their faith. That is the reason that they were tempted to believe the false teaching that the sufferings of the end time Day of the Lord were already upon them, as we saw last time. It is the very purpose of both these letters, and particularly of this section which we will study today, to encourage them to stand firm in their faith, to continue to trust in Christ and hold firmly to the Gospel message that Paul had taught them. And that wonderful encouragement to stand firm is just as necessary for us today as it was for them, even though the attacks against us may be of an entirely different type. In her book *Battlefield of the Mind*, Joyce Meyer says, "When a person is going through a hard time, his mind wants to give up. Satan knows that if he can defeat us in our mind, he can defeat us in our experience. That's why it is so important that we not lose heart, grow weary and faint." That "hard time" can be the pressure we face from the culture around us that tries to belittle what we believe and force us into its mold. Or the "hard time" can be the pain of the sufferings that we experience in life like battling cancer or losing a loved one or enduring divorce and desertion by a spouse. As we learn from Job's experience, Satan's plan has ever been to use the pain of our sufferings of whatever type to turn our minds against God so that he might control our lives. Standing firm in our faith is indeed of utmost importance and Paul reminds us that the very foundation of it is:

I. The Wonderful Assurance That We Possess (2:13-14) Here is the fact we know; like the Thessalonians:

1. God chose us from the beginning to salvation There is a slight issue in the text here. Many Greek manuscripts have two words in the text to describe how God has chosen us; in English they mean *from the beginning*, while other manuscripts have the two combined into one word with a different final letter which translates, as a *firstfruit*, which you heard in the ESV. Most translations prefer the first reading and it is consistent with what Paul wrote in **Eph. 1:4**, *For [God] chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love*. Our security is rooted in the fact that God chose us to belong to Him, to receive salvation, to become completely holy and unblemished in glory waaaaaaay back before the creation of the world! Before He made the seas and the sky and the mountains and the animals and people, any of it, He had already chosen that we would be created and that we would belong to Him and that Christ would die to make it so! Now that is a profound mystery that believers have always struggled to understand. We have developed whole systems of theological logic to explain something that God never meant to be understood; it was meant to be marveled at and believed and appropriated, especially in suffering when we're wondering what God is doing and how this can be happening to us and whether we will be able to make it through. Yes, we will! We were chosen before the world began! Our salvation has already been standing and secure longer than the earth itself! And then we were finally born and came upon the scene of time and, Paul says, there were three elements that actually caused our salvation to occur. First:

a. He brought it to pass through the sanctifying work of the Spirit The Spirit of God set us apart from the human race to belong to God. He worked in us in a special way. He convicted us of our sin and our need for salvation. He drew our hearts to actually believe that Christ had died for our sins and to cast ourselves upon Him. He caused us to believe in our hearts and to cry out with our minds and our lips, "Oh Jesus, save ME!" And then that same Spirit entered our very bodies and regenerated us. He birthed in us a brand-new spirit, one that is holy, like that of Christ and joined Himself permanently to us. He literally MADE us holy! Then secondly Paul says:

b. our part in it was simply to believe the truth We did nothing to save ourselves; God did it all. All we did was to believe, to accept the work of God on our behalf! Not one shred of it was from ourselves; it was the gift of God, not of works, not of us doing anything, so that none of us could ever have anything to boast in. We simply believed it, but for that to occur, there had to be a third element:

c. we were called to believe through the sharing of the Gospel Romans says that nobody can believe without hearing and nobody can hear without someone preaching the news to them. Paul says, "I came along and brought the Gospel to you and you believed..." In our lives it was someone else, but the proclaiming of the Good News was the thing that the Spirit used to draw us to Christ so that we would believe. That is the process that God used to actually bring about the salvation He had decided on in eternity past, but Paul's real point was the end of verse 14. All of this had a purpose; God did all of it *so that*...

2. we will certainly possess the full glory of Christ in the end In other words, what God started in the beginning and brought to pass in our lives, He will certainly complete in the future. We WILL share the glory of Christ forever, no matter what we have to endure in this life! Look with me at the tremendous promise we have in **Rom. 8:29-30**. Simply put, our glorification with Him is already accomplished; it's a "done deal". The price has been paid and the goods are already delivered! It is more certain and more permanent than the dirt we stand upon! Nothing in all of creation can take it away from us. No matter how deep and how long the suffering we have to endure in this life, in just a short while we SHALL be glorified with Jesus forever! Hallelujah! So, as Paul says:

3. we must always be thankful for this great assurance! What if God had simply told us to fight the battle and face the struggle without any assurance of the outcome? Our minds would be continually filled with fear and doubt, and the greater the struggle, the greater the uncertainty. Bill Hybels suggests, *Sometime when you're in an airport, observe the difference between passengers who hold confirmed tickets and those who are on standby. The ones with confirmed tickets read newspapers, chat with their friends or sleep. The ones on standby hang around the ticket counter, pace and smoke, smoke and pace. The difference is caused by the confidence factor. [Bill Hybels, Too Busy Not To Pray, IVP, p. 113.]* In other words, the ones who know what their future holds have confidence about it and wait expectantly for their plane to depart. The ones who don't know whether they'll even be on the plane, have anxiety and worry constantly whether they'll make it. Knowing what the future holds for us brings peace and calm to our lives right now, no matter WHAT we are having to endure. The Scripture teaches that, so thank God that He has given us an unquestionable, rock-solid knowledge that we will be glorified with Christ just as certainly as if it is already done, which it is to God!

You know, all of us have a tendency to leave things undone. At home we've all got projects we started but never really finished. At the beach you can see the remains of partially built sand castles. The sculptors made significant progress, but apparently, they got distracted or bored and stopped building before their castles were completed. There are unfinished paintings, half-built houses, and incomplete manuscripts. We are all inclined to stop working on projects before we have completed them. But God is not like us! Our Creator will always finish what He has started. Every single one of His masterpieces, planned in eternity past and begun in time, will be brought to fulfillment in eternity future! Our future is as secure as God Himself! Hallelujah! So, having reminded us of that confidence as our foundation, Paul's exhortation is this:

II. We Must Stand Firm In What We Believe (2:15) The Greek word means to be stationary, to stand still, like a post set in cement that doesn't move when you lean on it. We are encouraged to be like an unmovable rock that weathers every storm that life hurls against it. But what does that mean for us? Two things, Paul says. It means that:

1. we must firmly hold on to the truths that we've been taught We are to seize them with a firm grip and refuse to let go of them with the tenacity of a mountain climber clinging to a rope that is suspending him on the face of a vertical cliff. So firmly are we to continue to stand in the truths of our faith. Now:

a. we received them orally from trustworthy teachers as the Thessalonians did from Paul. And I'm sure he is referring to the truth that he had just reiterated to them in the preceding section of the letter, the truth that Jesus IS coming and He WILL catch us all up to be with Him BEFORE the awful suffering of the Day of the Lord begins. That truth was slipping away from them and he reminded them in verse 5 that he had taught them this when he was with them. We need to cling to the things that godly men and women have taught us and passed down to us, the important truths of the faith. Of course, in that day the New Testament was just being written and believers HAD to trust what they'd been taught orally by men like Paul, yet even so, he mentions the importance of clinging to what he had taught them in his first letter. Likewise, we have received many important truths:

b. we received them directly from the written Scriptures themselves Ultimately, we have the completed repository of God's truth because we have the whole Bible. So, we are to grasp what the Scriptures clearly teach with an iron fist and never let go. As Paul wrote to Timothy, *...continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* - **2 Tim. 3:14-15**. The Scriptures are the once-for-all repository of saving truth; we must cling to them or we have no anchor at all. And the godly people who taught them to us, we know them and trust them and must cling to the Scriptural truths they impressed upon us. But at the bottom line, our trust cannot be simply in facts we've learned; it must be in a Person (**2:16-17**).

2. we must trust in Jesus and God our Father who gave us this glorious hope of a guaranteed future with Him forever. And what Paul trusted God to do for the Thessalonians, WE must trust Him to do for us.

a. we must trust Him to comfort us as we endure the sufferings of life We KNOW that suffering is going to come into our lives. Jesus went to great lengths to warn us that we will be hated and endure persecution, that in this world we WILL have tribulation. But He also assured us that He would send us the Comforter and He put it in writing that He is the God of all comfort and that He WILL comfort us in all our afflictions and troubles. That word *comfort* is *paraclete*. It means that He will always be right there in our suffering and come alongside us to help us and console us and encourage us and strengthen us in whatever way we need. He has promised it and we must trust Him to do it, no matter how dismal our circumstances may seem. And secondly:

b. we must trust Him to empower us to continue good works and words You know as well as I do that the pain of suffering often tempts us strongly to do things that are sinful and wrong or to lash out and say things that are sinful and wrong. It saps our energy and even our resolve to do and say what is holy and right. Therefore, Paul urges us that we must trust God to establish us in that pattern, to provide the energy and the power and the determination to continue steadfastly in that godly direction without wavering. *A young man named William Wilberforce was discouraged one night in the early 1790s after another defeat in his 10 year long battle against the slave trade in England. Tired and frustrated, he opened his Bible and began to leaf through it. A small piece of paper fell out and fluttered to the floor. It was a letter written to him by John Wesley shortly before his death. Wilberforce read it again: "Unless the divine power has raised you up... I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that (abominable practice of slavery), which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well-doing. Go on in the name of God, and in the power of His might." [Daily Bread, June 16, 1989]. Wilberforce did exactly that and in 1807 slavery was abolished in the British Empire.*

Beloved, we are to stand firm! We are to tenaciously hold on to the truths we've been taught and to firmly trust God to comfort us and to work through us to accomplish everything He has called us to do! Standing firm does not mean standing still; it means continuing to move forward in faith. And it also means this:

III. We Must Be Diligent In Prayer Because We Are In A Spiritual Battle (3:1-5) Paul told the Ephesians that *...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* - Eph. 6:12. Satan and his demons are always opposing us, always fighting against us and therefore, he concludes in verse 20 that we need to pray *...at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication...* The battle is fought and won in prayer, therefore standing firm means a life of fervent praying. Paul says that:

1. we need to pray the Word of God will spread quickly and be honored, as it had done there in Thessalonica and as it is doing among the Yenadi people in India right now. As they prayed for the impact of Paul's missionary travels,

we need to pray for our partners who spread the Word of God all over the world, to ask God that it will take root and grow, that people will respond and the church will be planted. Your praying must never just be about you and your own struggles and difficulties; it must first of all be focused on the expansion of God's Kingdom. Second, he says that:

2. we need to pray for deliverance from evil people who reject the faith Our new brothers and sisters in India and in Kyrgyzstan and many other places face great opposition from their own families and their villages. They suffer a great many things because they believe and we need to pray for them to be rescued from the designs of evil people who would destroy their faith. And there are a few of those here too, people who would drag every one of us away from our faith in Jesus if they could and demolish everything we believe through their rational arguments. We, especially our young people, need to be rescued from them too. So, we must fight the battle on our knees all the time. But no matter what, Paul assures us that:

3. God will always remain faithful *If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.* - 2 Tim. 2:13. It is an unchangeable part of His character. We can count on Him.

a. He will always strengthen us to endure our circumstances, no matter how bad they become. He will keep us standing firm by His power, if we simply trust Him to do it. And:

b. He will always protect us from the evil one John promised it, *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God [that is, Jesus] protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.* - 1 Jn. 5:18. He cannot touch us; He cannot do the slightest thing to us without express permission from God, and then only exactly as much as God chooses to allow. But even so, He cannot touch our souls! He cannot take us away from the One to whom we belong, no matter how much suffering God may allow him to send into our lives. And therefore, because of this confidence, we must pray as Paul did for the Thessalonians:

4. we must ask God to focus the direction of our hearts toward Himself and away from our circumstances. We should pray:

a. that we would love Him with all our heart After all, that is the first and greatest commandment. That is the "main thing" and to "keep the main thing the main thing" in our lives, we must ask Him for it! "Lord, help me to love you more, to love you with all my being. Draw me deeper into Your love so that I see only You and with You at the center of my vision let all else fade away!" That should be what our hearts are focused on and the last thing Paul mentions is:

b. that we would persevere as Christ did The writer of Hebrews put it like this, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* - Heb. 12:1-2. How do we run our race with endurance? By constantly looking away to Jesus, focusing our hearts and our thoughts on Him and how He endured the awful suffering of the cross, totally ignoring the terrible shame it brought to Him in the eyes of the world, and seeing Him now seated at the right hand of God and US there with Him because of what He did!

If our hearts are focused on the immense love of God for us and the incredible sacrifice of Christ on the cross for us, then our hearts will love Him deeply and persevere as He did for us. *A certain medieval monk once announced to his people that he would be preaching the next Sunday evening on "The Love of God." As the shadows fell and the light ceased to come in through the cathedral windows, the congregation gathered. But instead of using words, in the darkness of the altar area, the monk simply lighted a candle and carried it to the crucifix, the statue of Christ hanging upon the cross. First, he illumined the crown of thorns, next, the two wounded hands, and finally the marks of the spear wound. In the hush that fell, he blew out the candle and left the chancel. There was nothing else to say. In the cross God is saying, "I love you so much that I would rather die than live without you!" Ask God to indelibly impress that vision upon the eyes of your heart and you WILL stand firm, all the way to the end.*

Thessalonians: Jesus Is Coming!

Earning Our Daily Bread - 2 Thess. 3:6-18

With this message we conclude our study through Paul's two epistles to the Thessalonian church. It's been a heart-felt journey filled with Paul's love and encouragement for them and for us. But before he closes his second letter, there is one more thing that Paul feels strongly that he needs to write about. He wants to address:

I. A Troubling Issue In The Church (6-15) Let's read verse (6). Those are pretty strong words, especially just coming off Paul's focus on loving God and fixing our hearts on the cross of Christ in verse 5. He commands us in the name of our Lord Jesus to obey this two-part:

1. the principle The first part is pretty obvious: believers should not walk, should not live a lifestyle that is disorderly and disruptive, that is contrary to the godly example that Paul had lived before and taught them. This would apply to any type of lifestyle that is disobedient to Christ. We are not to live in immorality; we are not to live in drunkenness or gluttony or greed or a host of other things that displease God, but as we'll see in just a moment, in this case what he really means is that believers should not live a lifestyle of idleness where they do not work. And the second part of the principle is that we should dissociate ourselves from those who do live that way; we should set ourselves apart from them! Now, after giving us that strong command, Paul goes on to spell out:

2. the problem in verses (11-12) Paul had heard the news that in Thessalonica **some believers had given up working altogether**. They had quit their jobs or their professions and were essentially doing nothing productive, relying instead on others to take care of them. Now that may be a bit hard for us to understand, so let's take a moment to think about:

a. the reason for this idleness What would make people want to lay around and do nothing all day? Well, first of all, it is possible that:

(1) it may have been a cultural tendency I wonder if in your Bible reading you have ever noticed **Titus 1:12** and pondered it. Paul wrote Titus, *One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."* What an un-politically correct thing to say! At first glance it sounds like a prejudiced ethnic slur: "The people of Crete are a bunch of lying, lazy bums!" Indeed, it was basically a racial slur that Paul was quoting, one that was made by a poet named Epimenades, who himself was from Crete. Paul is saying, "He was right! The people of Crete ARE lazy!" Now, he didn't mean that every last Cretan was a lazy bum, but simply that the culture on Crete was one that promoted a lifestyle of laziness and gluttony and many of the men there followed it. We're still using the term *Cretan* in English slang today as a derogatory term! For centuries gypsies were known as thieves and still are, simply because many of them have been thieves! It was a primary occupation in their culture and a rite of passage into adulthood! In many of the tribal peoples of the world culture dictates that the women do all of the work, the gardening and tending animals and cooking and washing while the men lay around and do nothing! That was how the Sougb people of Papua Indonesia lived before the Lunows brought the Gospel to them. The men were lazy! It may be that in Thessalonica, the cultural norm was to be lazy and some of the believers there were simply reverting back to living like their neighbors. There are certainly areas right here in the US where that is a cultural problem, where people simply tend to be lazy and believers really need to live a different lifestyle from those around them. However, in light of the theme of these letters, it's highly possible that their laziness:

(2) it may have been in expectation of Christ's coming They may have figured, "Jesus is coming soon; why should I waste time in working! We should just use up what we have and spend our time praying and waiting for Him to come!" Various groups have done this very thing down through the years. *On September 29, 1975, in the town of Grannis, Arkansas, a group of approximately twenty-five residents, most of them relatives, closed themselves off from the rest of the world to ready themselves for what they believed to be the soon-approaching return of Jesus Christ. They met together for religious services and prayer, and during one meeting, one of the family members reported hearing a direction from God that they were to gather together and wait for the return of Christ. Over a period of almost ten months, the vigil members left jobs, removed children from school, and gathered food and supplies in a single residence to await the end of the world. The members gathered in the home of Gene Nance, many of them leaving cars and houses of their own behind. One of the families owned a store, which was used for supplies. Since Nance made no mortgage payments on his house during the vigil, it was repossessed and the residents evicted by federal marshals on July 16, 1976. The families also lost three other houses and six cars to repossession during the course of the almost ten-month vigil.* [<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2637>]. Perhaps something of this very sort had begun to happen in Thessalonica, the believers using the "soonness" of the return of Jesus as a reason to "check out" of the normal realities of life on earth, like working. But, on the other hand:

(3) it may have simply been personal laziness, as it is for many people today who choose to live a life of idleness. It's nothing new; Solomon warned us against it over and over again 3,000 years ago in **Proverbs** like these: *The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth. - 19:24.* The caricature of this kind of person is that somebody puts the food in his dish and he's too lazy to even lift his hand to his mouth to eat it. Or how about **20:4**, *The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing.* He won't do the work to plow and plant his field and yet he expects it somehow to magically yield fruit at harvest time without work. We all know people with a similar disposition who simply don't like to work; they'd rather lay around and relax and will use any excuse to get out of labor.

Well, whichever cause it may have been, or some combination of all three:

b. the result of this idleness in people's lifestyles was exactly the same as it is today:

(1) it made them a burden upon others and the church Eventually their own store of goods ran out and others were forced out of love and caring to provide for them. Believers are especially susceptible to this. We love

people and we have soft hearts and we are often willing out of pure sympathy to help people who make no effort to help themselves. Paul gave young pastor Timothy instructions about how to take care of widows among the believers in Asia where he served. Look with me at **1 Tim. 5:16**. Family members ought to take the first responsibility in caring for their widows or any members who are destitute without income and not leave the burden to fall on the church body; that frees the church to take care of those really have nobody to care for them. If families don't do this, it becomes a heavy burden that the church has difficulty carrying. But what's even worse, Paul says, is that this idle lifestyle:

(2) it led them to become busybodies With all this time on their hands and nothing productive to do, they would just hang around and get involved in each other's affairs and it led to fighting and arguing and rumor spreading and gossip, which is exactly what Paul saw happening to the younger widows when they were cared for by the church and didn't have to work as they normally would. Look at **1 Tim. 5:13**. The old saying, *Idle hands are the devil's workshop*, is true and it probably comes from St. Jerome's words about 400 AD, *Do something, so that the devil may always find you busy!* Satan uses idleness; when we refuse to be engaged in the work that God intends for us to do, we always tend to wind up engaged in doing things that God never intends for us to do! You don't have to look around very far to see examples of that. That's why Paul gives us such a strong:

c. the command against this idleness in verse 6 and later repeats and expounds upon it in verse 12. God's design for us is that:

(1) we are to work in a quiet fashion, that is, to stop all the useless, destructive hustle and bustle that idleness brings and work diligently with our own hands at what we do, whether we are a sanitation worker or a CEO. Each of us has a profession, a job, a place that we fit into society and we are to focus on working hard at that without complaining or disturbing others. In **Eph. 4:28** Paul said, *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need*. Even if we have not been thieves before conversion, that admonition can be applied to all of us. Let us labor daily, let us do honest work with our own hands and minds, and let us do it, not with a view to get all we can for ourselves, but with a view to having the means to help others who are in need! And in the second half of verse 12 Paul says clearly that each of us is to literally *eat our own bread*. That is:

(2) we are responsible to provide our own needs as much as possible, not to sponge off the labor of others through idleness and laziness. Now right in the middle of our passage we have:

3. the example: Paul had shown them this principle by his own life when he lived among them a year or so earlier (7-10) Paul:

a. he had the "right" as an apostle to expect them to provide his needs while he lived there and taught them. That's a normal principle; we ought to support those who minister to us in spiritual things, so they are freed up to focus and concentrate on doing that for us. But:

b. he chose instead to work hard to meet his own needs He was a tent maker; his home province of Cilicia was known for its goat's hair cloth called *cilicium*, a strong felt which was used in the making of tents, probably much like the ones the Bedouin dwell in in the desert today. It was not an easy occupation; it required a lot of hard work and time, time and effort that could have been invested in teaching and discipling his new converts. But:

c. he did this to give them (and us) an example of how they ought to live He showed them that he worked just as hard as any of them, that he didn't come to them to mooch off of them and that each one of us needs to work hard at what we do and give to others. So, from the basis of one who was working hard:

d. he gave them a clear command in verse 10 **that those choosing not to work should not eat**. Evidently, he knew this problem of idleness already existed there in Thessalonica and he wanted to ensure that these new believers were taught their responsibility to work hard. So his command to them was simply, *"If you don't work, you don't eat. We're not going to feed you if you are lazy and do nothing to provide for yourself!"* Now, of course:

(1) this does not apply to those unable to work or unable to find work None of this is meant to make those who are disabled or sick or who can't find a job feel bad or guilty. It is no shame and we are ALWAYS to take care of those who are unable to take care of themselves by their own efforts. By this maxim Paul is simply saying that:

(2) people learn best by suffering the consequence of their wrong choices If we rescue them all the time, they never learn. If they commit an offense and we pay the fine for them, they repeat it. If they are idle and we feed them, they never learn to work; instead, they learn to take advantage of the "system" better!

So, what about those who won't listen, who won't follow the example, who persist in idleness and refuse to work? Paul gives us:

4. the answer in (13-15). Here is **how we are to treat those who live in idleness or any other form of serious disobedience** to God's word. Most importantly:

a. we are not to grow weary of doing what is right ourselves We are not to learn from their negative example and imitate them. We're not to say, "How come they get away with that? Maybe I should do that too." We are never to tire of doing what God says is good. Then:

b. we are to warn the disobedient sincerely as brothers We're not to count them as enemies, to say, "You aren't a Christian because you do this or that!" They are still our brothers and sisters; disobedience can't change that. We must love them and that means warning them in the most heart-felt fashion that we can that the choices they are making are going to bring disaster into their lives. Yet at the same time:

c. we are not to enable them by provision or by full companionship We are not to pay their bills or fix their leaking roofs; we are to let God teach them the lesson that He needs to, that if they want Him to meet their needs, they need to obey Him. And at the same time, we are not to act like nothing is wrong, to continue the close companionship that we had before. The ESV phrase *have nothing to do with him* sounds a bit strong; *do not keep company with him* or *do not associate with him*, as other translations put it, is closer to the point. It is not shunning as the Amish practice it; it doesn't mean that you can't speak to that person or must turn on your heel and walk away when you run into them. It means that you must break close relationship with them; you don't hang out with them; you don't laugh and joke with them and do things together the way you used to, as though nothing has changed. You allow them to feel the shame that their behavior is causing them by seeing that it has pushed you out of their lives and experiencing that great loss. As I said, this applies to any form of serious disobedience, but here Paul is aiming directly at those who are idle and lazy.

God places great value on work. Jesus testified, *...My Father is working until now, and I am working.* - Jn. 5:17. God is always at work; He is never idle, never lazy. Charles Kingsley said, *"Thank God every morning when you get up that you have something to do that day which must be done whether you like it or not. Being required to work and doing so to the best of your ability will breed in you self-control, diligence, contentment, and a hundred other virtues which the idle never know."* Martin Luther wrote, *"The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays -- not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."* [Our Daily Bread, September 5, 1994.] The Apostle Paul wrote, *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.* - Col. 3:23-24, and he wrote it to believers who were slaves and didn't have a choice. Our daily work, no matter what it may be, is a gift of God, one He expects us to fulfill to His glory. Now Paul concludes His letter with:

II. A Heartfelt Benediction (16-18) Most of Paul's letters were physically written down by someone else as he dictated, in this case probably by Silas or Timothy. Yet at the end, he always took the quill in his own hand and wrote out a benediction in his own writing as a verification of authenticity. And in his blessing to the Thessalonians, there are three things that he wished for them, the same three things that I'm sure Jesus wants for all of us who live in the midst of the suffering and trouble of this world. First:

1. Jesus wants us to constantly live in His peace, to face all the circumstances of life, no matter how difficult, with the confidence that He is in control and that He will work out all things according to His will and for His greater good. If we take everything to Him in prayer, He will give us that peace. He has promised it. Second:

2. Jesus wants us to continually experience His presence He is never NOT with us; that's impossible. He lives in us! The point is that He wants us to experience His presence, to draw near to Him and rest in Him and when we do, He will draw near to us. He has promised it. And finally:

3. Jesus wants us to perpetually draw upon His power We often read quickly over that last phrase, but it has deep meaning. By grace, Paul means Jesus' power which He gives to us, though we are undeserving. He wishes that Jesus' great strength may be given to us to endure and it will be, if we simply ask Him. He has promised it.

Therein is the secret to living: His peace, His presence and His power. Jesus is what we really need, Jesus alone. John Newton was a rough, dirty sailor with a foul mouth and an appetite for rotten living. He hated life and life hated him. He was captain of a slave ship. But he also had the gift of a good mother who told him about the Savior when he was young. On a return voyage to England in 1748 the ship encountered a severe storm off the coast of Donegal, Ireland and almost sank. Newton awoke in the middle of the night and, as the ship filled with water, he called out to God. The cargo shifted and stopped up the hole, and the ship drifted to safety. He immediately began to read the Bible and eventually gave his life fully to Jesus Christ. From his heart and his rescued life came our beloved song, Amazing Grace. He became an ordained minister and served for many years. In old age, he had to have an assistant stand in the pulpit with him on Sundays. He was nearly blind and spoke in whispers, but nothing could keep him from preaching while he still had breath.

One Sunday, while delivering his message he repeated over again the sentence: "Jesus Christ is precious." His helper whispered to him: "But you have already said that twice." Newton turned to his helper and said loudly, "Yes, I've said it twice, and I'm going to say it again." The stones in the ancient sanctuary fairly shook as the grand old preacher said with all his force: "Jesus Christ is precious!" That is Paul's benediction to you! Jesus is precious! He is what you need. He is ALL you need. Cling to Him!

God's Design For The Local Church - 1 Timothy The Importance Of The Local Church - 1:1-2, 3:14-15

Today we begin a new series of studies in which we'll make our way verse by verse through the New Testament book of First Timothy. This morning my purpose is to introduce you to that Book and give you a glimpse of how important it is that we study it. So let's begin with the most obvious fact:

I. First Timothy Is A Letter, or what is sometimes called an epistle. Look at **1:1-2**. That's the salutation of a letter, the *From*: and the *To*, like you put on the letters you write, only a little more fancy. So this letter:

1. it was written by Paul the apostle about 64 AD If you recall, Paul went on three missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean world. After the third he was arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome. In all, he was a prisoner for more than 4 years. But evidently at that point, after his first trial, Paul was released and he traveled once again to visit his beloved churches over a period of perhaps three years and Timothy was at his side. Evidently, during that time they passed through Ephesus and Timothy was left there to shepherd that flock while Paul when on. This letter, then is written and sent back to Timothy. So:

2. it was written to Timothy, the pastor of the church at Ephesus Timothy became Paul's sidekick as a young man and was one of his most trusted coworkers. Paul invested years of his life in him and now entrusted him with the oversight of a large and growing church. Paul wrote back to him to encourage, support and clarify what his ministry there was supposed to be about. So the subject matter of this letter is:

3. its subject matter is the local church By the way, you do realize that the Scriptures use the word *church* in two different senses, don't you? Sometimes it refers to:

a. the universal church which refers to **all believers from Pentecost to Christ's Return**. Everyone who has ever believed in Jesus Christ is part of the church in that sense. That is the church Jesus declared in the Gospels that He would build and nothing could stop it. That is the church that Paul said Jesus loved and gave Himself for that He might present her to Himself a glorious church one day. That is the church that we find gathered around His Throne in Revelation, a huge multitude from every people, tribe, tongue and nation worshipping Him. But that universal church is not the focus of this letter. Here Paul focuses on:

b. the local church What's that? It's **a group of believers joined together in one place** to worship and serve Him together as they edify one another. Glenside Bible Church is a local church, a group of 100+ believers who have bound themselves together in this time and place right here as a spiritual family following Christ together.

Now, in our day many people have become somewhat disillusioned with the local church. It's made up of too many people who have problems. The trend is to say, "I accepted Christ; I'm part of God's church (the universal church). I believe the Bible and I watch church programs on TV or I listen to Brother so and so on the radio. I even send in money. I don't NEED the local church!" Well, I want to set the record straight that that's not how God feels about it. He says, *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* - Heb. 10:25. The closer we get to Christ's coming, the MORE we need to be part of the local church. Let's look ahead to 3:15 where Paul spells out for us:

II. The Importance Of The Local Church - 3:15 Those are some heavy statements. How we conduct ourselves has to do with the people we see and interact with all the time, the body of Christ right here, not a global concept. So, look what Paul says about us!

1. we are the family members of God's household God has a family, a household of sons and daughters. And while that family does extend all over the world, we in this local church are the branch of His family that is right here. In fact, being part of a local church is the only way we can experience what the family of God truly means here on earth. We may have far-off spiritual relatives or long-dead spiritual relatives whom we'll only meet in heaven, but the people in the pews all around us are literally our brothers and sisters, born of the same Father and indwelt by One Spirit. God intended us, His children, to live together in spiritual families like this one, so that we can love one another and help one another and edify one another the way family members do! Unless you are part of a local church, you can't keep or receive any of the numerous "one another" commands of the New Testament in a real way. Ps. 68:6 says, *God causes the lonely to dwell in families*. From Genesis 2 it never has been good for a person to be alone. That's why God's design is for all His children to dwell in spiritual families of like-minded, like-hearted brothers and sisters who encourage one another and meet each other's needs. Remember how from the cross Jesus said to John, *Behold your mother* and those words bound John to care for Mary as his own mother in his own home. So Jesus says to us, "Look around you...behold your true brothers and sisters, your true fathers and mothers and children, your true family, the very household of God! Then, second he says:

2. we are the called-out assembly of the Living God The very word *church* in the Greek is *ecclesia*, which literally means a *gathering of citizens called out from their homes into a public place together, an assembly*. It was a common word; an assembly could be called in any town or village for a variety of purposes, governmental or religious. Any idol could have an assembly of its followers for a festival or whatever. But Jesus said, "I will build MY OWN ASSEMBLY, MY CHURCH!" He rose from the dead; He is the True God, the Living God, the God who is Alive and Powerful. And we are the assembly of the people that the True and Living God has called out from among all our neighbors and friends and the people of Glenside to come together to worship Him. In other words, we are the people that Jesus Christ has called to come together in His Name in this place to worship Him. We are the people who stand for the Name of Jesus Christ in this community; we are the local, visible representation of the *general assembly and church of the Firstborn whose names are written in heaven!* If the world wants to find Jesus Christ and know Him, they have to look to US! We represent Him on earth. And thirdly, look at this:

3. we are God's means for the continuance of His Truth What's a pillar? A pillar is a column that holds up the roof. A foundation is an immovable base that holds up a building. God has given His eternal Truth in His Word, but that truth is held up firmly and unchangingly and passed on from generation to generation by the local church! Suppose Darth Vader suddenly shows up and runs through our Foyer and with a mighty swing of his light saber cuts through the two pillars in the middle of it that hold up the steeple? What will happen? You'll be holding the steeple in your laps; it won't stand! Suppose we, the local church abandon the Word of God, stop teaching it as being true and passing it on to our children. What will happen? The truth will not continue to be held up and believed. God has always relied on local bodies of His people to be the means of holding up His truth and passing it on through the ages. Picture it like crowd surfing at a music concert. One time on TV I saw Garth Brooks come up to the edge of the platform and just lay down on his back on the crowd and they all held up their hands and passed him from person to person all through the crowd and back to the platform while he was singing. That's how we hold up the word of God and pass it on, but if we fail, if one or two in the crowd don't hold the singer up, he falls and so does the Word. We are the repository of God's truth for this place for this time; we hold it up so it will continue! Wow! You didn't know we were that important, did you? Well, we are! So no wonder that verse 15 says that:

4. God is concerned about how we conduct ourselves in the body It matters! How we live with one another as His children, how we assemble together in His Name, how we teach and pass on the truth, it all matters! It matters greatly to Him! We all know of churches that are unhealthy. Some have left the truth. Some are full of divisions and power struggles or controlled by a particular family. Some are cold and unfeeling don't care for one another. Others are ingrown and self-centered and don't care about the world. The way that we conduct ourselves in this body matters to God! Now back up to verse 14 and let's add one more concept:

III. The Responsibility Of The Pastor - 3:14-15 Paul wrote these things to Timothy as the pastor of that church at Ephesus so that he would know and therefore teach his people how they ought to conduct themselves in the body. The pastor, the shepherd, is supposed to know how people ought to live and act as part of the local church and he's to teach them and instruct them and encourage them and correct them to see that it happens! Of course, the responsibility of carrying that out is shared by all the elders of the church, but it all starts with the pastor knowing and teaching and leading even them. That's a serious responsibility. That's why James said, *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.* - James 3:1. The responsibility of leading and shepherding God's household, His assembly, His truth-bearers is really serious. And that's my job; that's why we're doing this series of messages. Yours would be to listen to the Word of God and learn and conduct yourselves well in God's household. Now as we close, I'd like to lay out for you:

IV. God's Concerns About The Local Church, the things He is concerned about in our body. These form the outline of the letter and they are the subjects we'll be dealing with over the next six weeks. First, we'll learn in:

Ch. 1 - He is concerned about our teaching, our doctrine, what we teach here. He doesn't want any of us teaching things that are false, that we've dragged into the church from the world around us. He doesn't want us teaching a message of legalism where we try to please Him by the strength of our own hands, but rather a message of grace where we live only by His power. Then we'll learn in:

Ch. 2 - He is concerned about our worship And the first aspect He addresses is our prayer life; He is concerned that we pray, that we make prayer a high priority together. We'll see that He's also concerned about the role of women in the church and that will be an interesting subject! But He's concerned about all we do when we worship, how we praise and testify and even give! Then we'll learn in:

Ch. 3 - He is concerned about our leaders God wants the right kind of people leading His family. He gives whole lists of spiritual characteristics they must have. Not just any warm body will do! Wrong leaders lead a whole church astray. Then we'll learn in:

Ch. 4 - He is concerned about our pastors We'll find here admonitions for those in ministry. God cares that a pastor knows and preaches sound doctrine, that he sets the goal of his life on spiritual things. Next, we'll learn in:

Ch. 5 - He is concerned about our people He tells us how to care for the needy, for those who need exhortation, for those who are widows, and those who are sick. The way we care for one another is important to Him. Then lastly, we'll learn in:

Ch. 6 - He is concerned about our purity He's concerned that His family doesn't become enamored of social position or fixed on materialism and the drive to get money. He wants our eyes to stay fixed on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ so that we remain a true lighthouse shining forth His glory.

God cares about His church, about this particular church. It is not a game we play, not a nice organization we belong to, not some activity we go to each week. It is the very representation of the Kingdom of God on earth. And it is the base unit of His plan to reach the entire world. *All of us are familiar with the famous author Mark Twain. But you may not know that church leaders were largely to blame for Mark Twain becoming hostile to the Bible and the Christian faith. As he grew up, he knew elders and deacons who owned slaves and abused them. He heard men using foul language and saw them practice dishonesty during the week after speaking piously in church on Sunday. He listened to ministers use the Bible to justify slavery. Although he saw genuine love for the Lord Jesus in some people, including his mother and his wife, he was so disturbed by the bad teaching and poor example of church leaders that he became bitter toward the things of God.* How we conduct ourselves in the household of God touches many; in fact, it touches the entire world. Maybe it's a good time to ask yourself, "What does this local church really mean to me? What is it all about anyway? Why am I really a part of it?" Do you "play at" church? Or is the church an integral part of your very life?

God's Design For The Local Church - 1 Timothy

What We Teach In The Local Church - Ch. 1

As I shared with you last week when I introduced Paul's first letter to Timothy, it is a letter focused on God's design for the local church, explaining what He cares about and is concerned about in local assemblies of His people, like Glenside Bible Church. And as we enter chapter 1 today, we find that the very first thing God is concerned about is what we teach in the local church. You see, from the very beginning of the church it has been plagued by:

I. The Universal Problem Of False Teaching Satan has two basic strategies by which He tries to destroy the church. Sometimes he tries to destroy it outright by persecution, but that never seems to work. It usually grows and spreads! However, if Satan can infiltrate the local church with false teaching, He can destroy it just as surely. And everywhere the church has been planted, this has probably been its greatest danger. Look at **(3-6)** with me. It had already started in the church at Ephesus where Timothy was pastor. There were "certain men" who were already teaching things that were false. Now notice in verse 6:

1. how false teaching originates (6) Sometimes outsiders will come to a local church and begin to introduce a false belief that they bring with them. There were people in Paul's day who did just that. They went to churches he had started and introduced the people to a different teaching on purpose and gained followers and even turned churches against him! Of course, we have to be on our guard against people like that, but at Ephesus, as is many times true in local churches today, it seems that the false teaching had arisen from within the body itself. There were some folks who had *wandered away*; literally it says they *swerved and turned aside*. On Highland Ave. over the hill from where I live there is a pothole. I know it's there but sometimes when I'm coming home, I'm not thinking and suddenly it will come into view and if nothing's coming I'll spin the wheel and swerve left to miss it and find myself in the other lane. That has happened to you, hasn't it? That's what happened to these folks. They hit some pothole in the road of life that caused them to swerve away from the truth and turn aside and end up promoting false teaching. A youth pastor in one of the churches in our area removed himself from the group we participate in, saying, "Your view of salvation is too narrow". He mentioned having had "bad experiences" growing up in the church where he now serves, which, I'm guessing, was at that time more orthodox like we are. He hit some unpleasant bumps in the road of life that challenged what he believed, so he swerved and turned aside to where he's now promoting the idea that God loves everyone and salvation is not only through personally trusting in Christ. And he's not the only one that has happened to! False teaching often arises within a local church when somebody goes through a tragedy and changes their view of God or goes off to school and is impacted by some impressive professor who challenges their thinking. Now, what are:

2. the general marks of false teaching Well, first of all:

a. it often proclaims "something new and different" (3) Those words *teach false doctrines* are literally *teach something "other", or "different"*. People teaching false things often believe they've discovered something different, something new and unique. Beware of that claim. To me it is the epitome of pride to think that God has shown me something that none of His people have realized or understood for 2000 years, that I am the first to figure it out! If Joseph Smith had realized that, there wouldn't be a "Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints". There wouldn't be Jehovah's Witnesses. Liberalism, which doubts the accuracy of the Bible and challenges all the doc-

trines which the church held through the centuries, would never have arisen. When you hear teaching that is “new and different”, beware! Secondly, false teaching:

b. it often focuses on useless intellectual debate (4, 6) It raises questions and controversies about *myths* (non-biblical stories or ideas), or about *endless genealogies* (assigning meaning to minute details like *The DaVinci Code*). They say a lot of things, but they are often *meaningless talk*. When I read papers even today that come out of the very liberal seminary I once attended, I am often left scratching my head and saying, “What did all that mean?” False teaching often uses a lot of religious language and high-sounding words, but somehow the words don’t mean what they mean to us or what they’ve always meant. And thirdly:

c. it often separates morality from faith (5, 19) It separates *good conscience* or a sense of moral right and wrong from faith. In other words, it says you can believe in Jesus Christ, but it doesn’t impact what you do. You can believe in Him and commit sexual immorality, have sex with your girlfriend or boyfriend or have an affair while you’re married. You can believe in Him and practice homosexuality. Beware anyone who tells you that morality is relative; YOU decide what’s good for you! Now, Paul’s point to Timothy is that:

3. leaders must carefully guard the church against this kind of false teaching. Pastors and elders have a responsibility to put a stop to it if it is happening in the church. Our culture says that’s “being narrow-minded”; but God says that kind of guarding:

a. it is an act of love (5) It comes from a pure heart. It is loving to protect the people we care for, to protect our children from being taught things that could keep them from heaven or ruin their lives. It is loving to challenge people who have been caught up in error and try to bring them back to genuine faith. But guarding the church also:

b. it means expelling those who refuse to stop (18-20) Hymenaeus and Alexander were false teachers and Paul must have confronted them, but they wouldn’t listen; they wouldn’t stop. So Paul had the church put them out; he literally turned them over to Satan so that God could let the consequences of their actions fall on them and break them and ultimately show them they were wrong. Some three years later we find them mentioned again in **2 Tim. 2:17-18, 4:14**, where they’re still out there finding people who will listen to their false teaching and trying to hurt Paul. He says their particular false teaching was that the resurrection has already taken place, that there is no resurrection of our bodies, and they were still destroying people’s faith. People that won’t repent and stop teaching false things *have* to be put out of the body! Yet that doctrine was not what Paul was really worried about.

In verses 7-11 Paul addresses what could well be *the* most common form of false teaching then or now:

II. The Common False Teaching Of Legalism (7-11) Legalism, simply put, is:

1. what it is: teaching believers to keep the law From the very earliest days the church has always had a problem figuring out what to do with the Old Testament. It is the Word of God and we believe it is true, yet it contains rules and instructions and laws that we know we don’t have to practice, *or do we?* The majority of the earliest believers were all Jews, so it was natural for them to continue doing what they were already doing in keeping the law while believing in Jesus as the fulfillment of it all. The problem came when people who were not Jews began to believe in great numbers. What about them? What about the Old Testament? Don’t they have to do those things too? That’s how legalism arose but it has existed in several forms. In:

a. its most extreme form: it becomes salvation by works In **Acts 15:1**, *Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”* Those are the people that Paul fought throughout his ministry, people that taught that “salvation is by believing in Jesus AND doing this AND doing that...” Faith PLUS works. You MUST be circumcised, you MUST keep the feasts, and so on, in order to go to heaven. That was a lie then and many cults still promote it in some form today, however churches today are more often plagued with legalism in:

b. its subtler form: in the church people are taught to live a **performance-based Christian life**, to keep a new “Christian” sort of law Look with me at **Col. 2:20-21**. Many of us grew up in churches that taught long lists of Christian behavior. Don’t smoke. Don’t drink alcohol ever. Don’t go to movies. Hey, did you know that back in the ‘30’s or ‘40’s a member of *this* church was disciplined for working as an usher at the Keswick Theater! Men, don’t have long hair. Women, don’t wear pants or maybe jewelry. Don’t work on Sunday. Only read the King James version. Of course, those things don’t keep you from being saved, they just make us doubt that you really are! A real Christian is a person who believes AND does this AND doesn’t do that... That’s a subtle form of Faith PLUS Works. And even though some of the cultural rules have now changed, the underlying principle hasn’t. Somehow, we are taught to believe that the Christian life is about doing. I must DO certain things to earn God’s favor, to be acceptable before Him. I have been saved from my sins and now I must “perform my duty”. Sounds good, but it’s a subtle falsehood. Paul tells us in verses 9-10:

2. the true purpose of the law It was made for people that break it! It was made for murderers to know that murder is wrong, for adulterers to know adultery is wrong, for homosexuals to know that the practice of homosexuality is not “how God made you,” but a wrong practice.

a. it was given to convict of sin and point to Christ Look with me at **Gal. 3:19, 21, 24**. The Old Testament law was never made to give life. It was made to convict people that they couldn’t keep it, that they need a Savior so that when Christ came, they would turn to Him! It serves the same purpose today. The New Testament makes it clear that all the sacrifices and offerings ended with Christ; that ceremonial part of the law was not meant for us. But the moral law, the “right and wrong, good and evil” part of the law still stands and is even repeated in the commands we’re given in the New Testament. Yet its purpose is not to teach us to perform for God, but rather to show us how short of the mark we all fall, so that we turn to Christ. The law:

b. it was not given for believers (for the righteous) **to earn acceptance with God** He is not interested in our performance; He is interested in our surrender so He can perform! We need to guard the church against legalism in all its forms and make sure we are clearly emphasizing:

III. The Foundational Teaching Of Grace which Paul goes on to explain in **(12-17)**. He discovered in his own life that:

1. grace is the principle by which the Christian is to live (12) Grace means that *Christ does for me what I cannot do for myself*. Look carefully at what that verse says:

a. Christ provides us with the strength to live He doesn’t save us and then say, “There now, go out and do what I have told you to do”. He literally *puts the power* inside of us to do it. Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit came, we would receive *power* and that power would *make* us be His witnesses. When you trusted Christ, the Holy Spirit came to dwell inside your body to give you the very power of God to live the life you could never live in your own strength. All you do is yield to His control and ask Him to do it! Then it says that:

b. Christ leads us to be and judges us as faithful It’s not that, “He sees how faithful I am and because of that entrusts me with serving Him”. Rather the Greek says, *He rules me and leads me to be faithful*. HE makes us faithful, not us! When we yield to Him, He produces faithfulness and perseverance in us; He makes us steadfast. And then it says that:

c. Christ puts us into His service It’s not that we volunteer to serve Him; He puts us there! He puts us into the place of His service. He thrusts us forth as His laborers in the harvest in exactly the way that He’s planned for us. So in the end, who gets all the credit? He does! That’s why Paul says, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who gives me all the strength, who makes me faithful and who put me into His service!” That is the principle by which we’re to live; He does it ALL for us! Then Paul reminds us of how:

2. grace was poured out on us superabundantly in salvation (13-14) Here is Paul’s personal testimony. He’s now an apostle, a son of God, a saint, but he remembers what he used to be before Jesus changed him. At one time he was Saul the Pharisee. He cursed the name of Jesus. He dragged Christians off to prison and to death. He was a violent man filled with anger and rage at them. And that reminds you and I of:

a. the awfulness of what we were I was only 15 when I met Jesus on my Damascus Road, but when I think back on my short life the picture wasn’t too pretty. I never killed anybody but I remember how several times I stole things. I lied to my parents. I cursed and took God’s name in vain. I imagined lustful things about girls and I would have acted them out if one of the girls I knew had given me the chance. I was only a kid, but I was what Saul was and what we all were, **wicked**. I was living life my way apart from God in ignorance, knowing right from wrong, but not knowing Him. But Paul’s point is to remind us of:

b. the awesomeness of what we received When we didn’t deserve it, He showed us **mercy**. He didn’t give me what I deserved, but what I didn’t deserve. He came into my life and forgave me ALL my sins! He worked in my heart to give me **faith**, to bring me to trust in Jesus alone. And He not only lavished His love on me by making me His own child, but He filled me with His **love** to love others. He filled my heart with it so much that it overflowed and I learned to care about other people instead of myself.

That is grace! He gave me what I didn’t deserve. He **POURED** it out on me, not just abundantly but, the Greek says, *overabundantly*, *HYPERabundantly*. (You know, like the hyper-drive in the Millennium Falcon on Star Wars, the one that makes you go WAY beyond any normal speed.) When He saved me, He dumped grace on me by the bucketful, by the truckload. He dumped an OCEAN of grace on me. And that is what I always go back to. That is my point of reference for all things. That is my landmark, the foundation-stone of my life that keeps me lined up. HE DID FOR ME WHAT I COULD NEVER DO FOR MYSELF and that is how I am to live now every day! And then Paul makes the claim that:

3. grace is our foundational teaching (15-16) Three times in this letter Paul stops and says, *This is a faithful saying and everyone should accept it!* In other words, “Stop, look and listen! This is something that’s really true, something I want you to remember and hold fast to!” What is it?

a. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, to save the undeserving and that means **ME!** “I’m the worst, I’m the chief, literally *the first*; I’m no. 1 in line. Christ came into the world to save me, a lost, rotten, wicked sinner who deserved hell.” And why did He do it?

b. He saved me so others might see His grace, believe and live forever So that in saving me and transforming my life by His power He might shine the light of His grace on others who will see it in me and believe and will receive eternal life!

No wonder in **verse 17** Paul breaks out into a doxology. Every time he thinks about his own story, he is so full of awe at the grace that God displayed in saving him that he just breaks out into spontaneous worship and praise! That’s what kept him on track. That’s what kept him from going back to the law, to performance living. *One day the famous evangelist D. L. Moody took his concordance and studied every passage in the New Testament on the grace of God. The subject of grace so captivated him that he immediately wanted to tell others of the Lord’s free and marvelous mercy. So he ran outside and stopped the first man he met with the enthusiastic question, “Sir, do you know GRACE?” Startled, the man replied, “Grace? Grace who?”* We don’t know whether Moody led that man to the Lord, but the point is that once he saw it for what it really was, Moody was captivated by grace. Paul was captivated by the grace of God. It was the foundation of his salvation, his life and his ministry. And once we understand it, it will be of ours also. It is the very bedrock of the teaching of the local church and we must always be vigilant to keep it that way.

God’s Design For The Local Church - 1 Timothy

How We Worship In The Local Church - Ch. 2

In Chapter 2 Paul moves from talking about the importance of what we teach in the local church to the subject of how we worship. And it’s worth noticing what you *don’t* find Paul talking about. For instance, music is not on his list, no matter how important it may be to us. There’s no mention of an offering here, nor even of the sermon or teaching time! Of course, all the elements of our corporate worship do have value, but here he mentions only two things, so perhaps these are areas where the Ephesian church had a particular problem or, just maybe, they are issues that the Holy Spirit knew would be particularly important for the church down through the centuries. And the first one is:

I. The Place Of Prayer In The Worship Of The Church (1-7) Please notice:

1. the importance of our praying together (1) Those words *first of all* don’t simply mean “the first thing I want to say is...” He means, “The first and most important thing, the chief thing is that we need to be praying!” And he’s not talking simply about personal prayer. Of course, you and I need to spend time every day talking with God individually. That is vital. But here he is talking about us praying *together with one another*. Praying together is to be a first priority in our common life. That’s why we’ve had a prayer group every Wednesday evening where for an hour we reach out and touch the world together in prayer. Because praying together is IMPORTANT! Frankly, this is the one thing that the church in our day has neglected, I believe, more than any other. People will come in numbers to seminars and Bible studies and discussion groups and services, but call a meeting for prayer and see how many come. We delight in singing; we delight in studying; we delight in sharing. Why don’t we delight in praying together? Be honest. Where is it in your life that you are praying together in a meaningful way at length with people from this body? Now notice also in verse 1:

2. the universal scope of our praying together Paul says when we pray together:

a. it should include all kinds of prayer There should be requests, petitions where we ask God together for the things we need. There should be intercession where we pray for the needs of others, where we step into their lives and join them by praying. There should be thanksgiving where we express our gratitude to our Father together for what He has done for us. When we pray together there should be every type of prayer, not just one. And:

b. it should include all kinds of people Not just those we know closely, our friends and family, but *everyone*. We should pray for all those within this church body, whether we know them well or not, and for those beyond this body. How about those who are our enemies? How about those who have never heard the Gospel? So many times, our praying is focused on this little sphere that is our own lives, when God wants us to expand our hearts, to expand our love and touch the whole world as we pray. And I know that’s what Paul means, because he goes on to mention in verse 2 that:

3. one important focus of our praying together is that:

a. we should be praying for all those in secular authority (2) such as kings or rulers. Think about that; Paul prayed for Nero, the mad Roman emperor who at that very moment had already begun to persecute Christians! When we are together praying, we should be praying for our President, for our congressmen and judges and Justices. Our leaders are worth praying about, Paul says, because:

b. this kind of praying will impact our own lives Our praying can impact the government of our land and enable us to live peaceful and quiet lives where we can bear witness to Christ. It could keep us from ending up being discriminated against and ultimately persecuted or having to hide our faith as believers must in so many places. Of course, this is not a guarantee that if we pray, we'll have peace; rather, our praying for the secular authorities who rule us WILL have a definite impact on our lives! And then Paul goes on to tell us:

4. why we must be praying together (3-7) Most obviously:

a. our praying together is pleasing to God (3) God is delighted when His children come together to be with Him and talk to Him. Jesus encouraged us that wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name that He is right there in the midst of them in a special way. His presence inhabits our being together, our praying together. He delights in it and that in itself is enough reason for us to do it, but then realize this:

b. our praying participates with God in the salvation of the world (4-7) Let me try and string the logic of these verses together for you. Verse 5 reminds us that:

(1) there is only one God and one Savior, Jesus (5) There is no other God anywhere on earth. The gods of the nations are idols. The Allah of Islam is a false god. Buddha is a deception. The gods of Hinduism are lies and myths. There is only one true God and there is only ONE NAME by which people can be saved, the Name of Jesus. Verse 6 tells us that:

(2) His death paid a price for the sins of the whole world (6) John put it like this, *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* -1 John 2:2. He didn't just die for us personally. All over this world there are people who will be saved by His blood and brought into His Kingdom. In fact, verse 4 says:

(3) God wants all people to have knowledge of Him and be saved (4) His desire is that every last person from every last people, in every last language would have the knowledge of the One True Savior, so that they can be saved. Missionary friends wrote from Guinea this past week about a little village they had visited where the people just stared at them like they had never seen a white person before. Their comment was, "These people have never heard the Name of Jesus. They have no one to tell them, no TV or radio station to hear the news on, no way to know of Jesus unless someone goes there." Well, Jesus died for them too and that's why the scope of our praying must include the world, because, according to verse 6:

(4) this news must be taken to all people in its appointed time (6b-7) As the Good News spreads out over the earth, God has appointed a time for each people to hear, for heralds like Paul and other missionaries to arrive and tell the story.

And that's why we pray! Our praying participates with God in that process; as we lift up to the throne the needs of everyone, not just of the people we know, but of people in far-off places and cultures, we participate with God in saving the world, in redeeming His blood-bought children from among every people. That's the chief reason we pray together; want to get in on it?

Now in the second half of this chapter, Paul transitions to a second issue:

II. The Place Of Women In The Worship Of The Church (8-15) This is just as hot or delicate an issue today as it was then, so I want to be careful to speak clearly and respectfully about it. To begin with, Paul points out:

1. the differing tendencies of men and women Look at verse (8). Now what does that tell you? There is a common tendency among men:

a. immature men will focus on competition rather than prayer Put a group of guys together and it will eventually turn somehow into a debate. They'll argue over which football team is better or the best lure to catch fish or debate whether Ford trucks are better than Chevys or brag about how much weight they can bench press. Anything rather than pray! Paul says, "MEN, grow up! You need to focus on praying together! Don't leave it for the women! It's natural for them to open up and share and pray together. Make it so for you!" By the way, this verse does NOT mean that only men should pray in public; in 1 Cor. 11 Paul says directly that a woman can lead in public prayer, if she's dressed modestly, which brings us to his next point here:

b. immature women will focus on appearance rather than character (9-10) Put a group of women together and the topic will inevitably turn to things that have to do with beauty and external appearance. Hair styles and makeovers and the style channel and so on. So, is Paul saying that women shouldn't use makeup or buy a new Easter dress or get a new hairdo? No, he's saying, "Women, that should not be what you focus on! Focus on your heart! Develop your character! Grow close to Christ; be like Him and fill your time with serving Him." His only real command to women here is to dress modestly! That is, don't dress in a sexually revealing way. Do I have to explain what that means? Actually, somebody probably should! And it should probably be you mothers out there explaining to your daughters that so much of what the clothing designers put out there for them to buy is intended to be alluring and to attract the eyes of men in a sexual way. You can be beautiful and yet modest as so many of you dear

women of this church are. And godly character is what the church should emphasize for its women, not physical beauty!

Men and women are very different. They have different tendencies that they have to resist. But then Paul goes on to point out:

2. the differing roles of men and women in the church (11-12) Just let me say that no pastor likes having to read, let alone explain, these verses in public anymore! What do they mean? Is the church to be like the Taliban in Afghanistan who made their women wear a “burka” to cover their entire body and made them stay home and be quiet and not go to school while men run the world? Not at all. Taken in the context of the whole of Scripture, I think these verses are saying two things. First:

a. mature men should normally have the primary teaching and ruling roles Paul is talking about women teaching and leading men. Now, throughout Scripture there have been times when God has used women in this way. Deborah judged Israel and Barak led the army at her direction. Several times God used prophetesses to give His direction to men. The New Testament mentions women who were leaders of house churches or vitally important in the work. In China through the years there have been hundreds of “Bible women” whom God sent out to plant little churches in villages and they have pastored and led those groups. Women teach men all the time on the mission field as the church is planted, but Paul is saying that His normal plan is that within the church, mature godly men should normally be the primary leaders, just as in the home the husband should lead his wife and family in the things of God. And he’s also saying that:

b. mature women should be marked by “stillness” and supportiveness The word *quiet* or *silent* in 11 and 12 literally means “stillness”. It doesn’t mean she can’t say a word in church; in fact, 1 Cor. 11 says directly that in a public gathering a woman can pray or prophesy (share words from God, and dare I say that would include preaching?). It means she is to be a quiet and reverent learner and not be gossiping or talking or trying to undermine what’s going on. For instance, a dear friend of ours who is pastoring a small church has told me that one of the chief problems in his church is that two of the deacons’ wives gossip continually and spread negative things about other people in the church and that they manipulate their husbands to get their own way in the body! They even visit others to stir things up. In fact, they are hindering the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the church in that community. That’s what I believe Paul is addressing here and in 1 Cor. 14. So many of you women here at Glenside Bible Church are tremendously spiritual people and you have a heart and passion for God and are leading in various ministries and I respect and value you so much; I don’t know what we’d do without you! Us men would sure never fill your shoes! Thank God for you! I think, I hope and I pray that we have a good balance here between mature men in primary leadership roles and mature women vitally involved in every part of the ministry. But it has not always been that way. There have been times in the distant past when we’ve had a portion of some of those same problems that Paul was addressing right here. Thank God for changing people and hearts and circumstances and healing the body in this way, but it does stand as a warning to us to be careful to honor Paul’s instruction. Mature men should take on primary roles of loving compassionate leadership and mature women should be found with hearts that are still and quiet and supportive. Now, why is it that way? Is this not simply being old-fashioned and archaic? Are not women and men equal as human beings? Of course, they are! In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female; all are loved and valued equally! But Paul points out that:

3. this difference is a part of God’s very plan in creation (13-14) God made Adam first and created Eve to be his “partner”, to be a “helper fitted to him”! He is not complete without her. Together they make up one whole. But she is not to hijack his leadership in the family. I don’t think verse 14 is saying that women are “stupider” than men and easier for the devil to deceive; I think it is saying, “Look what happened when Eve tried to reverse that order and take leadership over Adam to pursue her own ends.” You can’t argue with the way God has designed the universe in His wisdom. He has made men and women different and has assigned them different roles and has actually built them in such a way that they find the greatest fulfillment and joy possible in being who he has created them to be, male or female. But their roles are different according to His plan. And then note that in closing Paul points out:

4. the tremendous role that women have in shaping the next generation (15) Women will be saved, preserved, kept safe, through childbearing. From what? Not from sin, but from falling into some secondary, insignificant role and having no influence on the world and the church! Mothers are the greatest single shaping factor in the life of a child. If you hold fast to the faith and display the unconditional love of God and live a life of holiness and purity, the impact you will make on your children will shape the very world!

Susannah Wesley had 19 children. Ten of them survived to adulthood. Despite the tremendous amount of work entailed in cooking and caring for such a large family and home-schooling them, Susannah spent one hour each day praying for her children. In addition, she took each child aside by themselves for a full hour every week to discuss spiritual matters. When Susanna Wesley was on her deathbed, she gathered her children around her. As she neared the end and was about to be called home to Glory, she admonished them not to weep but rather to “sing a hymn of praise.” Then with her last breath she reminded them that the greatest comfort we have in any circumstance is the fact that “God is with us”! No

wonder that two of her sons, Charles and John, were used of God to begin a revival movement which swept thousands into the Kingdom of God and planted local churches all over England and in much of America in the late 1700's. William Ross Wallace (1819-1881) so wisely put it like this, *The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world!* Single women, God has a special place and ministry for you too, but those of you who have children, listen to me; in your ministry to those children lies the future of the world and of the Kingdom. There is no more important task; it may feel at times like hard labor, but it's a tremendous privilege. Through your praying and through your loving those children, you impact the very world.

God's Design For The Local Church - 1 Timothy

Leaders In The Local Church - Ch. 3

Having spent a chapter on what we teach in the local church and one on how we worship, in chapter 3 Paul moves on to talk very specifically about the leaders of the local church. But before we begin, you must realize something. The New Testament never spells out a specific organizational structure for the church. The church was not at that point yet. That's why all the various branches of the church have developed so many different ways of organizing, everything from the Catholic church with its chain of Pope and cardinals and bishops and priests, to the Lutherans with their synods and Presbyterians with their presbyteries, to the Baptists with their conventions and associations, to the loose organization of the cell church movement where every house group is a "church". The truth is that the church has developed a variety of different forms and structures for itself through the years in response to its needs and none of them is really absolutely "biblical" or "right"; all that kind of deliberate organization came later. In Acts 1, 120 brethren more-or-less "voted" on a replacement leader for Judas, similar to the way we do it. On the other hand, Paul left Titus in Crete to "appoint" elders in every city for the churches there, the way many denominations do it today. All we really have described directly for us in Scripture is:

I. The Leaders Of The Local Church There are four terms that are applied to church leaders in the New Testament and I think it would be helpful to define all of them. The first term is the word:

1. **elder** Look at **5:17**. The term *elder* simply means an **older spiritually mature person**. In biblical times every town had its *elders*; the Jews had their *council of elders*, the Sanhedrin, older, respected members of the community viewed as leaders. It is, in my opinion, a general term for the **leaders of the local church**. The term *elder* is not used in chapter 3, however, in **Titus 1** Paul calls the same people that he calls *overseers* here *elders*. So *elder* in its most basic sense is not so much a specific office as it is a term of respect applied to the leaders of the church body. Now let's move on to the term:

2. **overseer**, the group of leaders he's describing in verses **2-7**. This word is often translated **bishop**, but it is not referring to our modern concept of a high ecclesiastical leader who is in charge of many churches in a given region or diocese. The word literally means "overseer" and it refers to **an elder whose function is oversight and teaching** in the local church. **5:17** mentioned "elders who rule", that is they give direction and oversight to the ministry of the local church. And in the two lists of characteristics given in chapter 3 for overseers and for deacons, the only difference between the two lists is that an overseer must be "able to teach". He must have teaching gifts to instruct the church. Now that brings us to the term:

3. **deacon**, the group of leaders he's describing in verses **8-13**. The root of the word means *to serve or minister* so a deacon is simply **an elder whose distinctive function is serving**. In Acts 6 we read how the church chose 7 men to carry out the distribution of food to the widows supported by the church. And even though the word *deacon* is not used there, these are the first *deacons*. They were Spirit-filled leaders, every bit as much as the apostles, but having a distinctive responsibility of serving the body in practical ways, freeing the *overseers* to give themselves to teaching the Word of God and prayer in accord with their gifts. Then, just to confuse you further there is the term:

4. **pastor**, which in spite of how commonly we use it today, is only used once in the New Testament, in **Eph. 4:11**, where it says that Jesus gave some to the church as pastors and teachers. The term *pastor*, literally means *shepherd* and it simply refers to **an elder who cares for the flock**. It is **more of a gift than an office** or title as we use it today. So to sum it up, the local church has one body of leaders, generically called *elders* together. Within that body are 1) *overseers* whose function is the supervision and instruction of the body, 2) *deacons* whose function is carrying out ministries of service to the body, and 3) *pastors* whose gift is caring for the spiritual needs of the people and teaching them. At Glen-side Bible Church we have people within the Board that we officially call "Elders" that function as all three. Some act more as overseers, some more as deacons, and some more as pastors. And then we have some here who are truly "elders", godly mature leaders whom we heed and respect, but are not actually on our elected "board" at this particular time. So, is our structure biblical? As much as anybody else's and perhaps more than some others, however, Paul's point is not to explain the structure of leadership but rather to explain what leaders should be like. First off, he refers to:

II. The Choosing Of A Leader (1) No matter what the type of leader or whether they are elected or appointed, there are two things that any person coming into leadership should have. First of all:

1. there should be an inner desire placed there by God A leader should not be chosen because “there is nobody else to do it”, or because “it sounds like a neat idea or something they’d like to try.” It should be something he genuinely longs to do in his heart. Years ago, I knew a person who was always asking, “What would I have to do to be an elder?” But, in my opinion, his root motive was that he wanted to be in charge, to have some control, to have a place of authority and to be looked up to. That’s the exact opposite of what Paul is saying. A leader doesn’t need some special call, some “sign in the sky”; rather he needs a deep intense desire in the heart to care for Christ’s body and tend His flock. Like Jesus said to Peter three times, “Do you love Me? Feed my sheep!” Hey leaders, do you love caring for His flock? Is that the deep desire of your heart? Or, maybe you’re not a leader now, but is that desire in your heart to care for His flock? You could be a budding leader soon to emerge! However, desire by itself is not enough:

2. there must be outward evidences recognized by the body, which is the point of the rest of the chapter. When God calls someone to a ministry by putting a desire inside them, He also gifts them for the task. And the body is supposed to recognize those gifts at work in the person, those marks of God’s choosing in order to place them in leadership. Not everyone who desires leadership is “qualified” for it; in fact, a person may be completely blind to whole aspects of their life that everyone else can see. That’s why the body must put into leadership those who bear the marks He has prescribed. Now what are:

III. The Marks Of A Leader Paul lists 15 qualifications for overseers in 2-7 plus a number more for deacons in 8-13. However, if we put the 2 lists together, I believe we can boil them down to seven key marks of a leader. And, lest you think that the rest of this message is only for leaders, understand that these are the marks of spiritual maturity for ANY-ONE, period. The things that God demands in leaders are the very things He wants to develop in you too! The first one is:

1. a good reputation (2a, 10b) In the church a leader must be *above reproach*; that is, when he is tested no one can truthfully accuse him of anything that is clearly wrong; nothing can be found against him. Verse (7). He must have a good reputation both within the body and even with those outside the church, because if he doesn’t, they will see right through his hypocrisy and it will dishonor the Name of Christ. And this mark is kind of the overarching category for all the rest. He must have a good reputation in all the following areas which Paul mentions. By the way, how is your reputation? Mark number two is:

2. godly family relationships That’s the first place to look. In the church a leader must have good and godly relationships within his own family. Of course, that means he must have:

a. a solid marriage (2b, 12a) *The husband of one wife*, now what does that mean? Well, for sure it means he doesn’t have two wives at the same time! You laugh, but in one of the African tribes I read about, none of the older men could be elders because they all had two or more wives! I think it would also exclude the man who switches from wife to wife lightly and not for biblical reasons. I think it would exclude the man who cheats on his wife or flirts with women. The real point is that this man is a solid and faithful husband who loves his wife and only her, whose marriage is solid and an example. And look at verse (11); He’s got to be married to the right person also! She can’t be a gossip or a drinker or dishonest; she has to be the same mature kind of person he is, because they are a team and without that he will not be able to be much of a leader. At the same time, he must be:

b. a sound parent (4-5, 12b) The point is that if your household is a wreck, if you don’t pay proper attention to your kids and meet their needs, if you never restrain your kids and let them do whatever they want, you won’t do a very good job of caring for God’s larger family! Now, does that mean that no one who has a wayward child out there should ever be a leader? No, many godly leaders do. When they grow up, our children have to choose for themselves who they will follow. And this is not about mechanical obedience. There is more than one person here this morning who would testify to growing up in a very legalistic Christian home being afraid to cross any lines, but rebelling against all the rules later. The point is that a leader is one who has a real heart for his family, a heart to take care of them, a heart to mature them and grow them. If he can understand what they need, he can understand what the church needs! By the way, how solid are YOUR family relationships? God may want to work in that arena in your life! The third mark is that a leader in the church must have:

3. a Christ-like character A whole string of things fall under this category such as being **self-controlled (2d)**, literally *sober-minded*, a level-headed balanced person with good sense. Such as being **respectable (2e)**, a modest person who is orderly in their demeanor. Such as being **hospitable (2f)**, a person who loves others, especially strangers and is always ready to help care for them. Such as being **not violent (3b)**, literally *no striker*, not the kind of person who loses their temper and lashes out in anger, but is instead **gentle (3c)**, patient, willing to hold back and listen carefully, and **(3d) not quarrelsome**, not always in an argument, not always trying to get their own way and prove themselves over the other but a peacemaker. Go down to verse (8a); it means being **worthy of respect**, one who is serious about what matters, one whom you would go to for advice and help and being **sincere (8b)**, literally *not double-tongued*, the kind who says one thing and does another, a man you can trust to keep his word. Just look at Jesus; just look at the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Galatians. That’s the kind of character a leader ought to have. All kinds of havoc is going on in church bodies today because they have people in leadership who love to argue, who get angry and nobody stops them, who don’t take their faith seriously or who never do what they say they’ll do. John wrote, *Whoever claims to live*

in him must walk as Jesus did. - 1Joh 2:6. A leader must be the real deal; he must display the character of Christ Himself; without that how can he lead others on to maturity? And isn't that what He wants to do in all of us, conform us to the likeness of His Son? Mark number four is that a good leader has:

4. a Spirit-controlled life in contrast to two other things that Paul lists. First of all, he is:

a. not controlled by an addiction He is **temperate (2c)**, literally *sober*, free from intoxicants, **not given to drunkenness (3a)** and again in **(8c)**, **not indulging in much wine**. A good leader is not living under the bondage of any addiction, whether it is to alcohol or to drugs to food or anything else. Remember the command, *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.* - Eph. 5:18. Neither wine nor anything else is to be a controlling factor in your life; the Spirit of God is to be in control! And the same goes for addictions that are not about substances. He says that a leader is:

b. not controlled by materialism (3e) He is **not a lover of money** and is **not pursuing dishonest gain (8d)**. Money and the desire to get it doesn't rule his life. He's honest and is not willing to give up his ethics for money! Look at **6:9**. A leader can't be one of those people. He can't be controlled by the desire for money or for any other thing; He must be controlled by the Spirit of God. Is YOUR life being controlled by anything other than the Spirit of the Lord? Then fifth, a leader, particularly an overseer in the church, must have:

5. an obvious gifting (2g) If he's someone charged with oversight and instruction, he must be **able to teach**, gifted in that area. You wouldn't ask someone to run the music program who has no musical gifts. You wouldn't ask someone to care for the church's money who has problems balancing their checkbook. A leader should display gifts in the particular area in which he is needed to serve. And how will you know that? Because he should also have the sixth mark:

6. some positive experience (6) A person should not be thrust into leadership too soon after they come to Christ; they require time to grow and mature and be a learner. Let God work out some of the "kinks" in their lives. Otherwise, pride is liable to spring up and pride is the deathtrap of leadership; it is Satan's biggest snare for leaders. A person needs time to really discover that they are nothing and God is everything! And then look at **(10a)**. There needs to be some trial by fire, some testing by experience. A person needs some opportunities to try their wings, to learn whether they have gifts in a particular area, to do some teaching, to work with kids, to be involved in mercy ministry or visitation or to do whatever it is, so that they can see and the body can see whether God has gifted them for that or not! We have to be quick to give people opportunity, but honest enough to help them realize what their gifts really are and are not. Then finally (and you'd think this would go without saying), a leader must have:

7. a firm faith (9) They must be holding firmly on to the deep truths of the faith. A person who's always questioning or doubting, who is not firmly convinced to the core of his being that what he believes is true, is NOT the person to put in to leadership, no matter what area of service we're talking about.

These are the qualities God is looking for in every one of us. These are the marks of the people Jesus wants to raise up as leaders in His church. Are you one of them? Well, don't forget something Paul mentions in verse 13:

IV. The Rewards Of A Leader (13) Leaders who serve well have a reward. They gain an excellent standing; they have a place of honor, both in the eyes of the church and of the Lord. It is, according to **5:17**, a double honor, not an honor you seek to achieve as a goal for its own sake, but one that fills you with humility and gratitude. I've told you before that I have a file in which I keep letters and cards that people have sent through the years when they were appreciative. And when I look back over those, what an honor it is to for the Lord to use you in people's lives. It's humbling. But it also gives you great confidence and boldness to continue serving, which is what the rest of verse 13 says. You rest in the assurance of how God has used you and become determined that there is nothing like this and you want to continue to be used in the future. Then finally, Paul closes the chapter with two thoughts about:

V. The Importance Of Good Leaders It is hard to overemphasize how important it is that a local church have good leaders. Why? First of all:

1. it stems from the great importance of the local church (14-15) We studied these verses in the first message in this series. Since the local church is God's very family, His own assembly of His people and His means of passing the Truth down from generation to generation, the church **MUST** have good leaders or it will not be what it is. It will degenerate into something else, lose its focus and its purpose. Leaders are important because the CHURCH is important. Moreover:

2. it stems from the great privilege of being entrusted with the Gospel (16) This is a creedal statement, a statement of what we believe. We are the stewards of a sacred mystery, a truth that the world does not know. Jesus came to earth in a body, was shown to be the Son of God by His miracles and His resurrection, was seen by angels and taken up to glory where He reigns. He was and is being preached among all nations and believed on in all the world. That is the GOOD NEWS and that news has been entrusted to the Church, to this local church. Without good and godly

leaders, it will be lost or kept to ourselves and the world will not hear. Leaders are important because the GOSPEL is important.

Someone makes this application for us: *A number of years ago when the draft ended, certain branches of the military fell behind in meeting their personnel quotas. Because of this, some recruiters used trickery and unethical practices to get volunteers through their intelligence and physical exams. At first this seemed to get the job done. But then something unthinkable happened. A marine lost his life during combat drills. It became apparent that someone had sidestepped the requirements and allowed an unqualified man to enter this proud branch of the service. When it comes to keeping the church strong, God's Word clearly indicates that only spiritually qualified people should fill positions of service. The reason for this is to preserve the dignity and effectiveness of that body which the apostle Paul called "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). It's our responsibility as members of local congregations to choose prayerfully the kind of leaders who have God's approval. So, let's staff our church boards and committees with people who meet the biblical requirements. And I would add, let's determine to BE the kind of people who can be available to lead in the body as God directs!*

God's Design For The Local Church - 1 Timothy

Pastors In The Local Church - Ch. 4

In chapter 3 Paul told us about the leaders of the local church in terms of their qualifications, that is, he explained what kind of people ought to be placed into leadership. In chapter 4 Paul begins to give his personal advice to Timothy who is the chief overseer and pastor of the church at Ephesus and tells him specific things that are important for him to carry out in his ministry. So, what we have here are Paul's instructions to pastors in particular, but they are really instructions for anyone who shepherds a flock of God's people; they're for all our elders and leaders and Sunday School teachers and small group leaders; you can even apply them to shepherding your own children. He explains first of all that:

I. Pastors Are Watchmen To Guard The Church (1-6) Paul points out for us:

1. the danger of demonically inspired false teachers (1-2) There were then, and there certainly are now, people who have departed from the faith, who have set aside the core truths that are vital to salvation and are teaching falsehoods, things that are not true. Notice that the source of these false teachings is not simply human thinking. They come from demons. We always think of demons being at work in jungle tribes where they worship spirits and throwing people into trances and so on. But a whole host of them have been to Satan's "charm school" to learn to masquerade themselves as "angels of light" so that they can deceive people more easily. Not only is Satan the inventor of every false religion, he is the inventor of every "Christian" heresy in history. Who do you suppose gave Joseph Smith his visions that started the Mormon church? Who do you think first circulated the idea that the Bible is merely a human book and that Jesus was only a man, a great teacher and example, but not fully God? These things are not merely sadly mistaken human ideas; they are part of Satan's diabolical master plan to sabotage the church. They are doctrines that people come to accept and believe and then to teach by demonic influence. And Paul gives:

2. two examples of false teaching in verses 3-5. The first is the idea that:

a. spirituality means abstaining from marriage (3a), the concept that the state of singleness and virginity is the supreme virtue. The Essenes were a sect of the Jews in Jesus' day who lived out in the desert and believed this. Of course, they ended up adopting children to keep their numbers from falling! The Gnostics picked up this idea and it must have been floating around in Corinth, because Paul had to tell the Corinthians that it was wrong in 1 Cor. 7. Yet it was only a few centuries later that this very teaching did find its way into the church and, of course, the Roman church clings firmly to it to this day in spite of all the biblical statements about God's blessing of marriage. Paul's second example of false teaching is very similar:

b. spirituality means abstaining from certain foods (3b-5) The Essenes taught this too; they ate no meat, only bread and vegetables. And the Judaizers who opposed Paul taught strict dietary laws, even though the Scripture is very clear that God has declared that all foods are clean and all are to be received with thanksgiving because they come from Him. You can be a vegetarian if you like, but there is nothing at all spiritual about it. And yet for years the largest "Christian" group in the world ate no red meat on Fridays and declared it a sin.

False teachings abound everywhere. Today our society is loaded with them: homosexuality is an acceptable alternative lifestyle; abortion is the free choice of a woman; an unborn child is not a person; there is nothing immoral about sex without marriage. And these kinds of teachings are always creeping into the church so:

3. pastors are to point out these falsehoods to the body (6) You're a good shepherd, a good leader, if you keep an eye out for these falsehoods and warn your sheep. You are their watchman; you are keeping watch over their souls, the Bible says. Guard them carefully. Warn them of the demonic teachings all around them that threaten them. Secondly, Paul says this:

II. Pastors Are Coaches To Train The Church (6-10) This ought to make you guys happy; now we're in an athletic analogy. Pastors and leaders are like coaches of a team of people and it is the responsibility of the coach to train both them-

selves and their team to do three things. Now what's the first thing you need to be physically fit? Good nutrition, right? So we train ourselves and our team:

1. to eat the proper nourishment of the Word of God (6b-7a) Literally it says that *you were nourished by the words of the faith and the good teaching you have followed*. We train our people to eat the good food of the Word of God. We train people to read the Scriptures regularly, daily, to think about them, to meditate on them, to search them. And we train them to sit regularly under good biblical teaching, hearing the Word of God preached and taught. This is our real food, our proper nourishment, and without it there will be no spiritual growth, only starvation. This is what will keep them from believing the godless myths like evolution and the other fairy tales that abound in the world. How about you? Are you eating right? What's your diet like? Then, of course, to be a good athlete you must exercise. Coaches are always training their teams through hours of vigorous exercises. And we are to train ourselves and our people:

2. to practice the continual exercise of godly behavior (7b-8) Exercising your body is a good thing and so many people today are focused on that. Paul says it is of *some* value. It will benefit you for a little while; it will increase your health for the short time you have on earth. But the exercise of practicing godly living has a good effect here AND it has effects that last forever! Any good coach is continually teaching his team to play the game better. So, we are continually teaching our team, our flock, to live better, training them to live life God's way. Play by play, incident by incident, circumstance by circumstance, we train them to live God's way instead of the way everybody else is doing it. The new thing today is for a person to have a "life coach", someone who helps them plan their lives and make their choices in a healthy way. That's really what we are, only helping them live Jesus' way! And the third thing every coach wants to train his team to do is to give all they have, to strive with everything inside them when they play, to win the game, to win the race, to score the goal. So, we are to train our people:

3. to strive mightily toward the goal of bringing men to the Savior (9-10) This is another of Paul's "You can take this to the bank..." statements that everybody should accept: *Jesus Christ is the Savior of ALL men and especially of those who believe!* It's like 1:15, *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and I'm number One!* Or 2:4, *He wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*. Paul says, "That's what I labor and strive for! That's the finish line I reach out for with everything I've got! I want to give God what He wants; I want to bring people to Christ!" We train our people to invest everything they have, their hearts, their time, their prayers, their abilities and their money to be involved in reaching the world for Christ. Hey, are you in it with everything you've got? So we are watchmen to guard our flock and we are coaches to train our team, but finally Paul says that:

III. Pastors Are Instructors To Teach The Church (11) A pastor or any leader has to teach his flock the things they need to know. And, as anyone will tell you, that instruction has to start:

1. by being a living example of what we teach (12) No matter how old you are, set an example in your own life of the very things you teach. And, of course:

a. we must be an example in every area of our lives, in the way that we talk to people, the language and the tone we use, in the lifestyle we live, in the love that we display toward others, the way we care for them, in trusting God instead of leaning on our own resources and in moral purity. If we are to be effective teachers, every area of our life must be a living illustration that can be imitated. That's why Paul exhorts down in verse 16 that:

b. we must watch our own lives closely (16a) We have to keep an eye on ourselves first, honestly looking at what we're teaching to make sure it's right and at how we're living to make sure it lines up! How about it? Do you look in the spiritual mirror? Are you honest with yourself? Can you say without hesitation as Paul did, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ!" Well, if you're life's in line, then you can instruct your flock:

2. by teaching carefully from the Word of God (13-16) Now remember, these believers didn't have a personal copy of God's word. Bound books and the printing press were still a thing of the distant future. So, at every meeting the leader would have to be sure to spend a good deal of time reading the Scriptures out loud to the people. How else would they know them? But then he would explain to them what they mean and exhort people to live out the lessons in what they had read. That's the job of a pastor, of anyone in a place of instruction. And Paul's point is that:

a. we must give ourselves fully to it Look at the verbs in **(13-15)**. *Devote yourself to it...do not neglect it...be diligent in it...give yourself wholly to it...* Literally, *in these things BE!* Be absorbed in them; they are your life's work, so don't get sidetracked into anything else! When the apostles started to get bogged down in taking care of food distribution in Acts 6, as important as it was that these poor widows had something to eat each day, the apostles realized, "We have to have other trustworthy folks take care of this; we have to *devote* ourselves to the teaching of the Word of God and prayer! That's our calling!" So many times, pastors and church leaders get sidetracked into other things; it's so easy to do. I could spend all day doing email and answering phone calls a lot of days! I need continual reminders that my primary calling is to teach the Word of God and I need to be wholly absorbed in it. And then Paul adds that:

b. we must persevere in it (16b) Sometimes it doesn't seem like it's making much difference! Sometimes it feels like you do all this warning and training and teaching and some of your flock still wanders off and does what they

want to do anyway! But Paul says, "Persevere!" Keep at it! Keep on absorbing the Word and giving it out. It will not fail; it will accomplish the purpose for which God sent it. Keep on living it in front of them. Keep on watching your life and your teaching closely. Why? Because:

c. it will have eternal impact (16c) It will save you and it will save those who are hearing you. Yes, it will actually make the difference between heaven and hell for some who will come to true faith under you and that's always a joy, but it will also rescue others from a wasted life and untold amounts of suffering and difficulty. Your investing yourself in your flock will make a genuine difference for all eternity.

A young soldier lay in an Army hospital dying of combat wounds. A chaplain was attempting to comfort him in his last moments. "Will you write a letter to my mother?", asked the boy. "Tell her that I died happy. Also, write one to my Sunday School teacher," he continued. "Tell her I died as a Christian." The chaplain went back to his office and wrote the two letters. In a few weeks, the chaplain received a reply back from the teacher. "I can't tell you how much your letter impressed me," she wrote. "Just the week before it arrived, I had resigned from teaching my junior boys' class. I had taught it for 10 years and had become discouraged and felt I just wasn't getting through to the boys; that I had failed completely. After reading your letter, I asked to have my class back. This time, I'll endure, by God's grace." Will you? Will you be a faithful watchman to guard that little flock under your care? Will you be a good coach to train them and a diligent instructor to teach them the Word? Whether it's your Sunday School class, your small group, your Pioneer Club, or a whole church body like this one, will you persevere? It will make an eternal difference!

God's Design For The Local Church - 1 Timothy

People In The Local Church - 5:1-6:2

In chapter 5 Paul turns from addressing the leaders of the local church concerning their qualifications and duties in the last two chapters and begins to give a series of special instructions that apply to four specific groups of people in the local church. These instructions are, of course, given to Timothy personally as the pastor of the church, but as you read them it is evident that they are meant for the whole church and they are just as meaningful and useful to us here at Glenside Bible Church as they were to the church at Ephesus where Timothy served. The first set of instructions have to do with:

I. Fellow Believers In Need Of Correction (5:1-2) What do you do when there is a fellow believer in the church who is out of line, who has a glaring fault and is blind to it or who has fallen into a sin of some sort and doesn't seem to realize how wrong it is? Do we just let our brothers and sisters go and say, "Well, that's between them and God."? No, part of our function as a body is that we keep one another on track spiritually. Paul said in *Gal. 6:1, Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.* We are supposed to approach them about it, but the issue is how we do it! And here Paul gives three specific pieces of advice:

1. approach them as a loving family member Don't give them a harsh verbal rebuke; it is not your mission to "set them straight" or "put them in their place" by whatever authority you may have. Rather you are to *exhort* them. That word is the word *paraclete* which means a person who comes alongside someone to help them. Approach them with a heart that longs to see them grow closer to Christ and approach them the way you would your own father or mother, your own brother or sister whom you care about deeply. And as you approach them:

2. be mindful of your age relationship If it is an older man or woman, approach them in a humble manner with the respect you would show to your own father or mother. If it is someone nearer your age, approach them in a loving manner with the care you would show to your own brother or sister, that seeks for their good. If it is someone much younger, approach them with the love you would show if you were their own father or mother, desiring only what's best for them. After all, we are literally family members with one another in God's family in this body. We have many fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and children all around us and that's the way we should always approach one another and also receive one another when we are approached; it should never in some mechanical fashion. But, as Paul cautioned Timothy, we must always:

3. be careful to maintain complete purity when a brother is dealing with a sister or a sister with a brother close to their own age. It is so easy for our flesh to fall into the trap of romantic attraction or sexual thoughts as we're trying to help one another, even if we keep it to ourselves and don't express it. In dealing with a woman I often pray, "Lord, please guard my every thought and keep them pure; she is my sister in Christ". So many immoral affairs have begun simply by brothers or sisters failing to guard their hearts in this way. The pastor who followed me at our previous church was not careful to guard his heart and ended up leaving his wife and children to marry a divorced single mom with four children that he had been trying to help. Solomon's warning still rings true, *Above all else, guard your heart, for out of it are the issues of life.* – Prov. 4:23.

Now, Paul's second set of instructions has to do with:

II. Widows In Need Of Support (3-16) There are always needy people in the church and it was particularly true in that day when there were no government care systems or insurance in place to help, not even Meals on Wheels. Your own

children were your only source of security in old age. Your family was your safety net in all situations of crisis. It is still like that in the majority of the world even today. But what about those who are alone, who have no family and no means of support? One particularly needy group in Paul's day was widows. In that time, it was nearly impossible for a woman to find a way to survive financially on her own, especially if she was older; it is still like that in many places. And of course, in the local church we have a responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters who are in need. So the church seems to have developed a regular system of providing food for needy widows. It seems they literally kept a list and leaders distributed from the offerings of the group daily to those who were poor and could not earn their own bread. But even with all the changes and helps available today, we still have people in the church with financial needs. Very often they are no longer widows but instead single moms with children who have been left by the men in their lives in various states of distress. Sometimes they are families where both husband and wife are out of work or an accident has happened. So here are Paul's principles about caring for these folks. First:

1. their own relatives carry primary responsibility for them (3-4, 8) You know firsthand that we human beings are only all too glad to let others take on our responsibilities if they will, especially financial ones. If the government will take care of our parents, we are glad to let them and in fact, we come to expect it. Well, in that day the church was the one with the program in place to help, so sometimes when a woman's husband died, the children and grandchildren or other relatives were only too glad to let the church take care of her needs. Paul is saying that's not right! A person's own relatives and family carry the primary responsibility for their care. When someone within your family structure (particularly a parent) is in financial need, YOU are to be first in line to help and provide. Family comes first! Plus, they cared for you; now it's time for you to care for them. And here's why in verse **(16)**. The church is not a social welfare program. It cannot care for the financial needs of every one of its members. When families do all they can to care for their own members who have need, it frees the church to care for those who are TRULY in need, who have NO ONE to take care of them and no place to turn. Then Paul turns his attention from those who give care, to the person being cared for and he says that:

2. genuine widows devote themselves completely to Christ (5-7) Here's a believer whose husband dies leaving her with no means of income and no family to care for her. In America we haughtily say that's poor planning; for our brothers and sisters in many countries, that's just harsh reality; savings are a luxury that simply doesn't exist. At any rate, this lady can't earn a living so she cries out to God, she devotes herself to loving and serving Jesus, to ministry. The church body comes to her aid and cares for her physical need. It's a great partnership; we actually help someone in ministry by helping her. Yet here's another believer in the same situation but with a different heart. Her needs are met by the church so she sees that as license to do what she wants and to live for her own pleasure. She ends up wasting time on frivolous things and being a gossip and a busybody meddling in people's lives but supported by the church! The first lady deserves support; the second one doesn't and that's what Paul is really trying to say:

3. the church must care for widows who have no one else While an emergency can happen to anyone at any time and the church should, of course, rise to the occasion and help, that kind of:

a. permanent care is normally for older widows of godly character (9-10) He puts an age of 60 on it and while I don't think that's some hard and fast rule for all time, even today it's not a bad rule of thumb. A lady of that age will generally not remarry and will have a hard time finding substantial employment. If through the years she has displayed a godly character in caring for her family and helping others in the body and showing hospitality to people in need, then she will probably continue to devote her life to the Lord's service and the church should be there to care for her until she dies, if she has no one else to do it. It's our responsibility. The same could also be applied to a man in a similar situation. On the other hand, that kind of:

b. permanent care is not normally for younger widows (11-15) Now that doesn't sound very good at first glance, so let me try to reiterate what Paul is saying about younger women who lose their husbands. First:

(1) it will be very difficult for them to remain single all their lives That is just a fact that I have seen over and over again. God built most of us with a strong desire to be joined to a life-companion and we don't do well alone. So even if this 30 year old widow starts out saying, "No, I'm never going to marry again; I'm going to be single and give everything I have to serving Christ. Forget men.", eventually there is a good chance that even the most devoted of wives will eventually desperately want the companionship of a husband back in their lives. Of course, that's true of widowers also. Barbara Youderian lost her husband Roger on that beach in Ecuador in 1957 and she never remarried; she has served the Lord as a single to this day. But she's the rare exception, not the rule. And, Paul says, that:

(2) desire for a mate may entice them from their devotion to Christ How many ladies have I known through the years that were solid loving wives, but then lost their husbands and eventually made terrible choices in men or even wound up in immorality, just because that desire for a mate was so strong that it overruled what they knew the Lord wanted in their lives! I've seen it happen with men the same way. It seems to be the one area of our lives where we are the most vulnerable; our flesh has such a strong desire to have a mate that it can get us into all kinds of trouble. That's why Paul advises younger widows in verse 14 that:

(3) they should normally remarry and pursue a godly life, have kids, manage their households, and so on. It's not unspiritual. We have this romantic notion that somehow our love for our first spouse wasn't true if we remarry, that if he or she dies young, a long life of singleness is the ultimate virtue. And if a young lady or man who is widowed or divorced by their spouse starts to date, we whisper things like, "It's only been a year! It's too soon! How could they!" Well, Paul actually urges the exact opposite. He says, if you're young, re-marry! Go for it. Singleness in itself is not spiritual. But do it in the Lord. Ask Him to send you a solid believer and go have a normal life! Elizabeth Eliot lost her husband Jim on that same beach in 1957 but she remarried, twice in fact, and is still serving the Lord, just as devotedly!

The point is that the church can help and get you through the emergency of the moment, but in time you should pursue a normal life once again, instead of leaning on the church and trying to hold yourself to the difficulty of a life you're not gifted to live. Does that make sense?

Well, now at verse 17 Paul moves on to the third set of instructions which have to do with:

III. Elders Directing The Affairs Of The Church (17-25) He has five things to say concerning them. First of all:

1. those that lead well should be honored and provided for (17-18) Those who give their lives to ministry, to teaching and preaching and guiding and overseeing the local church, should be honored and respected. Their devotion should be appreciated by the people they care for. And then he adds that bit about muzzling the ox. The ox walks around in a circle all day long threshing the grain; it's cruel to muzzle him all day when he needs grain to eat and send him out to find his own when he's all done. Jesus said that any laborer who has worked hard deserves the pay he's earned. The church has always to one degree or another provided for the physical needs of its pastors and overseers, not so they could get paid for what they do, but so they would have what they need to live and be free to serve the church. Of course, in many places in the world believers are desperately poor and often their pastors have to hold a job at least part of the time, because the body just can't support them, however, in many other places, if the body has at least 10 solid families that are each tithing their income, that should be enough to free up at least one leader and his family to serve them and minister to them with all of his time. And if that's the case it should not be held back. The leader who serves the church faithfully should not be starved to death, while his people live in relative ease; he should be provided for as well as they are and joyfully so. On the other hand:

2. those that sin should be rebuked publicly (19-20) If you're going to accuse a leader of something serious, it shouldn't be just your word against his; there ought to be two or three witnesses to validate it. That accusation should be thoroughly investigated and confirmed by others. However, if the leader is really guilty, he ought to be brought publicly before the whole body with the truth of what he has done so that they learn and see how serious sin really is. Boy is that hard. We went through that a number of years ago and some of you remember how excruciating it was for the whole body, yet it has to be done. The church must know that sin cannot be tolerated in the body, especially among its leaders. Then Paul says to those who are leaders that:

3. they should be impartial in caring for their flock (21) They shouldn't favor one sheep over another or care for this sheep and neglect that one. They shouldn't discipline this one and let that one get by with sin. Further he says:

4. they should be cautious in appointing (ordaining) new leaders (22) They should not thrust people into leadership before they know them really well. Why? **(24-25)** Some people's sins are obvious; others are pretty well hidden and don't show up until you know them a good while. Likewise, some people's best qualities take a long while to show up. So it's best to wait until someone has been really proven before ordaining them to a ministry position. And then, back in verse 23, there's a little personal note which tells me:

5. they should care for their own health (23) Timothy must have been a sickly type; it seems he was prone to gastro-intestinal problems. And maybe he was a bit of a health nut who would drink nothing but water. Paul says, "Care for that problem...drink a glass of wine every day. It will help." That, of course, was as much medicine as they had, but it's still advice doctors are giving today as a healthy practice. The point is that leaders should take care of their own bodies so they can prolong and continue their service and serve well.

Then finally, Paul has a few words to say specifically to:

IV. Believers Living In The Situation Of Slavery (6:1-2) We almost think of this subject as irrelevant. But some make the claim that probably half of the population of the Roman Empire in the first century was composed of slaves. A great many of the early Christians were slaves and when entire households were converted, slaves and masters together came to Christ. So what should they do now? In our 20th century mindset and thinking of slavery the way it was practiced in our country, we are quick to cry that it should be renounced and abandoned, but the Bible never does that. It simply says *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* – Gal. 3:28. In Christ it doesn't matter; we all have the same spirit; we are one body before the throne, even though on earth one is the other's master or servant. What changes in Christ is the way we TREAT others. Paul writes Philemon, a master, about his servant Onesimus; *Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good-- no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both*

as a man and as a brother in the Lord. - Philemon 15-16. Masters should treat their servants lovingly and considerately as dear brothers. And here in verse 1, Paul says that servants:

1. they should treat masters with respect to bring honor to Christ (1) It would be easy to say, "I am your equal in Christ; I don't have to listen to you; you have no right over me!" but that would spread abroad the idea that Christians are rebellious and disrespectful and make Christianity in the eyes of the world about eliminating the system of slavery instead of trusting in Christ. Slaves who believe should honor their masters and submit to them wholeheartedly all the more. In fact, verse 2 says:

2. believing masters should be respected even more as dear brothers (2) If they are believers, serve them even better! Love them as dear brothers in Christ while you serve them!

How could we apply this here? Well, the same principles could apply to employment relationships now, boss-employee, foreman-laborer. Honor that boss with the respect he or she deserves for their position of authority and carry out their instructions wholeheartedly and sincerely. And if the person happens to be a believer, serve them all the better with even greater joy as a dear brother or sister! Not exactly the way the world teaches you to act, is it?!

You know, the two things that stick out in all of these instructions over and over are love and purity. Love brothers and sisters who need correction with a pure heart; love poor sisters who need help just to survive and help them stay pure; love the leaders of your flock and leaders, love your flock...and stay pure; servants love your masters with a pure heart. Peter put it like this, *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart - 1Pet 1:22 (NASB).*

God's Design For The Local Church - 1 Timothy

Money And The Local Church - 6:3-21

Today we wind up our series in 1 Timothy and complete our look at what Paul had to say about the local church. To review the chapters, he's talked about what we teach in the local church and about how we worship in the local church. Then he spent two chapters focusing on the leaders of the local church, first on their qualifications and then on their duties. In chapter 5 he talked about the people in the local church, specifically about people with special types of needs and how to care for them. Now last of all, in chapter 6 he comes around to talking about that thing we either don't like to talk about or that we talk about too much in the church, the subject of money. The first argument I ever saw inside a local church was over money. It shocked me. I was amazed how angry people could get over spending money to buy some new carpet, over how their nice loving veneer evaporated so quickly when it touched their pocketbooks! You know, Jesus had an awful lot to say about money and about being attached to it and that's really what Paul focuses on in this chapter. But he gets there by first talking about:

I. The Trap Of Living To Satisfy Our Own Desires (3-5) He's talking here about people who started out within the church but have gone off the deep end in two ways:

1. some think their "knowledge" supersedes God's revealed truth They get caught up in trying to know and figure out everything for themselves, rather than simply accepting what God has to say. Paul says they end up with a disease, literally, a sick, unhealthy drive for controversies and quarrels about what they think they know. These are the same false teachers that Paul talked about back in chapter 1 who lead people astray from simple faith. Now, when you look at something the Scripture clearly says and you declare, "That can't be true", what is that? For instance, the Bible says that homosexuality is literally "against nature" and that the practice of it is a perversion and a sin. So, when someone says, "That is not true; that is simply the way those people are made; it is just an alternative lifestyle.", what is that? It is putting their so-called "knowledge" above the truth and that is **pride**. When I think I know more than God does, that I can tell Him how things really are and that He's wrong, I'm proud. The root of all of that is a desire to elevate myself, to be more right than God, to have things be the way I want them to be, rather than the way He says they are. It was that desire to be "like God", to make her own rules, that got Eve in trouble in the garden and it's been destroying people ever since. That's why, in the last verses of this chapter, there is a strong warning about this. Paul admonishes Timothy that:

a. we must carefully guard that truth (20a) That truth that God has given, the truth that today we hold in our hands in the written scriptures, we must guard that truth! And:

b. we must turn away from all false "knowledge" (20b-21) I can't for the life of me figure out why we end up letting people like this teach in seminaries and hold office in our large denominations! However, we spent enough time on this subject in chapter 1. Suffice it to say that the pride of false knowledge is one place where people who live to satisfy their own desires often end up. The other place is in the end of verse 5:

2. some think that godliness is a means to financial gain Of course, there have always been charlatans like Simon the magician who want to use Christianity to make money. And there are still many frauds out there today on the radio and TV who say, "Send me your money" and promise some blessing from God in return. Some of them are really blatant. I literally did hear a guy one time promise that if you send him your tithe that he would send you a bottle of oil and

you could go down to the car lot and pick out the car you like and anoint it and God would give it to you! The amazing thing is that folks fall for it! But the more subtle way that this appears today is in what we've come to call "the prosperity gospel". You hear it quite a lot on TV, "God wants His children to prosper; He wants them to always have the best, to be the head and not the tail. He wants you to do well in business, to succeed, to have a nice house and nice things; after all you're a child of the King!" The premise is that the more godly you are, the more God will bless you financially, but at the root of it is the misuse of a bunch of Old Testament promises that were given to Israel, but were never promised by Jesus to the church. That whole notion of godliness resulting in financial gain is completely contrary to what Jesus taught and what Paul taught. Yet it still sells well for one reason; it appeals to a basic human desire that we all have in our flesh, **greed!** We want to accumulate things for ourselves. That's why Paul here gives the church such a strong:

II. A Warning About The Danger Of Desiring Wealth in verses (6-10). But before the actual warning he spells out:

1. three principles about the true nature of wealth (6-8) Look at those three verses closely. First of all, they tell us that:

a. the true gain in life is eternal gain Verse 7 is one of the most haunting verses in the entire Bible. You brought nothing into this world and you can't take anything out of it. So many ancient pagan cultures insisted on burying their dead with all kinds of household items, money, pets, you name it, as though they could take these things with them. But it's a pipe dream. Accumulate all you want in this world and arrange to have it hauled to the cemetery and buried with you and that's where it will stay, but you won't! When you die you are either with the Lord in heaven or without Him in hell and nothing material goes with you! So why would you want to spend the one and only lifetime you have focusing on getting stuff you can't keep anyway! The only things in life that are truly profitable, that really last forever are things that are spiritual in nature, things that impact your relationship with Christ and things that impact other people and their relationship to Christ. Secondly:

b. the true means of eternal gain is godliness according to verse 6. Genuine godliness (not the sham variety) brings tremendous eternal profit. When you share your faith with a friend and they invite Christ into their life, it changes their destiny forever! God gets another worshipper for His glory and another servant to use to impact the world. When you live righteous and holy and act in honesty and tell the truth, people see God at work in you and His truth is spread, His glory is enhanced and people are drawn to Him. There is great profit in it, profit that lasts forever, eternal gain that you will be present to see and enjoy forever. And so, thirdly:

c. our true goal concerning material things is contentment, to learn to be satisfied with what we have, to be content if we have food to eat and clothes to wear and a place to live. And even when we don't! Paul put it this way to the Philippians, *I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.* - Phil. 4:11-13. Jesus' goal for you in this life is not to change your circumstances; it is to change YOU! It is to bring you into such a close relationship and dependence upon Him that you are able to victoriously endure any circumstance that comes your way by His power so that He gets the glory. But it is so easy to miss that, and that's why Paul warns us of:

2. the grave danger of letting the desire for wealth control us (9-10) Money is neither good or bad; it's a-moral. It's like a gun; a criminal can use it to take life or a policeman can use it to save life. But THE LOVE OF MONEY is a root of all kinds of evil things. When you let the desire to get money control you, it will put you in a spot where you are tempted to sin to get it. Sooner or later, you'll cheat, lie, steal or hurt someone, because the money will be more important. It will absolutely kill your meaningful relationships and bring you a boatload of sorrow. Remember Ebenezer Scrooge? Some of his kind are real! And it can ruin and destroy your life. *In the 1970's a couple of genuine Christians by the name of Jim and Tammy Bakker started a TV show called The PTL Club. It grew rapidly to 100 stations and some 12 million viewers and then they established The PTL Network which eventually delivered programming 24 hours a day by satellite over the entire nation. In the 80's they built Heritage USA in Ft. Mill, SC, the third most popular theme park in the nation and sold time shares for vacations there. Contributions from viewers grew to a million dollars a week. The message they preached did include the message of salvation through Christ but it went on to add that God wants His children to prosper financially, to have health, and so on. They lived a lavish lifestyle. But as many of you remember, eventually greed caught up with them. Jim was convicted of embezzling several millions of dollars for personal use and sentenced to 45 years in prison. It came out that he had been involved in an affair. Their huge empire of properties went bankrupt and was sold for a portion of its worth. Tammy divorced him. He ended up a broken man with a ruined life. He was paroled in 1993 for good behavior and in 1996 published a book with the title, "I Was Wrong" and today he clearly denounces his past teachings on prosperity saying they were wrong.* That's what Paul's warning us against. You may never be around that much money, but if you let the desire for money take over your life, you will not believe how quickly you can end up a broken, ruined person. So, live for that which is eternal and beware of greed!

Now in the middle section of the chapter (11-16), Paul talks to us about how to do that. He gives us:

III. An Exhortation To Be A Man Or Woman Of God Right there's the key. That is not just a term for someone wearing a white collar, a clergyman; that's all of us! We've got to learn to be what we are, a man of God or a woman of God, a person who belongs to God, who is controlled by God and whose life is consumed with His purposes. That's what we are and must be, but how? First:

1. we must frantically flee from the desires of the flesh (11a) *All this* means the foolish and harmful desires of verse 9, the desire to get rich, the love of money and eagerness to get money in verse 10 and all the kinds of evil these desires will produce. Gal. 5:19-21 calls this stuff *the works of the flesh*. And what must we do about *all this*? Flee from it! Run away from it as fast as you can. I think it was Elizabeth Elliot who said that when she and Rachel Saint moved in with the Waodani tribe, that their friend Dayuma gave them a full course in Waodani "fleeing techniques". They literally learned to run for their lives. That's what *flee* means. When you sense those fleshly desires rising up in you, run! Get away! Flee for your life! In Kyrgyzstan, foreigners can't actually own property so they often buy it in the name of a trusted local believer. Some time ago, the brother in whose name the Rainbows of Hope building was bought came to them and said that since it was in his name he was feeling tempted to take possession of it for himself. But he knew that wasn't right, so he asked them to quickly get it out of his name and into someone else's so he wouldn't be tempted anymore! That's fleeing! Then:

2. we must zealously pursue the fruit of the Spirit (11b) Pursuing is the direct opposite of fleeing; it's what the murdering enemy with the spear does to the one who's fleeing, what Saul used to do when he hunted down Christians. He chased him relentlessly with all his might. That's how we're to go after the things that Paul calls the "fruit of the Spirit" in Gal. 5:22-23, righteousness, godliness, love, faith and so on. With everything in us, we must choose and cultivate these things that the Spirit wants to produce, while fleeing from the things our flesh wants. Then Paul says:

3. we must carefully guard our pure testimony (12-16) I explained verses 13-16 at length on a previous occasion, so we won't repeat that. Rather Paul's overall charge is that we guard our reputation as a believer, our testimony, and be extremely careful to keep it pure in the sight of God and of other people. Jim Bakker's lapse into greed impacted millions; who knows how many turned away from Jesus Christ forever because of their disgust with his behavior as a Christian. Be what you profess to be. Live out what you said when you were baptized or when you publicly said, "I have given my life to Jesus Christ!" Guard that testimony carefully. And then Paul concludes with another warning, this time:

IV. A Warning For Those Who Already Have Wealth (17-19) By the way, do you know who he's talking to? Lest you think he only means the Donald Trumps of the world, if you look at this world as a whole, he means YOU! You and I are the richest generation in the richest society that has ever lived. We have a car for every family member and a computer too; our kids carry cell phones around and watch cable TV while Facebooking on broadband internet; we go on vacations that cost more than most people in the world earn total in a year! I need to listen up, because Paul is talking to me when he warns of:

1. the dangers inherent in having wealth (17) The first one is:

a. becoming arrogant because of what we have When we see pictures of teeming thousands of refugees or of poor tribal Indians in the jungle, in your heart do you think you're somehow in some way better than they are. Look at all you have; do you in any way that you feel like you deserve it somehow? Or just watch the news and look at the folks in the inner city. Are you somehow better? Put simply, having a lot of stuff makes you think you are somebody! It can do to you in miniature what it did to Nebuchadnezzar who looked at everything he had and said, "*Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?*" – Dan. 4:30. Stuff puffs up and being puffed up is NOT a good place to be. And the second danger is:

b. putting our hope in what we have rather than God When we have money, when we have credit cards, we don't need to pray for our daily bread, we don't need to ask God to provide for our bills and it seems like we don't need Him! Afterwhile, we make all our economic decisions without even consulting Him, because we really come to trust in what we have. And if think you're immune to that, just try to imagine what it would be like for you if you suddenly lost every penny you have and had no credit, like people did back in 1929. Or what about the families who lost everything on 9/11/2001? Wealth is so uncertain. It can all disappear tomorrow; it can seem to sprout wings and fly off, as Proverbs says. That's why Paul closes by giving us four:

2. principles for dealing with the wealth you have The first is just that:

a. make sure you are trusting God (17b) Put your hope in Him; put your trust in Him and make sure of it, not in your own strength or intelligence or abilities. Not in the fact that you've always made a living. Moses wrote, *Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...* - Deut. 8:18. Moses was right. Never forget that. Thank Him for every paycheck. Pray about every economic decision. Without Him you don't even breathe; whether you live or die, eat or starve, all depends on Him, so be sure you remember that and talk to Him about it. And that goes with principle number two:

b. regard all things as His gifts to you Paul asked the Corinthians a good question, *What do you have that you did not receive?* - 1Cor 4:7. Nothing! Absolutely every single thing you have in life is a gift from God which He has given you richly to enjoy. And that word *does* mean enjoy! There is nothing wrong with enjoying your house or your car or taking a vacation. They are gifts that your Father has lavished upon you because He loves you! Like any good father, He intends for you to enjoy them, but the key thought on our part ought to be appreciation! Be thankful! Thank Him when you eat a meal. Thank Him when you get new clothes. Thank Him when you get in your nice car. Thank Him when you lie in your warm bed tonight and the wind is howling outside. Thanking Him will keep your heart in perspective; it will keep you trusting Him. Thirdly, verse **(18)**:

c. be a generous and willing giver Give freely, generously, all the time. Give to God's work and not just your left-overs at the end of the week. He gave it to you, so determine that you're going to give the very first part to Him. Give a generous portion to Him. Give to missions as you have opportunity. Give to the needs of others around you. Don't do it grudgingly or out of necessity, for the Lord loves a cheerful giver, the Scripture says. Become a person who loves to give and you'll never put your trust in material things. And finally, Paul says:

d. always remember your treasure is in heaven (19) You want to live a life that is truly living? Then determine to lay up for yourself treasure in heaven. Where your treasure is, your heart will be also, so treasure the things that last for eternity. Treasure people. Treasure growing in Christ. Treasure investing your life in reaching the world for Him. One day you'll leave all your stuff behind, but if your treasure is in what you sent ahead, it'll be waiting for you.

*The story is told about some Christians who were traveling in the Middle East. They heard about a wise, devout, beloved, old believer, so they went out of their way to visit him. When they finally found him, they discovered that he was living in a simple hut. All he had inside was a rough cot, a chair, a table, and a battered stove for heating and cooking. The visitors were shocked to see how few possessions the man had, and one of them blurted out, "Well, where is your furniture?" The aged saint replied by gently asking, "Where is yours?" The visitor, sputtering a little, responded, "Why, at home, of course. I don't carry it with me, I'm traveling." "So am I," the godly Christian replied. "So am I." Now I'm not saying you can't have furniture or any other particular thing. But that needs to be our attitude. The song says, *I'm a pilgrim and a stranger passing through this world on my way to that fair city*. So don't settle down too much. Travel light.*

2 TIMOTHY

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Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World **A Study Of 2 Timothy**

AN INTRODUCTION:

1. to this series of messages We live in a perverted world. All you have to do is look at this week's news. We live in a world where terrorists will blow up a public building and kill dozens of innocent people including children without any regard for their lives, simply to prove a point or get recognition, but where people would turn around and call the immediate execution of such a terrorist inhumane and seek to ban it. We live in a world where 1 out of every 4 women you say hello to today has experienced the terror of being sexually abused or molested, yet where in many states a woman who has been raped has to pass a cruel and grueling lie detector test within hours of the event to prove it. We live in a world where they hand out free condoms in public schools, but forbid students to pray. We live in a world where statistically right now 1 of every 3 or even every 2 young couples will be divorced before a few years have passed, which means that if things don't change in another generation half of the people you meet will have grown up in a broken home. It is a world where wrong is right and right is wrong, where values shift and change and everyone pretty much stands with Pilate and asks with a cynical sneer, "What is truth?" Now, if you think that all these things around us don't affect us Christians and the way we think, act, and live, you'd better think again! The divorce rate inside the church is approximately the same as the rest of society. We hear time and again of pastors having moral failures and if it happens to them, you can bet it happens to people in their congregations! Christian couple after couple marry having no idea how to be husband and wife, let alone parents, because they had no role models. Our children often grow up to reject the faith of their parents as archaic and old-fashioned. These are signs that we're being affected. The world around us is gradually making its way into our lives and it's getting tougher and tougher to keep and live out of God's perspective. We live in a society where the foundations are being destroyed. What shall the righteous do?

2. to the Letter of 2 Timothy Well, our world is not unlike the Roman world in which Paul lived. In the year 67 AD Nero, a madman who tried to blame the Christians for the ills of his own reign and use them as a scapegoat, was on the throne of the world. It was an empire ruled by greed and power where justice was hard to come by. Morals were non-

existent and human life was cheap. And it was getting worse. Paul himself was in prison right there in Rome by the order of Nero himself and awaiting eventual execution. Timothy was a young man who, though he had traveled in missionary ministry with Paul earlier, had for several years now served as a pastor of the growing church at Ephesus. He was by no means a perfect man. 1 Tim. 5:23 says he was frequently ill. The whole tone of this letter suggests that he was somewhat timid and needed reassurance and encouragement to be faithful. He needed instruction on how to make it in a perverted world and Paul couldn't be there, so he wrote him this letter to help him keep his head straight, to help him keep his perspective on what was important in the world from God's perspective, what he should be doing and what he should be avoiding as a servant of Christ in a perverted mixed-up world. And there's a very good possibility it can help us do the same.

3. to the content of 2 Timothy There are four principles Paul teaches in this letter that will help us keep our perspective:

Remembering Our Roots Continually
Setting Our Priorities Carefully
Seeing Our World Clearly
Facing Our Dilemmas Confidently

It all starts with understanding our roots, with knowing who you are. Once you know who you are, you can set your priorities accordingly and you can also see the world around you as it truly is and not as the thing it masquerades as. And then you can face your personal dilemmas with the absolute and utmost confidence. So, let's begin at the beginning:

Remembering Our Roots Continually - Ch. 1 (Part 1)

In "The Lion King" young Simba, who is destined to be King of the pride lands, is driven into exile as a cub after the death of his father. His wicked uncle takes over the Kingdom. In the jungle he meets two new friends who teach him a new philosophy, Hakuna Matata, life without worry. Live for today. Forget the past. Don't worry about anything. Live for the moment. Sound familiar? We live in a generation that believes that. What matters is right here and right now and your own personal pleasure and well-being. But one day a wise old monkey pokes a finger in Simba's nose and says, "You don't know who you are!" Moments later he has a vision of his father who says, "You have forgotten who you are!" And the point of the story is that once he remembers who he is, he knows what he must do, so he goes back and takes up his responsibility and defeats his wicked uncle and restores peace to the pride lands. It is by no means a Christian film, but we would do well to take heed to that point. In order to keep your perspective on the world and know how to live, you must continually remember who you are. The world will do everything it can to help you forget and the more you do, the more your life is shaped and molded according to its ways. Isaiah called Israel to that, *Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth...* – Is. 51:1-2. Every stone ought to look back to the rock from which it was sawed and to the quarry from which it was dug in order to see what it is made of! Israel was to look back to Father Abraham and they did. They said to Jesus, "Abraham is our father" and Jesus said "If Abraham was your father, you would do what Abraham did!" But they didn't! They knew in words who they were, but in reality, they had forgotten. They had lost their perspective and were actually far away from God. Now, we also have both a rock we are cut from and a quarry from which we were dug. The Rock is Christ Himself and the quarry is His Church. We are living stones cut from the One rock; we are of His material and that gives us our identity. And we are living stones who come out of a quarry full of others just like us and that gives us our Christian heritage. So first:

I. We must know our identity in Christ (1-2) Paul knew who He was and what He was about! He started every one of his letters with it, so it must have been on his mind a lot. He knew two things that we also must know:

1. we must know the Source of our life Our life is where? In Christ Jesus. To us a promise is something that will happen in the future and when we see statements like this one, we tend to think of heaven. But the Greek word has a much broader flavor meaning to announce, proclaim or declare. God has declared and proclaimed that life is in Jesus and He who has the Son has [His] life, the very life of God, eternal life! That means so much more than living forever. It means that the very basis of God's own existence has now become the basis of yours! His character has become yours; His resources have become yours; His power has become yours! You are not simply a child of God struggling to imitate Dad. You are your Father's child; everything He is is in you. Every good thing about Him, you are. Now the problem is that most of us are still busy devoting our lives to trying to *get* His life, that is, to get a life like His, to produce it somehow by our own effort. We're trying to be what we *think* we are not. But when we discover that the key is to allow Him to make us what He says we already are, that changes our life. The center of our living is not me and what I have to do; it is Jesus Christ and what He does in me! Then Jesus, the Rock from whence I am hewn, becomes central to every moment of every day of my life and He becomes more important to me than anything else in the world. I hate to quote another movie but, I remember a line from "The Sandlot" where the narrator was describing a good friend this way, "To us baseball was just a game, but to him baseball was life!" You see, to most of us, Jesus is a part of life. Life is family and work and friends and church and Jesus. But Jesus *is* life and living is Jesus working in my family, Jesus working in my friends, Jesus working at my job, Jesus working in our church. Christ is my life. That's who

I am, a person to whom Christ is everything and everything else is nothing apart from Him! I must know that and keep remembering it continually! Secondly:

2. we must know the reason we are here Paul did. He said, "I am an apostle" I am one who has been sent out by the commission of another. Paul says, "Jesus Christ gave me life and sent me out by the will of God." Now, we are not apostles in the same official sense that the 12 and Paul held the office of apostle. But, like them, **we are sent ones**. We are a people sent with a commission. Let's **Compare Heb. 3:1**. Jesus is called The Apostle, *THE* Sent One and we are to consider or fix our thoughts on Him. So let's think about what it meant for Him to be a sent one. Roy Brill says that between John 3:17 and John 8:42 Jesus made 23 references to the fact that He was sent by God! It must have been continually on His mind! Let's look at a just four of the things He said that reflect on what it means for us to be sent:

a. we are not here of our own accord - Jn. 8:42 Jesus didn't come into the world on His own, of His own accord. He was sent! God has put us in this world and placed us exactly where He wanted us. Our lives are not accidents. God put me here in this world. My home is heaven!

b. we are not here to teach what we please - Jn. 7:16 Jesus didn't come to say what He felt like saying, to teach what He felt like teaching. God sent Him and told Him what to teach. He was on the earth to say what God wanted Him to say. So are we!

c. we are not here to do what we please - Jn. 5:36 Jesus did the works the Father told Him to do! He didn't come to do what He felt like doing, to become what He felt like becoming. He was on the earth to do what God had laid out for Him to do. So are we!

d. we are not here to want what we please - Jn. 6:38 Jesus didn't come to earth to have His own way, to make His own choices, to ask for what He wanted. He came to comply with the Father's way, to do and say and be and want what He wanted! He was here to accomplish the Father's will and purpose. So are we!

Do you get it? Christ is my life and I am here as a sent one of His. This life is not about me. It's not about what I want and need and have and like. It's about accomplishing His purpose, running the course He has laid out for me! And that affects every day, every deed, and every decision of my life.

II. We must realize our heritage in Christ (3-5) Paul said, "Timothy, when I pray for you (which I do constantly), I remember two things. I remember how you cried the last time we parted, how much you love me and I miss you. And I keep thinking about how sincere or genuine your faith is and how I saw it live first in your grandmother and in your mother and now in you too." You see:

1. Timothy had a personal heritage - Acts 16:1-3 tells us Timothy was from Lystra in Asia minor where Paul met him on his second missionary journey. But he was not Paul's convert.

a. he came from a line of believers His grandmother Eunice and mother Lois had been converted, probably during Paul's visit there on his first journey a year or two before. By the time Paul got back, not only had they passed the faith on to him, but Timothy had become well-known and spoken of by believers in both Lystra and Iconium. At that point, Paul took him along on the journey and:

b. he served many years under Paul He was with Paul for much of his second and third missionary journeys and was often sent by him to one location or another. He was with Paul during the time of his first imprisonment at Rome and was even sent from there to Philippi. He became like a son to Paul and Paul was closer to him than any other associate. If there were anyone to whom Paul would pass his mantle it would have been Timothy.

So, Timothy had both a heritage of faith in his family and in the ministry to which he could constantly look when he was tempted to forget who he was. We also read in these words that:

2. Paul had an appreciation of heritage "I am serving God as *my forefathers did...*" or literally "*from my forefathers.*" That is, "I'm not just serving *like* they did; I'm serving as a *result* of what they did!" What forefathers? He's certainly not thinking of his own parents or of his spiritual mentors, the Pharisees! He's looking back to a long line of the faithful, to the prophets and godly men of old, to Daniel and Jeremiah and Isaiah, to Moses and before him back to Jacob and Isaac and Abraham of old. And not just those who were well-known and stand out, but Paul sees himself as part of a whole line of godly men and women, all sent by God and serving His purpose down through the centuries. He saw himself in that line of those who had passed the mantle to him and he saw Timothy and how it had been passed on now to him. He had a real sense of heritage. And:

3. we have a precious heritage We stand in that same continuum that Paul did:

a. we fill a place in a line stretching from the cross to the Rapture Paul passed the faith to Timothy, who passed it to others and it came on down through the centuries through thousands of men and women and somewhere to either our parents or to the one who led us to Christ and that faith now lives in us and we've passed it on to another generation and that will go on until Jesus comes. So often we forget that we stand in that line. We have

very little sense of history anymore. We know so little about even our own physical ancestors, much less about those who have preceded us in the faith. Our lives are too busy for that. And with that loss of information goes the sense of continuity, of what it means to step up and take our handoff from the runner who precedes and to pass it off to the next runner and to see not just our few yards but the whole race and our few yards as extremely important to that race. Having a heritage means:

b. we have the example and encouragement of those who go before Others have stood where we stand in this perverted world. They have paved the way. They stood faithfully and held on to the faith and passed it accurately on to us. They endured all kinds of things and have testified that it's worth it all. That's what Heb. 11 is all about, where the writer looks back and traces faith from Abel through Noah and Abraham and Moses and on through Gideon and Barak and Samson and David and Samuel and the prophets and how they all stood for God whether they saw any reward in this world or not, or even died for it. And the conclusion he comes to is *Heb. 12:1, Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* They ran their race well, so let's run ours and run it well! We owe it to them. They sacrificed that we might have their legacy and:

c. we have a tremendous responsibility to those who come after If we don't run our leg, the team is done for. Nobody can run it after us! Our segment may not be much, but without it, the race stops. If just one generation of Christians doesn't pass it on, the faith would be lost forever! Paul explains that principle in 2:2!

You see, that's part of who we are! Our identity is in Christ. We are here to serve His purpose in the world, not our own. And He has put us here as one in a long line of servants. We have a heritage to take upon ourselves and be proud of and live up to and pass on! Those facts determine the goals we'll set in life. Who we are (or who we think we are) will determine how we live. Paul says in verse 6, *"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you..."* That's what I'm doing, reminding you who you are so you can fan the flame in your own life!

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Remembering Our Roots Continually - Ch. 1 (Part 2)

Roots are important. If you forget your roots, you lose your perspective. Let's review briefly the points from last time. There are several aspects to our roots. First is our heavenly identity, who we are in Christ. He is the Rock from which we were hewn. The second part is our earthly heritage, the Church of Jesus Christ, the quarry from which we were dug. If we keep looking at those things, it will keep our head straight. The third aspect of our roots relates to our own personal experience. *General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, once sent this message to those under him. "The tendency of fire is to go out; watch the fire on the altar of your heart."* Prov. 26:20 says, *Without wood a fire goes out...* If you don't feed it, if you don't stir it occasionally, if you don't pay it constant attention, any fire eventually goes out. And Paul uses that truth to remind us that:

I. We must rekindle our gift from Christ (6-7) Now first of all, let's consider:

1. Timothy's problem: fear Remember, Timothy lived in a perverted world, a broken-down society where there was no justice and no safety where it was almost impossible to protect yourself and your family either physically or morally or spiritually. And to top it off, he was a Christian living in a society which was at that time officially against Christians. You can easily see how Timothy or any other disciple might be timid or afraid. There was, of course:

a. fear of personal persecution As Paul is writing this letter, he is sitting in a prison in Rome awaiting trial and execution for his faith. And Paul wants Timothy to do a brave thing (compare 3:9), to come to Rome to visit and help him there in jail! Would you go? On top of that, Timothy was a pastor in public ministry. He was known and had good reason to have fear that he might be next to suffer! We're so fortunate that we've never had to face that in a real way here! Our freedom is a precious commodity the world has known little of. But at the same time, don't you sense it as true that the more of a minority we become, the more fearful we are to speak out, to make ourselves known? Whether at work or school or even in the neighborhood, we too can know fear in this crazy world. But along with it, evidently Timothy and the other Christians were sensing some:

b. shame over apparent inability (8) It's hard to sell a faith whose chief leader is in jail and whose founder died on a cross to a world where it is the strong who survive! In the ancient world, it was always the religion of the winner that sold! Israel was always going after the gods of the other nations, because it looked like they were doing the job! Their nations were conquering, while poor Israel quivered in fright. In Paul's day Rome was the winner. Everybody was afraid of Rome and Roman gods and particularly the Emperor were easy to believe in. Everybody wants something that works! If somebody says "What do you believe in? Who do you follow?", and your reply is "I believe in a man who died but was raised from the dead and the chief leader I follow is a guy in prison on his way to a chopping block", it was easy to feel a bit ashamed. People today are not much different. They want something that

works, that will take all their problems away. And when you tell them it doesn't, that most of the things they need to overcome in their lives will not go away automatically, that it will still require months and years of fighting old habits and learning new ones and being changed in a gradual fashion and often through much pain, they don't much want to hear it and run off to look at some New Age philosophy! And you don't feel much like sharing it, either. There was a lot of pressure on Timothy and the other believers to become timid and fearful, to keep to themselves and to back off on reaching out in any conspicuous ways. We don't know whether they were yielding to that pressure, but Paul knew it was there. Yet he also knew:

2. Timothy's gift: public ministry Paul looked back to a time, a special occasion in Timothy's life which he was a part of, a time when he had laid hands on Timothy in a public ceremony. Compare **1 Tim. 4:11-14**. We're not sure where it was, but it was probably in his home church group at Lystra, before he set out to accompany Paul on his mission. We would call it an ordination or a commissioning. The whole body of elders had gathered and, with Paul, laid hands on Timothy and prayed for him. There was a prophetic message, a Spirit given sermon. All because Timothy had a gift. What was it? I think verse 13 explains verse 14. It was the gift for public ministry, the public reading of Scripture, teaching and preaching. Timothy had the pastoral gift of a leader. Now where did he get it?

a. it was given by God the Holy Spirit It was the gift of God, not of Paul. Please don't think that's what he's saying. The Holy Spirit had obviously gifted Timothy for public ministry and on this occasion:

b. it was publicly affirmed It is not that they laid their hands on him and gave him the gift. But the gift was on this occasion accompanied by a message and with the laying on of hands in affirmation of it.

What's Paul saying? "Timothy, remember your roots. Remember the gift God gave you and called you to exercise? Remember how we all recognized it, how we set you apart, and acknowledged that gift before God? That's part of who you are! You are not simply a saint of God. You are not simply a Christian from a heritage of faith. You are a person whom God gifted and called and set aside for a purpose in the world, for ministry!" I want to tell you why I am in the ministry today. It is not for the money. If a person knew what this job entailed, you couldn't pay them enough to take it. It is not for the glory or recognition; I spend a whole lot more time in the painful process of trying to hold broken people together than I do shaking hands at the door Sunday morning. It's because when I was 19 years old, God gave me a call and with it a gift. He called me into public pastoral ministry. I am as sure of that call as of anything else that has ever happened in my life. And with it He gave the gift of preaching and teaching which I gradually began to develop and exercise. I will never forget the text of the sermon at my actual ordination five years later, Rom. 11:29, *for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable*. God doesn't change His mind! I don't know whether the interpretation is dispensationally correct, but the idea is. You see my gift is part of my identity; it is part of who I am. It is part of my spiritual roots. I can no more quit ministry and go devote my life to selling insurance than I can leave my family or go join the Buddhist Temple in Glenside! I am part of Christ. I am part of my family. And I am a pastor-teacher! That's what Paul was saying to Timothy, "Remember what you are!" You're probably saying, "That's great for you! What about me; nobody ever laid hands on me and told me what my gifts were!" Well, what gifts has God given you? Music is not just something our worship team likes; it's part of who they are. Prayer is part of who others of us are; it is their ministry. Our nursery workers don't just take care of babies; they minister to babies. And keep in mind that most of us have a number of gifts, and maybe there is not one in particular that dominates our life. There may be a number of gifts and ministries that God has given us. They may be private or low profile, instead of public and visible. And like Timothy, the pressure is on us to forget those things and think of ourselves, to become afraid in this perverted world and wallow in our self-concern. Well, Paul reminded him of:

3. Timothy's responsibility: to keep the fire blazing! To remember his gift and to keep that fire blazing, to never neglect it through timidity and let it smolder down into buried embers, but to fan it so that it burned brightly. God did not give us a Spirit who causes us to be afraid. That comes from the *other* spirit!

a. we have the Holy Spirit's power When we surrender to Him and let Him take control, His power works through us and touches and changes lives!

b. we have the Holy Spirit's love When we surrender to Him and let Him take control of us, His love flows through us and we love the unlovely in this perverted world! And:

c. we have the Holy Spirit's controlled thinking When we surrender to Him and let Him take control of us, His mind, His thinking, controls ours and we don't cower in fear of the world around us; we realize who we are and what we are supposed to be about and we go do it!

But we have to daily, sometimes hourly, fan that flame by remembering who we are and surrendering to the Spirit's control and use. Jeremiah the prophet was put in the stocks for his preaching. Nobody affirmed what he said and he wanted to quit and give up in his perverted society. But when he tried, it didn't work. He said, *But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.* - Jer. 20:9. It is like that for us too and we've got to fan that fire, not try to douse it! Now, wrapped up with this whole issue is a fourth principle and it is this:

II. We must relinquish our care to Christ (8-12) There is a watershed we must come to, a continental divide we must choose to cross. Unfortunately, we spend too much time trying to straddle the ridge top. We must decide whether we're going to be who we are or not be who we are, whether we will live out of our roots or be shaped and molded by the world around us at the moment. And if you boil it all down:

1. the decision we must make has two parts. First, we must decide, like Paul:

a. to entrust ourselves completely to His keeping (11-12) Paul says, "I know what I am; I know what God called me to be. I did what He said and it put me in this prison here in Rome. I'm going to die shortly. But I'm not ashamed and I'm not afraid because I've gone to Somebody I trust and I've made a deposit. I deposited myself, my eternal well-being into His care. And I am absolutely convinced that He has the power to keep the real me, my soul, my spirit safe forever, come what may!" Somewhere along the line, if you want to keep God's perspective in this world, you've got to make that deposit. You've got to make up your mind to trust God more than yourself or anybody or anything else on this planet, come what may, and then:

b. to willingly accept whatever suffering He may allow (8) He can carry you through it by His power. Paul says, "Yes, it's going to cost you. Yes, you're going to get hurt. Yes, it often won't be pleasant, not in the world we live in, but you have to decide to join with me in suffering for the Gospel out of the resource of His divine power!" Whether it pays, whether it feels good, whether it means a hard life on some foreign field or even persecution, it is worth it! Now in verses 9-10 we have:

2. the basis on which we make that decision (9-10) Here, Timothy are the hard facts:

a. Christ saved us from our sins. Every last one of them was laid on Him at the cross and:

b. He called us to a holy life out of a life dominated by sin and the course of this world. He changed our lives. And:

c. He did it completely out of grace It was not because of anything in us or because of anything we did, but simply because He chose to. In fact:

d. He did it before the beginning of time, before we ever existed, before the world existed. Our names were written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world. And whether you're a five point Calvinist or not, the fact is that your redemption was accomplished in God's economy and His mind and His plan before creation and:

e. He proved His faithfulness in appearing to accomplish it In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son to redeem them that were under the law that they might receive their adoption as sons! And for Him that meant going to the cross. It meant dying. But through His death:

f. He put death out of business He took the sting out. He broke its back. Death still exists, but it doesn't matter anymore, because death has no hold on us. It is merely a doorway, not the ultimate end of our existence. Because:

g. He gave us incorruptible eternal life, His life. Death was who we were. it was part of our being. But now we have life, His life, life that is immortal, incorruptible, unchangeable, that can never be altered by anything, not even physical death. If we live, we live to the Lord; if we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live or die, therefore, we are the Lord's!

Oh hallelujah, we don't need to be afraid to make that deposit! We can't lose. We can place ourselves and our well-being in a perverted world in His hands, because He's already given us life that never ends or changes. What can man do to me? So while I'm here, I'd better get busy and be who I am and exercise those gifts!

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Remembering Our Roots Continually - Ch. 1 (Part 3)

With roots comes responsibility. I shared the Lion King illustration with you at the beginning of this series. Simba's problem was that he had forgotten who he was and so his perspective on life was all out of whack. He was living life with "no worries". But when he remembered who he was, he knew what he had to do. He had to go back and take his place as king. Our roots determine who we are and when we know who we are:

I. We must recognize our responsibility to Christ (13-18) It changes our perspective on what it means to pass through this world. We are not here for ourselves, to get our needs met in life. We are here for His purpose. So, Paul reminds Timothy and us first of all, that:

1. we must be faithful with the message He entrusted to us (13-14) The other day I went down to the bank and made a deposit. I took some money that had been given to me and I deposited it in the bank. I left it there in their keeping as the sole custodians of it. I made them responsible for taking care of it and using it in the proper fashion without losing it or misusing it. Because of who we are as Christians, each of us has received a great and valuable deposit. What is it? The message of God's truth, the pattern of sound and true teaching about God and salvation and Jesus Christ. How did we get it?

a. we received it from others Timothy got it first from his mother and grandmother and then from Paul who taught him over and over again the pattern or the outline of sound teaching, of God's truth. Paul was going to die soon and the truth had been left with Timothy as a deposit. Where'd you get it? I got it from my pastor who got it from his parents and his pastor who got it from... Because of our heritage and roots, it was deposited and left with us by those who went before. And because it is precious and life-giving, we have a responsibility to Christ in regard to it. First:

b. we must cling to the truth without altering it ourselves We must keep it, cling to it. Did you ever play "Whisper Down The Lane"? What happens when you try to pass even a single sentence through a number of people. The tendency of people is to alter what we receive as it passes through the filter of our lives, either for personal reasons or just to make more sense out of it. For example, there's a church in the city called Faith Tabernacle. Their pastor received the truth from somebody. He saw in that body of truth the strong emphasis on trusting in God, not in the hand of man. He was so inspired by it that he tried to apply it in an extreme way and taught that trust means you should never seek medical help, but simply trust God. He taught his people never to get help but to call the elders and pray instead. In 1991 five children died of measles in that congregation. A 17 year old boy died of a ruptured appendix. In 1993 a 16 year old died from an infection from an untreated compound fracture in his leg which was not allowed to be set. A baby girl playing with a pen cap sniffed it up her nostril into the sinus cavity and was in terrible pain. The family prayed for 92 days before it worked its way out and the baby recovered! Do you see what a slight altering of the truth can do! Imagine if you or I tried to simplify the doctrine of the Trinity to make it more understandable. We'd end up without salvation! That is the primary reason that God caused His truth to be written down in the Bible, so there would be a written record with multiple copies that could be objectively guarded and passed down without alteration. But even with that, the tendency to alter is so easy. We must be careful to keep the truth that was delivered to us whole and pure. And:

c. we must guard the truth from outside influences It is always under attack from the outside, from people trying to say that Jesus isn't God, that the resurrection didn't happen, that all religions are equal ways to God. In Paul's day it was people like the Gnostics who wanted to change the truth and make Jesus a created being and integrate it with their pagan belief in many deities. There's always somebody who wants to change the truth and make it fit something else. And we are charged with guarding it carefully in its pure unaltered state! Now, fortunately:

d. God has given us One to help us keep the truth: the Holy Spirit God did not just give us His spoken Word, but His written word. And not just His written Word, but His Spirit to live in our hearts to guide us into all the truth. More accurately we might say in our day, to keep us centered in the truth which has been once and for all delivered to us. If this process of passing the faith down was simply a manmade thing, even with written Scriptures, we'd be far from the truth by now, but the same Spirit has been living in us one generation after another to ensure that we guard the truth correctly.

This is a big responsibility. But it's who we are, guardians of the truth. Without fulfilling that responsibility those who come after us will die. Now here's a second responsibility:

2. we must be faithful to the people He has placed with us (15-18) Having roots means being stones from the same quarry with others and we have a responsibility of faithfulness to the other stones. First, Paul mentions:

a. a bad example: Phygelus and Hermogenes (15) - deserters We don't know who these guys were, but they deserted Paul. He was imprisoned and sentenced to die and they were probably afraid and didn't want to hang around, so they went home along with a bunch of others. And in a situation where a prisoner's well-being depended on help from friends and relatives, that was really a serious thing! But we do it too. We desert one another. If a fellow believer gets too needy or we don't think they're responding like they should or if they get in some serious trouble, we can easily just back out of their lives and leave them to hold the bag or face the problem alone. But fortunately, Paul also gave:

b. a good example: Onesiphorus (16-18) - a refresher He did the exact opposite. He came from home to Rome and sought Paul and found him and helped him. Phygelus looked and saw his own need. Onesiphorus saw Paul's need and became a refresher of the saints. That's what we need to be, one who ministers life-giving water to those in the desert.

(1) it involves selflessness toward them, putting their well-being ahead of our own. He wasn't ashamed or afraid of Paul's chains. He didn't consider what it meant to him, but thought of Paul.

(2) it involves seeking them Often times they can't or won't come to us. We have to go to them and seek them out. If there's one thing I've learned in many years of ministry, it is that the people who need you the most are most likely not to tell you, because they're thinking about you. You have to be aware of the needs of your brothers and sisters and seek them out. And:

(3) it involves serving them Helping, serving, stooping down, being willing to do unpleasant and maybe menial things, that's our calling. Being from the quarry means faithfulness to the other stones. If we desert one another, our heritage is in trouble!

Now we move into the second chapter and a second major emphasis of Paul's letter. If we're going to maintain God's perspective in the world, once we know who we are, we must then choose to set our priorities carefully.

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Setting Our Priorities Carefully - Ch. 2

1. the importance of discipling	1-2
2. the importance of purpose	3-7
3. the importance of evangelism	8-14a
4. the importance of the Word	14b-18
5. the importance of purity	19-22
6. the deathtrap of conflict	23-26

Life is full of choices. There are so many things to occupy our hours and our days as we pass through it. And it is so easy to become occupied with whatever is in front of you. One of the most important concepts for the believer is that of purposefully choosing what you will and won't become involved in, that is, setting priorities, knowing what's important and deserving of your effort and attention and what's not. As I'm sure you know, it is not easy to make God's things priorities in your life and that's why right in verse 1, before he enumerates them, he gives:

AN UNDERLYING PREMISE: You must choose to live out of His strength (1) To choose these priorities and live this way will take strength. And the strength to do it does not lie inherently in you. It's really easy to tell people, "You need to make this thing a priority in your life!" I've been doing it for years with Bible reading, for example. But I still find it a struggle to choose that priority myself many times, don't you? We need power and that power is found in Christ. Choosing priorities is not simply a matter of making another do and don't list. It's not anywhere near that simple. It means asking the Lord to show you what your priorities actually are and then to empower you to change them, so that the things that are important to Him become important to you! This chapter, of course, is not an exhaustive list of all our priorities. It doesn't mention worship or family, for example. Rather these are key priorities that will help us keep God's perspective in the midst of a perverted world and the first one Paul mentions is:

I. The importance of discipling (2) This relates exactly to what we just talked about as a responsibility. We have to carefully guard and protect the body of truth that's been deposited with us. Now Paul goes on share the importance of depositing that truth in turn with others. And Paul uses himself as:

1. the example of discipling: Paul Paul spent a great deal of time discipling Timothy. Timothy was already a known believer when he met Paul, but over the years of their travel and association together, Paul taught Timothy over and again the key truths of sound doctrine. He did it often in the context of other people. It was not just that they sat down one on one, but Paul took Timothy with him everywhere and he heard Paul, plus they had many, many times where they walked roads together and talked and prayed together and served together and took turns teaching. In short what Paul did was to pour himself, both his knowledge and his character, into Timothy. And that's what we must be doing. We must be pouring ourselves into others, whether they are our own age or are our children. This has to be a priority and here's why:

2. the nature of discipling: a trust We've been entrusted with the faith by the generation who preceded us. They deposited the care of it with us and gradually left the scene through death. We are carefully guarding and preserving and using it today. But if we fail to deposit it with others, what will happen to it 20 or 40 or 60 years from now. Will our children be here studying together or will there be no one? That all depends on how seriously we take this concept. Now notice in verse 2:

3. the subjects of discipling Everyone needs the Gospel. Everyone needs to be taught. But not everyone is going to be a person who will participate in the process which God is about. It is easy to find lots of people to invest your life and time in. They abound. You can give every waking hour to ministering to needy people. But Paul notes the importance of choosing out from among them:

a. persons who are faithful, trustworthy, dependable. Persons who realize the importance of the Gospel in their lives and the importance of sharing with others. Persons who are sold out in their hearts to whatever God wants in their lives, who want His will at any cost. The Timothy types, that's who we need to be investing ourselves in in a particular way. And they need to be:

b. persons who are capable of discipling others Everyone is qualified; the thought here is more of ability. There are many who will get disciplined, but won't be capable by their gifts or their personality to pass it along to others. And if the process is to continue, that's necessary.

Over the years I've had the privilege of discipling or mentoring two younger men in the process of ministry. Through the years we've talked through a plethora of subjects. I've set an example and given advice. I've included them in many things and given them opportunities and spent time praying with them. And today I can step back and the church is safely in their hands for years to come. Listen, this process of discipling, of investing ourselves in others, is so important. We must make it a priority!

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Setting Our Priorities Carefully - Ch. 2 (Part 2)

We're talking in the second chapter about setting our priorities. To keep God's perspective, we must always remember who we are and then set our priorities in living accordingly. We talked last time about the importance of discipling others so that the faith is passed along and continues from generation to generation. Now let's talk about:

I. The importance of purpose (3-7), that is, of knowing what it is and choosing to focus on it. That's a little bit of a hard concept to explain, so Paul gives us:

1. some examples for our consideration Paul is great at analogies, at comparing the Christian or the Christian life to common ordinary things that were familiar to his readers. Here he uses three of them. First, he encourages us to have:

a. the single-minded stamina of the soldier (3-4) We are soldiers of Jesus Christ. Now, think about what a soldier is like:

(1) he is not stopped by hardship He often has to march long miles. He may be hot or cold or not have enough food, but that doesn't stop him from carrying out his mission or assignment. His main goal is not to take care of himself; it is to get the job done. And further:

(2) he is not sidetracked by "civilian" affairs The word *entangled* means "to braid the hair". And what he doesn't get tangled in is in the Greek the *pragmateia* of this life, the practical day to day business of living life in this world. That's what happens to most people. Their entire life is tied up completely with making money and possessions and home and family all that it takes to make those things happen. A Roman soldier had to put aside all those things and follow his commander on their mission. You see:

(3) he has one goal: to carry out the will of the commander, of the one who recruited him to be a soldier. He knows that he has a purpose to carry out orders and by carrying out his orders, he advances the cause to victory. He can't allow himself to get stopped or sidetracked.

Now this is not to say that a Christian should not deal with any pragmatic affairs, that he should hole up on a mountain someplace or forsake his family and become an itinerant missionary like Paul. Soldiers have to deal with practical affairs too. But it is that single-mindedness of purpose that Paul is pointing out to us. Or consider:

b. the disciplined zeal of an athlete (5) The games, of course, were the Olympic games, the great contests. And what was true then is also true now. The athlete:

(1) he strives toward one goal: the prize He devotes all his efforts toward that goal. He trains, he exercises, he practices. And when the contest is on, he devotes every ounce of his strength to one thing, that gold medal, that victor's wreath. But in order to get it:

(2) he disciplines himself to obey the rules of the contest He can't cheat. He controls that desire and competes according to the rules laid down for him.

What's Paul saying? Like the athlete, we should have that same single-minded purpose and zeal that puts everything into one direction but we should have it with discipline and control, so that we do it according to God's directions. Again, the athlete sees there is a primary purpose and focuses and concentrates on that and devotes himself to that. And then Paul mentions:

c. the satisfaction of a hard-working farmer (6) I had a friend who grew up on a farm and became a farmer. I've spent a lot of time on and close to a farm. And let me tell you there is no one who works longer and harder than a farmer!

(1) he labors long and hard toward one goal: a crop He gets up early and spends all day in the hot sun planting and weeding and watering and tending the plants. For him it is not the intensity of facing a battle or an athletic competition. It is the long hard work of the growing season, all leading to the goal of harvest, of bringing in a crop. He focuses his life on producing a crop but:

(2) he is the first to enjoy the results The first to taste the grapes, to eat the grain, to enjoy the corn. His diligence is rewarded with a crop and he is satisfied.

This is not the first time Paul has used the analogy that we are God's farmers, His husbandmen, His sowers and reapers. Even Jesus said that God had planted a crop in the world and there would be a time of harvest and encouraged His disciples to become workers in God's great harvest. Again, it's the focus, the singlemindedness, the knowing what you're about and being willing to make all other things fall in line with that, that Paul is pointing out here and then he pauses to give:

2. a challenge to make personal application (7) Ponder it. Look at your own life. Ask yourself, "Am I a focused person and do I see the other parts of my life fitting into that overall purpose?" Take, for example, work. I have to work to support my family and myself. But is my work primary in itself. Or do I see myself as an agent of the kingdom of God stationed in that company to shine His light on others and minister to them. Do I see my possessions as God's things entrusted to me to serve His purpose? Do I see my spouse as given for me to nurture and encourage spiritually and my children as a special trust to bring the light of God into their lives through my own and to pass the faith along? When you know what you're here for, all of life takes on that focus and becomes directed toward a goal. So, that's the importance of focus and single-mindedness itself. Now that moves naturally to talk about:

II. The importance of evangelism (8-14a) The only commission Jesus gave five times is the great commission. He emphasized time and again:

1. the priority of sharing the Gospel we've been entrusted with and Paul did the same **(8-10)**. The Gospel, the Good news about Jesus Christ, has to be taken to the people in our generation, so that (and here Paul's talking like a reformed theologian) the elect can be saved. That is the focus; that is the goal, the salvation of the world. God sent His Son into the world that the world through Him might be saved. And Jesus sent His church into the world that the world through them might be saved! That is ultimately why we're here on this earth, to share the Gospel with every creature. Now that Gospel has as:

a. its author: a Savior who suffered but is risen (8), who was both human and divine, who, as a descendant of David, knew what it was like to suffer, to be a warring soldier, to be a struggling athlete, to be a hard-working planter of seed, but as the Son of God knew what it was to take up His life again victoriously.

b. its priority: well worth all the suffering it may bring (9) Paul said, "For preaching this Good News, I'm here in prison counted as a common criminal and chained up! But it's worth it. It's part of the hardship I endure, part of my training regimen, part of my long hard crop-tending." It's important enough to be well worth it, because of:

c. its effect: eternal salvation for all who believe (10) It brings those elect ones who believe eternal life and glory! It saves them eternally. It changes their forever. I focus on this goal and endure all this for their sake, so they may know Christ!

However, everything in life tries to sidetrack us from the importance of that, to take away our focus and time and attention from that one fact that without evangelism, the sharing of the good news of Jesus, where I live and where I work and where I play, the world is lost! If you want God's perspective in your life, this is it. "The world is lost. My Son died that they might have life. Your assignment, should you decide to accept it, is to tell them. That is my focus and your goal!" It will cost you hard work and opposition and suffering sometimes, but here is:

2. the guarantee of God's Word (11-14a) The Greek simply says, *the Word is Faithful*. The Word of God contains our guarantee, something you can count on. Four things, actually:

a. those who have died with Him can count on living with Him Those who have been identified and united with him in His death will be united with Him in life forever. It's guaranteed.

b. those who endure hardship now can count on reigning with Him This is not saying, "if you endure, you get to reign". This is encouragement for those who ARE enduring hardship now, those who belong to Him. Count on reigning with Him forever!

c. those who deny Him now can count on Him denying them This is talking about apostates, not about failing Christians. Those who reject Him here, who fall away and deny him or who reject His message, He will deny once

and for all when they stand before Him. This is like the "Depart from Me; I never knew you!" passage that Jesus spoke. Count on it. They have no other way in but by Him!

d. those who fail to trust Him can count on His continued faithfulness This is for us, for Christians. Even if we fail to trust Him; even if we fail to listen and obey and get all fouled up and out of focus, He will not fail us because He does not have the power to deny His own nature! He will always remain faithful to us. We don't have to perform for Him to be faithful to us; He will be faithful anyway. But if we lose our focus and miss our purpose in the world, we'll miss what we're here for.

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Setting Our Priorities Carefully - Ch. 2 (Part 3)

Today we'll finish the second chapter on the necessity of setting our priorities. We've already seen three of the most important priorities; now let's look at three more:

I. The importance of the Word (14b-18) If there is any one thing that will help us set our priorities and keep God's perspective, it is His Word. In fact, the more His Word is central in our lives, the more we'll think like Him. Unfortunately, instead of immersing ourselves in it and applying it personally and letting it mold and shape our lives, we all too often get onto:

1. the perilous sidetrack of insignificant quarreling (14b) This is stern. It's a warning before God to not to get in useless, worthless word battles. And isn't that what we do? Christians argue their points and interpretations with each other and, far from convincing each other, end up putting each other down while the world watches and is turned off. Or we try to argue with unsaved people about what's really true. It not only has no value, but it is literally in Greek a *ca-tastrophe* for those who listen to it and are turned away! We must never stoop to this, but instead recognize:

2. the tremendous importance of correct teaching (15) We must make every effort, strive with all our might, to be someone who can stand before God with nothing to be ashamed of in this matter, someone who correctly handles the Word of Truth. The Greek says who "cuts straight" like Paul would cut a straight seam in his tent cloth or a farmer would plow a straight furrow. He's talking about straight teaching, holding and teaching sound doctrine, presenting genuine truth and making every effort to do that! It is so easy to become lax and uncaring in how we handle and treat the Word of God. And when we lose our zeal to see truth as it really is in Scripture and let it mold our lives, and start seeing it as something we use in the process of doing what we're doing, we're in grave danger and the door is open to many things. And so, Paul points to:

3. the insidious growth of heresy (16-17) We are to avoid the empty use of words without meaning because it leads to ever-increasing ungodliness. It is a path away from God. It spreads and increases and changes form like a chameleon. Paul's example is a pair, Hymenaeus and Philetus. Hymenaeus was already mentioned in *1 Tim 1:19-20, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.* He was evidently a known heretic who had started out as part of the church, but didn't shoot straight for the mark, didn't strive to discover the truth of the word and subject himself to it and so had ended up teaching the blasphemous heresy that the resurrection had already taken place (probably at the time of conversion) and that there is no bodily resurrection for us in the future. This teaching did spread and was evidently common in Corinth where Paul wrote against it extensively in *1 Cor. 15*. Their teaching ended up being Satanic and blasphemous toward the resurrection of Christ and Paul had evidently exercised church discipline and removed them from the body.

It happens so commonly today. A couple of messages ago I mentioned Faith Tabernacle in Philadelphia which teaches that all medical help is sin and the death and destruction and ruin their teaching is bringing to people's lives. How many people's faith has been destroyed totally because they watched a loved one die and God didn't heal them? The charismatic movement has led into all sorts of excesses and false teachings in this same way. As long as you hold the Word of God above yourself and your experiences and subject yourself to it, you'll stay on the straight path. But the minute you put it beneath you as a tool to be used in the process of your experience, your path will start to veer off and it can go awfully far afield. That's why making every effort to subject your life to the light of the Word of Truth is such a vitally important priority!

II. The importance of purity (19-22) With all this stuff going on and trying to figure out who really is and who really isn't a genuine believer, one might very well begin to wonder about the Church as a whole and where its clear boundaries lie. Are guys like Hymenaeus in or out? How about Faith Tabernacle people? In spite of all that, Paul reassures us in verse 19, God's foundation stands sure and unmoved. What is that foundation? **1 Tim. 3:15**. It is the church, the pillar and foundation of the truth! The true church is like a solid rock foundation that never moves off its base of truth and on it God has placed a two-fold seal or inscription: **1) The Lord knows those who are His!** That's His business. He knows the hearts

and who trusts in Him and who doesn't. We can't know that except in our own heart for ourself. This is a reference to what Moses said to rebellious Korah and his followers who insisted that they were the Lord's people in Num. 16:5, *Then he said to Korah and all his followers: "In the morning the LORD will show who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him.* It's not what we choose to say about ourselves; He knows who belongs to Him and will show it and, of course, Korah got swallowed up! Jesus talked the same way, saying that many who would say to Him "Lord, Lord" will not enter His kingdom because He never knew them! God's Church is unshaken. He knows where the boundaries are, even when we can't see them clearly. However, there's a second part to God's inscription: **2) Everyone who names the name of Christ must depart from wickedness** Just as God said to Moses about Korah in Num. 16:21, *"Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once."*, we must depart or separate ourselves from wickedness and those who practice it.

1. it is a foundational command of God (19) That's the sign we ought to be looking for and concerned about. God knows who belongs to Him, but those who really belong to Him will flee wickedness and the people that practice it, even if they name the name of Jesus! Moral purity is foundational to who we are and to what God has commanded us and so:

2. it is vital to our usefulness to God (20-21) Now Paul uses another metaphor. In a big house (the visible Church) there are two kinds of vessels. Some are made of gold and silver for noble purposes, to display, to decorate, to drink out of. These are the people who are genuine, who belong to Christ and are being used for His purposes. Others are made of wood and clay for ignoble purposes, like your dustpan and wash bucket! These are the people who do not really know Him and are contaminated vessels. And Paul says if you steer clear of the contaminated vessels and their contamination, you'll stay holy and pure and be useful to God; you'll be prepared so He can use you for any good purpose that He wants. Purity is vital to usefulness. If we're in this world to serve God's purpose and to be used of Him, we must be pure, holy in our hearts and our thoughts and our behavior. And so, Paul encourages us that:

3. it must be practiced with intensity (22) He uses 2 very strong words to stress our responsibility:

[The author apologizes that the remainder of this message is missing from his digital files!]

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Seeing Our World Clearly 3:1-4:5

It is of utmost importance that we see the world around us from God's perspective because it is so confusing. How we look at the world is called our worldview. And there are so many confusing worldviews out there which are being fed to us all the time. In our culture, we particularly get bombarded with humanistic worldviews which emphasize man's innate goodness and ability to improve the world and to fix its wrongs. We get awed with technological and ideological progress which has occurred in the last few centuries. And because very few of us have much (if any) real knowledge of history or any sense of what things are like anywhere else except for right here, it is easy for us to fall prey to false thinking. That's why Paul declares to us:

I. The nature of the age in which we live - 3:1-9 And notice that the first thing he emphasizes is:

1. the importance of understanding it (1a) "Mark this! Write it down! Don't forget it! Stick to the truth of it no matter what appearances may seem!" Literally, "Get to know this!" Why? If you don't, you can easily get caught up in all those movements trying to "make the world a better place". And the price of it will ultimately be giving up strict loyalty to Christ. Or, if you happen to live in an environment of suffering, you may buy into despair and hopelessness and be convinced to throw away your faith. God has already described for us in His Word the very nature of the age in which we live and we must understand thoroughly:

2. the principles which govern it (1b) First note:

a. the time he's describing: the church age This phrase *the last days* is not specifically a reference to the time immediately preceding the coming of Christ. Paul and Peter and John did not have 2000 years to look back over like you and I do. They did not see that "there will be 2000 years and then things will get really unbearable and then Christ will come." They were doing what we are to do, expecting and looking for Christ's return. Any time between the cross and Christ's return is the last days! John wrote, *Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.* - 1 John 2:18. Was he wrong? No, the term *hour* can be rendered *time* or *season*. He was simply saying, "the days in which we're living are the last days. Jesus is coming to terminate this age, but until He does, we are in the last days." So what Paul is describing is the character of the world during the entire church age, not simply what it will be like for a short period at some time in the future before Christ comes. Now he plainly describes:

b. the character of the age: difficult to bear The word *terrible* would be better translated as *grievous* or hard to endure, difficult to bear. Jesus never promised his disciples that the world would be a wonderful place for them, that they would have happiness and prosperity and peace. Instead, the New Testament shouts that this age will be hard for us to live in! We'll experience suffering and difficulty and hatred and persecution. *In this world you shall have tribulation!* But we are not to live in fear; rather we are to realize that He has overcome the world and live in the midst of it with confidence in His strength and power to help us endure! And the Scripture also makes clear:

c. the progression of the age: bad to worse (13) That's mankind's natural progression. He doesn't get better. He gets worse. All of the things we see in the world around us were around in Paul's world. None have been eradicated. Man has had some ups and downs in between, some higher points, but these things will not go away or be conquered. They will, in fact, get worse with time and with the increase in the population of the world, with the number of people who practice them. And the age will culminate in a period so bad, Jesus said, that there will never have been anything like it in all of human history, an hour of tribulation which will come upon the whole world.

Now Paul gives an example of:

3. the behaviors which will characterize its people (2-4) This is a list of 18 things which will be found in and characterize the human race during this age. They were all there in Paul's Roman empire. They're all here today. Their presence should not shock or surprise us. Rather we must be careful not to buy in to any of them. This is not to suggest that all persons will display all of these behaviors. Rather, together they are the character of the age. Let's examine them one at a time:

- **self-centeredness** – literally, *lovers of themselves*, people who love themselves more than they love others or family. Aren't we seeing and hearing that today? *To thine own self be true* has come to mean choosing yourself over and above every other factor in your life. People will run out on their marriages or families or any other relationship in life just to get what they want.
- **materialism** – literally *lovers of money*. Oh, the things people won't do to get money and what it can buy. They will kill for it, steal, lie, hurt people, compromise their morals, ruin the environment, abuse employees' health, anything to get money. Material things come to have greater value than human life!
- **pretention** – The Greek for *boastful* refers to an imposter, someone who claims to be something he's not, a pretender who blows himself up in the eyes of others.
- **self-aggrandizement** – I'm not sure if that's the right word or not. The Greek word for the NIV *proud* means "to show oneself above others", to compare yourself to others and put them down. You can see that in our political advertisements or our advertising quite clearly, can't you?
- **evil-speaking** – The Greek word is literally, *blasphemy*, speaking all kinds of evil, having no regard for what they say either against God or other people.
- **disrespect of parents** – We don't have to look far for this one. People will deny the natural respect and love for parents that ought to be there. And the ultimate, of course, are cases like the several on the news in recent months about children who murdered their own parents!
- **without gratefulness** – Without a sense of thankfulness for anything, feeling that anything I get, I deserve or that if I got it, I earned it, having no sense of appreciation for anything anybody has done for us, especially God.
- **secularization** – literally, *without holiness*. It describes the person who has no sense of God or the Divine in life and lives a purely secular life. Nothing is holy or sacred and we are left to make our way alone in a universe abandoned by God!
- **without caring** – literally *without family affection*, without the love that makes the family unit work. Parents who don't love their children or vice versa and husbands who don't love their wives and so on. The natural emotion we have toward those close to us is gone.
- **without forgiveness** – The KJV says *truce-breakers* and the Greek word means somebody without a treaty or a covenant, somebody that will never give in or give up or negotiate, somebody who has no place for forgiveness or reconciliation, but will fight to the death and will only negotiate when it is to their advantage and then break all terms when they choose.
- **false accusation** – This is the word *diabolos* (the devil), one who accuses others falsely for his own advantage, blames them with things they didn't do for his own advantage.

- **without self-control** – They are literally *powerless* to control themselves and this term has a moral connotation. It means they are unable to control the lusts of their own bodies and follow them to the utmost degree. It references all the perverted kinds of orgies and sexual behavior we have today and that Paul saw then!
- **brutality** – Violence. You wonder how it can be that some of these guys they interview from prison can tell you how they kidnapped somebody and raped them and killed them and dismembered them.
- **not loving what is good** – That natural sense that we should have, being in the image of God, of loving what is good and right and just and pure is gone. The removal of all moral sense and absolutes.
- **betrayal** – *Treacherous* refers literally to a traitor or betrayer, a Judas who would sell his master or even his mother to suit his own purpose. Someone nobody can trust.
- **recklessness** – or rashness, falling into things headlong without thinking, without regard for consequences, without concern for the welfare of anyone concerned. Living by uncontrolled passion to do things.
- **arrogance** – *conceited* is literally, *to be puffed up* with haughtiness and pride like old Nebuchadnezzar who walked around his palace praising himself.
- **hedonism** – Lovers of pleasure. If it feels good, that's what matters. The quest to get high and stay that way, to be stimulated. Pleasure seekers abound.

And those, my friends, are the characteristics of the age in which we live. That is the way the human race is going to behave and the closer we get to the return of Christ, the worse they will get. Not a pretty picture, is it? It's going on all around us right now. We may expect to collide with and be hurt by these forces. But on the other hand, these are the forces that are constantly making an impact on us and bombarding us. And it's so easy to be influenced by them, to incorporate them in some degree into our own thinking and actions. And that's what we see. These very things creep into the Church and into the lives of Christians who end up living according to "the ways of this world". We have Christians who are self-centered, who are materialistic, who are proud, who are immoral, who are not trustworthy, and so on. Paul is warning us to watch out! But there is another thing that will characterize this age:

3. the prevalence of false teachers (5-9) Now Paul refers directly to the false teachers that were in Ephesus and were troubling the church there. That same thing will be true of the entire age. False prophets will arise, Jesus warned. The whole New Testament screams this warning:

a. they will espouse a form of religion without God (5) This age has been full of prophets who taught a creed, but no Christ, who taught religious practices and beliefs, who tried to create a system of devotion and religiosity, but all without a genuine relationship to God through Christ. It is a substitute, a form of idolatry. And millions upon millions in this age have fallen into it and are bound up in religions which have no life. Secondly:

b. they will deceive in order to exercise control (6) They will be sweet and pleasing at first, but will try to worm their way into positions of control in families. This verse is not putting women down, by the way, implying that all women are weak-willed. The term is one Greek word, *gynaikaria*, a diminutive term that means "little women", women that are already less than true women because they've been involved in a sinful lifestyle and are following their sinful passions. False teachers have control as an objective, not freedom and truth. And they will do whatever they need to ingratiate themselves and gain control, split up families, come between husbands and wives, parents and children, all to gain followers and advance their position of control. Then:

c. they will crave knowledge but oppose truth (7-8) Jannes and Jambres were, according to Jewish tradition, two of the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses and tried to pretend that they could do by the power of their gods what he was doing by the power of Israel's God. They're the ones who said, "Don't listen to him; it's all a magician's trick. Jehovah is not the true God!" They had spent their lives acquiring knowledge, unlocking mysteries, but they could not see the hand of God! They could not see the truth! These false teachers will be like them, searching for knowledge everywhere, but always opposed to the real truth when they find it. But here's the good news:

d. their success will be limited (9) They will not get very far. Just as the day came when the magicians couldn't produce gnats out of the dust and everybody knew and saw it and even they had to say, "This is the finger of God!" so the day will come at the return of Christ when their foolishness will be evident to all!

Where are they? On every hand. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, New Agers, a thousand and one false teachers with a false message everywhere. That's our age! What's Paul's advice? Verse 5, *From such turn away*. Have nothing to do with them. Avoid them; they want to deceive and control you and they will if you let them. They are opposed to the

truth and they are rejected, disapproved, as one day we'll all see when they cry out, "Lord, Lord" and He says, *Depart from Me you workers of iniquity!*

What an age! What a world we live in! It's an age of darkness, an age where the powers of darkness seem to reign everywhere. If that was all I knew, I'd be tempted to give up. But you can be a light in it like Paul was. God can give you the grace to stand firm against the forces which assail you. However, you have to start by seeing the world the way it really is. It's a rotten place. There's nothing here to set your heart on. Up there, you have a citizenship and an eternal home. You must be careful to fix your eyes up there while you're walking down here!

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Seeing Our World Clearly 3:1-4:5 (Part 2)

Last time we looked at the description Paul gives of the character of the age in which we live. It wasn't a pretty picture. To summarize, we live in an age of self-centeredness, an age without accepted standards of good and without respect for people and God, an age of deception where there is plenty of religion without actual knowledge of God. And as it progresses, it will worsen until the world arrives at the conditions of the actual tribulation period, the worst time in the history of the race. Doesn't make you want to shout for joy, does it? Well, if that's the nature of the age we live in, then Paul goes on to share with us:

I. The nature of the treatment we can expect - 3:10-13 When you swim against the current, the water is going to beat on you and try to push you down! Everything that Christ is in the process of producing in us is the exact antithesis of the nature of the age and therefore, of the principles and emotions which drive the people around us. What kind of reaction would you expect? Would you expect people to put you up on a pedestal because you're different and say, "Man, we need more people like you!"? Some will, but most will have the exact opposite reaction. Jesus put it this way, *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.* - **John 15:18-21**. We need to understand and anticipate that the world system doesn't like people who buck it and the people in it don't like them either. Why? *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.* - **John 3:19-20**. The truth in our lives lights the darkness in theirs and paints them for what they really are and they refuse to accept that. To see yourself for what you are and denounce it and seek forgiveness and change takes an act of God in a human heart. The reaction of the unregenerated heart is to love itself and lash out at anything that challenges that. Of course, we see that pattern in Jesus Himself being crucified. But in our text here there is:

1. the pattern we can see in Paul's life (10-11) He says, "Timothy, you were a first-hand participant, you were with me, you traveled with me, you know me and my character and my life about as well as anybody, you have full-knowledge." He wanted Timothy to think about and analyze what he had seen in his own life. Since we're privileged to have the record of it in Acts, we too can get a glimpse of it. First note:

a. the tremendous character of the life Paul lived (10) There are two areas that Paul refers to:

(1) his teaching declared the character of God Paul taught all the right things. He taught the truth. He was not some false teacher out to lead people astray. His teaching taught the true character of God in an age full of deceit. And at the same time:

(2) his conduct displayed the character of God His way of life matched what he taught. He didn't preach one thing and do another. There was no hidden scandal concerning him. And he lists several components of that:

- **he displayed true purpose** He was not preaching to get something for himself, to bilk people for gain or to gain some high position. He was a man who sacrificed everything to serve God. His motives were pure and his purpose true.
- **he trusted God** Time and again he chose to trust God to take care of him and did what God said, no matter how hard it was.
- **he forgave others and put up with mistreatment** He had patience, literally, long-suffering. He prayed for those who mistreated him and preached to them. He witnessed to the very guards who kept him bound and sought to lead them to Christ.
- **he cared about people sacrificially** without expecting something from them in return. He was willing to exhaust himself for them. And:

- **he did not give up because of trouble** He wasn't a quitter who gave up when things got tough. He persevered. He endured. He was the genuine article.

In short, he was a tremendous example of the character of Christ! There was no reason that people should have hated him or turned against him. Yet look at:

b. the terrible way in which Paul was treated (11a) There are two key words here, persecution and suffering. First of all:

(1) he experienced persecution from unbelievers And in particular he mentions the way he was treated on his first missionary journey in the cities of Asia Minor. But the same treatment followed him through all of his life. Let's go to Acts and look at what he's referring to.

- **at Antioch they tried to drive him away - Acts 13:50** They ran him out of town; they told him to go away, to take his wares and peddle them elsewhere.

- **at Iconium they tried to attack him - Acts 14:5** They had a violent plan which they never carried through because Paul found it out. But they planned to attack him and hurt him and maybe kill him and:

- **at Lystra they tried to take his life - Acts 14:19** They were so cold that they stoned him and didn't even bother to take his pulse or bury him. They just drug his body out and threw it on the city's dump in contempt! These are the kinds of reactions we can expect to get from our age too. The church has experienced them. Missionaries are banned in some places, forbidden to enter. In some cultures, Christians are attacked and hurt violently, even killed. On July 6, 1994 the body of a prominent Iranian evangelist Mehdi Dibaj was found in a forest near Tehran. He was tortured before he died. He was the third prominent leader to be martyred in six months. So far in America we have enjoyed protection from many of these kinds of actions, but our brethren around the world know what persecution is. It is a daily part of the life of believers in many, many parts of the world. And we should not be surprised if it is part of ours in whatever measure. Then Paul says:

(2) he experienced suffering of all sorts While persecution points to actions of mistreatment by others, the word *suffering*, from the Greek root *pathos*, points to the emotional and physical pain which we experience.

- **they rejected his message - Acts 13:45** They argued with it and made fun of it and blasphemed the very truth of God.

- **they insulted his person - Acts 14:5** That word *mistreat* means to verbally abuse. They weren't just against his message; they were against him and rejected it by rejecting him.

- **they injured his body - Acts 14:5, 19** Stoning hurts! Time and again his enemies inflicted physical pain on him.

Paul suffered injury in so many ways. He was hurt emotionally and physically. These are the sufferings of Christ and we participate in them! We experience them too! We can expect an adverse reaction from the world toward us and to have to bear the pain of suffering as Paul did. But don't forget to notice:

c. the deliverance Paul experienced (11b) There are two things he found and that we can count on too:

(1) he received immediate grace to endure all his sufferings He was to remain under them, to last through them, to endure by the grace of God. His faith and love for God remained firm and strong. This is what God has promised us in Phil. 4:13, that we will have strength to endure any and every circumstance through Christ who will put the power in us to do it! But look what else he says:

(2) he received eventual deliverance from all his circumstances Every one of them ended. He was rescued time after time after time after time. God will often do that for us too. As Paul wrote this, he had been set free from prison, but he was soon arrested again and this time it didn't work out that way. He wrote Timothy again from prison and eventually died as a martyr. Yet even if he could have written this line later from heaven, it wouldn't have changed. God eventually delivered him out of all circumstances, all persecution, and all suffering into His own presence. Three young men about to be thrown into a furnace once said to an insolent king, "We don't know whether God will deliver us from the fiery furnace, but He is able to do it and no matter what happens, He WILL deliver us out of your hand, O King!" God never promised to make earth a heavenly place for us. He promised to rescue us from earth to be with Him in heaven forever! We will often be delivered and find release here, but we will eventually be completely rescued. Paul's life shows it. And so, we next have:

2. the principle we can discern for our own lives (12-13) Paul spells out three lessons we can learn:

a. all godly-living people will experience persecution Expect it. Count on it. Don't let it take you by surprise. Now, if you don't live like you are, you can avoid it. You have a choice to make. You can give intellectual as-

sent to the truth, but live the way the rest of the culture around you does and miss the persecution, but you won't please God. Or you can submit yourself fully to the Spirit and let Him make you live out the life of Christ. If you do, you will experience persecution and suffering because of it. And the implication seems to be this:

b. it will increase in proportion to our godliness The godlier we are, the more Christ-like, the more spiritually mature, the more full of light we are, the more waves we will make in the culture around us and in general, the more we will suffer for it. This is not a case by case analysis and God has particular plans for each of his children, but it would seem to be a general principle. The brighter the light, the more the darkness hates it. And finally:

c. it will increase in proportion to the level of degeneration around us As the evil men and false teachers in the culture around us degenerate and go from bad to worse, so will their offense at us. The further down the scale our culture gets the more of this we can expect. If the USA continues on its moral downhill slide, we and our children will know a whole lot more of this.

I know it's a gloomy message. This is a gloomy chapter. But I leave you with the words of Jesus, *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Seeing Our World Clearly 3:1-4:5 (Part 3)

Paul has spent the first 13 verses of this chapter helping us to see our world the way God sees. It is not a nice, safe, healthy, wonderful place. It is a nasty, rotten, abusive place where we are not safe. In fact, we must expect persecution if we live godly lives. We must look for the world to hate us and reject us. That's the world we live in. So, the next natural thing to talk about is:

I. The nature of the reaction we must have - 3:14-4:5 Look at verse 14, *But as for you...*, at 4:1b, *I give you this charge*, at 4:5, *But you...* Get the idea? Here's what you and I who live in a horribly evil age that is getting worse are supposed to do in the midst of it. Two things. We must continue to cling to the Scripture (3:14-17) and we must continue to proclaim the Truth (4:1-5). You see, we are His witnesses. To steal a metaphor from Peter, we are like "a light shining in a dark place". Jesus used the same image when He said, *You are the light of the world.* - *Mat. 5:14*. The picture is not of a candle at the dinner table, but of a flashlight in the blackest night. Spiritually speaking, the world is absolutely black darkness. The only light it has is us! The only true knowledge of God it has, the only hope it has, the only glimmer of salvation it has, is found in us! And men love the darkness and try to put out the light because their deeds are evil. However, our job is to continue to let the light shine, to proclaim the truth. That's why we're here. God wants to light this dark age with truth through us. And that's what we'll talk about next time. But if we're going to do that, we must make sure that our own light stays lit and doesn't get blown out, that we don't get absorbed by the darkness around us which presses in on us from every side. How are we going to do that? In the midst of all this, how can we stay on track? The answer is a very simple one. God has given us a Book! And:

1. we must continue to cling to the Scripture 3:14-17 Verse 14, *Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of...* The word *continue* means *to remain* or *abide*. In John 15 Jesus told us, *Abide in Me*. "Stay in Me. Continue to draw your life from Me, the Vine. If you abide in Me and continue to draw your life from Me, you will bear much fruit, that is, I will produce much fruit through you." Now Paul says, "Abide in the Book! Continue to cling to the Book. You've learned it. You've placed your trust in it and become convinced of it. Now abide in it. Continue to draw the source of your thinking and your acting from the Book." Joshua knew that secret. He said, *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.* - *Josh. 1:8*. David knew it. He said, *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* - *Ps. 119:105*. We are not the first people to live in dark times or difficult places. The saints of God have always known that the secret of surviving in dark places is *Cling to the Book!* When our missionary Dan Lunow was here, he told us that it is vital that a national church gets the Bible in its own language. In the tribes where churches were planted but did not get the Bible so that the people could read it for themselves, the church faltered and dwindled away when left on its own. The Scripture is what keeps the light from going out in dark places. In our case, we have the Scripture, so for us it is a matter of us clinging to it and abiding in it. And what's happening all around us? The church, at least in the West, is slowly letting go, slowly losing its grip, slowly walking away from using the Scripture as the guideline of truth. The light is going out as Christendom is being absorbed by the darkness of the world around it. And it will happen to us personally if we do not guard ourselves. Now let's look at:

a. what keeps us clinging (14-15) The first thing is:

(1) our knowledge of those from whom we learned it Where did Timothy learn it. Look back to 1:5. His mother and grandmother believed before he did. They lived in Lystra where Paul was stoned on his first missionary journey. That's how Paul could say in verse 10, "Timothy you know firsthand the persecutions I endured at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra!" They were saved and Timothy, though he was young, saw the whole thing. When

Paul came back a year or two later, Timothy was already a believer and well-spoken of by the church there. And Paul took him with on his journey. He traveled with Paul and saw firsthand Paul's life and ministry and his endurance of all kinds of hardship and eventually became pastor of the church at Ephesus. He's 20 years into the faith at this point and Paul says, "Remember your mother, your grandmother and me and how we've taught you from the Scriptures". There was a man in my life who led me to Christ. He taught me to love the Book. I saw the faith that dwelt in him. I saw what the book did in his life. I wanted the Book to do that in my life and it has. But when I think back to him or when I look at others around me, men whom I've known for years and have seen what the Book has done in their lives, it keeps me clinging to the Book. The other thing is:

(2) our own past history with it From his childhood, Timothy, growing up with a Jewish mother, had been taught the Scriptures (the Old Testament). It was these Old Testament Scriptures that had prepared him to receive the message that was brought by Paul to his mother and then through her to him. It was the Scripture that made him wise to receive salvation by placing his trust in Christ Jesus, the One to whom the Scripture pointed. God had not only used people to save him, but He had used the Book and through all of his life he had studied the Book and it had always stood him in good stead. It pointed him to Christ. How many times has God used this book in your life? It made me wise to salvation; it pointed me to Christ Jesus! In all these years of serious study, my love and respect for it has only grown and never has it led me astray on any point. I've seen it change countless lives. Why shouldn't I cling to it? It's the only anchor I've got, the only thing that doesn't change, the only place to go that has true and right answers that work!

Now Paul moves from a personal basis to make more of a theological statement and detail for us:

b. why we must cling to it (16-17) First of all:

(1) it is God-breathed The NIV translates literally from the Greek *theopneustos*, God-breathed. It finds its source and origin in the very mouth of Almighty God, even though it got to us by human pens. Compare **2 Pet. 1:20-21**, *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit communicated directly with and through those men and they wrote it down. Thus, the written Scriptures are God-breathed. God spoke them through men and had them reduced to writing so they could not be distorted or changed over time, so they would always stand unshakeable in a rapidly deteriorating world. And if it comes from God, then **it is Truth!** Pilate asked the \$64,000 question, "What is truth?" The whole dark world has taken the same attitude, "Nobody really knows!" But we do! We have a book of Truth to cling to in a world of lies. So, it becomes our tool for casting light on the darkness that floods our lives and seeing it for what it really is. The Book shines the light on the things all around us and shows them for what they are! And:

(2) it produces the maturity God wants in us It is useful, profitable. It produces something. It produces something in us. Verse 17 says it equips us, as we'll see in a moment. There are two phrases that refer to us personally in verse 16:

- **it trains us in what is right** It shows me what I should do. The Spirit takes the command, *Love your neighbor* and points out in my mind who my neighbor is and how I should love him! The Word puts before me both examples and commands of right living, things like forgiveness, sacrifice, trustworthiness, faith, honesty, compassion, and so on and the Spirit whispers, "Do this..." So, He trains me step by step, little by little, in the right things to do, the things that are His will through the Word. But also:

- **it corrects us in what is wrong** As I read the warnings and the negatives of Scripture, the Spirit of God inside me will whisper in my thoughts, "You do that; that's in your life; that ought to stop." And He does that with you and I on a daily basis, even in the much smaller and more subtle areas of our lives, the things we say and our attitudes and our feelings. He uses the Word of God to correct in me what is wrong. For example, when I have an argument and am angry and am tempted to stomp off and just avoid the other person, the Spirit may bring to mind, *Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.* And I realize that God is saying, "Go talk it out, even if it is painful; don't wait!" And so, He corrects me and trains me and I mature. But it is not only for our personal maturing:

(3) it becomes the basis of our ministry to others The Book is our Tool for ministry. It is not simply to preserve us, but to save and preserve others. Two of the phrases in verse 16 relate to that:

- **it is a basis for teaching others** God wants to use His Word, not just as I read it for me, but He wants to channel it through me to others. Others may mean my own children, a friend, a spouse, or an unsaved person, anybody. There may be something God wants to communicate to them through me. And if I just give them a human opinion or a gut feeling, I could lead them astray. But that's why God has given me His Word. I have a basis from which to share with them. I can use the Word of God to point them in a godly direction and God can use His Word through me to speak to their heart as I myself mature. He may use it to make them wise unto salvation! And then negatively:

- **it is a basis for admonishing others** That simply means lovingly helping others who are engaged in wrong behavior or acting in immaturity by revealing it to them. It is not simply pushing our own standard; we have a Book. And the book differentiates between darkness and light. When we shine the light of the Book on others, it helps them to see the darkness in which they've been living and it may help them to come to the light.

(4) it is God's means of equipping us for service in this perverted age (17) The root word of *prepare* is a Greek word that means *to fit a joint*. It is actually repeated twice in Greek for emphasis (*thoroughly*). Did you ever work with wood? One of the most frustrating things for me is fitting joints. When you make a picture frame or cut the trim around a window or door, the two pieces have to be carefully fitted to each other. In those days, before nails and screws, many things such as furniture were fitted together with pegs and pins. Imagine how careful the fit would have to be to make a sturdy piece! The fitting had to be thorough! And in the spiritual application, he's talking about maturity. To be thoroughly prepared or equipped for God's use and service, God has to mold and shape and fit me just the way He wants and He uses the Scriptures to do that.

You see, God has intentionally left us in a hostile world, in a hostile age, to be a light shining in the darkness. We have a service to perform and it is to proclaim the truth in the midst of the darkness. Next time we'll look at that more specifically, but we can't serve God in this world unless we cling to the Book. Previously I used the image of swimming against the current. You can stand against the current in the midst of a raging river that is trying to sweep you away, if you stand on a solid rock. The Book is that Rock!

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy

Seeing Our World Clearly 3:1-4:5 (Part 4)

When we clearly see the nature of the world around us, the age in which we live, Paul tells us that there are two things that are absolutely vital that we must do in reacting to it. First, we must continue to cling to the Book, the written Scriptures, as we talked about last time. There is no other standard, no other thing that will keep us seeing from God's perspective and allow us to continue in truth without being corrupted by the age around us. But there must be more to living in this world than protecting ourselves. God has to use us for a purpose here and so, the second is this:

I. We must continue to proclaim the Truth 4:1-5 The NIV translators left out an important word in verse 1 and they did some rearranging of word order from the Greek, which literally reads *Therefore, I charge you...preach the Word*. You know the little axiom, don't you? When you see a *therefore* in Scripture, always look to see what it's *there for*! It looks back to the previous verses. "Because you have the Scriptures, because you've known them from childhood and are convinced of them, because they are useful and have a purpose and because you are thoroughly equipped through them for every good work, you have a responsibility and I'm officially charging you with it: proclaim the Truth in this world of darkness!" That's what God has you and I here for. We are lights in a dark place and our purpose in the dark is to shine, to declare the truth of God found in the Scriptures in the midst of the darkness around us. Now if you're like me, it's really easy to forget that and just sit back and get wrapped up in the busyness and the good things of the life I happen to lead and let my light slide back under the bushel basket. I need a little kick in the pants to keep me on track, a little motivation, don't you? Well, look at:

1. the continual motivation we have (1) We have two things:

a. the current presence of God Did you ever think, "How would my life change, what would I do, if God was sitting right here watching?" Well, the truth is that He is! Listen to the truth of **Heb. 4:13**, *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account*. Isn't that a sobering thought? All that we do, say and think, we do in the very presence of God. Nothing is hidden or covered from Him, not even my most private thought. You can't even die and get away from Him! And what makes it even more serious is that account we must give, *So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.* - **2 Cor. 5:9-10**. It is not that I am scared of Him or what He'll do to me some day, but I don't want my life to be wasted; I don't want to get there and find out my life was worthless and meaningless as far as His purposes were concerned. I want to hear, "Well Done!" I want to please my Heavenly Father because He loves me, not disappoint Him, so I keep it in mind that He is with me every moment and knows all I do and it moves me to be about my Father's business. And along with that is the second motivating factor we have:

b. the certain return of Christ Christ is going to appear and He is going to set up His Kingdom and reign. He is coming again. It is sure. It is certain. And **1 Jn. 2:28** says, *And now, dear children, continue [abide] in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming*. Christ left us with a job to do, a

responsibility to fulfill. The thought of His coming again moves us. He died for us; we don't want to be ashamed of ourselves before Him. We want to have fulfilled His purpose for us when He comes. And so, let's examine:

2. the serious charge we have: to declare what God says (2) *Preach* means to proclaim, announce or declare. We are to proclaim what? Our own thoughts, our own ideas? No, His word, what He says and that, of course, is the treasure given to us in the Scriptures. Put simply, our purpose in this dark age is simply to announce what God says in His Word to the dark world around us. Now:

a. When should we declare it? With or without opportunity. The two words *in season* and *out of season* have the same root *kairos* which means opportunity, the proper time. They mean literally *good opportunity* or *no opportunity*. Sometimes there will be just the right opportunity to share God's Word and bring light and, of course, that's what we pray for all the time. But sometimes there will be no "right time", no opportunity afforded to us and we have to make our own and declare it anyway! And we are to be prepared and ready to do it either way. Now, this verse is not put here to condone obnoxiousness. You all know people who are obnoxious in witnessing and that often drives people away. It is simply to say that there will be times when God sends you a wonderful opportunity to speak for Him, tailor-made for you to testify His truth and then there will be times when God has you in a situation to speak His truth and wants you to declare it whether anybody asks or is inquisitive or wants to know it or not! Let's relate the principle to missions, for instance. Jesus said, *Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*. In some places people may be inquisitive and want to know and invite you to share God's Word. In many they will resist it and don't want it. But we're to go anyway! The Muslim world, by and large, doesn't want the Truth, but we're still to take it there and proclaim it anyway! And the same is true individually. We are to continually shine the light, whether it is well-received or not, just as Jesus did. Now:

b. In what context should we declare it? Well, note that Paul tells Timothy four things to do with it and they happen to be pretty nearly identical to the four things we read that the Word is useful for back in 3:16. Look at this little chart:

4:2
correct (*elegcho*) = to convict, expose
rebuke (*epitimao*) = to honor by reprimand
encourage (*parakaleo*) = to come alongside for help
instruction (*didache*)

3:16
rebuking (*elegchos*) = to convict, expose
correcting (*epanorthosis*) = to straighten up
training (*paideuo*) = to child-train
teaching (*didaskalia*)

The things that back there were nouns (*ing* form) are here verb forms, *correct*, *rebuke*... The idea is to proclaim God's Word in the situations you find yourself in, to use it for the purposes for which it was intended. And there are four. The two lists are identical in two points and synonymous in the other two. And to make matters worse, the NIV didn't translate the two sets of identical words with the same English word! Share it to *correct*, to convict or expose, to reveal things for what they are. Share it to *rebuke*, to reprimand or to call for the stopping of wrong-doing. It's interesting that the root literally means *to put honor upon*. Reprimanding is not a punishment; it is the bestowing of an honor. It is an act of caring, an act of straightening up that which is bent over or diverted from the right way. Share it to *encourage*. The Greek is the root of *paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, one called alongside you to help you. 3:16 uses the word for child-training in righteousness. Share it to encourage others to do the right thing, to help them in knowing what to do. And share it to *instruct* or *teach*, to provide information that is true and so vitally needed in a world where truth is hard to come by. These four processes are vitally important, not just in the lives of the unsaved people around us, but particularly as they are applied to the lives of God's children living in this dark age. Timothy was a pastor, don't forget, and I'm sure Paul's advice was particularly directed toward the Church. Yes, we need to declare what God says to the dark world in which we live, but we also need to continually declare it to one another as well, because the darkness is forever creeping into the church! Believers are being constantly affected and influenced by the world around them in the way they think and act. And it takes faithfully declaring the Word to keep us on track, even the best of us! And then:

c. How should we declare it? In patience (persistently). The Greek *macrothumia* means longsuffering, persistence in the face of trouble and opposition, putting up with all the consequences it will bring! Often, declaring the Word will not be well-received, either by unbelievers or believers in this age! Just read the lives of the Old Testament prophets or the New Testament apostles. Darkness doesn't like light. If we quit shining, at the first hint of trouble we'll be snuffed out all the time. It should be a continual persistent process in our lives. Now Paul tells us:

3. the reason this is important (3-4) *As the age progresses* three things will happen more and more and you can see them all around you:

a. people will not tolerate true teaching They won't put up with it. It has happened even inside whole branches of the Christian Church. If they can't silence it, they will drive it away. That's why I'm your pastor today, because of some denominational leaders who wouldn't tolerate a young man who believed in the inerrancy of Scripture and wouldn't shut up about it! Secondly:

b. people will amass teachers to validate their evil desires They will find people who will teach them what their itchy little ears want to hear, to tell them what their evil flesh wants to do is OK. Paul says they will literally gather heaps of them; false teachers will proliferate! Just look around you. They're everywhere. And thirdly:

c. people will reject the truth in favor of myths They will turn their ears away from truth and towards untruths that masquerade in its place. Myths like evolution and reincarnation and false religions and all kinds of things that are just pure lies. In our age people will believe lies much easier than the truth!

And if we're not shining the light of the Word of God in the world, the darkness will become overwhelming and if we're not shining it on one another, the darkness will crowd in upon us and overwhelm us as well. Now as Paul closes this section in verse 5, He tells us that there are four:

4. the characteristics that we must develop (5) The first is:

a. alertness (*nepho*) which means **to abstain from wine, to be fully aware** "Keep your head" is a similar slang expression. You know how wine dulls the senses. No guard would ever drink wine because it dulls his perception of the sounds and actions around him and makes him sluggish and lethargic. To be unencumbered by wine or literally *sober* means to be fully alert and attuned to what's going on. As believers, our antennas need to be always up, alert, knowing that the darkness is always pressing in and carefully watching for ways it is creeping into our lives. The second is:

b. endurance (*kakopatheo*) which means **to persist through evil or hardship** We can't be quitters. We can't give up when the going gets tough. We can't hide the light to make things easier and avoid being persecuted or we lose our purpose in the world. Instead, we must continually do:

c. evangelism which means **to do the work of a herald (announce the message)** A herald is the town crier, a person who has been entrusted with good news of vital importance to others and sent out to announce the news. Our lives need to be characterized by continually sharing the message we've been entrusted with. And finally, they need to exhibit:

d. dedication (*plerophoreo*) which means **to completely carry out your service** It's not just that here's a set of things you should do and you have to do them all. The word *ministry* means service to others. And the Greek word means to completely carry it out or to carry it out to the full or with thoroughness. We're talking about being dedicated to the service of others, devotion to ministry. That's what our lives should be about.

Erasmus was a devout scholar who remained loyal to the Catholic Church while sympathetic to the cause of the Reformers. He gave the church its first published Greek New Testament in 1521 which in turn became the basis for Luther's German translation, Tyndale's English translation and a century later, for the King James Bible. Erasmus is credited as being the source of a classic fictional story that has been retold many times over the years. In the story, Jesus returns to heaven after His time on earth. All the angels gather around Him to learn what happened during His days there and Jesus tells them of the ministry, of His miracles, His teachings, His death on the cross, and finally of His resurrection. And when He finishes his story, Gabriel the Archangel asks Jesus, "But what happens now?" Jesus answers, "I have left behind eleven faithful disciples and a handful of men and women who have faithfully followed me. They will declare My message and express My love. These faithful people will build My church." "But," responds Gabriel, "What if these people fail? What then is Your other plan?" And Jesus answers, "I have no other plan!" The only source of truth and light God has in the world is us. There is no backup system. We cannot and we will not fail to be light in this dark world until Jesus comes. But if we intentionally cooperate with the plan, it works so much better!

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy Facing Our Future Confidently 4:6-22

Today we come to the fourth and final section of the book of 2 Timothy. Even though we live in a world dominated by evil that is growing worse, if we have and maintain God's perspective, then we can face our future confidently. Paul did and that is the theme of the remaining verses of the fourth chapter. And the first piece of our future that we can face with confidence is death. Now, I want you to understand that Satan has a plan. Compare **Heb. 2:14-15**. He holds people in slavery to all kinds of things through the fear of death. Through the fear of death, he can get them to worship idols and practice almost any vile thing, even religious prostitution or human sacrifice. He can enslave them to carry out his purposes on earth as long as he can keep them afraid of death. But Jesus put that scheme out of business at the cross! Jesus took the sting out of death, which is sin, by paying its penalty and then rose again victorious to demonstrate for us that death is no longer something to fear. But unfortunately, the scheme still works if we don't look at things from God's perspective. If Satan can keep us afraid of dying, he can keep us enslaved to finding ways to avoid dying and perhaps even cause us to deny or desert the faith. If he can cause us to suffer mistreatment or persecution and fear for our lives, and if we're not

seeing God's way, then perhaps we'll serve him by denying the Lord and ruining our testimony. How do you control a man who's not afraid to die? With what can you threaten him? At this writing Paul was in a Roman prison. He was awaiting trial before Nero. There was no justice and certainly no mercy available there. He knew what the verdict was going to be; soon he would be executed. Because he was a Roman citizen it would be quick and merciful, beheading with a sharp sword instead of the slow crucifixion Peter would get there. And in these three golden verses he shows us:

I. Our confidence in facing death - 4:6-8 He declares three very important facts about death which we must grasp if we are to see it from God's perspective. The first is:

1. the inevitability of our death (6) There is a very sobering fact that we all have to face. Unless Jesus comes in our brief lifespan, we are all going to die, no exceptions. It is inevitable. It is the nature of being human. Death has passed to all men and that means you. You and I will die, at one time or another, in one way or another. In fact, the way Paul puts it:

a. it is already in process Paul compared his life to a drink offering. Compare **Num. 28:4, 7**. With every lamb sacrificed, a container of wine was poured out before the Lord. With the daily lambs it was $\frac{1}{4}$ of a hin, about 4 oz. At Passover and other times, it was $\frac{1}{2}$ of a hin or 8 oz. This was poured out slowly and reverently to represent the life of the animal that had been slain. Paul said in essence, "That's what my whole Christian life has already been about. The day will come when I physically die like the lamb, but right now I'm alive and my life is being poured out unto the Lord like the drink offering." And if you read the record of his life, you'll get the drift of what he means. Look at **2 Cor. 11:23-28**. You see, our death is already in process. We are dying while we live and the horrible treatment this world gives us is simply us already being poured out as an offering to the Lord. But as far as our physical death goes:

b. its time is coming Paul knew that his time had come; it was at the door. He had only a short time, perhaps weeks or months, to live. You and I may be less certain of its approach, but think about it. 50 years from now, most of us in this room will be dead. In 75 all but the small children will be. In 100 every last one of us will be. Compared to the eternity which you will experience, the span of your physical life on earth is brief. James said, *What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.* - **James 4:14**. That's what earth is like. It is short and brief and the time of your death is sooner than you think. That's why you have to make it count and let God use you while there's time! If you could afford it, it would be a great idea to go out and buy a cemetery plot and a headstone and put your name on it and go out and visit your own grave once in a while. It would keep your mind clear and sober about the importance of the days you have. Death is coming. It is coming soon and it is coming to all of us. That sounds morbid, but it's not at all. You see, death:

c. it is the time of our departure The Greek *analysis* means to loose the ropes that hold the ship to the dock and set her free to go, to release her! And friend, my ship sails for glory! It means to loose the ropes that hold up the tent so it can be packed up and the traveler can be free to go. Death is my departure, my release. It sets me free! Free from what? Free from the suffering and mistreatment of this present evil age! Free from this body and the sin that indwells it. Free to be in the presence of my blessed Lord Jesus forever and ever. D.L. Moody, the great evangelist, sat up on his deathbed and said, "This is my triumph. This is my coronation day. I have been looking forward to it for a long time!" What's morbid about looking forward to the trip of a lifetime! We need to see death from God's perspective; it's how He sets you free. That's why He invented it, not so much as a punishment, but so that His children wouldn't have to live forever in sin-cursed bodies on this sin-cursed earth separated in their existence from His presence! It's important that we see our death from God's perspective, so let's talk about:

2. the nature of our death: the completion of a race (7) Paul uses three analogies to describe what death is really like for the believer. They are actually all athletic analogies; they come from the games. You see, life is like running in a race. It requires an agonizing effort; it follows an established course and eventually you cross the finish line and it's over. He told the Ephesian elders who were worried about his future in **Acts 20:24**, *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace*. His life was not about himself, about enjoyment or achievement or acquisition. His race was testifying about Jesus Christ and at some point, it would end in death. Death is the crossing of God's finish line for our earth lives. What does that mean?

a. it is the end of our agonizing struggle Literally, Paul says, "I have agonized the good agony". Did you ever run a race or watch someone run one? Watch those long-distance runners in the Olympic races and the way they strain and agonize as they run. It's pain and exertion. But it's a good agony. It's for a good purpose. Our life on this earth is like that agonizing struggle. It's effort; it's agony; it's struggle. But it's good agony; it's effort expended in accomplishing God's purpose in the world. However, death means that the struggle is over! The agony is finished. There is freedom and rest from our labors! Secondly:

b. it is the completion of our established course The Greek word refers to a racecourse, a laid out path that the runners have to follow. Our lives are like that. God has laid out a path for each one of our lives, a course that they will follow. Sometimes that path is long and winding and filled with obstacles and the race becomes a test of endur-

ance, but at any rate there is a finish line! And death is like crossing that line, it is reaching the completion, the capstone of all that my life has been about. I think of Jesus on the cross. He used the same word Paul did, *Tetelestai*, "It is finished", completed, accomplished. All that God has wanted to do through me on earth is done and over. What a thought! And then:

c. it is the safe passing of the precious baton (the faith) Think of this as a relay race and the job of the runner is not just to run himself, but to carry the precious baton. Without the baton he gets to the end, but loses! However, if he carries it safely and hands it off to the next man after crossing his own finish line, he has done well. Paul is not saying here, "I have kept on believing." He's not talking about his own faithfulness. He's saying, "I have been a good steward. The message of Jesus Christ, the faith was entrusted to me and I carried it safely all the way to the line and passed it on to others. That's our task. Someone hands off the faith, the Gospel, to us in life and we carry it safely and share it with others all the way to the finish line, the moment we die.

So you see, death is just the completion of a particular phase of our existence and so, unlike the rest of the world:

3. we can face our death with confidence (8) Paul didn't look at death and say, "I wonder what's going to happen. I hope it's good. I hope it all turns out all right!" He faced it with absolute and complete confidence and we can too! First of all, we can have:

a. confidence in being with the Lord Paul knew he would be with the Lord. He said that in 2 Cor. 5; to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. That's not even an issue. But the point is that there is nothing on the face of this earth that can prevent it. Look at **Lk. 12:4-5**. What a way to go through this world, absolutely unafraid of dying because we know that after they kill our body there is no more that they can do to us and if they do that, it just sets us free to be with Him! Compare **Rom. 8:35-39**. Note especially verse 36. Suppose in this world we face death all day long. Suppose like in North Korea they count us as sheep to be slaughtered. Can that separate us from His love? No, in even this we are more than conquerors, superconquerors, completely triumphant victors! We can't lose because He already took care of it at the cross. We will be with Him! But there's more. We can have:

b. confidence in receiving our reward: the crown (wreath) Now, you have to understand the symbolism that's going on here. Paul is sticking with his athletic imagery. The crown is not the crown a king wears (*diadem*). It is the *stephanos*, the victory wreath. Athletes in the games didn't compete for money or for a material reward. The winner would be called up onto a platform and given a simple wreath woven of laurel or ivy or some other natural shrub. The athlete did not compete for material gain and that says something we need to know about:

(1) the nature of a crown: a symbol of public recognition To wear the wreath was a symbol of public recognition of the achievement of winning, just as the gold medal of our Olympics today. It was the announcement to everyone that this person had put forth the effort, that he had run the appointed course, that he had not dropped the baton. He had run the race well, in fact, better than the rest. Now, Paul said that spiritually when he got to heaven and the day came, that is, the day of Christ's return when we all get called up to the bema seat, the winner's platform of the game of life, that he had confidence that Jesus would award him with a crown. And not just him, but us too. We're told in several places in Scriptures that we are given crowns. The symbol of the wreath tells us:

(2) the nature of our reward: the public display of what we truly are (righteousness) We don't labor all through this life to get some material reward from God. These crowns are not symbols of gaining either authority or possessions. That's not what heavenly rewards are about. To be given a crown means to announce to all who watch the true nature of the person as a victorious athlete. And Jesus is going to do the same with us. He's going to display us publicly before all, not as the world has seen us through the years, but as we truly are and here specifically Paul says that means He's going to display our true righteousness! Compare **Phil. 3:8-9**, *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.* The words *be found* point ahead to the bema seat. It means to be found by examination and proving. Christ is going to display to all what the world could never see, that I am righteous and have been all along, because His righteousness was given to me and I am clothed in it. And I will shine like the brightness of the sun forever as a trophy of His grace. And look at:

(3) the nature of the Judge: righteous I am not judged by this world. It doesn't matter what they think of me. I have a righteous Judge who knows my heart and my true identity. What if the world hates me and brands me a criminal for my faith and even kills me; Jesus is the One before whom I will stand and He will crown and display me as I truly am!

And one final note here which I'm so glad Paul included. We have:

c. confidence that it is personal Paul says, "It's not just for me alone. It's for you personally and for a million others like you who love His appearing, who long for that day when you'll stand before Him!" It's for me. It's for you. We can have the same confidence that Paul had.

And once you have it, you're free! No more slavery for you. Satan has lost; he can't manipulate and scare you into anything. All you have to do is believe the truth God has given you.

Keeping God's Perspective In A Perverted World

A Study Of 2 Timothy Facing Our Future Confidently 4:6-22

In this last chapter, Paul is closing on a positive note; we can face our future confidently even though we live in a world given over to evil and perversion. We have absolute confidence in facing death. We're set free from fearing it. We'll be with the Lord and He will display us for what we really are. In the Disney video *The Return of Jafar*, the evil genie Jafar is threatening his bumbling master to try and get him to do what he wants and his master says, "I thought genies can't kill anyone." To which he replies, "You'd be surprised what you can live through!" implying that there are a whole lot of horrible things that you live through that are worse than death! That's so for us too. Maybe we're confident about facing death; it's facing the distressing things of life, that we're worried about! Well, in this section Paul talks about:

I. Our confidence in facing distress (9-18) Now remember, Paul at this point is an old man in prison awaiting trial in Rome before Nero, expecting to be sentenced to die. But as he closes his letter, he gives us a glimpse of:

1. the numerous difficulties Paul experienced (9-16), the things he was experiencing during this prison ordeal of his. First there was:

a. separation from those he loved (9) Paul loved Timothy. Timothy to him was "my dear son" (1:2). But Timothy was way over in Ephesus. What's he saying? Go back to verse 6, *the time of my departure is at hand...do your best to come to me quickly*. "I want to see you before I die. I miss you." Xu Yonhai, a Christian doctor in Beijing was sentenced to three years labor after signing a petition commemorating the massacre of pro-democracy activities at Tiananmen Square in 1989. His family was not been allowed to visit or write to him! This old world may separate us from our loved ones and God may allow us to be in that place. We all know it to some degree even now, the ache of separation which Paul felt. Then he also experienced:

b. abandonment by all his friends (10, 16) Crescens and Titus were gone, probably because he'd sent them on errands of ministry far away. But Demas had abandoned him. He had been an associate for years and is mentioned in Col. 4:14 and Philemon 24, written while Paul was in prison before. But things had changed since. The great persecution had begun and all Christians were in danger. Demas couldn't take the risk. He loved this present world and wanted to stay in it. He just couldn't risk martyrdom along with Paul and had fled. But before you're too hard on him, look at verse 16. At Paul's first legal hearing, not one single person went with him or would stand with him. They abandoned him in his greatest hour of need. He didn't hold it against them; he understood why. But it must have hurt! In this perverted world, you will find yourselves that way at times, abandoned by those who you know cared about you, all alone, forsaken and left without support. Then Paul experienced:

c. inability to do what needed done (11-12) Paul was overseeing and caring for the needs of a lot of churches at this point. He was sending out his trusted few to various places where there was need. But the word is, "Bring Mark; I need him!" Why? Paul would have loved to go and minister and teach and exhort and correct personally. But he couldn't go. He was sending others, the few he had. He needed more to do the work for him because he was so limited. He felt the frustration of inability. In this perverted world the need is so great and we are so often limited by so many factors. We watch horrible things happening and we can't stop them. We see tremendous needs before us, but we can't fill them. Whether it's a prison or our health or simply being just one human being that limits our ability to serve and meet the need, it can break our hearts. Then we may experience the:

d. lack of specific needs (13) Winter was coming. Neither clothing nor books were provided for prisoners. Paul was cold. He had no scriptures to read and nothing to study from. It was the love of his heart. So, he asked Timothy to bring what he needed. Sometimes this world may take or keep from us specific things we need. And God may choose to allow it. God does allow some Christians to experience hunger, to experience lack of specific things which cause them tremendous hardship. He allowed Paul to do that sometimes in his life and Paul said he had to learn both how to be abased and how to abound. The world may send times of genuine hardship into your life! And lastly, Paul experienced:

e. opposition by a deliberate enemy (14-15) Alexander had deliberately opposed Paul's message and ministry. He may even have been the one who had him arrested. It must have hurt, but Paul wasn't bitter, just wary. He knew the Lord is just and vengeance belonged to him. He had every confidence that God would take care of justice in his

own time. But how it must have hurt him to have a heart full of love, to be trying to save people, and to have people oppose and hurt him in the process. Our friends Ed and Nancy Keene in Kyrgyzstan wrote to say, "We get cheated every day in every way that can be devised. Practically everyone lies and steals what they can. This is one of the most difficult things about living here, how to love these people who will do or say anything to get some advantage from you. It can't be done without the Lord's help!" We live in a world where people hurt you! Even here! Can we face all these things in life that distress us, that tear us up? What if in this perverted world God allows these kinds of things to come upon us as He did Paul? Well, just look at:

2. the special comfort Paul received (17) First of all:

a. the Lord's presence was with him There he was in that moment of truth, his first hearing, separated from everyone and deserted by all, but he was not alone. Jesus was right there with him. That's what He promised all of us in **Mt. 28:20**, *Lo I am with you always...* His presence is always with us. He will never leave us or abandon us (Heb. 13:5). His Presence was there for Paul and it is there for us. It can't be otherwise. He has come and indwelt us; His Spirit has taken up residence within us. We are never alone! And he also found that:

b. the Lord's strength was in him Jesus expressed His strength through Paul's weakness in that moment. Oh, Paul had already learned that secret. Compare **Phil. 4:13**. He literally puts the power in me to face any and every situation. 2 Cor 12 says that when I am weak, the power of Christ rests upon me and is evident through me. That's what he experienced standing there all alone that day. Christ strengthened his inner man to face his accusers, his judges, and to say what he needed to say! And so, he found:

c. the Lord's purpose was accomplished through him He preached to them! That's what he did every time he was on trial. His aim was always to give his testimony and to share Christ. He did it with Felix and with Festus in Acts. Compare **Phil. 1:12, 18**. He did it all during his first imprisonment and won even the palace guards and some of Caesar's household to Christ. Now an old man and alone, Christ strengthened him to do it again, perhaps even before the Emperor himself. And what he found was that God's purpose was accomplished in his life even in the midst of the suffering! And finally:

d. the Lord's deliverance was granted to him He was delivered from the lion's mouth. Most obviously that means that he was sent back to prison after that first hearing, instead of being instantly sentenced and executed. But it looks back to the language of the prayer of Ps. 22, *Rescue me from the mouth of the lions...* and to what King Darius said about Daniel's God, *He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions...* David's lions were evil people who were against him. So were Daniel's, really. It was not the physical lions that were the real enemy but the people who got him thrown to them. Lions stand for the evil forces which come against us. Even Satan is pictured as a roaring lion looking to devour us. God's power is so great that it rescues us from the lions we face in life. Now, that bears a little more explanation and we get it in the next verse. Look at:

3. the tremendous confidence Paul had (18) It is two-fold and it is not just for Paul. It is a confidence he had personally, but he shares it because it is a confidence that each and every one of us can have in the Lord when it comes to facing distress, persecution and suffering in our lives. It is bi-directional:

a. He will deliver us from every evil work, from everything evil that works against us, that attacks us. From all of it we will be delivered. **Is. 54:17** says, *No weapon forged against you will prevail and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from Me, declares the Lord.* Nothing of evil can ever ultimately touch us. But you say, "Whoa, hold it! What about all the believers who are victims of terrible persecution, the missionaries who are kidnapped and killed, all the pastors who are imprisoned. Paul was sitting in a jail cell at the moment he wrote this; wasn't that a successful work of evil against him?" No! It's like Shadrach and his two friends told King Nebuchadnezzar, *Our God is able to deliver us out of the burning fiery furnace but He will deliver us out of your hand, O King!* Our God is able and many, many times He does rescue us out of our earthly situation and foil what otherwise would have been our ruin or death. But He doesn't always do that. The next time around, Paul himself was sentenced and beheaded! He died as a martyr! God does not promise to keep us from being touched by every evil thing, but He will deliver us always from the Evil One and his plans and designs will never succeed. Even if we are hurt, even if we suffer, even if we die, the weapons He forges against us can never succeed, because they can't separate us from Christ. That's the second part of the promise:

b. He will deliver us to His heavenly kingdom Even if they kill the body, they usher us straight into His presence. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. No earthly distress, no evil power, nothing in all of creation. Listen to **Jn. 10:27-30**. Your Father is greater than all. Nobody can take you out of His hand. He will deliver you safely to His heavenly kingdom, no matter what is formed against you along the way. It can't really pierce you!

What a confidence! We can face any distress, any trouble, any persecution, any suffering, knowing that any evil intent that is in it toward us can't work because it can't touch our souls and even if it kills us, we will be delivered safely into His heavenly kingdom. Look back to **1:12**, *I know whom I have believed and I'm persuaded that He is able to guard what I've entrusted to Him until that day!* My friend, when you've convinced, when you're persuaded, when you have

the absolute confidence that He will keep you and deliver you, you can face anything the world can dish up! Now let's quickly look at:

II. Paul's concluding reminder for us (19-22) On the surface, this is Paul's goodbye and closing salutation. But no piece of Scripture is wasted. It has in us a good concluding reminder for facing trouble:

1. we have the fellowship of the brethren (19-21) He greets the brethren there at Ephesus and mentions the brethren there at Rome even though they had all left him alone at his trial. We are not alone. We have the fellowship of the saints, always to encourage one another. And:

2. we have the presence of Jesus (22a) The word *be* is supplied; it's not there in the original either time in this verse. You have to supply the verb *to be*, but you can supply it just as well in the present or the future. The Lord *is* with your Spirit and the Lord *will be* with your spirit! That's Jesus. He is with you and will be with you. You have His presence indwelling you always. And:

3. we have the grace of God (22b) Grace, when it's used in this sense, is almost a synonym for power. It's a tangible thing. God's grace is with you and will be with you. That freely given, undeserved power is yours and it is always with you, no matter what you face. You can face it all!

In 1992 a man named Pastor Selchun was convicted of the crime of carrying a Bible in Nigeria. His sentence was to have his hand cut off. In the presence of his family and others they made him kneel and lay his hand on a block. A Hausa warrior swung his sword in one swift motion and it was done. Immediately he lifted the other hand into the air and began to sing, "He is Lord, He is Lord...every knee shall bow..." That's not much different from what Paul faced. And both of them had the same confidence, "You can cut off my hand but you can't kill my soul and the grace of God will carry me through everything I have to face and will bear me safely home. I am persuaded. I am convinced. My God is greater than anything this world can throw at me. I rest confidently in Him."

Titus: Godly Living In A Decadent Society OUTLINE

Who We Are In Christ (1:1-4)

What A Godly Life Must NOT Include (1:5-7)

What A Godly Life MUST Include (1:8-9)

What A Decadent Society Looks Like (1:10-16)

Godly Living For Older People (2:1-4a)

Godly Living For Younger People (2:4-6)

Godly Living For All People (2:7-10)

Grace Is Our Motive For Godly Living (2:11-15)

How We Must Act While Living In A Decadent Society (3:1-8)

What We Must Avoid While Living In A Decadent Society (3:9-15)

Titus: Godly Living In A Decadent Society What A Godly Life Must NOT Include (1:5-7)

This is a letter that Paul wrote to Titus, who was a beloved, younger partner of Paul in his missionary ministry. In verse 4 he calls him, *my true child in a common faith*, which probably means Paul had personally led him to faith in Christ, and from the brief mentions of him that we have in other letters, it's apparent that he sometimes traveled with Paul in his work and was several times sent by him to complete ministry assignments in various places. The end of the book of Acts tells us that Paul was in prison for two years at Rome. Evidently, he was released and continued to travel in ministry for a couple more years before his final arrest and martyrdom. During that period, he and Titus must have gone through the island of Crete establishing little house churches in several of the towns. And that brings us to **(5a)**. Paul himself traveled on, but left Titus behind in Crete to complete work there. Now for a moment, let's talk about:

I. Crete: The Place Where Titus Was Serving Crete is a large island about 160 miles long and 35 miles wide lying south of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea. Crete was the home of the Minoans, an early advanced civilization dating as early as 2500 BC from which we know legends like King Minos and his famous labyrinth and his half-bull, half-man minotaur that lived in the center of it. However, by Paul's time during the Roman Empire:

1. Crete was a decadent society much like our own Look with me at **(12-13a)** Here Paul is quoting Epimenades, a semi-legendary philosopher-poet from Crete who lived some 500 years earlier and agreeing with his description of what Cretans were like. Now I know your modern mind is thinking, "Isn't that prejudice or racial bias?" No, various cultures develop reputations as a whole. In other countries today, Americans, for example, are seen as individualistic (having a disregard for family and community), as materialistic (always seeking after technology and prosperity rather than spiritual things) and as immoral (because of the profusion of sexually graphic movies and media that we export to the world). That's a cultural reputation; it's what we're known for in the world. Another example: in Paul's day the Corinthians had become so identified with their flagrant sexual immorality in every aspect of their lives that it became a verb in the Greek language; *to Corinthianize*, was to be openly and flagrantly sexually immoral. Likewise, the Greek language developed two verbs based on the reputation of the people of Crete: *kratizein* which literally means *to act like a Cretan* and means *to lie*, and *chrasthaikratismo* which means *to deceive*. The reputation Crete had throughout the Roman world by Paul's time was three-fold. First:

a. its people were known for lying, for being deceptive and dishonest in their dealings. Two weeks ago, one of the Spanish families connected with GBC through their children received a call from the actual number that they call to pay their PECO electric bill. The caller demanded they pay almost \$400 that was overdue or their electric would be shut off in 45 minutes. They did it and the caller called back to say, "Oops, the amount was slightly wrong, we'll refund what you paid; just go ahead and pay the correct amount." The call came two more times before they finally caught on that it was a scam and they found themselves out \$1600! We are constantly warned about scammers who prey on elderly people; I get repeated calls saying the IRS is out to get me or my credit card has a problem. Many years ago, a shop told me I needed a new transmission in my car and charged me \$400, which at that time was more money than I had, only to find out later they were doing it to many people. Politicians lie outright to get what they want. It used to be that honesty and integrity were core values to people, but in our society today lying and deception are commonplace, just like in Crete. Secondly, Paul says:

b. its people were known for cruelty and brutality, which is what *evil beasts* points to; they were like the legendary minotaur who ate people. One scholar points out interestingly that Crete had no wild beasts, no dangerous predatory animals; rather it's people took their place! They were cruel and brutal to one another. When I was growing up, children roamed freely all over town, went to the playground all day and came home for supper all summer long and the parents never gave a second thought to their well-being. Any adult they met could be trusted to help them if they fell off their bike or got lost. We never heard of a child being kidnapped. What do we teach our children today? "Don't talk to strangers!" We have amber alerts on our phones because innocent children are routinely kidnapped for evil purposes and we wouldn't dream of letting them out of our sight. Girls are being lured and trapped and literally sold by sex trafficking rings, not just elsewhere but right here where we live. Some public figure proposed recently that a mother should have the right to kill her baby even after it is born! We're devaluing human life, becoming heartless and uncaring just like in Crete. And thirdly Paul says:

c. its people were known for laziness and gluttony Unwillingness to work hard, having a sense of entitlement that everything should just be handed to us, always wanting more and more pleasure and seeking it any way we can find it. This is what's growing among us, just like it was in Crete.

Crete was a decadent society, a society that had gone morally downhill and nearly hit bottom. And we too live in a rapidly decaying society, one that, apart from a work of God, is going to end up in the same place. Now look at verse (5). After establishing a number of churches together:

2. Paul left Titus to serve on the island of Crete for two reasons. First of all, *to put what remained into order*, by which he means:

a. to instruct new believers how to live godly lives in that society These new believers had grown up with the values of their society. They had few examples of right living and Paul wasn't among them long enough to finish instructing them in all the things they needed to know. So, he left Titus there in Crete to go from group to group teaching these new believers, spelling out the way that God wants us to live now that we are in Christ, which is completely opposite of what they saw around them every day. Most of this letter contains instructions to help Titus do just that and it can help us do the same thing; it shows us how to live godly lives in the midst of a morally decaying society. Secondly, Paul left Titus there:

b. to appoint godly leaders to care for the new believers He couldn't stay there and he knew Titus himself couldn't stay very long. Each new little flock of believers needed a shepherd, a good shepherd to care for it spiritually, to protect and lead the believers on their faith journey together. So, Titus was to seek out a trustworthy person or two within each group to assume that special role. And think about it, none of these people had been believers very long. None had any education and training in Christian things. There were no Bible schools or seminaries! Yet among the new converts were those with the right heart and the right character and a deep love for Jesus whom Titus would have to put in charge. The same thing happens today. I know of two house church movements in Kyrgyzstan. One in the lake region has 46 house groups and they do the same thing; they give what little training they can to people who have the right heart to take care of each little group from its earliest days and it works and the groups multiply. I see it work in India. You don't need Rev. in front of your name or BA MA PHD behind it to care for a flock of believers; you don't need 5 or 10 years of experience; you need the kind of heart and character that God can use!

So, how is Titus to recognize this kind of person? Well, Paul gives him a list of characteristics in verses 6-9 to look for and as he begins, he spells out:

II. The Most Important Quality That A Leader Must Have, repeating it twice in (6a, 7a):

1. a leader must be above reproach. Many translations say *blameless*. It means a person who cannot justly be accused of sinning by others. Not that they are perfectly sinless, but nobody can look at their life, point their finger and say, "There, that thing you are doing is sinful before God!" Jesus Himself said to His enemies, *Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin?* - **Jn. 8:46** and none of them could point out even one thing! Daniel's enemies knew they couldn't find one thing he did wrong to accuse him of, except that he prayed! Samuel challenged the stubborn people of Israel who asked him to appoint a king over them, *Now testify against me in the presence of the LORD and before his anointed one. Whose ox or donkey have I stolen? Have I ever cheated any of you? Have I ever oppressed you? Have I ever taken a bribe and perverted justice? Tell me and I will make right whatever I have done wrong.* "No," they replied, *"you have never cheated or oppressed us, and you have never taken even a single bribe."* - **1 Sam. 12:3-5**. That's what *above reproach* means and that's what a leader of God's flock must be. Why? Because, as verse 7 said:

2. a leader is God's steward, His *oikonomos*, His manager **assigned to care for His household**. Suppose I'm in the army and I'm going off to war and I come to you and say, "I want you to be my steward; I want you to care for my wife and children in my place. I want you to be sure they are always supplied with everything they need out of my resources. I want you to be sure that they are always protected from any harm and danger that others might work against them. I want you to always guide them to live the way you know I want them to live until I get back!" That's what a leader is in the church, a steward given responsibility to care for God's precious family, His own sons and daughters, until He returns! Now, note that Paul uses two terms to describe these leaders. First, he says that:

a. they are elders (5b) An *elder* is someone who is usually **older**, wiser, more experienced, and, spiritually speaking, it denotes someone who is **more mature in the faith**, who is farther along the journey, who has walked with the Lord longer. That's all a leader needs to be. It's the generic term for any community leader in that day and is used of any leader in the church. Then Paul says:

b. they are overseers (7a) The word is *episkopoi*, often translated *bishops* in English, but not like we use it today to denote some high church office. It simply means *one who watches over*, that is, **one who supervises others spiritually**, who is responsible for their spiritual care, protection, feeding, guidance and growth. A leader must see his or her responsibility as a steward and take it seriously.

Paul used these two terms interchangeably. *Elders* is the more general term for all kinds of leaders, while *overseers* or *bishops* specifically points to those who are placed in stewardship over the body of believers. Now let me point out that:

3. the qualities God expects in leaders He wants to grow in ALL of us As Paul writes these things, we can't say, "Well, that's how a leader has to be, but God doesn't expect ME to be like that!" These are marks of maturity, marks of a godly life, the kind of life God wants ALL His children to have, so we must be sure to take them personally and apply them to ourselves and not merely use them to choose leaders. Now in verses 6-7 we have:

III. The Marks Of A Godly Life Expressed Negatively, the things that are common in the society around us that we must NOT allow in our lives. First of all:

1. we must not allow our family to deteriorate (6) The deterioration of the family is one of the most obvious signs of decay in our society. Families are falling apart everywhere and dysfunction is rampant in them. And preventing it begins with this:

a. we must be completely devoted to our spouse That phrase *husband of one wife* has been interpreted in various ways. It could simply mean you can't have more than one wife and that would be relevant today in Muslim societies and in some African tribes that practice polygamy. It could mean you can't have been married more than once, but the Bible urges young widows to remarry and it says that if our spouse dies or abandons us, we're free to remarry. Still others say it means he should be a *one-woman kind of man*. Rather than debate the nuances, I think I'm safe in saying that, if we're married, we must be completely devoted to our spouse! That's what God wants. He makes it clear in **Eph. 5:25**, *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. Love your spouse with a sacrificial love. Be willing to die for her or him as Christ did for you. Give up selfish and demanding ways and be absolutely faithful, devoted to the person who gave themselves to you and whom God gave to you. Then Paul goes on to mention that:

b. we must not neglect training up our children You know **Prov. 22:6** which says, *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it*. From little on up we have to be investing ourselves deeply in our children and Paul mentions three specific ways. It means:

(1) leading them to embrace our faith in Christ, loving them so deeply and living a godly life before them in such a way that as they grow up, they themselves embrace our faith and become believers. It means:

(2) not allowing them to act in an ungodly fashion, but disciplining them in love so that they learn to act in a righteous fashion and not give in to the sinful opportunities that surround them. And it means:

(3) not allowing them to rebel against us or God We all know children who get their own way in everything and parents who let them do whatever they want. So they do the same when they grow up. From little on up we must be training them that we all have to submit to those who have authority over us and above all, to God.

And why is this important? Paul explains in **1 Tim. 3:4-5**, *He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?* If a person has the ability to be a steward or manager of God's family, he will show it first in managing his own family. That being said, I know there are those of you here this morning that have prodigal sons and daughters who are not following the Lord and I am confident that you have been good, loving parents who devoted yourselves to your children and disciplined them in godly ways and set great examples of faith before them and in spite of it, they have gone their own ways. I have great compassion for you! That happens even to the most godly among us! We are not the only factors in our children's lives and sometimes Satan is able to use powerful influences from the decadent society around us to overrule our influence. But don't give up hope. Keep praying and trusting God will use what you have poured into them to eventually touch their hearts! Now, quickly, we have five more negatives in verse **(7)**:

2. we must not be arrogant In Greek that word is **self-willed or self-pleasing**. God wants neither leaders nor us to self-centered, always thinking about ourselves and doing what's best for us. To the Philippians Paul wrote, *Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.* - 2:3-4. Next:

3. we must not be quick tempered God wants neither leaders nor us to be **prone to passionate anger**, to flaring up and lashing out at people. We all know people like this, even believers, and it is not just "the way I am"; it is a sin, a habit that God wants to deal with and remove from our lives. Next:

4. we must not be substance abusers, not addicted to anything, neither alcohol nor narcotics nor prescription drugs nor anything else you can think of that takes control of your life. Jesus alone deserves that control. Next:

5. we must not be violent The Greek is *no striker*, that is, we must not be **prone to do physical harm to others**, by hitting them or shoving them or punching the wall or slamming and throwing things or threatening them. We had a lady many years ago whose husband actually shot at her, but missed, thankfully! This may happen in the society around us, but it has no place in the life of a child of God. And finally:

6. we must not be greedy It's referring to **shamefully gaining money**, being so materialistic that we're willing to be dishonest to get more of it. I think this probably refers to those Paul mentions in **1 Tim. 6:5** *...who imagine that godliness is a means of gain*. That is, who want to use their Christian leadership to greedily make money for themselves. That's the most shameful of all.

Just look at the society in which we live and you can see all of these things! It's falling down around us and these things characterize it. They're common; they're normal; they're even expected. But it must not be so among us! If we read this list and the verses that follow and apply it to others, without looking deeply into ourselves to make sure that WE are not allowing them into our lives, it will be useless. And leaders, here's some good advice. *W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "As water never rises above its level so what we do never rises above what we are...We shall never take people one hair's breadth beyond our own spiritual attainment. We may point to higher things, but we shall only take them as far as we ourselves have gone.*

Titus: Godly Living In A Decadent Society

What A Godly Life MUST Include (1:8-9)

If you remember from last week, Paul had left Titus on the island of Crete, a very decadent society, to help further establish the newly planted churches and to appoint elders or overseers for each of them. And in verses 5-9 Paul is telling Titus what qualities to look for in a person who is to be a leader. But in doing so, Paul is really explaining the marks of maturity, the marks of what a godly life should look like and so we have to apply these verses, not only to those who we choose to be our leaders, but to our own selves. Now before we go on to today's text, let's briefly:

I. Review Of The Marks Of A Godly Life Expressed Negatively that we went over at the end of last week's study in verse (7), because they set the stage for what comes next. First of all:

1. we must not be arrogant, literally **self-willed**. We must not be a self-centered, self-pleasing person who only thinks about what's good for them. Second:

2. we must not be quick tempered, prone to easily flare up in anger and lash out at people. Third:

3. we must not be substance abusers, drunkards or drug users or addicted to anything else. We must not let anything control our lives but Jesus. Fourth:

4. we must not be violent, prone to hit or shove people, or smash or slam things or threaten people. And fifth:

5. we must not be greedy, willing to cheat or lie or take advantage of others to make money.

And I wanted to review those negative things because verse 8 begins with the word *BUT*, which in Greek means *rather, instead, on the other hand*. The things he's about to list are the polar opposites of those very things and are equally or even more important. A godly life is not just about what you DON'T do! Half a century ago fundamental churches used to teach their teens a slogan, *I don't smoke, and I don't chew, and I don't go with girls who do*. Do any of you remember that? It rhymes nicely and sticks in your mind, but a godly life is not primarily about what you DON'T do; it's about what you DO do! So now Paul goes on to list:

II. The Marks Of A Godly Life Expressed Positively (8) He lists six characteristics that should be, that WILL be, growing in our lives if we truly love Jesus and are letting Him live out His life through us. And the first thing he says is that:

1. we must be hospitable The Greek word is *philoxenos* which combines *phileo*, to love, and *xenos*, a foreigner or stranger, so hospitality is **loving strangers**. It's the exact opposite of being arrogant or self-centered and of being greedy. Many eastern cultures consider it an absolute duty to take care of and protect travelers and strangers who come to them. In Gen. 19 you see the story of how two angels come through the gate of Sodom in the form of men and Lot is sitting there and he says to them, "Please come to my house and spend the night." But they say, "No, we'll just spend the night in the square." However, Lot knows how dangerous it is for strangers there and he urges them strongly, "No, please come to my house, I insist!" And when the men of the city surrounded his house, he was willing to sacrifice his own daughters to protect them. That seems a bit misguided to us, but it shows just how deeply this duty of hospitality, of caring for strangers can be ingrained and still is in many places. And here God says it ought to be ingrained in us (not the sacrificing your daughters part, but the caring for strangers part!) We find the command to be hospitable in several places. Look with me at **Heb. 13:2**. It means:

a. caring in practical ways for people we don't know, opening your home to them, providing food, giving a ride, giving money if they need it and you have it. You never know, you might just be host to a couple of angels who are passing through like Lot was! In previous generations this was such a critical thing. Today we can get ourselves out of almost any jam with a cell phone and a credit card. We can get a place to stay, a ride with Uber, a tow and a repair. Money comes out of an ATM at will. In all previous generations that wasn't so. People were always dependent on other people being hospitable and willing to help strangers, and still are in much of the world and God still wants us to be that way, to have an open heart to take care of people when they need it. He commands us to be like that Samaritan man who came upon a Jew lying unconscious in a ditch, picked him up and took him to an inn, cared for his wounds and paid his bill until he could get better. Yet we're often hesitant to open our door, to inconvenience our schedule or to part with our money, plus we're scared of strangers! How is the world ever going to hear about or be drawn to Jesus if we always pass by on the other side and don't stop to care for their needs? But then look over to **1 Pet. 4:9**. Hospitality also means:

b. caring in practical ways for one another, doing for each other the same things that we'd do for strangers who were passing by or were in need, opening our home, making time in our schedule, opening our wallet to a brother or sister when they need it, and doing it without grumbling or complaining, either out loud or in our inner attitude. Loving acts should just flow out of us to others from the Spirit who lives in us.

Are you truly a hospitable person? Now the second thing Paul says is that:

2. we must love good The Greek word is *philagathos*, which again combines *phileo*, to love, and *agathos*, that which is good, so it means **loving good**, whether that is good persons or good things or good practices. In **Amos 5:14-15** God says the very same thing to His people Israel in a more spelled out form, *Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so, the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you... Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate [that is, where court is held]...* On the one hand, loving good means that:

a. we must detest and seek to stop what is evil whenever we can, whether it is in our neighborhood, our school, our workplace or our culture. Whether it is unfair treatment, racial prejudice, bribery, abuse, false testimony, cheating people, taking the lives of the unborn, trafficking, or pornography or immorality in whatever form it takes, God hates all of these things and stands opposed to them and so should we. On the other hand:

b. we must love and zealously support what is good because it is our very nature, just as it is in God's. Peter said about Jesus in Acts 10:38, ...*He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.* He healed people who were sick, opened the eyes of those who were blind and made those who were lame to walk. He freed people who were demon possessed. He fed people who were hungry. He comforted people who were grieving and taught people who were ready to listen. Everywhere He went and in everything He did, He went about doing good and urged others to do likewise. His life was a stream of one good thing after the other because He was a lover of good and ours should be the same. And not only that, because we have the rare privilege of living in a society where we actually choose the leaders who make the laws we live by, we should be careful to elect those who will promote the doing of good by God's standards. The question is not what party they are or what color they are or whether you will benefit financially or whether you like their personality or not. Romans 13 says that the purpose of secular rulers is to promote good and to punish evil. So, the question is whether they will promote what is good and pass laws that require people to do good and prevent them from doing evil according to what the Scripture says. If they won't, don't elect them! If they will, elect them, instead of those who won't! Vote your convictions! Use your God-given privilege and promote good in your society because you love that which is good!

Are YOU a lover of good? Thirdly, Paul says that:

3. we must be self-controlled The Greek word is *sophron* which means **sound in mind** or *sober-minded*. It means that:

a. we must have a balanced state of mind, an ability to think clearly and see our situation as it really is, as God sees it. In other words, being self-controlled means that:

b. we must be able to control our passions We must be able to keep our emotions from taking control of our mind and running our lives. We must have strength to keep our thinking from being consumed by anger or by the desire to get even or by jealousy or by fear or by pride so that our actions become governed by these things. Jesus was self-controlled. When He stood on trial before Pilate, the chief priests and elders accused Him of many things, all of them false. But He answered nothing, not a single word and Pilate was "greatly amazed". Why, because the average person on trial for their life would have been yelling and screaming, "That's not true! They're lying! Don't believe them!" or pleading desperately for mercy or cursing profanely. But Jesus trusted in the Father and just remained silent; His self-control made Pilate marvel at Him!

Are YOU self-controlled? Fourthly, Paul says that:

4. we must be upright The Greek word is *dikaios* which means **just, or righteous**. Immediately I think of Joseph. You can only imagine what he thought and how he felt when Mary came home from visiting her cousin Elizabeth and he learned she was pregnant. I'm sure he felt deeply hurt, betrayed and, no doubt, angry. He couldn't quite bring himself to believe her story about an angel and a miraculous conception, yet she had voluntarily come to him, told him she was pregnant and the cause of it which could have been punishable by death, so he couldn't quite bring himself to believe she was lying either. So, Matthew says, ...*Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.* He pondered within himself, "What should I do? If I accuse her to a magistrate, she'll be exposed to public shame and could receive a severe punishment, which there is a chance she doesn't deserve. If I marry her, everyone will assume that I behaved immorally." Most men would have gone with their emotions and wanted to get revenge on Mary for her apparent unfaithfulness. But Joseph was just. He wanted to do what was right in God's eyes. If there was a chance she was being truthful, he did not want to see her punished, so he resolved on a just course of action. He would give her a writing of divorce privately, in the presence of only one or two witnesses instead of the magistrate, and let her return to the care of her family unpunished. He cared more about doing what was right in God's eyes than about his own vindication. That's what being upright or just means:

a. our behavior must conform to God's standards of right, rather than what we feel like doing. Joseph had been sold into slavery unjustly. He was actually owned by Potiphar. You might expect him to be filled with anger and resentment at the loss of his freedom and all the things he'd been denied including the pleasure of marriage. But Joseph was a just man! When Potiphar's wife begs him to sleep with her, he replies, *[My master] is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?* He cared more that it would be a great wrong to his master and still more that it would be a great offense toward God, than he did about his own feelings or what had been done to him. Our culture says, "Do what's right for you! Do what's in your own best interest! Morality is relative!" No, it's not! God has clear standards of right and wrong and they have not changed. He had them written down and given to us in a book that was carefully preserved through the ages to make sure they would not be changed. According to God, adultery has always been wrong. Sex outside of marriage has always been wrong. The practice of homosexuality has always been wrong. Murder has always been wrong. Lying, cheating, and stealing have always been wrong. Being faithful, saving life, telling the truth and being honest have always been right! Being upright means knowing God's standards and making them your own. And therefore, it means that:

b. we must always treat others in ways that are right It means that we choose to abide by God's standards at all times and at all costs as we interact with other people instead of the way we may feel like treating them. Are YOU an upright person? Fifth, Paul says that:

5. we must be holy The Greek word here is *hosios*, which doesn't mean *without sin*, but means **devout toward God**. If *upright* refers primarily to the way we treat other people, *holy* refers to the love and respect that we ought to show toward God. Jesus said the greatest commandment in all the law is that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Without that, upright behavior is just the keeping of a set of rules. We must do what we do out of the right motive, because we love Him with all our hearts. And if we love Him, the evidence of that will be plain. Jesus said of the Father in **Jn. 8:29**, ...*I always do what pleases Him.* Everything Jesus did, everywhere He went, every move He made, every act, every miracle, He did to please the Father. And likewise:

• **we must always do the things that please Him** Paul said, *So whether we are at home [in the body] or away [from it], we make it our aim to please him.* - 2 Cor. 5:9. That's our one goal, our primary purpose in life, both here and beyond, to please Him.

Are YOU a holy person? Lastly, in verse 8 Paul says:

6. we must be disciplined The Greek word is *egkrates* which means *internal strength*. It is often translated *temperate* because in Scripture it primarily means that:

- **we must be in control of our bodily appetites** It's the opposite of *not addicted* in verse 7. We must have strength to control our appetite so that we are not gluttons. We must have strength to control our desire to drink alcohol so that we are not drunkards. We must have strength to control our sexual drive so that we do not lust or yield to it and become immoral. Paul used a good example when he said, *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things...* - 1 Cor. 9:25 and he urges us to do the same. Are YOU a disciplined person? Then finally, as he completes his list, Paul tells us:

III. The Most Important Mark Of A Godly Life (9) Whether we are a leader in the church or just an ordinary believer:

1. we must hold firmly to the Word of God We must literally, *hold it tightly against us* or cling to it with all our might. Paul says it is *trustworthy* and:

a. we must regard it as worthy of our trust We have to make up our minds, is this Book the very Word of God or is it not? If it is not, then it is merely the word of man, a book written by people that I can choose to believe or not, but if it is the Word of God Himself, then it is true and trustworthy and I must obey it. I must trust it so much that I make it the only rule of belief and practice by which all other things in my life will be judged. We must cling to it like glue, like epoxy, like cement, like sticky gooey caramel that pulls the caps off your teeth, like creek mud that you get stuck in and it pulls your boots off! And in holding fast to it:

b. we must be careful not to alter it We must hold fast to it as it has been taught, as it has come down to us, without changing it or altering it even one little bit. And if we hold fast to the Word unchanged, Paul says:

2. this will enable us to do two things. First, we'll be able to:

a. exhort others to believe correctly and practice it just like we do. We'll be able to disciple them and help them grow and mature in their faith. And we'll be able to:

b. refute those who oppose it Oh, there are so many today who say the Bible is not true, that it's outdated, it's ancient myths, it's archaic, it can't be trusted, it's full of contradictions. But pretty much everybody who says those things hasn't studied it and most haven't read it at all! Listen, there is nothing yet that science or history have proved as facts (and evolution is only a theory, not a fact) that is inconsistent with what the Bible says. In fact, when there is any question, science and history always end up proving that the Bible is accurate! And if you immerse yourself in it and study it carefully with a believing mind, you can tear down every lofty argument that people hold up to you. Are YOU a person who holds firmly to the Word of God?

These are the marks of a good leader and the marks of a godly life. Now, can you just produce all these things on your own? By trying hard? Of course not! You can only grow these fruits through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in you, only by asking Him every day and in every situation to take control of you and make you hospitable or make you love the good or make you self-controlled or upright or holy or disciplined. It's only possible by stopping and praying, "Jesus, help me. Help me do what pleases You in this situation. Take control of me and give me strength to act Your way!" Corrie Ten Boom used to take a glove with her when she would speak about the Holy Spirit and she would put it on and say, *I have a glove here. It can't do anything, but if I put my hand in it, it can do a lot, writing, sewing and much more. Now I know, of course, that it isn't the glove; it's my hand in the glove. You and I are like gloves and the Holy Spirit is like the hand - He can do a great deal.* If the hand doesn't fill the glove and move it, nothing happens! Likewise, we have to ask the Holy Spirit to fill us, to take control of us and live out a godly life through us by His power! And it happens by simply praying, asking Him to do it, one situation at a time.

Titus: Godly Living In A Decadent Society What A Religiously Decadent Society Looks Like (1:10-16)

Whenever the church exists in a decadent society, there is always a problem with the decadent values and practices of the society creeping into the church. And even when the church is newly planted there, or maybe *especially* when the church is newly planted, not only do the new believers have a lot of the society's ways and thinking still in them, but those who rise up among them as leaders do as well. Paul and Titus had planted a set of new house churches across the island of Crete and were trying to help them grow to a healthy maturity, but they were not the only missionaries out there. Christianity had already been around long enough that there were also aberrant groups present trying to recruit converts. So, Paul warns Titus that:

I. There Are Many False Religious Teachers (10) He's not talking about people in general, but about traveling religious teachers who are preaching a false Gospel to people and he wants to be sure that none of his new believers there are led astray to follow them and their teachings. And, of course, there are many such in the religious sphere of our own society. In this verse he mentions three qualities that seem to characterize these teachers and their followings. He says:

1. they are insubordinate, that is, **unwilling to submit to religious authority**. They didn't recognize the authority of the apostles who had walked with Jesus and were not willing to allow themselves or their teachings to be validated by those who had been in the Lord before them. These kinds of teachers and movements are always purposefully independent; they separate themselves from any denominational or associational relationships, claiming that what they have is directly from God and doesn't need man's approval. Then Paul says:

2. they are empty talkers, that is, they do a lot of talking, but they are **spreading foolish nonsense**. They are teaching empty things that won't help you or do any good. I remember hearing a man on one radio broadcast years ago say, "Send me your tithe and I'll send you a bottle of special anointing oil. You can go down to the car lot and pick out the car you want and anoint that car

and God will give it to you!" Believe it or not, I'm told that guy was rolling in money because needy people are gullible or desperate enough to listen to foolish nonsense! Then Paul says:

3. they are deceivers, literally **mind-seducers**, teachers **who lead believers astray**. They lure believers into accepting their false teachings and focusing on them, so that before long the Gospel which they have accepted ends up being a different Gospel in their minds. And in the end of verse 10 you have:

4. Paul's example: the circumcision party (10b) These were Jewish background believers who taught that Christians must essentially become Jewish in order to follow Jesus. They must be circumcised and taught to keep the Law. This group created trouble in the church from its earliest days and was officially declared wrong by the apostles in Acts 15, yet they seem to have spread everywhere. Paul wrote Galatians to combat their influence. He tells more about them in **(14-15)**. He says:

a. they focused on Jewish myths In **1 Tim. 1:4** Paul calls them *...myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations...* The Jewish rabbis had many unfounded stories, superstitious legends which they regarded as having great importance. Examples of these are found in a group of writings known as the Pseudepigrapha or "False Writings", which includes titles like *The Books of Adam and Eve, Life of Adam and Eve, The Apocalypse of Moses, The Apocalypse of Adam, 1 & 2 Enoch, The Apocalypse of Abraham, Revelation of Moses*, and others, which, as you can tell simply from the titles, contain lots of crazy legends about Old Testament people that are way outside the bounds of Scripture. The Judaizers focused on these and on ferretting out long genealogical records to prove what tribe they were from. And, Paul says:

b. they focused on man-made commandments, the traditions of the elders. Verse 15 is a reference to the dietary laws and laws of ceremonial uncleanness they were trying to get believers to follow. Jesus often ran up against these. For instance, Mark comments, *(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)* - **Mk. 7:3-4**. And Jesus says in verse **8**, *You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.*

These are the kinds of things these false teachers tried to bring into the church and foist upon believers in Paul's day. When we studied Jude, I gave you examples of churches and professors and teachers who believe in a "different Jesus", one who is not God and is not the only way of salvation but merely a great religious leader or example. Now, let me give you just a couple of:

5. examples of popular false teachings of a different type, doctrines that are widely common **in the church** in **today's** world, but have no problem with who Jesus really is and what He did. Rather they want to ADD things to the Gospel. The first is known as the:

a. prosperity gospel, the teaching that **all believers can have health and wealth by believing**, by having enough faith. They teach that God wants his children to have, not just every spiritual blessing, but every material blessing as well and that includes health. They say that the phrase *by His stripes we are healed* means that on the cross Jesus purchased physical healing for all His followers. All we need to do is believe and God will give us these things. This has spread widely to mislead and disappoint people all over the world. When we were in India in 2019, one pastor got up to give a devotional and he preached this doctrine. "There will be plenty of rice for your meals, your daughters will be married, you will not want for anything. Just have FAITH! I started with nothing and now my church has a whole row of nice cars parked out front every Sunday. We have 6 air conditioning units!" We were all appalled! Imagine the appeal this teaching has to poor villagers who are barely surviving! And then imagine their disappointment with Jesus when it doesn't work for them! You can hear it right here; it's all over the TV. Oral Roberts was a big name in this originally; today you can hear Creflo Dollar (so appropriately named) any day of the week. Benny Hinn organizes huge healing crusades all over the world, yet one source says, *Not a single one of Hinn's miracles has ever been verified, though many have been proven to be temporary or false.* [<https://www.challies.com/articles/the-false-teachers-benny-hinn/>]. And along with prosperity teaching often goes another falsehood popular today known as:

b. Word of Faith teaching which says that **believers can have health and wealth by "positive confession"**, that is, by **speaking or proclaiming it**. It's often called "name it and claim it" theology. It claims believers have the same power as God who spoke the worlds into existence, that their "word" has the same power to make things happen. "I declare that you are healed!" "I declare that your cancer is gone in Jesus' Name!" Kenneth Hagin is recognized as the father of this teaching, though oddly, he died of cardio-vascular disease in 2003. Kenneth Copeland is probably the most well-known and widely seen preacher of this today, though there are many others. Listen, Jesus NEVER taught his followers that they would have health or wealth! He taught that we would suffer and be persecuted for His Name. The Bible teaches that the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives and that God refused to take away Paul's thorn in the flesh because He is most glorified in our weaknesses! These things are false concepts derived from our materialistic culture that have been married to the Gospel! A third false teaching is:

c. the practice of impartation, the concept that **spiritual gifts can be "imparted" to other believers by the laying on of hands**. You find this in the "revival" movement begun at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship in 1994 to the present and in the Brownsville FL "revival" from 1995-2000 where the laying of hands causes people to fall down and be "slain in the spirit" and people experience uncontrollable "holy laughter" and other ecstatic manifestations. Its influence has been continued in the Bethel Church Movement led by Bill Johnson based in Redding CA and their School of Supernatural Ministry, a clone of which operates in Harrisburg PA, where people are taught to "how to operate in the supernatural realm". Listen, we lay hands on people when we pray as a sign of our support and love; there is no "supernatural energy" flowing from us into them, the way healing power did from Jesus when He was here!

These teachings and teachers have impacted literally millions of believers. Now listen carefully. I am NOT saying that these people or their followers are not genuine Christians. I am not saying that they don't love Him or won't go to heaven. I have seen some of them give invitations to receive Christ and people do. A few of them might be outright charlatans, but certainly not all. I'm saying that they have added false teachings to the Gospel and have focused on those nonbiblical things and that is dangerous! Paul gives us:

II. The Facts About False Religious Teachers (11) First he says:

1. their teaching upsets and divides whole families When a family member gets into one of these groups, they try to get the rest to join them. If they do, a whole family is led astray and if they don't, that member often feels superior, like he or she has the Spirit and the rest don't. And that leads to alienation and separation. Second, Paul says:

2. they tend to be motivated by shameful gain Not all of them, but many are. Many teach that a "seed" of faith must be planted by giving something to their ministry in order to receive God's blessing for themselves. It might interest you to know that Kenneth Copeland has a net worth of \$760 million. His ministry's 1,500 acre campus includes a church, a private airstrip, a hangar for the ministry's \$17.5 million jet and other aircraft, and a \$6 million church owned lakefront mansion. Benny Hinn is only worth \$42 million. Creflo Dollar is worth \$27 million and he owns two Rolls-Royces, a private jet, a million dollar home in Atlanta, and a 2.5 million dollar residence in Manhattan. [<https://www.etinside.com/?p=539>] Wouldn't you think if you had that much money, you'd give most of it away to send missionaries to the remaining unreached peoples or to feed the poverty-stricken millions of the world or to care for refugees or something? It would seem that prosperity teaching often has a lot to do with the prospering of the one who preaches it and comes from the sacrifices of much poorer followers! Shameful gain! Third, Paul says:

3. they have imbibed the deceitfulness of their culture (12-13a) We looked at these verses two weeks ago to understand what the culture on Crete was like. If you remember, I told you that the Greek language had developed a verb, to *cretanize*, which meant to be a liar! Lying, cruelty and pleasure-seeking were the chief hallmarks of Cretan culture and the whole world knew it. Paul is pointing out that through these false teachers, these very characteristics had been absorbed by them, incorporated into their teaching and were being foisted upon the church. If you look at the false teachings I've mentioned, it's awfully clear that most are simply disguised forms of the materialism and pleasure-seeking that characterize our American culture and they have been baptized into the church by saying that Jesus wants us to have those things! Fourth, Paul says:

4. they profess to know God but deny it by their works (16) Again, I'm not saying that none of these guys know Jesus. It's not my place to judge that. But their works, the things they do, seem to deny what they say with their mouth. It's hard to believe that a guy who claims thousands have been healed by Jesus' power can't produce credible testimonies of it. One who left one of the groups I've mentioned says, *The real thing that got me, though, was the death of little J.C., the infant of two dear Korean friends of mine. He died from cancer at two years old. Prayers went out for him every second of the day. People jerked, shook, laughed, convulsed, spoke in... tongues over him...the works...and when he died, we were left with feeble excuses like "God needed him more" ...!!!* [<https://kimolsen.net/2013/07/11/a-testimony-how-god-rescued-me-from-bill-johnsons-cult/>] It's hard to believe that a guy who claims to love the poor like Jesus does keeps millions for himself. Jesus said we will know false prophets and false teachers by their fruits. Sadly, in the third world millions flock to their events, but thousands are left disillusioned because Jesus didn't give them the healing or the prosperity they were promised. So Paul uses three terms to describe these folks. He says:

a. they have become detestable They're foul. Like rotten meat or sour milk, they're something you turn away from because of the stench. Next:

b. they are willfully disobedient They are obstinate and unpersuadable. You can't convince them they're off base. And because of that:

c. they are useless to God's work To one degree or another they're unfit, unworthy, useless. They're not accomplishing the true work of God in the world. God can't truly use them to advance His Kingdom because they're too busy advancing their own kingdom.

Lastly, Paul tells Titus:

III. What Should Be Done With False Teachers He says:

1. their teaching should be silenced (11a) The Greek word means *gagged*. Somebody needs to tie a gag across their mouths. Of course, you can't do that literally. It would be nice if we could get such people off the air, but then if we did deny them that freedom, someone else would be able to deny us the same freedom. We can't literally stop false teachers from teaching, but we certainly can do everything possible to silence this kind of teaching wherever we find it rearing its head. Wherever it pops up in the church, we can say, "That's not true and you can't teach that here!" We can make sure that kind of teaching doesn't go on in our church or any other group where we have influence. And then Paul says this **(13b)**. It looks to me like Paul is telling us that:

2. they should be rebuked and reclaimed if possible We should do what we can to strongly challenge people who are caught up in these false doctrines and practices and leading others astray with the goal of restoring them to a sound, biblical faith. So there is hope! Many are genuine believers and the Spirit can work in their lives to show them where they have gotten off track. Pray for them And ask God to reclaim them from error!

In closing I'd like to let well known pastor, author and missions speaker John Piper share with you. As a favor, he was speaking to about 1,000 college students from the University Christian Fellowship campus ministry in Birmingham. The leader of that ministry said, *"Out of the blue, we started getting this little bit of prosperity gospel coming in. One guy had just become a believer, and he was gifted in evangelism and started to bring people in with him. But his doctrine got off."* Within several years, that "guy" would take several hundred students from UCF and start his own ministry called *The Basement*, which at one time drew crowds of as many as 7,000 before he was arrested twice in 18 months for impersonating police officers. But that night this campus leader knew trouble was coming and begged Piper to address the prosperity gospel in his message, which he did extemporaneously. The result was this 3 minute video clip that is so powerful that it has been viewed over 1.1 million times on YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTc_FoELt8s] That is the Gospel. Amen. [Story found at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/story-behind-john-pipers-most-famous-attack-on-the-prosperity-gospel/>]

Titus: Godly Living In A Decadent Society

Godly Living For Older People (2:1-4a)

As we move into chapter 2 in our study through the letter to Titus, Paul has already given Titus a list of qualifications to use as he appoints elders to care for the churches they had established and he has encouraged Titus to warn people against supposedly Christian teachers who are teaching false doctrines, such as the Judaizers, the circumcision party. And we discussed some of the false teachings prevalent in our own society. But now Paul turns to give a word to Timothy himself in verse (1). If you look closely, he's saying more than "teach the correct things"; he's saying "teach the things that are the result of healthy sound teaching." Let me read it to you in the NET, *But as for you, communicate the behavior that goes with sound teaching.* He's telling Timothy that:

I. We, who know and promote biblical truth in a balanced way, Have A Responsibility To Promote Godly Living. It is not enough to know all the right things God wants us to know from Scripture. It is not enough to teach all the right things from Scripture. We must first of all LIVE the right way that goes along with it. And if we're going to do that, Paul is implying here to Titus what he already said outright to Timothy. Look back to **1 Tim. 4:16** with me. Paul is saying that:

1. we must continually examine ourselves It is not enough to point out the flaws in others. The first place we ought to be looking is in the mirror! I don't know about you, but every morning one of the first things I do is go in the bathroom and look in the mirror to see how messy I look. Then I shave off the stubble and use a trimmer to catch all the little hairs that have somehow grown overnight, because I don't want to look unkempt. And I do that continually, day after day. Paul tells Timothy that we must do the same thing in the spiritual realm. First of all:

a. we must keep a close watch on our lives Why? Because it is so easy to slip into doing the very things that we know God doesn't want in our lives. We'd never outright hate somebody, but it's awfully easy to harbor a little root of bitterness when someone hurts us somehow. We'd never seek after pornography, but it's easy to stare at that racy scene on the TV a moment too long and savor it. We'd never steal money but if there's a way, we can keep from reporting that we earned some or get out of doing some of the work we're getting paid for, we might be tempted to let that happen. Solomon said it's the little foxes that spoil the vineyard and you need to catch them! (Songs 2:15) It's the little things we need to watch carefully for and catch before they become full grown and lead into bigger things! It's easy to miss one day of reading Scripture or spending time with God in prayer, but before you realize it, you miss two or three, then a whole week and soon the entire habit is out of your life. We have to keep a close watch on our lives all the time, and not only that:

b. we must keep a close watch on what we teach, examine it carefully to make sure it's the truth. It's so easy to just parrot what we heard someone else say in a message somewhere or an idea or thought that comes to our mind without checking it out and seeing whether it's biblical. This was especially important in Paul's day before the printing press where nobody had their own personal copy of the Scriptures and they depended on memorizing and remembering. Today we have Bibles all over. We have them on our computers and our phones. With a click or a touch, we can see different translations, original word meanings, and commentaries from others. We have NO excuse for not communicating what's true, except that we don't bother to look! So we must still keep a close watch on what we teach or communicate to others. But what Paul is saying to Titus is that:

2. we must communicate behavior that reflects healthy teaching The point of sound teaching is to impact, not people's knowledge, but their behavior, their character, their lives. It is to motivate others to live a godly life in the midst of their decaying society. And that's what Paul goes on to describe for Titus in the rest of this chapter. He begins to explain what godly living specifically looks like for different age groups and genders and even for people who are bondservants. But he begins by sharing:

II. What Godly Living Looks Like For Older Men (2) Now, as soon as we hear "older", we're picturing an 80 year old guy who can barely walk, hobbling about with a cane, but that's not who Paul has in mind. People didn't live as long on average back then and "older" probably begins with what we'd still describe as middle aged, men in their late 40's, 50's and above, men whose children are largely grown, who have been established in their occupation or trade and who are probably looked to as the leaders of the community and the church. Paul paints a picture for us of what our lives should look like. First he says:

1. we should be sober-minded or temperate, meaning primarily that we should be free from the influence of wine or strong drink and use it in only in moderation. There's nothing worse than an old drunk guy who can't quite control himself, but there are plenty of them out there. I'm thinking of one of my neighbors with whom I'm good friends, but he drinks a lot and when we have a neighborhood gathering his wife is embarrassed and always worried about what he's going to say or how he might act. It's sad. As older men, we should be examples of moderation for the younger who might be prone to wild parties, examples of someone who is in control of their bodily desires and doesn't let anything get control of their lives except the Lord Jesus. So along with that, Paul says:

2. we should be worthy of respect, dignified, not in the sense of pompous or proud, but a man that other people honor or look up to for the way they live. That would mean we are serious about life, not that we don't have fun or a sense of humor, but you know older men as I do, whose mode of communication is always joking or always sarcastic or always critical. I'm thinking of an older man who's long dead but was a member here 40 years ago who was always sarcastic, always making a wise crack or a joke. You'd never look up to him. But then I think of a Keith Crews in his 70's who's been an example of humbleness and kindness and helpfulness and endurance through many difficulties over all these years, and above all who loves Jesus and sees his purpose in life as being a witness to others and helping children and younger believers to grow. That's an older man worthy of respect and an example of what Paul is saying that all of us should be. And part of that is:

3. we should be self-controlled, having a sound mind, a balanced way of thinking that does not let our passions, our emotions, run away with it. I remember another older man when we first came here who was obsessed with grief over the passing of his wife. It consumed his life and was all he thought about for years, so that he essentially stopped living. He had no purpose, nothing in life he wanted to do but to wait to die and see her again. I've seen others become obsessed with their health, their illnesses, and let

those become the focus of their life. God wants us to have sound, balanced minds that focus on the reason we're here in the first place and that means:

4. we should have a healthy spiritual life And in this realm, Paul lists a trio of spiritual qualities that should characterize us as we grow older. The first is a *sound* or a *healthy* faith. That is:

a. a deep personal faith in Jesus, not simply a whole lot of accumulated knowledge about Him. Now, in my experience men in general tend to be less spiritually minded than women. Get a bunch of them together, even if they're believers, and what do they talk about? Sports. Work. Cars. They don't generally tend to share what the Lord spoke to their hearts the other day as they were reading Scripture, the way women might. Listen, older guys, this should be the time of our lives when we really walk with Jesus, when we have learned to be men of prayer, men of the word, men who are examples of trusting and loving Jesus that can be imitated and followed by our families and be a witness to others, men who aren't ashamed to talk about what's the most important thing in life to them! The second quality we should display is a *healthy love*:

b. a continual love toward others By this point in life we should be past that self-centered male thinking, that "me first" attitude that often characterizes men in their younger years, and have settled into a pattern of caring about others and putting them first. The best example who comes to mind is our own Assistant Pastor, Jim Garcia. I don't know anybody who puts himself out more for other people, who goes the extra mile to help, who is always looking for a way to make the situation easier for the other person, who cares so deeply about those who are sick or shut in, who thinks about how other people feel more than about his own feelings. Amen? And it never stops. It never ends. That's the love God wants to characterize our lives at all stages, but especially by this stage it should be at the core of our behavior. And finally, Paul adds, a *healthy steadfastness*, that is:

c. a constant endurance through suffering By this point we've lived 45, 50, 60, 70 years and you can't be in this world that long without living through a number of hardships, difficulties and sorrows. And through them all, your faith has not been shaken; indeed, it has been strengthened and is deeper now because of the way Jesus has carried you through. We have endured. We've lived out the title of Eugene Peterson's classic book "A Long Obedience In The Same Direction" and we're still going in that direction! We've persevered through thick and thin, up and down, better and worse, richer and poorer, in sickness and health and we're still clinging to Jesus who has carried us through it all! That's who we're to be, so that those coming along the trail behind us can find in us the encouragement and the example to carry on and know it will be worth it all! Joe Stowell writes, *The Greeks had a race in their Olympic games that was unique. The winner was not the runner who finished first. It was the runner who finished with his torch still lit. I want to run all the way with the flame of my torch still lit for Him.* [J. Stowell, *Fan The Flame*, Moody, 1986, p. 32]

Guys, is that you? Walking with Jesus, loving other people and enduring through all that life throws at you, being faithful to Jesus? That's what God's looking for in you! But now Paul moves on to tell Titus:

III. What Godly Living Looks Like For Older Women (3) Now here's where I get in trouble. Who exactly are "older women"? It's really hard to tell since they're all either 29 or 39! Again, we might picture some gray-haired old lady sitting in a rocking chair on a porch, but Paul is talking about women who are done having children, whose children are mostly or all fully grown, so that they are not the focus of every moment of the day any more, women who now have more free time to focus on work or on ministry, as well as those who are actually elderly. Paul begins by saying, *Likewise*, in the same way, in the same fashion. In other words, he's saying:

1. you should live godly the same as the men should The same things we've just mentioned for the men should also characterize your lives! A deep faith in Jesus, a continual love for others and a constant endurance and faithfulness to the Lord through all the difficulties of life, that should be YOU as well. But there are some things that Paul mentions because they specifically apply to you and the first thing he says is that:

2. you should be reverent in demeanor and this word in the Greek is a deeper concept than the word *dignified* or *worthy of respect* he used for men. It literally says *having a demeanor that is consecrated to God*, that of a *sacred woman*. In other words, the way that you act, the way that you talk, the way that you dress, everything about you should display that you are a woman who is absolutely devoted to Jesus, a holy woman. But when I say that, don't picture wearing a nun's habit or something. It's about character and Paul goes on to mention two things that are earmarks of that holy-appearing life. First, he says:

a. you should be careful not to slander others The Greek word is *diabolos*. Sound familiar? Don't be an accuser like the devil! Don't speak evil about them. Of course, I know there are a few men who never stop talking, but as a generalization, most women love to talk; they love to communicate. It's wired into them. Men would rather sit together and stare at a TV and grunt occasionally. But, as Solomon observed, *When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.* - Prov. 10:19. The more we talk, the more we have to guard our lips to make sure we don't say something evil, especially about others. In 1 Tim. 5:13 Paul gives this warning about young widows who are provided for by the church and so don't have to work. He says, *Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.* A woman who is older, whose family is raised and doesn't have the burden of the many responsibilities she once had faces that same temptation, especially if her husband earns enough and she doesn't have to work. It is so easy to fall into gossiping with friends about the latest thing that one or the other has heard about someone else or sharing feelings about someone and reproducing your own attitude toward them in the person you're talking to. Be reverent; be a holy woman in the way that you talk! Now let me assure you that we have some of the godliest women I know who are 45 and up in this church and I deeply appreciate your love for the Lord, and I am sure none of you would ever be tempted to act like this, so please don't get mad at me for mentioning it; after all, Paul's the one that wrote it! And the second aspect of reverence he mentions seems even crazier! He says:

b. you should be careful not to become addicted to much wine, not to become enslaved by it. Now, for all the drunken older men I've met through the years, mostly because I was dragged into bars by my dad in childhood, I think I have yet to meet an older woman who was an alcoholic. Yet they must exist or Paul wouldn't have warned about it. Surprisingly, they do. In 2017 the Huffington Post printed an article titled, *The Face Of Binge Drinking In The U.S. Is A 60+ White Woman*. It says, *More older*

American women are drinking — and drinking more heavily. The number of women over 60 who binge drink has been rising at a pace that rivals the sea-levels — and exceeding the rate for older men. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/when-older-women-drink-they-really-drink_n_59274729e4b01b9a59378951]. Why? The website of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism says, *Older women tend to have longer life expectancies and to live alone longer than men, and they are less likely than men in the same age group to be financially independent. These physical, social, and psychological factors are sometimes associated with at-risk drinking in older adulthood, so they are especially relevant for older women. Older women have major physical risk factors that make them particularly susceptible to the negative effects of increased alcohol consumption.* [<https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh26-4/308-315.htm>] So maybe Paul was ahead of his time! Or maybe when a woman gets past the busy family-centric years when she was most needed, and especially if she survives her husband or has to become his caretaker, she is tempted to escape her depressive feelings of loneliness or unattractiveness or uselessness, or at least soothe them with alcohol or pills or even with eating. Paul says that older CHRISTIAN women need to be careful NOT to fall into that sort of addictive behavior! You are holy women! Rather God has a new role for you:

3. you are to be teachers of what is good It's one word in the Greek. You know how in *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wizard says, "Back where I come from, there are men who do nothing all day but good deeds. They are called phila-, er, er, philanth-er, good-deed do-ers!" Paul's word is like that; it means good-things-teachers! Women who do nothing but teach good things! To whom? Well, the children are now grown and gone or almost gone, so certainly to the grandchildren, but Paul goes on to spell out who he means in (4a). He says:

4. you are to be the primary trainers of younger women! You have lived through those difficult years. The Lord has carried you through the heart-stretching process of Him leading a husband to you, the stressful process of making a wedding happen, the tremendous adjustment to being married to another human being, the anxiety of having children and the exhaustion of caring for them and the frustration of training them up. He has carried you through the stress of financial woes and taking on debt and getting a house and the hard work of caring for what He's given you. You have lived the life they're going to live at every stage and have accumulated God's wisdom from it. And you single older women, you have lived the life that some of the younger women are going to live as singles. You know all the obstacles and discouragements they face and all that they feel inside, because you've faced it and felt it. So now, older women, invest yourself in discipling and mentoring and training younger women, whether they're your own daughters or other younger women in the church or other parts of your life. Be there for them. Call and check up on them. Encourage them when they're down. Pray with them. Make that an important calling of God in your life, right up there with sharing the Gospel with others and reaching the nations!

I remember years ago one of our then young moms lamenting the death of a godly older woman from this church by saying, "We're losing all our Titus women!" Oh, we need Titus women! Listen to Andi Ashworth share her experience: *Though mentoring is not a biblical word, it is a way of life modeled in the Bible.... As I move into the decades of becoming an older woman, I'm paying increasing attention to the topic of mentoring. I know from experience that younger women have a hunger to hear from those who've walked the path a little ahead of them. For many years now, younger women have been coming to me in a slow trickle and asking me to mentor them. I'm always somewhat stumped by the question and have rarely felt qualified for the task. I don't have any sort of mentoring program to follow, no methods and no curriculum. What I find is that most women don't want something formal anyway. What they're looking for is more organic—someone to share life with them and have conversations about things that matter, things that develop in importance as life is lived. The older I get, the more I realize the treasure of these relationships and consider them one of the great privileges and responsibilities of becoming an older woman.* [<https://byfaithonline.com/the-wisdom-of-older-women/>] Older women, and men too, I challenge you to purposely build relationships with the younger generation and invest your life in them. It's what they need most and God will use it powerfully in their lives!

Titus: Godly Living In A Decadent Society Godly Living For All People (2:7-10)

Titus was living and serving in a decadent society, one that was full of moral decay, just as our is, and this letter was intended to outline what godly living looks like in that context. In the second chapter of his letter, Paul is outlining for Titus what godly living looks like for various segments of believers in the churches. He started out with admonitions for older men and then older women in verses 1-3. In our last study in this series, We skipped Paul's admonitions to younger women and younger men in verses 4-6. But now in verses 7-10 he goes on to address Titus himself as a leader of the churches in Crete, before going on to address another widely represented group in the churches. But before we get to them, let's apply his leadership advice to ourselves. He says:

I. We Who Lead Should Be A Model For Others To Imitate (7-8) Paul was pretty bold about this teaching that leaders should be imitated and he applied it to himself. To the Corinthians he wrote twice, *I urge you, then, be imitators of me* in **1 Cor. 4:16** and again, *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* in **11:1**. How does a young boy learn to be a godly man? By watching and imitating the godly men in his life, starting with his father. How does a young girl learn to be a godly woman? By watching and imitating the godly women in her life, starting with her mother. And therefore, fathers and mothers have a primary responsibility to make sure that our lives are the kind of model that we want our children to imitate, because if we're not, they'll imitate our bad example anyway! And we who lead in the church, we who are elders and Sunday School teachers and preschool teachers and Pioneer Club leaders and childcare and youth workers and group leaders and Bible study leaders - and pastors! - need to make sure that our lives are the kind of model that we want those whom we lead to imitate, so that we can safely say, with all genuine humility, "Imitate me as I follow Christ! Learn from my example." That's how Jesus' disciples learned. They followed Him about for 3 ½ years. They went where He went, they ate what He ate, they heard and absorbed what He taught and they watched what He did and then participated in doing it themselves. They learned to be the people God wanted them to be by following their leader, by imitating Jesus Himself. God's method of making disciples is not primarily sending them off to school to learn information (though, of course, I'm not against Bible schools); it is largely done life on life, by follow-

ing the example of those who lead, by imitating the lives of godly men and women who lead us. So, we who lead need to be sure that we model godliness that others can imitate in every area of our lives. First of all, Paul says we must be a model:

1. in the way we act, by our good works. The NIV reads, *In everything set them an example by doing what is good...* The things we do are an example to those we lead, so we must make sure it's a good example. The way we have compassion on people, the way we help them, the way we always tell the truth even when it hurts us and refuse to cheat even when it costs us, is an example to our followers. I'm sure you know **Mt. 5:16**, *...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* That happens with nonbelieving people. When they see us do good things, generous things, sacrificial things, when they see us love people no one else cares about or they see us endure suffering in our lives without bitterness and we tell them that we do it because of Jesus, they give Him the credit. He gets praise. But the same thing happens with other believers. When they see us doing these things in Jesus' Name, they worship and thank God and it makes them want to be like us and do the same things! So, it's important that we set a good example in the way we act and react, all the time. Paul also says we need to set a good example:

2. in the way we teach, specifically that when we teach our followers we should teach with *integrity* and *dignity*. That word translated *integrity* literally means *incorruptibility*:

a. we should be incorruptible in teaching the truths of the faith or, as he put it back in 1:9, *[We] must hold firmly to the faithful message as it has been taught...* We must never allow anything to creep into our teaching that will take away from or add to the truths of the Word of God that has been passed down to us. We must never bend to the dictates of our culture or the false teachings of those who want to twist the Scriptures to make them say what they want. In our teaching we should be like stainless steel. How many of you know that regular steel rusts? Add a little water or dampness and in a day or two a layer of rust quickly forms on the surface. Some of you may remember the little green truck I had a number of years ago. Before I got it, even though it was nearly new, it had been driven on winter roads in northern PA with lots of salt on them and never washed. So when I got it, the whole frame underneath was solid rust. The elements corroded it and eventually I traded it. But stainless steel has about 12% chromium added to it and under anything like normal conditions, it won't rust. It can rain or even be under water for long periods but it won't be corrupted. That's how we must be! No matter what pressures and forces, what "road salts", come against us to try to corrode our faithful adherence to the truths of the Word of God, the chromium of the Holy Spirit in us is there to keep us unspotted, uncorrupted, unchanged and unmoved. That's what *integrity* in teaching means. Then Paul adds that:

b. we should be worthy of respect in the way that we teach We should display *dignity*, not the proud, nose-in-the-air, better-than-you sort of dignity that the Pharisees had, but with gravity, with a seriousness that comes from realizing that we are delivering a message for God Himself as we teach. That doesn't mean we can't use humor in our teaching, but I think we've all seen preachers, at least on TV, who grandstand and make a show as they teach to impress their audience with their eloquence or with the greatness of their ministry. We're to teach in such a way as to be worthy of our followers listening to us and respecting what we say, and who we are as we say it. Then, Paul goes on to mention the hardest thing of all; we should set an example for those we lead:

3. in the way we talk, in sound *[literally, healthy] speech that cannot be condemned*. Now he's really meddling in our lives! James said, *No human being can tame the tongue! ...if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man...* And we know that we're not perfect, don't we? So, we have to be doubly careful to ask the Holy Spirit to take control of our mouths as we talk to people and react to them. To the Ephesians Paul wrote, *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* - 4:29. What a tall order, to never say anything that hurts, that harms, that tears down, that dishonors the Lord we serve, to always say things that are loving, kind, that build others up, that benefit and help others! I don't know about you, but that convicts ME, and if that's how we're all to talk, we who lead must really trust God for the grace to set an example with our mouths! In summary, Paul says:

4. our goal should be that no one can accuse us of evil, that we are above reproach in the way we act or teach or even talk, that no one has anything bad to say about us, unless it is that we love Jesus and cling to the Bible. As leaders there should be no area of our lives that others can point to and say, "That's wrong." May God give all of us the grace we need!

Now, starting at verse (9a), Paul begins to address another group of people, *Bondservants* or literally, *slaves*. And as soon as I say that word, awful red flags go up in our minds. We think of the terrible abuses of chattel slavery as it was practiced in America before the Civil War and we wonder why the Bible doesn't simply condemn it outright. But in the Bible the words used to denote slaves did not necessarily carry the same connotations that we associate with slavery today. Let me share with you:

II. Some Facts About Slavery In New Testament Times By the way, in researching for this message I found the best article I've ever read on slavery in the Bible by a pastor named Doug Becker and I simplified the URL for it and put it on your outline. I hope you'll go online and read it and even save it. [<https://bit.ly/3ckuWoS>] I'll summarize a few of his facts for you. First:

1. slaves were common in Greek and Roman society. *One source estimates that as much as 90% of the population of the city of Rome itself were slaves.* In essence, they pretty much formed an entire class of people. People became slaves either by owing debt or by being captured in war or by being born into a family of slaves. They were everywhere and as the Gospel spread throughout the Roman world, many believed, so that **slaves formed a significant portion of the church**. A great many of the early believers were slaves, which is why they are addressed as a group in Ephesians, Colossians, Titus and 1 Peter and why the book of Philemon is in our Bible. And while some slaves were certainly required to do hard labor:

2. slaves occupied many (and some important) positions Doug says, *Slaves could actually own property and even other slaves. They were not enslaved based on the color of their skin or ethnicity and slavery was often temporary. Many served as tutors, professors, estate managers, bookkeepers, even doctors, or as artisans. Roman Emperors used slaves to manage imperial estates and often placed them in charge of important tasks, such as lighting, tailoring, wine-keeping and tasting, and cooking. Furthermore, unlike in our day:*

3. Christians were powerless to change government policies They were a tiny, hated, and soon afterward, persecuted, minority. They had no vote and no voice. Slavery was deeply embedded and exceedingly common in society. The abolition of it was not something even conceived of until many centuries later. Christians had to live as subjects under the powerful government of their day. Doug says, *For us, ...freedom appears to be a basic value—indeed the fundamental right without which happiness and fulfillment cannot be attained. But we need to realize that this is a modern conviction that may have not been obvious or desirable at earlier points in human history.* On the other hand:

4. the New Testament does condemn the slave trade, forcefully taking people as slaves and selling them. Under the law of Israel, one who kidnapped a person and sold them was to be put to death. **1 Tim. 1:10** lists slave traders as law breakers and rebels right along with murderers and adulterers. In **Rev. 18:13** trading in “slaves, that is, human souls” is listed among the evils of Rome (referred to as “Babylon” there). The New Testament does not “condone” slavery; it goes deeper than that:

5. in the church social hierarchy was abolished so that masters and servants became brothers and sisters in Christ You remember passages like **Gal. 3:28**, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* Or **Col. 3:11**, *Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.* When you became a believer, it didn't matter who you were or what you were, the ground became all level in the body of Christ. All worshipped alike and interacted alike and became equal parts of one family, regardless of their position in society. The slave could teach the master and the master could serve the slave in love because of the transformation of their hearts. So don't let people tell you that the Bible is wrong because it condones slavery; it transforms slavery!

Now the question is, how are we going to apply these next verses today in a society where we don't have a slave class? And the answer is that the great majority of us today function in servile roles in our daily lives. We work at jobs where we're under the authority of bosses and superiors who tell us what to do and how to do it and we have to do what they want done. And even though we may have the freedom to quit if we don't like it, the truth is that most of us just have to go find another master to serve who is going to pay us to do his will and his work. We can't escape being servants in that way, at least until we retire. So, we can take the lessons that Paul gives here to bondservants and apply them directly to ourselves and the overarching primary admonition is this:

III. We Who Serve Should Bring Jesus Honor In All We Do (9-10) First, he says:

1. we should be submissive to those in authority in everything Of course, that doesn't mean we should do something evil if they tell us to, but in all non-moral things we should do what they tell us to do, whether we like it or whether we don't. The first job I ever had at 16 was being the clean-up guy, the janitor, in a machine shop. And one of the first assignments I got was, “Go clean the bathroom!” Let me tell you, you have never seen a dirty bathroom until you've seen one that was used by a dozen or two greasy, dirty, men who are heavy smokers, who could care less about leaving the toilet seat up, much less about cleaning up after themselves, and after the bathroom had been left go for a couple of weeks! Let me tell you, I didn't want to do it, but I did it. I didn't want to stick my hands into the oily coolant reservoirs of lathes and machines and pull out handfuls of metal chips and shavings, but I did it. Why? Because it needed done and I was told to by the employer who was paying me and meeting my needs. Today we in the US protest whatever we don't like, whatever we don't want to do, but one of the great hallmarks of Christianity still is that we are willing to humbly do what we're told by those in authority over us without protest and complaint, whether it's a parent or a boss. But it goes even deeper than that. Paul says:

2. we should truly seek to please them by our service Look with me at **Col. 3:22-24**. We're not just to try to please them when they're looking to make a good impression and then goof off when they're not. We're to *sincerely* try to please them, to make them happy and carry out their instructions. Why? Because when we serve them, we're serving Jesus! So we ought to serve them *the way* we would serve Jesus, with all our hearts, sincerely. Our goal should be to please them well, if at all possible. Wow, won't that transform the way you do your job if you really think about it?! Paul goes on to say in verse 9 of Titus 2 that we should not be *argumentative* and what he means is that:

3. we should not talk back to them disrespectfully I don't know how many places of employment would actually let you get away with that today, but it sure fits in the home, doesn't it? Young people, you're under the authority of your parents. Your role is to do what they tell you to do, even if you don't want to. And if you're a believer, you should do it without talking back to them in a disrespectful fashion! If you're an employee who wants to honor Jesus with your life, you don't talk back to the boss. You treat him or her with the respect that goes with their position. Then Paul says that:

4. we should not steal from them in any way Where I worked, we had a stockroom full of supplies and it would have been an easy matter to pilfer something you wanted or needed and drop it in your pocket or your lunchbox. Some of our ladies clean houses for people and it would be so easy to see something nice or some money left lay around and drop it in their pocket, but they would never do it because they love Jesus and stealing dishonors Him! As believers, Paul says:

5. we should be entirely trustworthy, showing all good faith, demonstrating to those who hire us or those above us that we can be counted on to do what we're supposed to do and what is right. Everybody else rebels and argues and steals and does whatever they can to get out of work and make life easier for themselves. Everybody else has to be watched and supervised to make sure they're doing what they're supposed to do, but it should not be so among us! We must be trustworthy in all things because we're serving Jesus! We want others to know and love Him. We want them to realize how wonderful He is and that starts with them seeing Him in us first! We want to *adorn the doctrine of God our Savior*; we want to *make the teaching about God our Savior attractive*, as the NIV puts it. The way we work, the way we serve, IS evangelism! That was Paul's admonition to slaves in the first century and it's just as important for us today in the 21st.

The great Bible teacher Harry Ironside shares this testimony: *When I was a boy... I worked for a Scottish shoemaker, or “cobbler,” as he preferred to be called... named Dan Mackay. He was a forthright Christian and his little shop was a real testimony for Christ in the neighborhood. The walls were literally covered with Bible texts and pictures... On the little counter in front of the bench on which the*

owner of the shop sat, was a Bible, generally open, and a pile of gospel tracts. No package went out of that shop without a printed message wrapped inside. And whenever opportunity offered, the customers were spoken to kindly and tactfully about the importance of being born again and the blessedness of knowing that the soul is saved through faith in Christ. It was my chief responsibility to pound leather for shoe soles. A piece of cowhide would be cut to suit, then soaked in water. I had a flat piece of iron over my knees and, with a flat-headed hammer, I pounded these soles until they were hard and dry. It seemed an endless operation to me, and I wearied of it many times. What made my task worse was the fact that, a block away, there was another shop that I passed going and coming to or from my home, and in it sat a jolly, godless cobbler who gathered the boys of the neighborhood about him and regaled them with lewd tales that made him dreaded by respectable parents as a menace to the community. Yet, somehow, he seemed to thrive... As I looked in his window, I often noticed that he never pounded the soles at all, but took them from the water, nailed them on, damp as they were, and with the water splashing from them as he drove each nail in. One day I ventured inside,...timidly, I said, "I notice you put the soles on while still wet. Are they just as good as if they were pounded?" He gave me a wicked leer as he answered, "They come back all the quicker this way, my boy!" Feeling I had learned something, I related the instance to my boss and suggested that I was perhaps wasting time in drying out the leather so carefully. Mr. Mackay stopped his work and opened his Bible to the passage that reads, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of god." "Harry," he said, "I do not cobble shoes just for the four bits and six bits that I get from my customers. I am doing this for the glory of God. I expect to see every shoe I have ever repaired in a big pile at the judgment seat of Christ, and I do not want the Lord to say to me in that day, 'Dan, this was a poor job. You did not do your best here.' I want Him to be able to say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" Then he went on to explain that just as some men are called to preach, so he was called to fix shoes, and that only as he did this well would his testimony count for God. It was a lesson I have never been able to forget. Often when I have been tempted to carelessness, and to slipshod effort, I have thought of dear, devoted Dan Mackay, and it has stirred me up to seek to do all as for Him who died to redeem me. [H. A. Ironside, *Illustrations of Bible Truth*, Moody Press, 1945, pp. 37-39.] Amen!

Titus: Godly Living In A Decadent Society

Grace Is Our Motive For Godly Living (2:11-15)

In chapter 2 Paul has been giving Titus specific, practical instructions about what godly living looks like for all varieties of people in the church. But now at the close of this chapter, he goes on to talk about the theological basis for godly living. He lays out the reason WHY we should live godly lives and he sums it up in one word, grace. We have been the recipients of God's grace! Look with me at verse (11). What a simple statement, yet amazingly rich with meaning:

I. The Grace Of God Has Provided Salvation For All People You see, every human being is sinful and every human being is lost and that includes you - and me, of course. The Bible says that we were enemies of God and were by nature objects of His wrath. In other words, our sins had to be justly punished and for them we deserved an eternity in hell. But we have such an amazing, gracious God that:

1. He has provided pardon for the penalty of sin and freedom from its power through sending His Son Jesus to die for us on the cross. He did not want to live without us, so He made a way for us to be restored to Him. Jesus bore the penalty of our sins in His own body on the tree, instead of us receiving that penalty. He saved us! But there's even more to it! He placed His Holy Spirit inside us when we believed and freed us from the power of sin by giving us a brand-new nature that is pure and holy. So now we have His power NOT to sin! That's what salvation is, and grace means that:

2. we did not deserve this salvation and could never obtain it ourselves. G. W. Knight said, *When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award--yet receives such a gift anyway--that is a good picture of God's unmerited favor. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.* [G.W. Knight, *Clip-Art Features for Church Newsletters*, p. 53.] God provided for us what we did not deserve. In fact, we deserved just the opposite, yet God gave salvation to us anyway! He provided for us what we could never obtain for ourselves, no matter how hard we tried. That's grace! And what's more:

3. He has made this salvation available for all people as a free gift Anybody can have it! No matter who they are or where they live or how good or bad they are! No matter whether they have been a terrorist or a persecutor like Saul or a self-righteous religious person like the Pharisees. We don't have to do anything; we CAN'T do anything to get it. God says, "Here it is; it's a free gift! Believe on My Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!" That's it! Pure and simple!

You may have heard that this week Ravi Zacharias, one of the most renowned Christian apologists and evangelists of our generation died of cancer at 74. He was born in Chennai and grew up in Delhi, India. His family was Anglican, but he was a "skeptic" until the age of 17 when he tried to commit suicide by swallowing poison. While he was in the hospital, a local Christian worker brought him a Bible and told his mother to read to him from John 14, which contains Jesus' words to Thomas. Ravi said it was John 14:19 that touched him as the defining paradigm, "Because I live, you also will live," and he thought, "This may be my only hope: A new way of living. Life as defined by the Author of Life." He committed his life to Christ, praying, "Jesus if You are the one who gives life as it is meant to be, I want it. Please get me out of this hospital bed well, and I promise I will leave no stone unturned in my pursuit of truth. [Wikipedia] He shares,"...the person of Jesus Christ transformed my life. He doesn't only change what we do, He changes what we want to do and the meaning that He imparted to me - I was 17 then, I'm 73 now, so 56 years have gone by, my love for Christ has grown deeper, my meaning has grown stronger and I know why He placed me in this world, to be a follower of His and to be an instrument of His choosing." [www.youtube.com/watch?v=XESiL7h3ZRO]. We'll miss Ravi, but God saved him! God saved me. And I hope God has saved you! If not, He will if you ask! The grace of God provided this salvation for us, but the result is that it transformed our lives! Paul goes on to say:

II. The Grace Of God Trains Us To Live Godly Lives In This Decadent Age (12) When we experience salvation, it changes us. It trains us to live in new ways. First of all:

1. it trains us to renounce the evil way of living the world around us follows People in the world around us do what they want. They do what they think is right or what they think is beneficial to them. They live as though there is no God. Even if they think He exists, it doesn't seem to make much difference to them. But God's grace has changed all that for us:

a. we no longer live as though God doesn't exist or matter We no longer think, "I'm the master of my own destiny! I can do anything I want! I'll do what I desire, what feels good to me!" Rather:

b. because of Him we reject sinful pleasures that others pursue Because of His grace that has rescued us from the awful penalty of our sins, we don't sleep with our boyfriend or girlfriend, we don't watch pornography on the internet or sleazy movies on cable, we don't party and get drunk or drown our sorrows in pills, we don't abort our baby because it's not a convenient time to have one. There are a thousand things we reject, that we refuse to do, even though people all around us are doing them, because of the amazing grace that God has showered on us! After He paid such a price to give us such a gift, how can we forget that and do whatever we want? So, it is His very grace that:

2. it trains us to live lives that are devoted to God As Ravi said, we now have a new meaning, a new purpose in life, *to follow Him*, to go where He sends, to do what He says and to act like He wants us to. We are His instruments. So, God's grace trains us, in the same way that we train up our children, to live:

a. lives that are self-controlled instead of yielding to every impulse we have. We don't do everything we feel like doing, we don't say everything we feel like saying or look at everything we feel like looking at. We don't blow up every time we feel like blowing up or criticize every time we feel like criticizing. We don't eat or drink everything we feel like eating or drinking and we don't go everywhere we feel like going. We temper our lives by placing them under the control of the Holy Spirit, so that we live:

b. lives that are filled with righteous behavior We do what is just and fair and right and good. We say what helps and builds up and encourages the other person. We go out of our way to be kind and meet needs and help others. We forgive and overlook faults because we've been forgiven. We share what we have, even the Good News that has saved us. Why? We can't help it because the grace of God has invaded our lives to such a degree that we could not possibly do otherwise!

Jesus told a story about a man whose master forgave him a tremendous amount of debt instead of throwing him in prison, just because he asked for it. It's a picture of grace, of the immense grace God has lavished upon all of us who believe by saving us. But in the story that man turns around and refuses to forgive someone who owes him much less and has him thrown into prison. How could he do that? After receiving so much grace, how could you possibly NOT show grace to someone else? Jesus' point was that you can't! If you really and truly have received the grace of God and realize what you've received, it transforms your life. It trains you to live a new and different way, a godly way! And it does even more than that. Paul says:

III. The Grace Of God Causes Us To Look Confidently For The Coming Of Jesus (13) I hope you'll pardon me for bringing up a theological side note. This verse is one that has been referred to down through the ages to prove that Jesus:

1. He is our God and our Savior! He is not merely the Son of God as a secondary being, but is Himself our God! We worship Jesus as God of very God, as the creed puts it. And when any other religion or sect says that He is merely the Son of God, that He is less than the Father, we say, "NO! He is our God and we worship Him just as we worship the Father and the Holy Spirit!" We worship one God but He exists in three persons and ALL are equally God! People say, "I'm OK with talking about God, but I don't want to hear about your Jesus!" Friend, Jesus IS our God! We HAVE to talk about Him! Now, this verse tells us something that we as believers have almost forgotten in our day:

2. His appearing is our blessed hope! *During the American Civil War, General William T. Sherman drove his troops on his decisive march to the sea. In a fort on Kennesaw Mountain, he left behind a small contingent of men to guard the rations. General John Bell Hood of the Confederate Army attacked the fort, and a fierce battle followed. One-third of Sherman's men were killed or wounded and J. M. Corse, the general in command, was severely injured. Just as he was about to hoist the white flag and surrender, a message came through the signal corps set up on a chain of mountains. General Sherman was within fifteen miles of the fort and sent the message: "Hold fast. We are coming." Those few words so encouraged the defenders that they held on and kept the fort from falling into the hands of their attackers. [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI.] The knowledge that Sherman was definitely coming gave them hope; it became their hope! R. W. De Haan says, *The fact that our Savior is coming again gives us hope. It makes us want to stand our ground. It encourages us to continue fighting the good fight of faith. It assures us of victory. Fierce as the battle may rage and difficult as the conflict may be as we serve Him, we dare not give up. Christ is coming again!* That IS our hope and it is a blessed hope, the thing we look most forward to in life because:*

3. His appearing will reveal His glory in all its fullness! As Mt. 24 says, *For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.... Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* The whole world will see the awesome greatness of our Jesus and the reality of their own destruction and they shall wail, but when we see it, we shall rejoice! He will come to receive us to Himself, set the world straight, and set up HIS kingdom on earth! That's our hope! That's what we're waiting for! That's what we're living for! That's what makes every difficult moment of struggle in this world, every struggle against sin, every effort to reach others worth it all. Jesus is coming! The early church believed that strongly and lived out of it and it changed their world. We must not let the sophistication and the rationality of our age take that away from us! God saved us by grace through Jesus and by grace Jesus has given us the awesome privilege of knowing that He is coming again! Let's live, not as *if it were true*, but *because it is true*! But, back to godly living; in verse 14 Paul explains:

IV. The Purpose Of Jesus' Gracious Self-Sacrifice (14) Jesus sacrificed His life at unbelievably immense personal cost, not merely to pay for our sins, but to accomplish three very important things. First, He did it:

1. to release us from all lawless behavior The Bible in Basic English says, *...so that he might make us free from all wrongdoing.* His purpose was that we might have the ability to stop sinning, to stop acting as if His Divine law didn't exist and doing whatever we want. Second, He did it:

2. to purify us to become His very own people He is holy; He is pure. He cannot be joined to anything evil. Yet He loved us and wanted us to belong to Him, to be His own people, His own family, His very children, the Bible says. So how could He do it? Only by the greatest act of grace the universe has ever seen, by sacrificing Himself for us. His grace purified us so that we could become His very own and that is what we ARE. And as **1 John 3:3** says, *...everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.* He died to make us pure so we could be His and His grace moves us to live pure lives all our days! Then third, He did it:

3. to create in us a zeal to do good works The Bible says about Jesus' life on earth, *He went about doing good!* - Acts 10:38. He had a zeal, a passion, a consuming drive to continually do good everywhere He went, for everyone He met, in whatever way He could. And Jesus sacrificed Himself to create that same zeal in us! The founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley, is often credited with giving this as a rule of life, though it is found in the writings of others: *Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.* Regardless of who crafted it, that's the best description I've ever heard of what it means to have a zeal for doing good, and that's what Jesus died to produce in us!

Contrary to what you might hear so often today, Paul's point is that Jesus didn't just die for us so our sins could be forgiven and we could go to heaven and be happy when we die! He died for us to transform our lives in this world into lives like His own, lives of holiness and purity overflowing with good works! And because of that, Paul concludes this chapter by exhorting Titus that:

V. God's Instructions To Us Are To Be Declared With Authority (15) You see, these instructions to live godly lives that God has given us through the pen of the Apostle Paul:

1. they are not merely the opinions of some human being which can be accepted or rejected at will. They are not optional and they should not be presented as such. They should be declared! Where believers need to be taught, they should be declared as strong exhortations, "Live this way!" Where believers are living wrong, they should be declared as a rebuke, "Stop living that way!" Don't let anyone discredit what you have to say with, "Well, that's your opinion..." or "Well, that's one way of looking at it but there are other ways..." These instructions:

2. they are commands of God which are to be obeyed! Let me just remind you of a few of them from this chapter: *Love others! Be self-controlled! Be kind! Don't slander people! Be submissive to your husband! Submit to your masters (those in authority over you)! Don't argue! Don't steal! Have sound speech! Be pure!* Those commands come to you and I with the very authority of God Himself; He expects us to obey them. He commands us to obey them! Are you doing them? Are you really living the godly life He has commanded you to live or do you pick and choose which precepts you will obey?

Gary Inrig says, *Prior to her coronation, Queen Elizabeth sent out to her friends and various Commonwealth dignitaries engraved invitations which read like this: "We greet you well. Whereas we have appointed the second day of June 1953 for the solemnity of our coronation, these are therefore to will and to command, all excuses set apart, that you make your personal attendance upon us, at the time above mentioned, there to do and to perform such services as shall be required of you." A queen does not request attendance, she commands it. The striking phrase in that invitation occurs in the very middle: "All excuses set apart." When a monarch expresses her will and issues her command, her subjects respond without hesitation or excuses. But we serve One who is far greater, the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords... Our King, Jesus, has expressed His will and issued His commands; they are to be obeyed and all our excuses must be set aside. [Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay, by Gary Inrig. Moody Press, 1979. Pages 68-69.] Yet we obey Him, not out of the fear of punishment like we might obey an earthly king. He has the right to command us and we obey Him without hesitation because of the great grace He has lavished upon us in saving us when we didn't deserve it. How could we do any less?*

Titus: Godly Living In A Decadent Society

How We Must Act While Living In A Decadent Society (3:1-8)

Today we move into the third chapter of Paul's letter to Titus. In chapter 1 Paul explained the conduct that is expected of church leaders. In chapter 2 Paul explained the conduct expected of believers as members of the Christian community. Now, in chapter 3 he goes on to explain:

I. How We Should Act In Our Society As Christian Citizens Christians have a duty, not only to one another, but to the government and the society in which they live. As I shared earlier in this series, Titus was serving on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea and Crete and its people had a very low moral reputation, so believers had to live in the midst of some pretty vile things that went on around them regularly. And sadly, in the last two weeks we've seen some pretty awful things across America, from murder and abuse of power to rioting and looting in our major cities. Yet Crete was also a province of the Roman Empire, governed by a proconsul, a military commander, so believers there had to live under Roman government, Roman laws and Roman taxes, and likewise, we live under American government and laws and taxes. And Paul wanted to clarify for them what the duty of a believer is to government and society, so he lays out seven things that we are to be careful to do in this regard. Look with me at verses **(1-2)**. First of all, Paul says that:

1. we are to voluntarily submit to rulers and authorities who are over us The word *submit* in the Greek is actually a military term and it refers to the way that troops arrange themselves under the command of a leader. It indicates an attitude of voluntarily doing what those who are in authority over you tell you. Now why should we do that? Well, Paul explains his thinking more clearly elsewhere. Look with me at **Rom. 13:1-2**. God is the one who not only instituted human government but, Paul says, He actually controls the very people who are in those places of authority. HE puts them there! Now think about this for a moment. The Roman Emperor when Paul wrote this was none other than Nero! PBS says, *The Roman emperor Nero is considered one of history's greatest criminals. His name has become synonymous with evil, as historic accounts have accused him of killing his stepbrother, his wife and his mother, as well persecuting Christians and instigating the devastating Great Fire of Rome.* He's the one who, not long after, beheaded Paul and crucified Peter upside down and burned Christians as living torches to light his gardens! And God says, "I put him there; obey him whether he's a good ruler or not!" But how far does this go? Look at **1 Pet. 2:13-15a**. It applies to emperors, gover-

nors, local magistrates, police, to every human authority. Whether we like them or not, whether they're good or not, our attitude is to be one of submission, not rebellion. I can only think of the recent scenes of protesters yelling in the faces of policemen and taunting them, trying to get them to react violently. It reminds me of the Zealots who plotted constantly to overthrow Roman rule and plotted terrorist attacks and we have the same thing going on today. We can't let that attitude grow in us; God says His will is to honor Him by submitting to authorities. And Paul goes on in Titus 3:1 to say:

2. we are to obey their laws and decrees If they decree we have to pay taxes, we pay them. If they declare a curfew, we abide by the curfew. If they tell us we must serve on a jury, we serve. The only exception is where a ruler commands us to do something that God forbids. For instance, soon after this all citizens were commanded to worship the Emperor. Christians refused and for 250 years many of them died because of it. But in all other things we're to obey, whether we like it or not. Now thank God that in America, we get the opportunity for some input into all this. We can run for office, we can vote good people into positions, we can lobby legislators to pass beneficial laws. We can write letters and gather petitions to declare what we don't like. We can even hold peaceful public assemblies to express our concern about things like racial prejudice or abortion and draw attention to these issues. We have freedoms the world never dreamed of throughout history and thank God for them, but the bottom line is that God wants us to obey the laws of our society, as long as they don't go against His commands. Third, Paul says at the end of verse 1 that:

3. we are to be ready to do good works that bless our society Throughout history Christians have been the ones to care for the sick and feed the poor. During the Antonine plague of the second century which might have been the first appearance of smallpox in the west, perhaps a quarter of the population of the Roman Empire died. But Christians were the ones found caring for the sick and Christianity grew. During the Cyprian plague of the third century, which might have been related to ebola, while pagans were casting their own loved ones into the streets to die at the first sign of the disease, Christians, "heedless of danger, took charge of the sick, attending to their every need," according to Dionysius. In the bubonic plague, Martin Luther urged believers to stay and minister to the sick instead of fleeing to safety. I think of the dear doctors and nurses of Samaritan's purse running into the front lines of danger to care for them even today. It is often Christians who go and help those whose lives are ruined by natural disasters like floods and hurricanes. And whether it's buying groceries for the elderly lady across the street who can't go to the store or delivering meals on wheels to the seniors or visiting the lonely in a nursing home, those types of good things are what Christians should always stand ready to do for their society in the Name of Jesus. Now, in verse 2 this fourth thing we're told to do really hits home:

4. we are to malign or slander no one Literally, NO ONE. And that sits hard with us Americans. If we don't like our neighbor, we tell how bad they are on social media. If our church does something we don't like, we post negative things on Facebook and get a hundred people to agree with us and comment back negatively. Of course, this speaks to the attitude of racial prejudice that is the focus of the events of the last couple weeks in our country; we should speak no evil of people just because they're black - or white or of some other race! But just wait until I mention that, given the context of this passage, this applies to our governmental leaders too! Bashing senators and congressmen and presidents and governors and other officials is the order of the day! If we don't like their personality, if we don't like their policies, we Christians are as outspoken in maligning and slandering and calling them names as the rest of the world whether in person or on the internet. Well, let me share with you a little-known verse. In **Ex. 22:28** God gives Moses this law up on Mt. Sinai: "*You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.*" And before you say, "Well, that was for Israel under the law", let me show you how Paul regarded it. He was on trial before the Sanhedrin in **Acts 23** when the High Priest commanded those who stood near him to smack him in the mouth and he responded with name calling, *God is going to strike you, you white-washed wall!*" But others said, "*Would you revile God's High Priest?*" And listen to how Paul responded in verse 5, ... "*I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'*" He apologized immediately! He recognized that he had spoken evil of a ruler and displeased God and he humbly repented, even though this man was evil and breaking the law by having him struck at that moment! No matter how we feel about them, God doesn't want us slandering those in authority over us whether it's calling the police pigs or using curse words toward officials. We're to speak evil of NO ONE! You know, one of the nicest compliments I've ever heard at funerals is, "He never said an unkind word about anybody!" That's what we're striving for. Next, Paul says we are to *avoid quarreling*; that means:

5. we are to avoid both verbal strife and physical violence We're literally to *be no fighters*, whether with our fists or our mouths. I doubt that many of us are looking to get involved in a physical altercation, but you know how some people are always looking for an argument and they let that argument turn into an all-out verbal war that severs relationships. Sadly, that can happen with believers and we've seen it happen among us several times over the years. But that argumentative, angry, quarreling attitude is not to be found among us. It's not that we're just to avoid it; it's not to be part of our character, of who we are. But instead, Paul says:

6. we are to be gentle and considerate of others The Greek word has the thought of moderation, forbearance or patience toward other people. Oh, if we would only learn to treat one another with gentleness and consideration in our community, how that would please God! And the last phrase of verse 2 actually begins with a participle, *showing or demonstrating perfect courtesy toward all people* in the ESV. The NAS says, *showing every consideration...* So this phrase is a further exposition, a spelling out of what he means by being *gentle*. He's saying:

7. we are to demonstrate perfect meekness toward everyone The Greek word is a synonym for gentleness, mildness, and meekness and Paul makes a point to say we're to show "every kind of meekness to every person". So, it applies in every situation, in every realm of life, and with every person we interact with. We might put it like this: our entire life is to be characterized by genuine humility toward others in the world around us.

Most of you would recognize the name of Chuck Norris. He's a TV and movie actor and martial arts expert and an outspoken Christian. *One day when he was filming his television series in Texas, after work he stopped to have something to drink. He was alone and as he was relaxing in a corner booth, a big man walked up and said in an irritated tone that Norris was sitting in HIS booth. Norris says, "I didn't like his tone or his implicit threat, but I said nothing and moved to another booth. A few minutes later, though, the big fellow headed back in my direction. 'Here it comes,' I thought, ...[but] when he arrived at my new booth, he looked directly at me. 'You're Chuck Norris,' he said. I nodded. 'You could have whipped my butt back there a few minutes ago,' he said. 'Why didn't you?' 'What would it*

have proved?' I asked. He thought that over for a moment and then offered me his hand. 'No hard feelings?' he said. 'None,' I said and shook his hand. I had avoided a confrontation and made a friend. I won by losing." [Reader's Digest, Mar 1996. Page 37.] Gentleness, meekness, if we would all practice it daily in every situation with everyone, what a change it would make in our society and how many would be drawn toward our Savior! Well, Paul goes on to explain:

II. Why We Should Act In A Godly Fashion In Society in verses (3-7) Look at verse (3). He says:

1. before salvation we used to act the way that people in our society act We used to be like that other guy, like that tough guy, like that self-centered woman, like that demanding boss who doesn't care, like that disrespectful kid, like that lewd man. We were *them!* We walked in their shoes and behaved the ways that they do and:

a. it was the exact opposite of the behavior God expects Of course, everyone's life story is different, and I wasn't the town bully, but even as a young teen before I was saved. I walked in those shoes. I stole, I lied to protect myself, I cursed and I lusted - not all the time, but all on purpose, because I wanted to. I lived a self-centered life that was exactly opposite of the values that God has. But Paul's point is that:

b. we must now act differently in order to impact people Listen to **1 Pet. 4:3-4 NLT**, *You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy—their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols. Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you.* We spent enough time doing all that stuff, acting like they do. It was all wasted time. Now we need to surprise them, shock them, impact them, by acting and reacting differently than they do or than we used to. If we act in the same way toward others around us, they don't see a difference!

Now look at verses (4-7). Paul says:

2. Jesus saved us from that ungodly way of life! He rescued us from it! Why? Paul says:

a. He saved us out of His own goodness, mercy and love for mankind I wouldn't have saved me! I wasn't worth it! I didn't deserve it! I wouldn't have reached down into the life of a teenage boy who lived that way in a small country town who would never amount to anything and arrange his life so that he would meet Jesus and be changed! He did it simply because He loves human beings and has mercy on them because He is a good God and doesn't want people to perish.

b. He did not save us because of anything good we had done, not even the best of us who were raised in the best of homes and taught to do the best of things and who were pretty decent at it. The Scripture says, *There is NONE righteous, NO, not one!* None of us were worth saving, worth Jesus coming and dying for us, worth Him sacrificing Himself to take us to heaven with Him! Yet He did it:

c. He saved us through regenerating our hearts and giving us His Spirit When I became convicted of my sinfulness and my lostness and confessed my sins and placed my trust in Jesus, I was changed into another person. The Spirit of Jesus came into me and I was born all over again; I was transformed. Or to put it another way:

d. He washed away our sins and renewed our very nature The penalty for all my sins, past, present and future was imputed to Him at the cross and I was washed white as snow. The guilt of all my sins was completely and permanently pardoned and the Spirit of God killed my old sinful nature and, in its place, created a brand new one made just like that of Jesus Christ, pure and holy and righteous. Or as we like to sing, "The Resurrected King has resurrected ME!" Hallelujah! But there's more:

e. through Jesus He made us heirs of an eternal life with Him By giving me the life of Christ in my body, He gave me a guaranteed future, a life that is eternal, everlasting, that is not cancelled by death and one that propels me into a glorious new existence that I will spend together with Him in His Kingdom forever!

Oh, what amazing things God has done for this wicked young boy and for all of us! And in verse 8 Paul gets back to making His point:

III. The Importance Of Our Godly Behavior In Society (8) After all God has done for us, we can't live lives like we used to; we have to devote ourselves to good works, to living the kind of devoted, godly life that God commands. We have to insist on that in the church for two reasons. First:

1. this kind of behavior is excellent and beautiful It is the right way to live, the way God intended mankind to live and it is lovely to see lived out in society. And second:

2. this kind of behavior is beneficial to ourselves and others Though we don't do it for this reason, living right brings blessings on ourselves. The Bible says, *the way of transgressors is hard!* Examples of the fact that living wrongly brings all kinds of needless suffering upon ourselves are everywhere. On the other hand, living the right way, God's way, ends up bringing blessing upon us in a myriad of ways that would have been lost otherwise. But more importantly it is beneficial to others. No one yet was ever saved, was ever rescued from a path that leads to hell and into a transformed life, by a Christian living an ungodly life in front of them.

We have a responsibility to the society and culture in which God has placed us to live submissive, obedient, gentle, considerate lives filled with good works and that can't just be some religious jargon we spout. It has to be real in us and we each need to examine ourselves on every one of these points. Many of us were thrilled as we watched the successful launch of SpaceX's manned Falcon 9 rocket a few days ago. Everything went perfectly. However, one day in early 1967 NASA technicians and a crew of three astronauts at Cape Kennedy were conducting a ground test of the Apollo 1, the spacecraft that would hopefully put the first man on the moon. At 6:31 p.m. the technicians in the control room heard one of the astronauts shout over the radio, "We've got a fire in the cockpit!" On the television monitor they saw the white flash of an explosion inside the command module, and then smoke and darkness. They heard a scream and then silence. By the time the technicians were able to open the three hatches and get to the crewmen, Gus Grissom, Ed White, and Roger Chaffee had burned to death. It turns out that even though NASA had instituted a "zero- defects" policy that applied to all contractors and subcontractors on the Apollo 1 project, an investigation after the fire revealed that, not only had every company fallen short

of that standard, but each company had also made design decisions that made a dangerous situation deadly. It was found that the spacecraft actually had over 100 "open items." An open item was a component that could not stand up to the heat, pressure, speed, or vibration that it would be subjected to during space flight or reentry. It had been decided not to reproduce an earth atmosphere inside the cabin but to use pure oxygen. The danger of fire was high since there were many types of combustible materials in the cabin. In the case of fire, the plan was to vent all of the oxygen out into space in order to smother the fire in a vacuum. Meanwhile the astronauts would breathe oxygen from their own spacesuits. What everyone overlooked was the fact that while the Apollo 1 was sitting on the launch pad there was no outer-space vacuum into which to vent the oxygen. So when there was an electrical short circuit, sparks ignited some nylon material. Flames spread quickly and three men died. [Vista, Apr 1993. Pages 4-5] I wonder if we looked honestly at the details of our lives, would we find a bunch of "open items", flaws large or little, like the ones Paul points out to Titus? If so, it could well prove fatal, not to us, but to the very ones we say that we want so much to help and to bring to Jesus who are all around us.

Philemon - A Beautiful Story Of Restoration OUTLINE

- 1-3 *The Greeting Of Paul*
- 4-7 *The Character Of Philemon*
- 8-21 *The Change In Onesimus*
- 22-25 *The Conclusion*

The New Testament book of Philemon is a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote during his first imprisonment at Rome to a friend named Philemon who lived in the city of Colossae. He wrote concerning Onesimus who had been a slave of Philemon's and had evidently run away to Rome where he somehow met Paul and came to faith in Christ. Paul disciplined him and was now sending him home to Philemon with this letter. Paul was interceding for Onesimus as a new man in Christ and urging Philemon to forgive and receive him back, now as a brother. It is only a brief letter, but there is much that we can learn for ourselves from it.

I. The Relationship Between Christians (1-3) Even in a simple greeting like this, we can learn much about the relationships that we have with one another as believers in Christ. First, we are:

- 1. brethren** We are members of the same family with God as our Father. We share a common spiritual ancestry, a common spiritual life, a common heavenly home and a common future inheritance. We are also:
- 2. beloved** The Greek word is *agape*. We have a love for one another that is greater than that of an earthly brother or sister. It is a sacrificial, God-given love, a pure unselfish love. We are also:
- 3. fellow workers** We have different talents, but all have the same purpose and occupation which is to serve God and work together to advance His Kingdom. At the same time, we are:
- 4. fellow soldiers** We're in the same army, the Lord's army, fighting the same spiritual battle together against our common enemy, the devil and his forces. And lastly, we are:
- 5. fellow worshippers** We are the church, the *ecclesia* in Greek, a called-out assembly, a chosen separated group different from the rest of the world in that we belong to Christ and we worship Him alone. Now skip a verse and we can see:

II. The Character Of A Growing Christian (5) Paul here tells what he has heard from others regarding his friend Philemon, good things that should be true of all of us:

- 1. he displays love for the saints**, and for ALL the saints, not just a select group of friends. This implies understanding and patience with those who may have some differences, as well as having a heart that is touched by the plight of other believers who are in need of help, believers he may not even know personally. But most importantly, this love is not just an emotion; he is moved to do ACTS of love, to do something do display his love in practical ways.
- 2. he displays faith in Christ** It is not just that he believes correct doctrine, but that he exhibits his faith in his personal life. He trusts Christ for his needs, obeys His commands, gives as He leads, shares his faith with others, prays consistently and so on.
- 3. he refreshes the hearts of the saints (6-7)** By his loving, obedient behavior he becomes a source of joy and encouragement to other believers. As he interacts with them and shares with them, they see all the good things of Christ displayed in him. He is becoming more and more Christlike and they are discovering more and more the things of Christ in him. And then, note here some things concerning Paul himself about:

III. The Prayer Life Of A Growing Christian (4) It is marked by two things:

- 1. thanksgiving** When Paul thought of Philemon and remembered his love and faith, he ALWAYS gave thanks, every time. It was not some formality, but a continual process. Paul was always thankful, as we should be.
- 2. intercession** What Paul prays for Philemon is in (6). He prayed for Philemon's spiritual growth, that he would be effective in sharing and that what was displayed in his life would be more and more Christ-like.

The prayer life of a growing Christian becomes more and more wrapped up in thanksgiving and intercession for others and less and less concerned with personal needs. Compare verse 22; he left it up to others to pray him out of prison! But now Paul gets down to the subject that he is actually writing about and as we consider how he does it, we see:

IV. The Approach Of A Wise Christian Paul's intent is to ask Philemon to receive his runaway slave, Onesimus, back and it is instructive to us to note how he approaches this brother who has been a close friend.

1. he did not command Philemon what to do (8) Paul indicates that he could have, that he had the right to. Why?

a. he had the authority of Christ as an apostle and not only that:

b. he had the authority of principle What he was telling Philemon to do was the proper course of action for a believer; it was the biblical way to act.

So, he could have said, "Philemon, as an apostle I command you to receive Onesimus" or "Philemon, the teachings of Christ tell you that you have to receive Onesimus." This is the way that many of us choose to approach others, in a direct and straight forward manner demanding obedience. We either use whatever authority we have in the relationship to force it or give the person a lecture on what the Bible says about what they should do. But Paul didn't. Instead:

2. he appealed to him as a beloved friend (9) It is interesting that the word *appeal* in the Greek is *parakaleo*, a term used of the Holy Spirit that means *one called alongside to help*. Paul says, "I'm not writing you as a boss, but as a loving brother who wants to come alongside you and help you know what to do when Onesimus comes home. I'm just an old man, and now a Roman prisoner, not some official with authority. But at the same time, elders are wise and one who is in prison for Christ is certainly worth listening to. I'm not much, but what little I can do, I really want to help you in this matter." Oh, if more of us believers would learn to use this kind of grace, to come to others saying, "Can I help you?" instead of, "Let me tell you how it is." Love wins over authority every time! And that applies to pastors dealing with their flocks, to parents dealing with their children, even bosses dealing with their workers. But now Paul goes on to tell Philemon what he has not yet heard, the news about the change in Onesimus' life. And in that we can learn about:

V. The Change In A Genuine Christian (10-14) Paul is not simply advocating some general principle like, "Be kind to runaway slaves." He is writing to commend Onesimus on the basis that he is now a transformed person. Paul has won him to Christ while in prison. What joy that must have been for Paul, to have won a convert while chained at the wrist to a Roman guard! But he describes the change in Onesimus, saying:

1. he used to be unprofitable Onesimus was not a trusted, beloved slave; He was evidently a useless, good-for-nothing one. There is a play on words here in the Greek. The name Onesimus means *profitable*, but he wasn't! Yet:

2. now he was profitable and he proved it by being useful to Paul in prison. How odd that a slave would have to be saved in order to learn to be a good servant! It is only as a result of our salvation that we can truly be servants like Christ! The point is that servanthood is not a matter of social position, but of the heart. God saves us to serve, to be useful to Him and to others. So:

3. Paul was sending back a different man and he was concerned that Philemon recognize that right off the bat. We all have a hard time with that. If a person comes out of a bad background with a sordid past, it is hard for us to believe that he is now saved and is actually different; we're reluctant to trust him. Paul is exhorting Philemon to step out in faith and trust that Onesimus is different and that he has proved himself so. And note how Paul is also concerned that he himself display:

VI. The Action Of An Honest Christian in this matter:

1. he kept the letter of the law He sent Onesimus back to Philemon and Onesimus went back voluntarily. Both recognized that Onesimus had a legal obligation; he belonged to Philemon. Becoming a Christian does not place a person above their obligations, even what we may see as the unjust obligation of being owned as a slave. What a testimony that Onesimus returned himself to Philemon; it's like a thief returning what he stole to the owner to show he is different. We need to see more of this type of honesty. And notice:

2. he did it against his own preference Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus with him. He needed companionship and also practical help because he was confined, but that would have infringed on Philemon's right as his owner and Paul refused to do it. Sometimes our obligations go against our preferences or strong desires, but, like Paul and Onesimus, we must keep them anyway! But now Paul describes the new relationship between Philemon and Onesimus and we see:

VII. The Relationship Of A Fellow Christian Paul sends Onesimus back as a slave, but more than that. He says:

1. God used his running away to the benefit of all Onesimus intended it for an evil purpose, to hurt his master and free himself illegitimately, but in the process, he got saved. Now he comes back to be a true servant at heart who has been profitable to Paul and will be to Philemon. And most importantly, he himself got eternal life! So often God works like this. An unsaved person may do many things contrary to God. He may try to commit suicide and be rescued; he may steal and be caught, or whatever. But God may use those very things to bring that person to Christ and to make them to be a benefit to others and a blessing to society! And in doing this:

2. God changed the relationship of the two men Onesimus ran away a slave, but came back a brother, and a beloved one in Christ. As a believer Philemon had loved Onesimus before, but how much more he would love him now! It changed their relationship. They may still have been master and slave, but they were now equal brethren before the Lord. They may have kept on functioning in the same day to day roles, but there is now definitely a new relationship. The love of a brother brings the ultimate end of slavery. People always ask why the Bible doesn't condemn slavery outright. Actually it does, but in the first place, slavery in Bible times was nothing like American black slavery and second, both parties coming to faith would kill it anyway. A loving master would treat his servant like a hired workman, as an equal before the Lord, and if he really wanted to leave, a loving master would send him on with his blessing! You see:

3. God made them partners As much as Philemon and Paul were partners in the Gospel, so now Philemon and Onesimus were no longer merely master and servant in earthly tasks, but partners in a heavenly task. Compare Gal. 3:28. In Christ all the distinctions drop away. Jew or Gentile becomes just your ethnic history, not a wall that separates you. Master or slave are jobs you do, but you are one in Christ. We are not men and women, but true partners; we are one in Christ. The Gospel is the great equalizer! Be careful to look at others that way! So now Paul really bares his heart and we can see:

VIII. The Commitment Of A Caring Christian (17-19) First, notice what Paul is offering to do here. It is implied in verse 18 that Onesimus stole from his master. Paul, without even knowing how much, is committing himself to be responsible to repay Onesimus' debt to Philemon. The purpose of verse 19 is to make it a legal, certified document, one that is personally signed in his own hand. But look at Paul's caring. He doesn't just say, "Go home, Onesimus, and God be with you!" or "Go home and I'll send a letter of recommendation." Paul undertook legal and financial responsibility. I wonder if I'd do that. Do we see our brother's troubles as being his own problem or are we willing to get involved, financially if need be?

1. this action pictures imputation for us The word *impute* means to attribute to another. That is, to charge to another's account, which is what Christ did for us. Compare 2 Cor. 5:21. He did it in two ways:

a. positively Paul says, "Receive him as you would me." That is, "Reckon to him my merit." So, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us; we are received by the Father as Christ Himself.

b. negatively Paul says, "If he owes you anything, put it on my account." So, our sin is imputed to Jesus and He was made sin for us. He took our penalty so that we were freed from it. But that's not all:

2. this action pictures grace for us Paul committed himself to pay what Onesimus could not pay. And Christ did for us what we could not do for ourselves; we had nothing to pay, just like Onesimus! That's grace!

3. this action reminds us of spiritual debt Paul gently reminds Philemon that he had led him to Christ and that was worth far more than any stolen money. Oh, what a debt we owe, not only to the Lord for saving us, but to the one(s) who shared their faith with us and led us to Christ! And now finally as he closes, Paul shows us:

IX. The Trust Of An Experienced Christian (20-21) Paul wrote expecting that Philemon would pay heed to his request and carry it out. This is not a wishful, uncertain letter, but a confident letter. Paul KNEW Philemon (verses 5 and 7); he was always doing the godly thing, abounding in love, refreshing the hearts of the saints by his deeds. Therefore, Paul was confident that he would do even more than what Paul asked, maybe even freeing Onesimus. That is how we have to trust one another. So often we worry over how a brother is going to handle something, whether he or she will or won't react rightly. A solid Christian will have proved themselves trustworthy in the past, so now in the present we have to trust them! The same Holy Spirit who indwells and empowers you, indwells and empowers them. Trust Him to be at work!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises In Christ The Privilege Of The Son - 1:1-4

The Book of Hebrews is usually regarded as full of “deep things that are difficult to understand”, and so we often tend to leave it for the scholars and theologians, except to quote some favorite verses. I guess it’s because we live in an age which values things on the basis that they are “simple, practical and easy to use” and we like information served up to us that way too. But God knows there is something intensely valuable that we gain by grappling and wrestling with truths that are profound and difficult and deep and beyond us. We have a Gospel that is simple enough for a child to receive it and yet deep enough that only the mind of God can comprehend its fullness. We enter our salvation with the mind of a child, but we will only appreciate the salvation we’ve received as we ponder the deeper things God has chosen to reveal in His Word. And the message of Hebrews is as simple as it is deep. A. B. Simpson wrote a hymn whose chorus summed it up like this: *All in all forever, Jesus will I sing; Ev’rything in Jesus, And Jesus ev’ry thing.* Or to put it another way, in Jesus you have everything, so why are you clinging to all that other stuff? He’s better than the prophets; He’s better than the angels; He’s better than Moses and the law and all the priests and all the sacrifices of the Old Testament and the Tabernacle. When you have Him, you have everything. All the privileges and the promises of God are wrapped in the package of the person of His Son and given to you in Him. To receive it is simple; to comprehend it takes struggling and grappling and pondering and meditating upon the Word *and* the illumination of the Spirit of God who alone guides us into all truth. It’s a life-long process, but if we don’t enter into it, we miss so much of what God has given us. The writer begins by talking about:

I. How God Revealed Himself In Past Eras (1) God has always been in the business of revealing Himself, of showing Himself to man, of speaking, to use the author’s term. And you’ve had the awesome opportunity through all your years of Sunday School and Bible Study and personal reading to know all the wonderful stories from the Old Testament. But when you think back over it all from Adam to Malachi, you notice a couple things:

1. He spoke with what appears to us as randomness One source used the word *fragmented* to describe it.

a. His Word came at various times to different people We tend to blur it all together and feel that there was always a prophet around, but in reality, prophets who heard from God were rather rare. **1 Sam. 3:1** says, *The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.* In point of fact, it had been years, maybe generations, since the Lord had spoken to anyone. It was often years apart and it was always to a few rare individuals here and there, now to Moses, then to Samuel, years later to David, later to Elijah and Elisha. It has the appearance of randomness, here and there, now and then, to this one and that, not complete and full. And:

b. His Word came by a variety of methods Sometimes a message was delivered by an angel or by the pre-incarnate Christ Himself appearing as a man. Sometimes it was a dream at night or the person would have a vision in broad daylight! He gave laws and demanded sacrifices and a Tabernacle. But all these things were incomplete. There were many pieces and symbols of God’s wonderful person and plan and of the redemption He would provide, but it was impossible to put it all together. And most often in the Old Testament:

2. He spoke in men we call prophets, meaning one who speaks for God. God would speak and reveal Himself to men and He would speak to the whole community through them. How did it work? Peter explained that:

a. they were moved to speak by the Spirit of God - 2 Pet. 1:20-21 They weren’t just inspired in the common sense of being given good ideas. The Spirit of God moved them and carried them along. He gave them the very words that became our Scriptures. They were holy men, men of God, men *of whom the world was not worthy*, Heb. 11 says, yet:

b. even they could not fully comprehend, though they tried diligently Compare **1 Pet. 1:10-12**. They wanted so bad to know more, to understand the whole, to comprehend God’s person and what He was doing, to grasp the redemption He was going to bring. But they had to be content in not understanding the fragmented revelation they were given, simply trusting that it was given for those who would come later who could put the whole picture together.

Now understand, God knew what He was doing through all those years and it was deliberate. The Old Testament is neither flawed nor inferior. It was God’s word for that time and it was all God’s wise preparation to set the stage and prepare human understanding for what He was about to do; it was getting ready for:

II. How God Has Revealed Himself In This Final Era (2-3) You see, God:

1. He has now spoken once and for all, with absolute finality. He has now revealed Himself completely and there is nothing to add to it. And how did He do it?

2. He has now spoken (literally) in a Son Instead of visions and dreams and words at many times and places, He spoke not *through* a person, but **IN** a person. Look with me at how John described it in **Jn. 1:1, 14, 18**. Even the people who “saw God” never really, fully “saw God”. It’s impossible for us to comprehend the infinite God or even to look upon Him with human eyes, so the infinite, eternal God revealed Himself in a form we could behold. He became what we are. His One and Only Son took human flesh and lived among us so we could truly see the glory of God in Him! And isn’t that what Heb. 1:3 says?

a. the Son is (literally) the “shining forth” of God’s glory in visible flesh You can’t behold the glory of God in all its fullness, so God put His glory in a form you can behold, in the person of His Son. And:

b. He is the express image of God’s substance Everything that God is, the Son is. Jesus told Philip in no uncertain terms in **Jn. 14:9**, ...*“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? When you see Jesus, you see the Father. When you know Jesus, you know the Father. When you receive Jesus, you receive all the fullness of the Godhead in Him, because in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily! And His whole plan from eternity has been to send His Son, to save us through His Son, to exalt His Son, and at last to have all nations worship His Son. Everything God ever wanted to say or do is IN HIS SON! All of His plans and purposes are IN HIS SON! All His character and wisdom and power and majesty and everything He is, is IN HIS SON! And you know His Son!*

3. What a privilege it is to know the Son! Look at what Jesus said in **Lk. 10:21-24**. How blessed we are and most of the time we don’t know it! We complain and we moan and say, “Oh, I wish God would do miracles today like He did for Elijah; I wish He would speak today like He did to Moses; I wish I could see His glory like Israel did...” But those folks longed for what you have! You know the Son! You’ve read His Words, you’ve understood His death and resurrection and you’ve received His person into your own! And in knowing Him, you have been given everything! Once for all forever! If you will only take the time to stop and ponder and comprehend it! Now let’s go back to Heb. 1:2 where the writer talks about:

III. The Son’s Relationship To All Other Things First of all:

1. God appointed Him as heir of all things. And *heir* doesn’t mean somebody who gets something after a person dies. He is appointed as sole heir. It means **He is the Owner!** And what He owns is ALL things! It’s all His. He owns and controls it all! The cattle on a thousand hills and the wealth in every mine. All things in heaven above and earth beneath. People, institutions, circumstances, objects, time itself. He is the owner of all things and in Him you have been appointed, guess what? Joint heir, co-heir, co-owner, co-ruler! Eternity will be spent administering it all with Him! Paul told the Corinthians, ...*All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.* – **1 Cor. 3:21-23**. Ponder that for a minute when you’re thinking that you’re a nothing and a nobody and you’ve got nothing and you never will have! In Jesus, you’ve got it all! And He’s the Owner because:

2. through Him He made (literally) the “ages” Jesus made it all. *All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made!* **He is the Creator!** And it’s not just talking about the original physical creation. He made the ages, eons, the eras of time, all the things that have been made from moment one until now. All the pages of history were written by Him. All the kings and rulers and countries and inventions and technologies and all the things that ever have been or will be. In fact, the writer says:

3. He carries all things along by His powerful Word, so He is the Sustainer! He literally carries them along, causes them to continue to be and to function. All the processes of the universe, from the flying atoms to the flowing rivers. They all move along to serve His purpose in His plan. All the things He’s created are moving along under His direction toward the goal, toward the consummation of human history when Jesus reigns in all His glory over all the earth and on beyond that forever in a new heaven and a new earth!

That’s who God is and that’s who the Son is, Ruler, Creator, and Sustainer of all things. Ponder that when you get discouraged and think that evil’s winning and there’s no justice anywhere and the world will never be anything but a miserable place full of war and sickness and suffering. He made it all and He’s always been at work in every molecule driving it all onward toward the grand finale when all creation will join to sing our great Redeemer’s praise! And you know Him! You’re in Him and He’s in you! And in Him those “all things” are yours and you will reign with Him forever and ever! Hey, jump up and down and shout hallelujah or do something! And now think about this:

IV. It Is This Son Who Has Provided Our Salvation Look at verse 3. Our salvation didn’t come by Moses or some prophet. It wasn’t done by sacrificing some animal. It wasn’t a cumulative effort of our trying hard for years. It was provided by the SON! Literally, it says:

1. He himself provided complete cleansing of sins It was a one time act, a once-for-all, complete, never-to-be-repeated or needed again, act. He went to a cross and took our sins upon Him and rose from the dead and gave His life to us. DONE! And sometimes we wonder if we can be forgiven, if we have been forgiven. We smear ourselves with

guilt that's already been paid for. Why? **He is our Redeemer!** If the Son sets you free, you're free indeed. He himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree that we might be made the righteousness of GOD in HIM. We're made so clean that we've been given the very righteousness of God Himself. But that's not all. The writer says:

2. having finished He sat down at God's right hand He ascended to heaven and He's not standing there. He sat down on the throne next to the Father. It is finished once and for all, and having no more to do to finish our redemption, He has taken His rightful, exalted, majestic place. **He is our King!** And one day at the very Name of King Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and even under the earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! Our God reigns and His Name is Jesus! The old hymn says:

*O worship the King all glorious above
and gratefully sing His power and His love
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise!*

It is the Almighty Eternal Son who has become our Redeemer and King. Nobody but Him could provide such a wonderful all-in-all salvation and hold it sure! What a privilege it is to have the One and Only, the Son, to reveal to us all the deep things of God. Let me share an illustration that may help you to visualize what I'm trying to say: Years ago, there was a very wealthy man who, with his devoted young son, shared a passion for art collecting. Together they traveled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection. Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet and many others adorned the walls of the family estate. The widowed, elderly man looked on with satisfaction, as his only child became an experienced art collector. The son's trained eye and sharp business mind caused his father to beam with pride as they dealt with art collectors around the world. As winter approached, war engulfed the nation, and the young man left to serve his country. After only a few short weeks, his father received a telegram. His beloved son was missing in action. The art collector anxiously awaited more news, fearing he would never see his son again. Within days, his fears were confirmed. The young man had died while rushing a fellow soldier to a medic. Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas holidays with anguish and sadness. The joy of the season, a season that he and his son had so looked forward to, would visit his house no longer. On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man. As he walked to the door, the masterpieces of art on the walls only reminded him that his son was not coming home. As he opened the door, he was greeted by a soldier with a large package in his hand. He introduced himself to the man by saying, "I was a friend of your son. I was the one he was rescuing when he died. May I come in for a few moments? I have something to show you." As the two began to talk, the soldier told of how the man's son had told everyone of his, not to mention his father's, love of fine art. "I'm an artist," said the soldier, "and I want to give you this." As the old man unwrapped the package, the paper gave way to reveal a portrait of the man's son. Though the world would never consider it the work of a genius, the painting featured the young man's face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the man thanked the soldier, promising to hang the picture above the fireplace. A few hours later, after the soldier had departed, the old man set about his task. True to his word, the painting went above the fireplace, pushing aside thousands of dollars of paintings. And then the man sat in his chair and spent Christmas gazing at the gift he had been given. During the days and weeks that followed, the man realized that even though his son was no longer with him, the boy's life would live on because of those he had touched. He would soon learn that his son had rescued dozens of wounded soldiers before a bullet stilled his caring heart. As the stories of his son's gallantry continued to reach him, fatherly pride and satisfaction began to ease the grief. The painting of his son soon became his most prized possession, far eclipsing any interest in the pieces for which museums around the world clamored. He told his neighbors it was the greatest gift he had ever received. The following spring, the old man became ill and passed away. The art world was in anticipation! Unmindful of the story of the man's only son, but in his honor, those paintings would be sold at an auction. According to the will of the old man, all of the art works would be auctioned on Christmas day, the day he had received his greatest gift. The day soon arrived and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. Dreams would be fulfilled this day; greatness would be achieved as many would claim "I have the greatest collection." The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list. It was the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid. The room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked. Minutes passed. No one spoke. From the back of the room came, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son. Let's forget it and go on to the good stuff." More voices echoed in agreement. "No, we have to sell this one first," replied the auctioneer. "Now, who will take the son?" Finally, a friend of the old man spoke. "Will you take ten dollars for the painting? That's all I have. I knew the boy, so I'd like to have it." "I have ten dollars. Will anyone go higher?" called the auctioneer. After more silence, the auctioneer said, "Going once, going twice. Gone." The gavel fell. Cheers filled the room and someone exclaimed, "Now we can get on with it and we can bid on these treasures!" The auctioneer looked at the audience and announced the auction was over. Stunned disbelief quieted the room. Someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean it's over? We didn't come here for a picture of some old guy's son. What about all of these paintings? There are millions of dollars of art here! I demand that you explain what's going on here!" The auctioneer replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son gets it all." Can you see it? Our Father's greatest love is for His Son. Together they created all the vast treasures of the universe. All the glory of the Father is in the Son and shines out from Him. That Son came to earth and rescued us from our sins. And the Father has appointed the Son the heir of all He has. Human beings clamor to

get all the Father's treasures in any way they can. But God has willed that it only works one way: He who takes the Son gets it all. If you have Him, you have everything. Ponder it!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of Angels - 1:4-2:4

Angels. Just the mention of the word evokes fascination for human beings and their imagination takes over. Artists have painted them throughout the ages as everything from huge fearsome beings to little children with wings. Popular folklore says that when you die you become an angel and get wings, a halo and a harp. Just watch the cartoons!

I. The Popular Elevation Of Angels The love of angels goes way back. The Bible tells us that there was:

1. angel worship in the ancient world - Col. 2:18 *Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.* Evidently there were those in Colossae who had seen visions involving angels and became involved in the worship of angels. It is said that Michael, the archangel, was the protector of the city. The Gnostics (the New Agers of Paul's day) had evolved beliefs about whole hosts of spirit beings, emanations of God, eons, angel-like beings, not God and yet not man. There were orders and ranks of heavenly beings that they worshipped. And out of the pagan background, angel worship crept into the church. It was condemned without explanation at the Synod of Laodicea in 343. Yet along with the veneration of saints and of relics, the veneration of angels has actually become part of the heritage of the Roman Catholic church, particularly of the brand of superficial surface veneer that Catholicism has become in many of the Latin American countries. Yet it is not only poor and uneducated people who are awed by angels. Modern day intellectuals hold the same fascination.

2. the fascination with angels in today's world Have you ever noticed how popular TV shows about angels are. Recently there was "Teen Angel," a not-well-done comedy about a boy who dies and becomes his best friend's guardian angel. "Highway To Heaven" featured Michael Landon as an angel teamed up with a human who went about doing good. One of the most popular shows was "Touched By An Angel" which shows a great deal of reverence for God and says a lot of good things about His love and teaches some great life lessons. But do notice that the name of Jesus never shows up once and the angels are more like glorified human beings than heavenly messengers. The point is that we are fascinated to think that angels enter our lives. The New Age movement has embraced angels wholeheartedly. Angel symbols and paintings and figurines are everywhere. There are whole books out there to encourage you and explain to you how to contact your personal angel (who's probably a demon, biblically speaking) and invite him into your life to be with you throughout your life. You put yourself into a trance-like state of mind and have your own little seance of sorts with the spirit world. Somehow, we'd rather deal with angels that we would with Jesus Christ. And I rather suspect that what's going on today is not too much different from the kind of popular practices that moved the writer of Hebrews to give a whole chapter to talking about:

II. Jesus And The Angels The ancient thought of spiritual hierarchy still plagues us today. We tend to think God→Jesus→angels→humans. Sometimes, because angels seem more like God (spirit beings you can't see), and Jesus seems more like us because He had a human body, people get it reversed, God→angels→Jesus→humans. Now, which of those two is right? Neither! This chapter teaches us three things about Jesus which we must always keep in mind:

1. He is God's SON which means He is **far superior in nature to the angels (4-5)** In this chapter the writer strings together a number of quotations from different parts of the Psalms and elsewhere which he interprets for us as speaking about Jesus. I've put the references down in case you want to look them up. In Ps. 2 God the Father is speaking to His Son and:

a. Jesus is declared Son by the Father to inherit the earth - Ps. 2:7 says "*You are My Son; I am your Father*" and it goes on to say "*Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance.*" It is no accident that twice, at his baptism and on the mount of transfiguration, the voice of the Father spoke loudly from Heaven, "*This is My SON, whom I love; with Him I am well-pleased. Listen to Him!*" No angel was ever called God's son! No angel was ever appointed His heir! But it's more than just a title:

b. Jesus has the actual relationship of Son with the Father - 1 Chr. 17:13 which is quoted in verse 5 is a promise God gave to David that his son would have a father-son relationship with God and, of course, the promise skips on past Solomon to Jesus, David's greater son, because it says he will rule forever. Now, when you are someone's son, it means that you are what they are. If my father is Chinese, then I'm Chinese. This wasn't lost on the Jews. When Jesus called God his Father, they picked up stones to stone him because they knew that made him "equal with God"! If your father is God, then you have the nature of God! Think about it. How can God call us His sons too? Because He puts His nature inside us when we're saved! Despite the fact that there are two verses in Job where angels seem to be referred to generically as "the sons of God", no angel was ever declared to have the nature and the name and the position of the Son of God. He is a unique son, a One-and-Only Son, an Only-Begotten Son, something no angel will ever be. Secondly, the writer tells us:

2. He is God's FIRSTBORN who is **preeminent over all things (6)** The word *firstborn* is a special word. It can simply mean the first child that a person has. But it evolved to mean much more. The firstborn son was said to be the first sign of his father's manhood. He would become the next leader of the family clan. He would inherit a double share of his father's inheritance. There came to be a birthright involved, which seemed to be separate from the actual order of birth because Esau was able to sell his to Jacob! The term *firstborn* came to mean the one who is pre-eminent, above all others. Listen to how God speaks about the Messiah in **Ps. 89:27**, *I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.* And that's how God uses the Word about His Son. He is preeminent, exalted above all others. In the New Testament we read that:

a. Jesus is preeminent before and over the entire creation - Col. 1:15 It doesn't mean He was the first thing created, but rather that He is exalted above every created thing, including the angels. Indeed, He created all things! We read that:

b. Jesus is preeminent in His resurrection from the dead - Col. 1:18 He was the first one to conquer death and rise to newness of life and He stands exalted as the Lord over all who will rise. In that same verse we read that:

c. Jesus is preeminent as Head of the Church - Col. 1:18, He is exalted as Head of the church and **Rom. 8:29** adds that He is the firstborn over many brethren! And so, what's he saying here in verse 6?

d. God will cause the angels to worship Jesus when He again brings Him into the world to His rightful place If you read the context of **Deut. 32:43** (NIV margin) which is quoted here, you'll discover it's about the time when He will come to take vengeance on all His enemies, when He'll set up His kingdom to rule the world. The word *Again* is out of place in our NIV. When He AGAIN will bring His Son into the world as the Firstborn, the Preeminent One, all the angels will fall down and worship Him and all the universe will see it! The angels are not going to establish Jesus' kingdom; Jesus will come and trample His enemies underfoot and they will humbly bow in worship. He's the Firstborn, the Preeminent One. Then the writer says a third thing about Jesus:

3. He is GOD and that makes Him **far superior in nature to any angel** You see:

a. angels have the nature of servants (7) - Ps. 104:4 which is quoted here reverses the order. *He makes winds his angels...* But here we have the real meaning interpreted for us. Angels:

(1) they are sent to deliver the messages of God The name *angel* means *messenger, one who delivers a message*. They don't speak on their own. They go as swift as the wind, but they deliver messages from God. Gabriel was sent to tell Mary she would have a child. That happened over and over again through the Scriptures. They deliver God's word. And:

(2) they are sent to do the work of God They are sent to protect God's people. Elisha faced the whole Syrian army but he looked around and saw what? Horses and chariots of fire, an army of God's angels who stood with him. They appeared to Jesus in the garden and strengthened him. Angels don't do their own work; they don't go about their own business. They are merely servants. They carry out the work of God. But:

b. Jesus is declared to be in very nature God and the writer lists five references from the Psalms that prove it. First:

(1) He is called God by God Himself (8) - Ps. 45:6 If you look there, you'll see that it's a Messianic Psalm about the King who will rule forever, about the Son. God wrote that. And God Himself calls the Son God! He is Deity. And:

(2) He is exalted above all companions as King (9) - Ps. 45:7 Above all His fellows, all those around him. Now who would be around him but angels and maybe redeemed people. He's been anointed as the one and only Ruler of the Universe. But He is also:

(3) He is the Creator of all things (10), quoting **Ps. 102:25**, follows verses 23-24, where the Spirit pictures Christ's suffering on the cross, *In the course of my life, he broke my strength; he cut short my days. So I said: "Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations.* And these next verses are God's reply to His Son, the assurance of the Father to His Only Son. "YOU are the creator of all things. You made them!" And:

(4) He is eternal and immutable (11-12) - Ps. 102:26-27 The Son will never end, never perish. He'll roll up the heavens like a scroll. The whole creation will come to an end, but the Son will never change, never end. He's God! And:

(5) He is enthroned at God's right hand until the day He returns and his enemies are under His feet (13) - Ps. 110:1 No angel sits on that throne. No angel is exalted to sit at the right hand of God. Stephen looked up and saw heaven opened, but he didn't see any angel standing at the right hand of God; He saw Jesus! John

was caught up to heaven and he saw ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angels around the throne, but it was the Lamb who sat on that throne before whom they bowed down. It was Jesus! And it was Jesus who got up off that throne to return to earth in Rev. 19 and to destroy his enemies with the very word from his mouth. The angels only follow to watch.

Oh, Jesus is the Son; Jesus is the Firstborn, the Preeminent One; Jesus is God. The angels are just spirit-beings that Jesus created to serve His purposes, one of which is to give us:

III. Our Special Privilege Of Ministering Angels (14) I don't want to put the angels down. You're going to see a lot of them when you get to heaven. It's not their fault that people worship them; they don't seek it and would never want it. In fact, if you do try to worship a real angel, he'll instantly tell you not to do it, but to worship Jesus. I know, because John was so overawed that he almost did that very thing in Rev. 22:8-9. Check it out! But the privilege we have is this:

1. all the angels are sent by God to minister to us They are ministering spirits, serving spirits, helping spirits which Jesus created and sends to help and to serve us. They're about us, around us, with us. They protect us, strengthen us, aid us, direct us. All unseen. All unknown, yet their ministry goes on all the time. But every now and then it becomes obvious. *Jerry Jenkins tells this story about an incident that happened when he was 10 years old: "I was the youngest and smallest of the Sunday night regular tag players. My size gave me one advantage: I had a knack for being best able to slip through the crowd and out the door. Once I heard that final amen, I would 'walk--don't run' down the back steps, through the foyer, the first to set foot on the sidewalk. And once I was outside, I ran. The game had begun. One particular fall night, our family filled a row near the back. So far so good. And I had maneuvered myself a seat at the end of the pew, closest to the door. At the crack of dismissal, I leapt out into the aisle, down the stairs, and out into a pitch-dark night. "Yes! I made it." No one was even close behind me. By habit I took a hard left along a sidewalk close to the building, and sprinted with all my might toward the parking lot. Just past the edge of the building, where the sidewalk ended--wham! An arm as firm as an oak caught me in the stomach. My hands and feet flew out in front of me, but the arm held me upright until I could stand again. Dazed, with my breath slowly coming back, I looked down at a sight I could hardly believe; I was standing--teetering actually--on the edge of a huge, deep crater. I staggered back. Then I remembered. The parking lot had been excavated that week. I myself had watched the bulldozer dig the foundation for a new sanctuary. I'd played sidewalk supervisor as Dad and other men had slid a truckload of cinder blocks down a wooden ramp and made piles of them in that hole. With rubbery legs I slunk toward the church. By now my friends were out and running, but I was too shaken to join in the play. For a long time, I just stood near the front door, thinking about what might have happened. I would have fallen in, hit those cinder blocks, and been knocked out cold. The night was so dark, no one would have found me until morning. By then it would have been too late. Now my wild imagination took over. I pictured the headlines: "Jenkins Boy Found Dead". But the arm that saved my life? Whose arm was it? Big Walt Burke, my Sunday school teacher? With his bulk, he could certainly have stopped me. And he did sometimes hang around outside and warn us kids to be careful. No, he was just coming out now. Old Mr. Kemple, the church patriarch who looked the part of a Southern gentleman? He was too small and frail to have held me back. I would have run him down. And he was still inside. The truth was I'd been saved by something I couldn't see. By someone I couldn't see."* [All Night, All Day, Angels Watching Over Me, edited by Evelyn Bence. Zondervan, 1996.] Testimonies abound of, for instance, believers being tortured and forced to stand up straight for hours and hours under pain of death and being held up by an unseen set of arms, of individuals showing up to help them they'd never seen before and then vanishing without a trace, almost before their eyes. What a privilege that there are myriads of angels assigned to our care and you know why? Verse 14 says:

2. we are the heirs to Christ's salvation and position The true hierarchy is God and Jesus are one and the same, and we are in Him, so the angels, even though they are greater in power than we are, are really at the bottom of the totem pole! They were created to serve us because we are in Him! They long to look into the things God has revealed to us! So, as wonderful as it is that we are come to an innumerable company of angels, the writer concludes by issuing:

IV. A Warning For Us (2:1-4) Now, please note that this is written to believers, not to unbelievers. Sure, an unbeliever is in eternal danger if he rejects the Gospel and doesn't receive Christ. There won't be any second chance on the other side; there will be no excuses and no escape. It's Jesus or the lake of fire, to be blunt. After the agony of His Son dying for sin and rising again to provide salvation, God isn't letting *anybody* come to Him any other way. That's all true, but that's not what these verses are saying. They are written to us as believers to warn us:

1. we are in a continual danger of drifting away from the truth, of letting it slip away through our fingers because we're fascinated by stories about angels and mysterious things we can't explain. We drift so easily into venerating things other than Jesus, who is everything. A missionary friend of mine who was in Uganda wrote about questions some of the young church leaders had: *One young man asked about "the ministry of anointing". The preacher of another church in Fort Portal has been going around and pouring "blessed water" on people's heads and telling them to receive "the anointing". Another told of a teaching concerning the Mark of the Beast described in the book of Revelation. Should they make sure they don't have the number written anywhere on anything they own?* The American church is not much better. People are always seeking for healings and blessings and anointings to get their own way and are scared about things they don't understand. Whether it's seeking after angels or some other doctrinal teaching,

it's easy for believers, for entire churches to slowly drift away from the simple truth that Jesus is everything. But the warning is that:

2. we will receive certain discipline if we let it slip away from us, if we literally stop caring enough to stick to it. Listen, we're told that the Law was somehow given to Moses through means of angels (Acts 7:53, Gal. 3:19). If the Word that angels delivered was binding and God didn't tolerate any violation of it and disciplined his Old Testament people, how much more is he going to discipline us who have a gospel that was announced by the Lord Jesus Himself and His apostles and confirmed by the Holy Spirit with signs and wonders and miracles that you read of in Acts. You ignore that to your own peril! Not that you'll lose your personal salvation, not that Jesus will ever leave your heart or declare you "not His child", but Jesus says to the church at Ephesus, *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.* – Rev. 2:5. He will discipline us, chasten us, cause us to fail, allow suffering into our lives, whatever it takes to make us realize once again that HE is everything. So, the point is back in verse 1:

3. we must exercise careful diligence to adhere to the Word He has given My friend in Africa had a unique answer to the questions of those young leaders who were so confused about things other than Christ. He says: *At one point I told them, "What if someone told you to put bananas in your ears to receive an anointing? Would you do it? Why not?" The proper answer was thankfully forthcoming: "It is not in the Bible!" We encouraged them to be good Bereans and confirm everything with the Scriptures.* He calls that other stuff "Bananas-in-the-Ears-Theology". That's the writer's point: carefully, diligently adhere to the Word and the Word exalts Jesus. He's everything. All of this other stuff, angels and everything else, is all secondary, way-down the-line stuff, nothing in comparison to Him!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of Relationship - 2:5-13

I want to talk to you this morning about your destiny. That's something we don't think about much. Most of the time we're just concerned with getting through the day and home to bed at night. Often we talk about things we're looking forward to in the near term, like birthdays or vacations. Occasionally we rise to the level of focusing on long term goals and hopes and plans. But very rarely do we fix our eyes on our destiny, the ultimate end or purpose to which we are inevitably appointed and designated ahead of time. Paul Billheimer wrote a book whose title spells it out, "Destined For The Throne." If you will look with me at Heb. 2 this morning, you will quickly see:

I. The Incredible Position For Which We Are Destined (5-9) Look what it says:

1. the world to come, the Millennial Kingdom, which God Himself is going to set up when this age is all done, the Kingdom which Jesus Christ is coming again to set up on earth, where He will rule all nations and they will beat their shields into plowshares and righteousness will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea and the lamb will lie down with the lion, that world to come, that Kingdom **will be subject to us**, to redeemed and glorified human beings, **not to the angels (5)** Now that's awfully hard to envision because of:

a. our seeming insignificance (6) In verses 6-7 the writer is quoting from **Ps. 8**. Let's turn there and read verses **1, 3-5**. When you look at all God has made, when you look up and see the vastness of space, the moon and the stars and the planets, when you stand at the foot of a majestic mountain or a Grand Canyon and contemplate its sheer immensity or when you lie on the beach and watch a body of water so vast that it stretches for 1000 miles and waves so powerful they can't be stopped, and then you look at yourself, you seem so insignificant. What is a human being? What am I? A fly speck on a ball 25,000 miles in diameter hurtling through space. A single drop of water in an ocean that borders three continents? A grain of sand on a beach that stretches for hundreds of miles along the coast? I'm nothing. I'm less than nothing. Compared to all the vastness of the physical creation I'm so insignificant, that I really don't matter. Except to God. Just look at what He's planned:

b. our ultimate exaltation (5) Look at it; flocks, herds, birds, fish, all the works of His hands, are placed under us. But more than that. Heb.2:8 interprets verse 6 and says it twice. **He put everything under our feet**. In fact, God left nothing that is not subject to us! Not one created thing! Not one angel. Not one star or planet. Not one remote corner of the whole earth. We are over all that He has made. Our destiny is the Throne, to reign with Him. John saw it in his vision, ... *The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.* - Rev. 22:3-5. Amen! For those of us that know Christ, that is our destiny. We've been inevitably appointed to it and we'll be there! But sadly, the writer reminds us of what we know all too well:

2. we do not experience the reality of our destiny right now That's the frustration we live with every day. We're kings that have to live like paupers and serfs. We're not reigning; in fact, most of the time we have no control over anything. We can't stop illness; we can't avert accidents; we can't get justice; we can't change people or circumstances and it's just plain frustrating. The writer comments that even though we're destined to rule over angels, right now:

a. we occupy a position in many ways lower than angels In what ways? Well, one is mentioned in **2 Pet. 2:11**. Speaking about certain men it says, *...even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not... do certain things.* Angels are stronger and more powerful. They have abilities that we don't. They have to strengthen and protect us and shield us. They can see what we can't, the spirit world. They battle against forces that would overwhelm us. They can enter into heaven into the presence of God directly, while we're stuck here on earth. In many ways we seem inferior to angels; it seems that we should envy them. But God assures us in verse 7 that:

b. it is only temporary Instead of "a little lower", the NASB and other versions translate the Greek phrase in a time sense, **"for a little while"**. Our abasement, our humiliation, our vale of suffering, is only temporary. We are only made this way for a "little while". And what's "a little while"? It means **our life in this age**. What is that? 10 years, 20 years, 30, 50, 70, 90 years? Compared to forever and ever, it's a blip, the blink of an eye. A thousand years to the Lord are like a day when it is past. *There's a cartoon on our office board of a man interviewing God. He says, "What is a billion years to you?" And God answers, "A mere second!" And he says, "What is a billion dollars to You?" And God answers, "A mere penny". So he asks, "In that case could I please have a mere penny? And God answers, "Just wait a second!"* Seriously, our experience now, feels like eternity. When we're suffering and hurting and dragged down by the events of life, it feels like forever, even though verse 9 says it is only *at present*. And these are the things which make us doubt our destiny. We're told it; we know it; we believe it. But we don't experience it, not yet anyway. That brings us to verse 9, which I love because it starts with one of God's famous "But" statements. "But":

3. what we do know through experience is Jesus, the true Son of Man (9) We've met and experienced Jesus and we are convinced of what happened to Him. Just like us:

a. He was made for a little while lower than the angels For 33 years He laid aside the exercise of His glory and privileges as eternal God to take a human body and become a human being and enter our experience of this present. He knew what we know, the frustration, the injustice, the suffering, the pain, the hunger and thirst. Though they worship Him, angels had to come and strengthen Him. And we know how far it went:

b. He actually endured the suffering of death, as Paul puts it, *He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!* We know it. The King of Glory was brought low; He was laid in the dust; He was hung on a cross as a criminal though He had done no wrong! But:

c. that temporary humility was an act of grace for every one of us That "little while" on earth bought our salvation. That patience and humility and sacrifice saved you and me and millions of others like us forever. It was a gift given freely to us, praise His Name! But in God's plan, it only lasted a little while and:

d. we see Him now crowned with glory and honor "Now in heav'n exalted high, Hallelujah! What a Savior!" *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. - Phil. 2:9-11.* He's sitting there in glory at the right hand of the Father waiting until all things are put under His feet according to 1:13. He's in the glory and one day we will see all things bow to Him. Now what does that have to do with us? Well, consider:

II. The Incredible Relationship Which We Are Given (10-13) You see:

1. God's ultimate goal is to bring many sons to glory (10) Not just to give glory to His Son, but to bring MANY sons and daughters to share in that glory with Him. That's us! He knows that because of sin in the world and in us that we're stuck in this "little while," but He wants to bring us to glory. He wants to put us in that position we were destined for. He wants to put all things under our feet and have us reign with Him forever and ever. But He had a most:

2. God's unlikely method was to make the author of our salvation perfect through suffering That word *author* is filled with meaning. He is the source, the originator, the chief leader, the general at the head of his troops, the triumphant one leading his train of soldiers home in the victory parade. Jesus is the author and the leader in saving all of us and God chose to "make Him perfect" through a "little while" of suffering. How is that? In what sense was the sinless, spotless Son of God made perfect. Look at **5:8-9**. He "learned obedience". He knew what obedience was. The whole universe gave it to Him! But He learned it from our side, the human side, by experience. You women help me out here; it is one thing to know about having a baby, but it is another thing to actually HAVE a baby, right? It is one thing to know what a handicap is or what cancer is; it is another to have it and to feel it! Christ entered into our "little while" experience of suffering and being made low and was made perfect by adding the experience of humanity to His nature as Deity and so was made complete and it was fitting because it qualified Him to save us! And guess what, He uses the same process on us! He makes us perfect through this little while of suffering, but that's another sermon! Now look at:

3. the unbelievable results:

a. we are made holy by being made “of one” with Him (11) We are united to Him, made literally, *of one* with Him, one family, one nature, one in Spirit, one in every way. He is holy and so we become absolutely holy through being united with Him who was made perfect. His holiness, His nature, is ours, imparted to us when He comes to live in us and joins Himself to our spirit. And so:

b. the Son of God has made us His “brothers” (12) - Ps. 22, which begins with the “My God why have you forsaken Me?” of the crucifixion ends in verse 22 with “I will declare your Name to my brothers...” after the resurrection. Jesus calls us His brothers and is not ashamed to do it! We share His relationship as sons of the Father and that makes us brothers of the Son! It makes us heirs to the same privileges as He. It brings us to glory and causes us to share in His reign. And then the writer says:

c. we are given by God to be with Him as His “children” (13) Here he quotes **Is. 8:17-18**, but go there and look at the whole thing. Isaiah is speaking about himself. He was going through a “little while” of suffering. He was trusting God, who seemed to be hiding his face from Israel at the moment and waiting until the “little while” was over. But in that “little while” the Lord had given him three children. Don’t ask me to repeat their names! And he and those children were given as signs and symbols. Of what? Well, for one thing, Hebrews tells us, of Jesus. Jesus trusted the Father and patiently endured that time of suffering so that He could stand at the end and say, “Here am I and the CHILDREN God has given me!” Through it all, God gave us to Him as His children, of one blood, of one nature, one with Him in every way.

I know this is complicated, so let me try to sum up the point. Why does all this matter? The point of it all is:

III. The Incredible Assurance We Have Through Him as we go through this life. First of all:

1. our relationship with Him guarantees our future How many of your sons have you disowned? How many of your children have you abandoned to the streets? How many of your children have you forgotten about? Not one, I bet. Our unity with Jesus Christ guarantees our destiny. God told us we have a destiny to reign with Him and our relationship with Jesus guarantees that we’ll receive it because He’s already there. Circumstances tell you that you’re lower than the low, that you’re a pauper and a slave, that you’re a worthless nothing, a cog in the wheel of life. But Jesus says, *Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.* - **Lk. 12:32!** “All things will be put under your feet. You WILL reign with Me. I will bring you to glory! You will be with Me where I am and share My glory as I prayed! Your destiny will be fulfilled and your relationship with Me guarantees it! I’m in the glory and you’ll be in the glory and in just a ‘little while’ all things will be put under our feet together!” You have complete assurance that your future is guaranteed. And if we can get hold of that:

2. our guaranteed future transforms our “little while” of suffering We don’t suffer in despair as poor helpless victims anymore; we don’t grieve as others who have no hope. We’re on a path that leads upward to glory and this is just a “little while”. Our weeping may endure for a night, but joy is coming in the morning. Turn with me to **Jn. 16:20-22**. We could apply these words of Jesus to our whole life experience today, as well as to the three day wait of the disciples back then, *I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.* You are destined for the Throne and nothing will stop it, because you have the privilege of a relationship with Him!

Pastor Bob Christensen writes: “I once heard the story of a city boy who went out to his grandfather’s farm. He asked, ‘Grandpa, you told me that you raise corn. Can I see it?’ So his grandpa took the little fellow for a walk, and they looked out over the fields that had been planted earlier that spring. The grandson was amazed at the miles of open fields-- no concrete, no street lights, no traffic--just miles and miles of cropland. The boy wondered at all the green he saw. It wasn’t grass or weeds, yet he didn’t recognize what it was. It wasn’t yellow like corn. What he saw was row upon row of corn plants about 18 inches high. He wanted to see the corn, but the farmer told him that it wasn’t the right time, for it was only early summer, and it would be a little while, about 12 more weeks before the corn would be ready for harvesting. The boy was disappointed and became a little impatient. He couldn’t understand what his grandpa was saying. The grandfather saw the corn growing right on schedule, but the little boy wanted it to be harvest time. [Building the Kingdom in Families, Winter 1996. Pages 1-2.] Oh, that’s our problem, isn’t it? The Father sees things right on schedule. He sees the harvest. He sees us on the throne. It’s guaranteed. But all we see is the rows of little plants suffering in the heat of the sun. And we want it to be harvest time now! Trust the Father’s experience. He knows what He’s doing. And do it with joy!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of Freedom - 2:14-18

In the earlier part of chapter 2, we looked at the incredible privilege we have of a relationship with God through Christ, which guarantees our destiny to reign with Him as His children. In verses 14-18 the writer of Hebrews moves on to talk

about another tremendous privilege we have, the privilege of freedom. But we'll never understand the value of our freedom unless we reflect on the process by which that freedom was procured. It was procured by an act of God, something that God did which is absolutely outside the realm of comprehension. We're talking about:

I. The Act Of Incarnation: Christ Fully Shared In Our Humanity (14a) Christ has existed from all eternity as God. He shared the glory of the Father before time began. But at one particular moment 2000 years ago, He chose to become incarnate. He literally became a partaker of our blood and flesh. He didn't become LIKE us; He became one of us! Now what does that mean? Well, first let me point out that:

1. He chose to redeem human beings, not angels (16) We talked about angels back in chapter 1. As wonderful and powerful as the angels are, Christ didn't choose to literally "take hold of" the angels to make them like Himself and bring them to His full glory. He didn't become an angel. He took hold of human beings and became one of them, in particular, of the seed of Abraham. He didn't just pop onto the earth as a human being one day. It isn't just that He took the nature of a created human being, but separate from Adam's fallen race. He came by way of birth. He came as a Jew, a descendant of Abraham with a genealogy that can be traced through human parents all the way back. He was one of us in every sense of the word. He was born one of us, and because He was one of us:

2. He took to Himself a true human body like ours It was like ours, a true human body, the same kind I have and you have! It grew and aged and ached and pained and got tired and weary and hungry and thirsty and cut and bruised. He became flesh of our flesh, our own flesh and blood, not some kind of weird hybrid half man and half God, but a true human being. And so, the writer says:

3. He was made like us in every way, yet without sin (17) Every way, you name it. He went through all the stages of child development and learning. He played and worked and sweated. He had all the same limitations, the same frustrations. He lived under an oppressive unjust Roman government and a corrupt Jewish hierarchy. He knew poverty and had no place to call home. He was deserted by friends and mocked by enemies. He had all the same emotions and desires and temptations that you and I do, except that in Him was no sin and He committed no sin. He was one of us, but without sin. And finally, as one of us, He was subject to death.

What a choice! What a plan! To save us He had to become one of us. He couldn't save us from the outside. He had to be an insider, a brother, a full member of the group! It's beyond comprehension. *The story is told in Eastern lands of the great Shah Abbas, who delighted in mingling in disguise with the common folk of his realm. Once, dressed in wretched rags, he descended to the lowest level of the palace, where one of his humblest servants sat tending the furnace. Each enjoyed the other's company, and by and by the furnace tender shared his lunch of black bread and water with his companion. This led to many another visit, and a deepening friendship, though the servant had no idea of his new friend's identity. At last, the shah revealed his identity and waited, ready to grant whatever petition the servant might make. But the other sat silent, gazing on him with love and wonder. "Haven't you understood?" asked the shah. "I can make you rich and famous. I can give you a city. I can appoint you as a great ruler. Have you nothing to ask?" "Yes, my lord, I understand," the furnace tender replied. "But what is this you have done, to leave your glorious surroundings, to sit with me in this dark place, to partake of my coarse fare, and to care whether my heart is glad or sorry? Even you can give nothing more precious. On others you may bestow rich presents, but to me you have given yourself. It only remains to ask that you never withdraw this gift of your friendship."* [Pulpit Helps, Oct 1994. Page 12.] As lovely a picture as that is, it isn't nearly enough. Jesus didn't just mingle with us in the furnace room in disguise! He didn't just come and sit by us to know us. He BECAME us! He Himself became a furnace-tending slave alongside the other, living in the dark place, eating the coarse bread, with no going back to the throne room, except through the door of death, just like it is for us. That's what it took and that's what He did, but just look at the glorious:

II. The Result Of Incarnation: Christ Procured Our Freedom (14b-15) Now let's take this apart so we can understand it. First of all:

1. Satan had power which was derived from death He did not have the power of death, in that he was the ultimate lord of it and could kill whoever he wanted to whenever he wanted to. Death is not something Satan invented. God created it and God controls it. Satan would have liked to kill Job, but God told him he wasn't allowed to touch his life. Satan wanted to destroy Israel in Balaam's day, but God wouldn't allow them to be cursed. So Satan got Balaam to tell Balak to entice Israel to sin by joining in the worship of Baal so that GOD would kill them! Satan has only a secondary power to cause death. However, what he did have was a power that was derived from the fact that all human beings die.

a. he used the fear of death as a weapon against us Mankind has an innate, inborn, instinctive fear of death. We are by nature terrified to die. Our generation has worked very hard to insulate ourselves against the reality of it. For most of history and in many places of the world today, death is a much more real thing than it is to us. People see other people die. They see them get shot and killed in wars. They themselves are the brunt of attacks on their person. They nurse dying people at home when they suffer and die of illness. Executions were public and painful. Satan has used every means he can think of to increase and heighten this fear of death. Why? Because the more afraid that we were, the more:

b. he used it to control our lives and enslave us to himself Many of the jungle tribes live in a perpetual fear of death. They are afraid (and rightfully so) of evil spirits and of one another. Satan, over the years, has used this fear to get them to mutilate their bodies, to offer their children and women as sacrifices. All to keep from dying, all based on fear. He has built whole religious systems that have enslaved millions down through the centuries. And people do crazy things, all because they're afraid to die. In India Hindus still sometimes throw a man's widow on his funeral pyre and burn her alive with his corpse. Great and elaborate systems and codes of conduct have been developed out of this fear of what will happen to me when I die. Monasteries have been filled with those who hope by sacrificing everything in this life to attain a better place in the next. Holy wars have been fought to somehow please an angry God. And the root of it all is fear. *Sarah Winchester's husband had acquired a fortune by manufacturing and selling rifles. After he died of influenza in 1918, she moved to San Jose, California. Because of her grief and a long-time interest in spiritism, Sarah sought out a medium to contact her dead husband. The medium told her, "As long as you keep building your home, you will never face death." Sarah believed the spiritist, so she bought an unfinished 17-room mansion and started to expand it. The project continued until she died at the age of 85. It cost \$5 million at a time when workmen earned 50 cents a day. The mansion had 150 rooms, 13 bathrooms, 2,000 doors, 47 fireplaces, and 10,000 windows. And Mrs. Winchester left enough materials so that they could have continued building for another 80 years. Today that house stands as more than a tourist attraction. It is a silent witness to the dread of death that holds millions of people in bondage.* A human being will do anything, say anything, if he's afraid to die. If you put a gun to his head, he'll kill the person next to him on order, he'll deny the truth and even God himself, if it will keep him alive, as long as he's afraid to die. Satan has been playing on that in the lives of people and manipulating them to do his will ever since the Garden! But Jesus changed all that!

2. Christ's death as a man destroyed Satan's process You see, when Jesus, as a true human being, became our substitute on the cross and took our sins in His own body:

a. it took the sting out of death which was sin - 1 Cor. 15:56-57 What is the painful wound? What's the poison in death? What makes it able to hurt us? SIN! Sin makes death the gateway to hell, to the lake of fire, to eternal judgment. When you die in sin, without forgiveness, without redemption, you suffer the penalty of sin which is an eternity of suffering under the wrath of a Holy God. But Jesus took that penalty onto Himself on the cross. He paid it all right there. The penalty of our sin, which should have been visited on us, was heaped upon Him once and for all. We'll never suffer it! So, what did that accomplish?

b. it released us from the fear of death It took the fear out! There's nothing to be afraid of anymore! There's no sin on our account; there's no penalty to bear. So, it changed the nature of death for us who believe.

c. death for us is sleep for the body and gain for the spirit The body "falls asleep" in Jesus. It dies, yes, but we don't need it anymore. The moment we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. Paul said it clearly, *to live is Christ and to die is gain. To depart and be with Christ is better by far.* Death is now, not the doorway to hell, but the doorway to heaven, the entrance to the kingdom, the gateway to glory! There's nothing to be afraid of in it anymore. The sting, the wound, is all gone. It may hurt on this side until we actually die, but death itself is an instant trip into Jesus' arms. So, do you see what that does?

d. it rendered Satan's power ineffective As long as we know and are confident of what Christ has done, we're free! Satan is not personally destroyed, but he's rendered powerless. He's put out of business. He's shooting with a toy gun that can't hurt me. How do you force a man to do what you want by putting a gun to his head if he's not afraid to die? How do you make Christians deny their faith and worship Allah if they're not afraid of death? You can't! *Neil Anderson writes: "Freedom from spiritual conflicts and bondage is not a power encounter; it's a truth encounter. Satan is a deceiver, and he will work undercover at all costs, but the truth of God's Word exposes him and his lie. When I was a boy on the farm, my dad, my brother, and I would occasionally visit our neighbor's farm. The neighbor had a yappy little dog that scared the socks off me. When it came barking around the corner, my dad and brother stood their ground, but I ran. Guess who the dog chased? I escaped to the top of our pickup truck while the little dog yapped at me from the ground. Everyone except me could see that the little dog had no power over me except what I gave it. Furthermore, it had no inherent power to throw me up on the pickup; it was my belief that put me there. That dog controlled me by using my mind, my will, my emotions, and my muscles, all of which were motivated by fear. Finally, I gathered up my courage, jumped off the pickup, and kicked a small rock at the mutt. Lo and behold, it ran! Satan is like that yappy little dog, deceiving people into fearing him more than God. His power is in the lie. He is the father of lies who deceives the whole world, and consequently the whole world is under the influence of the evil one. He can do nothing about your position in Christ, but if he can deceive you into believing his lies about you and God, you will spend a lot of time on top of the pickup truck! You don't have to outshout him or out-muscle him to be free of his influence. You just have to "out-truth" him. Believe, declare, and act upon the truth of God's Word, and you will thwart Satan's strategy. [The Bondage Breaker by Neil T. Anderson. Harvest House, 1990. Pages 22-23.]*

Did you hear that? Then say Hallelujah! I'm free. I'm not Satan's slave anymore because I don't have to be afraid. He can't use my fear to get me to sin unless I let him! I'm a child of God. I belong to God. Not one sin will ever be held against

me because Jesus became what I am and died in my place. I am free in Jesus Christ! I'm not afraid of God and I'm not afraid of death because it will put me with Him in glory! I'm not letting Satan manipulate me anymore by making me afraid! And it's all because of the Incarnation, because of Jesus becoming man. Now the writer makes us look at:

III. The Reason For Incarnation: Christ Became Our High Priest (17-18) To procure that freedom, we needed a High Priest. In order for sinful man to come freely and without fear into the glory of a Holy God, we needed a mediator, someone to act on our behalf to make atonement for our sins, because we couldn't do it, someone from among us to bring us to God who would be acceptable to Him, who would be without sin Himself, to approach Him. And the only possible way for that to happen was the Incarnation. The sinless eternal Christ who was God became perfect and complete man! And that did three things:

1. it qualified Him as a faithful High Priest before God He was truly man, yet without sin. He always did the will of the Father and the Father repeatedly said, *In Him I am well pleased*. He was qualified to come into the presence of the Father on our behalf because He was faithful in every way to the One who appointed Him, as we'll see in chapter 3. And at the same time:

2. it enabled Him to make atonement for human beings He was not only the Priest; He was the Sacrifice. He offered Himself as one sacrifice for our sins forever, to remove them as far as the east is from the west. It took a man to do that! Man had sinned and man had to satisfy the penalty of God's holy wrath. The Incarnation made Him able to be our perfect sacrifice. And that's what removed our fear of death and set us free from Satan's manipulation and control. And finally:

3. it enabled Him to serve as a merciful High Priest to us (18) Because He became truly one of us and was made like we are in every way, He can be merciful to us. Without condoning our sin, He can understand and sympathize with our human frailty and suffering. The writer says:

a. He understands our temptation because He was tempted Compare **4:15**. He was tempted in every way, just like we are. Satan tried to get at Him just like He gets at us. He knows what human weakness and frailty are and how easy it is for humans to succumb to it and to fall into sin. He can feel that struggle. He knows the pain of it. He can suffer it with us, alongside us. He doesn't condone sin, but He loves and understands the whole pile of things that they suffer through and how tough it is to remain faithful and true. But He doesn't merely understand it:

b. He is able to come to our aid when we are tempted Compare **4:16**. He'll do something about it. He won't condemn us; He'll help us! He'll give us strength. He'll give us wisdom and reveal Satan's lies to us and show us how he's trying to manipulate us by fear. He'll make for us a way out of the temptation and show us where it is. He'll enable us to stand in the freedom that we have and continue to walk as children of God!

Our freedom was costly. It took the self-emptying of the Incarnation. It took the sacrifice of the Cross. Paul warned us in *Gal. 5:1, It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery*. I know the context there is freedom from the law, but the principle applies here too. Christ bought our freedom so that we'd live free, so we'd say, "I'm free and I'm not going back there! I'm not going back there and be moved and manipulated by fear anymore! Rather I'll go to Jesus who bought my freedom and get the grace I need to live as a free child of His! I am convinced of His perfect love for me and that casts out ALL fear!" What a precious privilege of freedom we have through Him! Let's cling to it and live out of truth and not out of fear!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Promise Of Faithfulness 3:1-19

The first verse of chapter 3 summarizes everything we learned in chapter 2. We found that we are made holy by our Great High Priest Jesus offering Himself for us and that sets us free from fear. Before that, we found that we were made Jesus' brothers, children of God who are brought into a forever relationship with Him. And before that, we found that we have a heavenly eternal destiny to reign with Jesus forever. So, as he starts out chapter 3, the writer says, *Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling...fix your thoughts on Jesus...* He wants us to look at Jesus and to see in His character the one thing that all of these privileges depend on, His faithfulness. If He's not faithful, then we're sunk. If He has promised, but there is any chance at all that He will for whatever reason not keep it, then our eternity hangs by a slender thread. However, if He is faithful, then we are absolutely secure. And the point that the Holy Spirit goes on to make in the first 6 verses is that:

I. Christ Is Continually Faithful To Us (1-6) Now Hebrews, as its title reminds us, is a letter written to believers with Jewish background. And to a Jew, there is nobody with a higher and better reputation than Moses. He was regarded as the greatest of men. He spoke with God face to face, He led Israel out of bondage, He gave the Law and He wrote the first five books of Scripture. The fact that Moses is the only Old Testament person mentioned 79 times in the New Testament should show his importance. The Jews trusted in Moses and referred to him continually and even these Jewish believers would have the highest regard for him, so the writer points out:

1. the faithfulness of Moses and quotes what God says in **Num. 12:7**, *But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house*. Just look what God says about him:

a. he was faithful in God's entire house Now what is God's house. Some say it is the Tabernacle and that this means Moses built it exactly as he was told, which he did, but the context of Num. 12 is that Miriam and Aaron were rebelling against Moses as the leader of God's people and God said to them, *How dare you speak against Moses whom I have chosen and with whom I speak face to face; He is faithful in all My house...* The word house can equally mean the building or the people who live in it. Verse 6 says WE are His house! Moses was faithful **IN** or among God's people. Paul wrote Timothy, *if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's house(hold), which is the church of the living God...* - **1 Tim. 3:15**. Moses was a part of God's people. And He was faithful in his dealings with all of them. And, Hebrews says:

b. he was faithful to God as a servant in the house God had appointed him as the leader and caretaker of His people, even though he was among them, and he was faithful to God in everything He commanded Him toward His people. Now, you and I remember how he lost his temper and struck the rock and how he didn't really want to go down to Egypt, but this is God's assessment. He was a faithful servant. He did for God's people what God told Him to do. However, as faithful as Moses was, even that pales in comparison to:

2. the faithfulness of Christ

a. He is continually faithful to the Father who appointed Him The NIV says He "was faithful" in verse 2, but the Greek says "who, being faithful"; it's a present participle. He was and still is faithful to the Father who appointed Him and sent Him down as the Great Apostle and High Priest to redeem us and, I might add, He always will be. He is continually faithful! There is no glitch, no flaw, no split second of failure. He always carries out the appointment the Father has given Him toward us! But not only is His faithfulness more absolute than Moses', it is of a different type.

b. He is faithful as the Son over the house Moses was faithful as a servant **IN** the house. He obeyed God as part of God's people, but ultimately, they weren't **HIS** people. Listen to what Moses said when they grumbled against him, *He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?" - Num. 11:11-12*. Moses loved the people. He begged God to forgive them and even offered to trade his own salvation for them at one point, but at the bottom line, He was only one of them, a servant sent to do the job of caring for them; ultimately, they were not **HIS**. But they **ARE** Christ's. He is the **SON**; God's people, the Church, are His body, His temple, His building, a people of His very own. They belong to Him. He is building **HIS CHURCH**, according to Mt. 16:18 and He is the owner of the house, which is us! He died to redeem us, to get us for His own, and He's going to care for us faithfully! So:

c. as builder and owner of His house, He is worthy of greater honor than Moses or anybody else because He's faithful. *A couple of years ago, the entire country honored one player on the Baltimore Orioles baseball team, Cal Ripken Jr. At the end of the fifth inning when the game was officially on the books, the fans interrupted it with a 22 minute standing ovation. The game was stopped by the celebration. Ripken was thrust out of the dugout by adoring teammates to run around the field and shake countless hands of idolizing fans. The President and Vice President of the United States of America had left their official duties and traveled all the way to Baltimore just to be there. Multiplied millions watched on television. Games were interrupted for standing ovations all across America and Canada when the announcement was made in their parks. Fans shouted, whistled, stomped, jumped up and down, and hugged each other. The President beamed, dignitaries saluted, California Angel players (the Oriole's opponents) took off their caps when they shook Ripken's hand. The Orioles pounded their teammate on the back and high-fived anyone who would raise his hand. Cal's kids smiled and waved; his wife wept. What had Cal Ripken done that had the world rejoicing? What great feat had he accomplished? Had he hit the ball farther? No. Hit it more often? No. Stolen more bases? No. A new strike-out record? No. His feat was simply a new record of 2,131 consecutive games played which broke a record that had stood in baseball for over 50 years. All he did was just go to work every day. He simply stayed on the job and refused to take even one day off. He was faithful. [Brown Gold, Mar 1996. Pages 2-3.]* My friends, ever since the creation of the world, Jesus Christ has been faithful to His appointed task of caring for His own, the people of God, every one of them, every single day, every single night, every single moment, no days off, no vacations, no coffee breaks, no rest periods, no sleep. His faithfulness is of a caliber beyond anything Cal Ripken or even Moses or any human being can achieve. It is perfect absolute permanent faithfulness and not only doesn't the world notice it, but what's worse, the very Church, the people of God whom He's faithfully taking care of, don't celebrate it most of the time either! "Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!" ought to come out of our lips as we fall on our faces every day of our lives in thanksgiving! He is worthy of the highest honor and praise because He is faithful. That's what guarantees all the privileges and promises we have.

Now in the rest of chapter 3, the writer makes the logical application of that. He is always faithful to us and that in itself demands that:

II. We Must Remain Faithful To Him (6b-19) The writer goes back to the example of Israel and points out that:

1. Israel chose a path of unfaithfulness (7-11) He quotes from **Ps. 95:7b-11** which is preceded by *Ps. 95:6-7a, Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as they did...* God's flock should have listened to their faithful Shepherd, but instead note four things:

a. they had hardened, unbelieving hearts It began in their hearts. Their hearts were easily deceived by their circumstances into unbelief, into doubting that God was faithful, doubting that He would take care of them. Despite all the proofs they had already seen in coming out of Egypt, they wanted another one every time. Their hearts became immune to the evidence of God's care; they ceased being able to see it and so, in the circumstances which were meant to test them:

b. they tested and tried Him and ultimately refused to go into the land At Rephidim there was no water and they became thirsty and quarreled with Moses and shouted, "Is the Lord among us or not?!" And God gave them water out of the rock. They cried for bread and He gave it every morning. They cried for meat and He gave them their fill. Yet every time they didn't have what they wanted, when the circumstances were difficult, their first response was to doubt God, to question His faithfulness, to make it a test or a trial of Him. And ultimately, they wound up at Kadesh Barnea where God said, "Go in and take the land," and they said, "We won't go in. We scouted it out and there are giants in the land. We didn't sign up to fight. You didn't hand it to us on a silver platter the way You're supposed to. We're not going in!" And brother, that was it. He had brought them out of Egypt for this very moment, to give them the land, and they refused because, even after all this, they doubted His faithfulness! And so:

c. God vowed they would never enter His rest Look with me at **Num. 14:20-23, 28-30**. Why were Caleb and Joshua different? 32:12 says, *for they followed the Lord whole-heartedly*. They were faithful. But about the rest of the nation, God made a vow. He swore by Himself, "As surely as I live, as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth..." and that whole generation died wandering in the wilderness and 40 years later God gave to their children what would have been their privilege, if they had only been obedient and faithful to Him. Now, what happened to them? Were they not forgiven for their sins? Were they lost eternally? Were they no longer God's people? Did He stop taking care of them? Absolutely NO! We read it, *I HAVE forgiven them!* He did continue to lead them, to provide for them, to take care of them, and to protect them in battle. They were still His people through that whole 40 year saga. But:

d. though still His people, they died having missed His "rest" It cost them something very important. They didn't get to go in and enjoy the rest that God had provided for them in the land of Canaan. Why? **(16-19)** What did they do? They rebelled; they sinned; they disobeyed or literally, they disbelieved. They were not faithful to Him who had been faithful to them and they missed His purpose for their lives! And they still stand as a warning to us:

2. we must be careful to choose a path of faithfulness (12-15) You see:

a. we must guard our hearts against the hardening of unbelief It can happen to us too. We can look at our circumstances and be deceived into thinking, "God has forgotten; He doesn't care; He's not doing His job; He is not faithful." And so enters the sin of unbelief and it hardens us. With each new problem, we pile up the evidence against God, despite His faithfulness to us over all the years. And eventually we come to a place where we have to make a choice, to obey Him or to turn away from Him to our own ways. But the warning is:

b. we must never choose to turn away from the living God and go our own way, try to solve our own problems, seek our own solutions and disobey His will as Israel did. That choice comes regularly. We can choose to lie or to face the truth. We can choose to bail out on our marriage or admit our problems and seek help. We can choose to seek our own pleasure and cross the moral lines God has set into immorality or we can say no. Over and over, we have the opportunity to choose our will or His. And the warning is to choose His. Why? *Missouri senator John Ashcroft writes: [My father told me], "John, I'd like you to fly this plane for a while." I was eight years old at the time, blue-jeaned and T-shirted and wide-eyed at the world. My father was an amateur pilot. I looked around me at the spartan interior, which was nothing at all like the multitudinous controls, gauges, and computerized equipment in planes today. The control stick looked like a broom handle and came up between my legs. "What should I do?" I shouted back to my father, who was seated behind me. "Just grab the stick and push it straight forward." "Okay." I took hold of that stick and did as I was told. Immediately the plane went into a straight bombing-raid dive toward a farm on the outskirts of Springfield! My stomach came up to my throat and I lost all sense of time or place as fear gripped my insides. I let go of that control stick in a millisecond, and Dad pulled the plane back up. He had a good chuckle, and I had a good lesson: actions have consequences. I learned in a particularly vivid--in fact, terrifying--way that my decisions and actions could imperil my future. [Lessons from a Father to His Son (Nelson, 1998)] Did you hear that? Our decisions have consequences. They can imperil our future! Now, what happens if we do choose wrong like Israel did? Do we lose our salvation? Does He stop caring about us? Does He stop taking care of us? No, but it is true that:*

c. our perseverance is evidence that we are His people (6b, 14) There is a careful balance between two things here. On the one hand, our salvation is eternal and if we are genuinely born again, we can never lose it. On the other, if we are genuinely born again, we will persevere and hold onto our faith to the end. We will continue to believe that Christ is our Savior and trust in Him for salvation. If we can stop that and walk away from our faith altogether and never come back, then we never really had it to begin with it. We were the shallow soil where the plant never really had roots or the thorny soil where it got choked and never really grew. We had knowledge about Him, but never really had Him in us. The very fact that we continue to believe, even though we choose to sin sometimes, is evidence that we belong to Him. But salvation is not really the issue here. It is not “whether we ARE His people,” but “whether we are FAITHFUL as His people” that is under discussion. And if we choose to turn away from Him and His way:

d. though still His people, we can miss His “rest” which was promised to us, which is what chapter 4 is all about. It is not that we won’t get to enter our heavenly home; our Canaan land is right here on earth. We will miss God’s purpose and God’s plan for our lives. There is a rest that belongs to the people of God, but we forfeit it and wander in the wilderness of life if we refuse to enter it by faith. We’ll study that next time. The point today is that our faithfulness to Him is vital in light of His faithfulness to us. And before we close, I’d like to ask whether you noticed that in what we’ve already read, God has described:

III. The Tools We Have To Enable Our Faithfulness How do we stay faithful? How do we keep from being deceived and turning away? Well, we have some tools God has given to help us:

1. we focus on the One who is continually faithful (1) We fix our eyes on Jesus. We gaze at Him. We watch Him be faithful to us every day. We watch Him be faithful to us even when we fail, which happens frequently. And we marvel at His faithfulness. *If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.* - **2 Tim. 2:13.** He can’t be anything else but faithful. He can’t change His character. Look at Him. Praise Him. Worship Him. Sing “Great is Thy faithfulness.” And the more you focus on Him, the more you’ll be moved by His faithfulness to be like Him. Secondly:

2. we rely on daily encouragement from one another (13) That’s why God gave us to each other. We can’t do it alone. We are blind to our own faults. We often can’t see when we’re beginning to believe the lie. So, God has put us together to encourage one another to be faithful, to trust Him, to not give up, to not turn away, to not follow the temptation to sin. We need to have the kind of relationships where we interact with other believers daily, regularly and share our hearts and pray together. The encouragement of others will help to keep us faithful. And finally:

3. we realize the importance of each “Today” (13) Opportunities are short. *Bruce Larson once saw a sign in a psychiatrist’s office which said, “In two days, tomorrow will be yesterday.” [Wind and Fire by Bruce Larson. Page 105.]* Today is short; it goes by quickly. It is only called “today” for 24 hours. That’s why the Psalmist said, *Today, if you hear His voice...* don’t harden your heart; listen to Him! Obey Him! Faithfulness occurs one step at a time. One moment at a time. One issue at a time. Every time you say “no”, that opportunity is past and enough “no’s” become a wasted life. Say “yes” each time. Say “yes” right away. Don’t give yourself time to doubt and fear and be turned away.

Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John and beloved leader in the early church who was arrested for being a Christian leader. When he was asked for the third and final time to disavow his Christ, the old man replied, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?” And 1900 years later we still quote him and tell the story of his martyrdom. [Quoted in Closer Walk, July, 1988, p. 22.] But what a point! He’s been faithful, so how can I not be? We only have three things to keep us faithful. We have Him. We have each other. And we have this moment today in which to choose. Let’s fix our eyes on Him like Polycarp did and bask in His faithfulness to us; let’s encourage one another constantly to make faithful choices in life and let’s seize each moment to say “Yes”!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of Rest 4:1-13

In chapter 3 we saw the faithfulness of God to us. He IS always continually faithful to us as His people. And we looked closely at the warning given to us in view of that to be faithful to Him, to listen when we hear His voice and obey immediately, instead of hardening our hearts as Israel did in the wilderness. But in chapter 4 we’re going to learn a very deep truth: being faithful to God doesn’t mean DOING; it means RESTING. We, as believers, have the privilege of entering His rest. Now to understand that, we begin as the writer does by continuing to look at:

I. The Rest Of God That Israel Failed To Enter (1-3a) Here’s what happened:

1. Joshua’s generation refused to enter Canaan and died in the wilderness God brought them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, destroying their enemies, led them to Mt. Sinai and gave them His law and then up to the very border of the land of Canaan which He had promised them. There, He told them to go in, but they rebelled and refused

to go in because their spies reported giants in the land and they were afraid. So, God swore that that one entire generation would not enter His rest in the land, but would instead wander and die in the wilderness. Now let's look closely at:

a. God's instruction At Sinai He had told them in **Lev. 25:38**, *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.*, and when they got there, Moses told them clearly in **Deut. 1:21**, *See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*" God's principle is simple: **"I give; you go and receive"** "I am giving it to you; that is my work. Yours is simply to believe Me and go up there and take possession of what I've given you. That's all!" But they didn't see it that way! They thought they would have to go up and fight the giants and take it away from them, all by means of normal human strength and ability. So they refused, but note:

b. the basis of their refusal was unbelief (2) They didn't believe God would do what He said, that He would give it to them, that He would take the giants out of the way. Even after all they'd already seen Him do, they doubted the ability of God and took the total responsibility for the work on themselves and that led to **disobedience**. They said, "No, we won't because we can't." So, they missed out on what God wanted to do with their lives and they died struggling in the wilderness instead of resting in Canaan. They missed entering His rest! But now we read that:

2. later generations had opportunity to enter His rest (6-8) A few hundred years pass and one day along comes David and writes Psalm 95 and says, "Today...when you hear his voice don't harden your hearts but obey and enter in!" We read the full quote back in chapter 3 last time. So, what the writer is saying is that now in David's day, Israel had another chance. They could have entered into His rest. It was another "Today" for them. Now:

a. Israel was IN the land, but trusting in their own works The issue was no longer physically entering the land. They were already in. But history tells us that instead of becoming God's example nation to the world, they fell away into idolatry and were taken into captivity. More generations didn't believe God so they disobeyed God and they missed His plan for their lives instead of entering His rest. And hundreds of years more pass and there's another "today". At long last, the central event of all history is upon them. Jesus, the long-promised Messiah comes in to the world. And what do we find Israel doing? Look at **Jn. 6:27-29**. They're trying to fill their own bellies and to work the works of God, to figure out what God wants and go do it so that they can impress Him. And Jesus says, "No, that's not it. You can't get eternal life; it's a gift God gives you. And I'm the gift. The work of God is to believe in Me, to trust in Me to give you the life and then simply go do what I tell you as My followers!" But again, that generation wouldn't do it!

b. they refused to receive God's Messiah and were set aside - Jn. 1:11-13 They crucified the Lord of glory and God set them aside in His plan as a nation and built the church instead. They missed His purpose and plan because they wouldn't believe and then simply receive and obey! Israel missed God's rest and they missed it and they missed it! They missed His plan for them because they wouldn't believe Him and obediently receive what He gave them! But notice that the writer says three times:

3. there still remains a sabbath-rest for the people of God (1, 6a, 9) There is still a rest left for the people of God to have. Today is another today and we can have it. And the writer coined his own new word here to describe it; he called it a *sabbatismos*, a rest like that of the sabbath. It's used only once in the Bible, here and nowhere else. It's not about going into a physical land anymore and it really never was. It's a principle of living, an entering into the way God does things. You see:

a. we become people of God by resting in Christ, not self, for salvation When I was 15 years old, I made a discovery. I figured out I was sinful and that I was trying to save myself by being good. I was going to church and Sunday School. I quit swearing and tried to sweep all the bad habits out of my life. I thought I was doing quite well until I saw that God isn't impressed by all that stuff and it couldn't save me. I saw that I was lost and only One could save me, that Jesus had died for me and that I must stop trusting in myself and trust Him to save me once for all. And one Saturday morning I did it! I did what the Jews refused to do. I exercised faith. I believed what God said and I accepted His gift of salvation. I just took it and depended on Him to save me. And all these years I've been resting in Christ for my salvation. I've been busy at a million things, but never at achieving my salvation. I'm at perfect rest in the finished work Christ has done. That's how we become the people of God, isn't it? We understand that. Most of us have experienced that. We've come to rest in Jesus for salvation. But this chapter isn't about becoming the people of God, about receiving salvation; it's about living as the people of God, about serving God's purpose with our lives, now that we are His people. And it is the same:

b. we live as people of God by resting in Christ, not self, for service Just as Israel was to believe that God had given them the land and simply to obey and go up there and let Him give it to them, that's how it is supposed to be with us. He does the doing; we believe He will do it and simply do whatever He tells us and let Him do it. We rest in Him. Now for a lot of years, I thought it worked the other way. I trusted in Christ for salvation but now as a believer I was working for Christ. I was serving Him, meaning doing things for Him, doing His work, building His Kingdom, FOR Him! I was trying to "work the works of God!" And, to be honest, that's how most Christians see the Christian

life. It is a life of a Christian DOING for God! But some years ago, I found out something; maybe you have too. I got awfully tired that way. Doing and doing and doing. Always trying to do the next thing for God but worn out and weary from it. And I finally saw the principle: He does the work; I simply believe it and do whatever He tells me, resting in Him to provide both the strength to obey and the result! And friend, it's a whole new way of life! It's an exchanged life, mine for His, living through me! Now, on the outside it doesn't look much different. I still read my Bible and pray and teach and visit and do all that pastor type stuff I did before, but I've learned to approach it all a whole new way, to rest in His working, not mine. So, life right here and now becomes a sabbath-rest, a rest like God's. Now let's examine more closely:

II. The Meaning Of God's Rest (10) There you have it. To enter God's rest means **ceasing our own effort and trusting in His**. It means resting like He did. When? Way back at the beginning. Look at what the writer says about:

1. the sabbath rest God entered (3b-4) Did you see what that said?

a. all God's work has been finished since the creation of the world The key words are finished and all. That's a real revelation. I used to think of it this way: in six days God worked really hard and made the universe and everything in it and on the seventh day He rested from all His work (not that He was tired or anything like that, but because it's a good thing and an example to us). And then on the eighth day He went back to work like we do on Monday mornings! But that's not the way it was at all. ALL God's work, everything God ever did, was completed and finished by the end of the sixth day. His work was over. Think about it. How many times does the Scripture mention that thought? Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world! Ephesians says God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Revelation says our names are written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. Jesus said the Kingdom has been prepared for us from the foundation of the world. All God was ever going to do was already done and accomplished before the foundation of the world. It was already done even though it had not yet come to exist in the continuum of time. So, when God entered into Sabbath-rest, He was done with all of it forever! Does that mean He no longer does anything? No, the other side of that coin is this:

b. yet God has been continually at work without ceasing - Jn. 5:17, *Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."* He's never taken a break. He works even on the Sabbath day (which is what the Jews were complaining about). God has been continually, unceasingly active since the creation, working powerfully in people and events, steering the whole world on its course. So how can that be? It's already all done, yet He's always working on it; He's always resting, yet always working. What does it mean?

c. God works continually out of a position of complete rest It's already all decreed and done. It is as certain to occur as His own Person. Now He's simply working it out as it occurs in time. It is sure, settled, established. There is no doubt about how it turns out, no desperate struggle to make it happen, no drivenness to make sure every piece falls in place. There is an absolute confidence in Himself and His power and His decree that it will be. There is a sabbath-rest and the activity is simply an unfolding day by day of what His power has already determined. Wow! But, after all, He's God. How does that apply to us? Well, first look at:

2. Jesus: our example of sabbath rest - Jn. 14:10-12 Look closely. "The Father lives in Me and He's in me doing His work. The words I say are His words; the works I do are His works and anyone who has faith in Me will do what I've been doing. This is how you will live too. You're a container. The Spirit of God will live in you and He will do the work." Look again at **8:28-29**. Do you see it? He is in Me. I just believe it and do whatever He says! He does the work; I rest in His power, ability and direction by faith! I simply choose to do what pleases Him and rest in Him. That's how Jesus lived and that's:

3. the sabbath rest that we enter into Over in Matthew we have Jesus' own invitation to us in **Mt. 11:28-30**. He doesn't say, "Come to Me and I will make you work; you'll work for me harder than anything you've ever done because your heart will really be in it!" He says, "Come to Me and I will give you rest! I'll give you rest for your souls! I'm not a harsh driving taskmaster pushing you on to pull harder and harder to get my work done. I'm not like that; I'm meek and humble at heart. I love you. I invite you to enter my rest. How? It's simple: I'll put you into a yoke with Me! What's a yoke? It's one of those wooden beam and harness things that joins two oxen together so they can pull a plow. Now we've got a plow to pull. And here's how we'll do it; we'll get into the yoke together, you and I. The yoke will be easy; the burden will be light. Why? Because I'll provide the power; I'll pull the plow. You just trust Me and follow where I say to go. That's all!" Do you see it?

a. we cease from laboring in our own strength to achieve His work We quit trying to do it the old way, quit trying with all our might to do His work, to work for Him, to work His works, to be everything He's said we have to be, to be perfect as He is perfect. We just quit and:

b. we rest in faith that He will do all He has determined through us We trust that whatever He brings into our lives, whatever He wants us to do, He will accomplish it all. It's His business, not ours. We have nothing to accomplish.

c. we simply obey what He commands We just do whatever He says. We believe Him, trust Him and act in simple obedience, no matter how impossible it looks. No matter how many giants we think are in the land, we say, "Yes, Lord!" and march in. So, we are **resting in Him while acting**.

Can you see what I'm saying? Oh, this discovery of His rest has been made by so many down through the years. J. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission and the father of the second wave of missions in the current era wrote: "I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked that I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me." If He's doing the work, I'm at rest. The pressure is all off. It is all of Him and none of me. Well, if that's the case, if that's how the Christian life is supposed to work, then we have only one true labor:

III. Our True Labor Is To Enter Into His Rest! (11) What a paradox! We have to work hard to rest! It doesn't come easy. We're used to doing everything out of self, self-direction, self-ability. Our greatest battle is to die to self, to simply quit, to cease our striving, to quit thinking that we have to do it all and to let Him. What makes that so hard?

1. our roadblock in choosing to rest is the same as it was for the Israelites. The word in verse 11 in the Greek is not disobedience but **unbelief**. They disobeyed because they didn't believe God could or would do what He said. And we have a hard time believing God too. We have a hard time seeing how He's going to get us through this problem, how He's going to make this work or that work. So, we're sorely tempted to try to fix it ourselves and to do it our own way, instead of simply saying, "Yes, Lord, You do it; now what do I do next?" It's hard for us. We have to die to self-effort. But you know what's worse is:

2. 1. we are often deceived about our own labor: So much of the time **we think we're doing His work** when in actuality we've decided what His work is and set out to do it without Him or relying on Him only to back us up when we run out of steam. It may be all good stuff, all wonderful deeds but if it is not His work in and through me, then it is all my work and not His at all. I so easily deceive myself about this, so easily slip into doing things in the self instead of resting in Him. And it is in that context the writer warns us that:

a. God's Word discerns the thoughts and attitudes of our heart (12) It can tell the difference between my own mind and emotions and the spirit. It can discern the very thoughts and attitudes of my inmost being. It's not what my outside is doing but what my deepest inside is resting on. God's Word wants to pierce and penetrate me down to that level so that way down in there at the bottom line, I'm resting in Him, not in me. And then the writer adds that:

b. God's eyes see every action, thought and motive (13) You can't hide anything from Him. It's all uncovered and laid bare. He sees right through it. And when it comes to looking back at all that's been done through your life and determining whether it's the gold, silver and precious stones or the wood, hay and stubble of 1 Cor. 3., in His eyes wood never looks like gold. He knows why you did what you did, and whether you were trusting in Him to do it through you or not, far more clearly than you do.

So again, we close with the challenge of verse 11. The word *disobedience* is literally *unbelief*. Trust God to do the work through you.

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of Grace 4:14-5:10

At verse 14 of Chapter 4 we begin a new paragraph and a new thought. The writer begins to talk to us about another privilege we have, the privilege of grace. What is grace? It is unmerited favor; it is receiving blessing and help and benefit that we don't deserve, but it's given to us anyway out of the love of the giver. Now, how are you going to explain grace thoroughly to a bunch of believers who are steeped in a background of Judaism with its laws and rituals? Well, the writer chooses to do it by telling us that we've got a Great High Priest. Our Gentile minds say, "Huh?" But these readers sat up and took notice because they understood:

I. The Office Of An Earthly High Priest The High Priest in New Testament times was the most important person in the nation. He was the chief civil and ecclesiastical dignitary among the Jews. He was chairman of the Sanhedrin and head of political relations with the Roman government. But his spiritual importance was even greater. He alone entered the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement and also offered the daily offerings during that week. So, He alone could procure atonement for the sins of the people and from the very institution of the office in the Old Testament, we read that his sins could be attributed to the people, that he ruled the people and that his death was a national event. Read **5:1-4**. The High Priest is THE one person that represents the people to God. Now look closely at him:

1. he is united in nature with those he represents to God (1) He is selected from among the people. He is one of them, one of their own number, one with a nature just like theirs, one in every point like they are. That's why he can represent them. He is appointed to go on their behalf to God. In essence, they approach God IN HIM, in his person. And:

2. he procures atonement for them by continually offering sacrifices (1b) Notice the plurals, *gifts* and *sacrifices*. The High Priest's function touched the most important area of their lives; it was to deal with their sins, to procure

atonement for their evil behavior by the repeated offering of regular sacrifices. His function was to get them grace, to get them what they didn't deserve, forgiveness, instead of punishment, so that they were cleansed and able to approach God and find favor with Him. Now, a good High Priest:

3. he deals moderately with them because he has the same weakness (2-3) He has a perpetual reminder of it. Every time he offers a sacrifice for the sins of the people, he has to offer one for his own first! They go astray, but he's a man like they are, so he knows that he too goes astray. For him to deal harshly and unfeelingly and judgmentally with them is hypocritical. If he's a good one, he deals gently. He doesn't approve of their sins; he's not happy about them. But he does understand how they fall because he's one of them! And so, his people feel that they can approach him, that they can come to him, because his own weakness helps him to have an attitude of grace toward them. And finally, the writer notes that:

4. he cannot presume to enter the office but must be appointed by God (4) Several times in Scripture people tried to assume it. They tried to assert the right to be priests and approach God. And neat things happened, like the earth opened and swallowed them or they were struck with leprosy or deposed from being king! God made it very clear that the only High Priest He'll accept is the one of his choosing, the one He has appointed, the one of the chosen line of Aaron. Now you're ready to understand what the writer means when he says that:

II. Jesus Is Our Great High Priest 4:14 is the only place that this description is ever used. We have literally a MEGA-High Priest, a High Priest that is greater, more majestic, more powerful, more worthy, more able to fill His office, than any earthly High Priest the Jews ever had. He didn't just pass through a cloth veil here on earth to enter in to do His work; He passed through the heavens all the way to the true Temple of God and there entered into His presence on our behalf **(5:5-10)**! And you'll notice that all that was true of a good earthly High Priest was far and away more true of Him. First:

1. He was appointed as our eternal High Priest by God Himself (5-6) He didn't assume the position to Himself. The same God and Father who declared to Him in Ps. 2:7, "You are My Son..." also declared in Ps. 110:4, "You are an eternal priest, a priest who abides forever, a priest who didn't get to be priest because his daddy was a descendant of Aaron but who, like Melchizedek, was appointed by God to stand alone as a priest, the only One in His order." God has designated Jesus Christ as the One True Eternal High Priest for all men for all time. God doesn't want anybody else. There's nobody else that's an acceptable representative for the human race, nobody else qualified to approach Him. That's why He's the Great High Priest. And the writer's got a lot more to say about that in chapter 7 when he goes back to it, but we'll leave that for another day. The point he's getting to is that Jesus:

2. He sympathizes completely with our weaknesses (4:15) Jesus' response to us as sinners goes way beyond just dealing moderately or being gentle. He *sympathizes* is literally, He *suffers with* us in our weaknesses in Greek. He feels them with us because:

a. He endured every temptation we experience, yet without sin Have you ever been tempted to hate somebody for what they've done to you? He was tempted too and more deeply than we are, yet He didn't yield! Have you ever been tempted to throw in the towel and do wrong just once because the reward seemed so huge? The devil literally offered Him the world on a silver platter to fall down for one moment of worship, but He refused. Ever been tempted to show everybody how great you are or take something that wasn't yours when you needed it? Ever been tempted to think lustfully or to be jealous of others or to be self-centered and send the crowd away just to get rid of them? He experienced all those things, every temptation you will ever face. He felt it full force. He understands why sometimes you give in, sometimes you blow up, sometimes you fail, why sometimes you just don't have it in you to keep going any more. He knows the war inside your mind. He felt all of those things in the weakness that came with becoming a human being, yet He did not sin. But instead of looking at you with condemning, critical eyes of judgment, He looks at you with eyes of mercy, with a heart that wants you to be forgiven instead of punished and which was willing to pay the price so you could have it! But the depth of that mercy came by way of experience! And not only that:

b. He learned obedience as we do in the depths of suffering (7-8) Here's a deep, deep thought. He was the Son. He knew obedience from the other side. He knew what it looked like as the universe rendered it to Him. But when He became one of us, He learned the pain of obedience, not in a simple painless way, but in the very depths of agony and suffering. He learned the depths of obedience in:

(1) the agony of Gethsemane where He cried out loudly and with tears to have the cup of death taken from Him, where He sweat great drops of blood from the intensity of the pressure He was under as **Lk. 22:39-44** tells us. Resisting the temptation to disobey was such an intense battle that angels had to come afterward and physically strengthen His body to get through that night to the cross! He knew what it was like to cry out for deliverance and get a "No!" and face the loss of His own life by obeying! We've not yet resisted unto blood, but He did! And He was heard because He was willing to say, "Not My will, but Thy will be done!" You say, how was He heard? In:

(2) the answer of Calvary Look back sometime at **Ps. 22:1-2, 22-24, 25-28**. David saw it in prophetic type. The struggle continued on the cross, *My God, why have you forsaken Me?* But the Psalm answers that, *When He cried unto Him, He heard!* How? God raised Him from the dead! He didn't save Him FROM death, but literally OUT OF DEATH. He took Him straight through death to resurrection ground and the long view is that because of His obedience, all the peoples of the earth will bow down before the Lord! But in the process of experiencing the tremendous cost of obeying and resisting:

3. He became the source of our eternal salvation (9-10) All who will obey Him, all who will place their trust in Him, receive an eternal atonement for their sins. He becomes their High Priest who saves them once and for all forever. But because of the route that He took in becoming a man, living as a man, resisting, suffering and dying as a man, here's:

III. What Having Such High Priest Means To Us (4:14-16) You see:

1. our High Priest sits on a throne of grace The High Priest was also the ruler. Jesus' priestly work of the cross is now done and He's sitting in heaven exalted high as a Priest on His throne. But the throne He sits on is not to us a throne of judgment, a throne of condemnation, a throne of punishment and destruction. It is a mercy seat! This is the only place in Scripture this lovely term occurs. It is a throne of grace, a throne where we get what we do not deserve, where we are not dealt with according to our sins, but according to His merciful love which paid for them all! So, we're told that:

2. at His throne we will find exactly what we need at that moment In that moment when we are struggling in the depths of our soul with our human weakness, when everything in us cries out to take what we want and do our will instead of His, we can run to His throne in prayer and:

a. we will find mercy that cares about us *Alexander the Great once found a private in his army fainting and sick in the cold air and had him carried and seated down in his own royal seat in his tent by a fire. When the soldier came to, he sprang to his feet and apologized. Alexander smiled and said, "Don't you know that you Macedonians live after another manner under your kings than your enemies the Persians? For them it is death to sit in the king's chair, but to you it became life."* For the rest of the world, the throne of God is a fearful place. If they stand before it as sinners, they find the wrath of a holy God; they find justice that is due them meted out. It is a great white throne of judgment. But because of what our Great High Priest did, for us it is a throne of life, a throne of mercy where we find Someone who cares about our struggle, our pain, our need, our weakness, our frailty, Someone who sympathizes with us in our weaknesses because He truly knows them. Yet when we come, we will not only find a High Priest who cares:

b. we will find power that enables us, grace to help us in our time of need. We'll find power when we have none, strength when ours is all gone, energy where we are all drained. How? *Eph. 3:20, Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us... Eph. 1:19-21, ...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.* The same power by which the Father answered Jesus and raised Him out of the grip of death is at work in us mightily. It is our grace to help in time of need. We can't resist temptation. We can't refuse to sin. We can't cleanse ourselves and become pure. Jesus did all that at the cross for us. But we can find power to obtain victory if we come to that throne of grace and look:

3. we are encouraged to approach Him freely (16), with confidence, with boldness, without hesitation, without thinking for even a moment that we will find condemnation instead of grace. "Lord, I am sinking, I am falling, I have no strength, I can't resist, I'm about to give in, Lord, Lord, Lord..." You're invited, you're encouraged, as much, as often, as long, as loud or as softly as you want or like, to come to the Throne of Grace. We have a High Priest sitting there who is touched deeply with our infirmities and:

4. we are encouraged to hold fast to Him (14) The Greek says literally, to *hold fast to our confession* and what is our confession? **3:1** says Jesus is the High Priest we confess! Cling to Him; hold fast to Him. His eyes are mercy; His word is rest! His throne is life!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Problem Of Immaturity - 5:11-6:12

There are few more difficult passages to interpret than the one we look at this morning; there are few that have been more widely debated and interpreted as to their meaning. I read almost every commentary I've got on Hebrews and most of them have a list of all the various interpretations that have been proposed and why theirs is the right one. So I've wrestled all week with these verses and prayed for understanding and here goes. If you don't agree with where I wound up, you're probably in some good company (but so am I because I checked!) This passage is actually an aside, an interruption of the

flow of the epistle. The author wants to go on to explore the subject of Christ's High Priesthood and the whole idea of the order of Melchizedek and he does get back to it in at the end of chapter 6 and in chapter 7. These verses are a "But before I get to that, there is something I've just got to say..." They are:

I. A Frank Digression About Immaturity (5:11-6:3) These believers he was writing to were spiritually immature. They had been believers for a good long while now, but they were still not sure and were wavering on elementary truths of the faith. He was having real hesitance about teaching them deeper things, because they still showed confusion about the very first things you learn in the Christian life. You see:

1. maturing is a natural part of spiritual life (5:11-14), just like it is in our physical lives.

a. it is natural for new believers to need basic truths, just like a baby has to drink milk. If you try to feed a newborn meat or solid food, it will choke him or he'll spit it out. He's not ready for it, not capable of consuming it. He needs milk first. A person who's just come to Christ is not ready to debate the five points of Calvinism or the theories of the rapture and second coming. He needs milk. He needs to understand his salvation fully and have assurance and those things. That's natural. But also:

b. it is normal to deepen in understanding over time As the baby grows and his body develops and his tastes develop, he is not only able but desires to eat solid food and eventually, meat. It's a normal process that occurs. Likewise, it is normal for a new convert to Christ to deepen in his understanding over time, to move beyond what he first knew, to understand deeper things and to have his life more and more thoroughly changed by it. BUT:

c. it is ABNORMAL to be unclear about basic truths AFTER a time, isn't it? It is abnormal for a 5 or 7 year old to drink nothing but milk, to desire a bottle, isn't it? No offense to you nursing mothers, but if you see a 5 or 6 year old who still wants to nurse, you think, "Something's not right here; there's a weaning process that hasn't occurred somehow; there needs to be a moving on toward maturity." And the same is true in the realm of the spiritual life. It is abnormal for someone who's been saved for a couple of years to be unclear and uncertain about elementary truths. If they are, something is wrong somewhere! By now they should be teaching others, but they end up having to be taught the same basic things over and over again. They're still not able to have spiritual discernment and tell what's right to believe and what's wrong to believe. So either they haven't been fed properly or something is more deeply wrong. But what are:

2. the elementary truths that should be settled by now (6:1-2) The Living Bible puts it like this: *Let us stop going over the same old ground again and again, always teaching those first lessons about Christ. Let us go on instead to other things and become mature in our understanding, as strong Christians ought to be. Surely we don't need to speak further about the foolishness of trying to be saved by being good, or about the necessity of faith in God; you don't need further instruction about baptism and spiritual gifts [literally, "the laying on of hands."] and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.* When you find people who say they've received Christ a good while back but still talk in the next breath about doing good in order to be saved or whether you have to be baptized in order to be saved or what happens when you die or whether there really is a hell or things like that, there's a problem. Those things should be settled by now! Now, what was it in the case of these Hebrew believers? You see, they wanted Jesus, but they could hardly let go of their old dependence on Judaism. They still wanted to look to Moses and the law. They still wanted to go to the Temple and offer the sacrifices, and felt the need of the earthly priesthood to help them. The overall message of the book of Hebrews is "LET GO OF THOSE THINGS! We've got something better. We've got Jesus who is better than angels, better than Moses, better than the old High Priest, better than anything. Let them go!" Those are all what verse 1 in the KJV calls "dead works" or the NIV margin calls "useless rituals" that can never save you! They were still vacillating on the essentials; is Jesus enough or isn't He? And so, in these verses the writer makes an:

3. the appeal to move on to maturity (6:1, 3) "I don't want to go back over that ground again and teach you those basic things; I want to move on to teach you about other stuff, deeper stuff, mature stuff, and I will, Lord willing, in just a moment. But you need to settle those things, choose to believe those things once for all and move on!" And then the writer gives:

II. A Grave Warning About Immaturity (6:4-8) Wow! A somber, sobering warning written to believers! What does it mean? Well, before we look at what the text actually says, let me lay a background for understanding. In this realm there are:

1. two fundamental complementary truths: They are both absolutely true and when rightly understood they complement each other, that is, they form the two halves of one vital truth.

a. a true believer CANNOT lose his salvation; he will persevere The New Testament affirms this everywhere. See Jn. 10:27-30. Salvation is a once-for-all work of God that cannot be undone or lost. When the Spirit of God comes in and the heart of the believer is regenerated, he is a new creature and that process cannot be reversed or undone. That person is secure and safe and God will keep them until the very end when they inherit the Kingdom. If you were raised a Methodist or a Pentecostal or otherwise came under the impression that you can, you'd better go back and take another look! However, the converse is this:

b. a true believer demonstrates life; he will grow and produce fruit You also read this everywhere through the New Testament. By their fruits you shall know them. You can't get grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. A tree is known by its fruit. Branches that produce no fruit are cut down and thrown in the fire. They aren't real. Faith that produces no works is dead; it's not real. Good soil produces a crop that is 30 or 60 or 100 fold. There is visible evidence of life and growth. The writer of Hebrews uses the same analogy in **(7-8)**. Good land, true land, produces a visible, useful crop. Land that only grows thorns and thistles in spite of all the farmer's efforts, gets cursed and burned over. A genuine believer who is truly converted and regenerated produces visible spiritual fruit. He has a hunger for the Word of God and is applying it to his life and his character and behavior are changing. His understanding is deepening. He is impacting others and so on. Now that brings us to the:

2. two enigmas we encounter in people: You know what an enigma is, don't you? Something that's confusing and hard to explain. We encounter two types of people that are like that. The first is:

a. one who professes faith without demonstrating life He says, "I'm a Christian; I've accepted Christ," but over time, his life doesn't demonstrate it. He lives just the way he did before. He lies, he cheats, he steals or commits immorality and he does it all without remorse or feeling guilty. He doesn't read the Word or pray or go to church or if he does, his heart isn't really in it. He literally continues in a life of sin. It's confusing and hard to explain. How can one who claims to have eternal life live in such a way? Well, we have a word for such a person; he or she is **a hypocrite**, an actor, a charlatan who's fooling themselves. He is someone who's pretending to be something he's really not. He is no more genuinely saved than Adolf Hitler. No fruit means no life. Yet here's a person who's even more confusing:

b. one who once demonstrated life, but now rejects it I know someone who told me that he grew up in a Bible preaching church. He was in the youth group and was full of excitement for Jesus and ran around with a Scofield Bible and all that stuff. But today he really wants nothing to do with any of it. What happened? At one time he seemed no different from you and I; he seemed to be living and producing fruit. Did he lose his salvation? No doubt you know someone like that. There are wonderful reports all over the world of Muslims and Hindus and Buddhists being converted to Christ. But there have always been some few reports of believers who were an active part of the church, even some Christian leaders, leaving their faith and converting to Islam or Buddhism or even atheism and becoming opponents to the faith. The Roman Emperor Julian, nephew of Constantine who converted to Christianity and made it legal, was raised in the faith, educated in the church and when he assumed the throne turned against it with all his might, earning himself the title of Julian the Apostate, by which he has been known for centuries. Through the years there have often been some strong Christian leaders who have just walked away from it all and become opponents of the faith they once professed. How can that be? Well, Christianity has developed a word for such a person; he is **an apostate**. And down through the ages, most interpreters have agreed that Heb. 6:4-5 is about a person who becomes an apostate.

3. what apostasy is: falling away (6) This is the only place this word is used in the New Testament. It is reserved for a special meaning. It means a **complete rejection of Christ(ianity)**. It means a complete and permanent rejection and turning away from Jesus and all that He taught after having embraced it all. And not just for a week or a month, but for life. It means a complete, utter rejection of Jesus and all He stands for. Now, where do we see such a thing in Scripture. Well:

a. we see it in the shallow and the thorny soils - Mt. 13:20-22 Here's a man who seems to receive Christ and to grow, to have life. For a while he's indistinguishable from any true believer. But when persecution or trouble comes, he walks away from his faith and doesn't come back. He was not a true convert. He never had salvation. Here's another who seems just as real as any of us, but after a time turns away and back to his old life of making money or leaves the faith because of some powerful influence in his family and never comes back. He was not good soil. There was not true fruit. He was not genuinely saved. That's why he fell away. Now to be fair, some of these are people who simply lose interest and drop out and may yet come back some day. But others of them become apostates, deniers and enemies of the faith, opposites of the Apostle Paul. He now preached the faith he once tried to destroy. They now try to destroy the faith they once preached.

b. we see it in the heresy of Simon the Magician He was a sorcerer who held the people of Samaria mesmerized by his powers until Philip came and preached Christ there and **Acts 8:13** says he believed. He made a profession of faith. He was even baptized and gave open testimony of it publicly. He followed the apostles around and was amazed by the power of God he saw in them. Weeks went by and at last Peter and John came down and look at **18-24**. Peter told him he wasn't real; he hadn't been truly saved and regenerated for all his outward appearances. His heart was full of sin and he urged him to repent before destruction came on him and there is just a hint that he seemed sorry, or rather, worried about his own destruction. Did he repent? Well, the writings of the early church are filled with his name. It is said that he founded his own cult, proclaiming himself to be the creator god and his mistress to be his female counterpart in creating all things. Indeed, the cult of the Simonians, though very small, persisted until the third century before it died out. And the early church fathers credit him with the dubious distinction of

being the progenitor and founder of Gnosticism, the constant heretical enemy of the true church in the first century. He fell away, though he seemed genuine, turned from Jesus and never looked back. He became an apostate, one who never truly had salvation, though he once seemed to manifest it, and fell away. And of course, most clearly:

c. we see it in the betrayal of Judas - Acts 1:16-17 Think about it. Judas was with Jesus for three years. He was part of the special circle of the Twelve. He had seen the miracles. His hands held the bread as it multiplied. He had been in the boat when Jesus walked on the water. He was sent out with the others and his hands worked healings and cast out demons! He was counted among them as no different. No one pointed a finger at him. He was there at Caesarea Philippi; he knew that Jesus was truly the Christ, the Son of the Living God! He waved the palm branches and shouted Hosanna. And then he turned around and betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver! Compare **24-25**. His heart was not right; he was not genuine and he left the faith. He threw it away and never came back and ended up where he belonged. He fell away and became an apostate. Did he lose his salvation? No, he never really had it, but he sure looked like he did. He seemed like all the rest to be genuine and true.

So it is possible for a person who seems to demonstrate spiritual life to fall away altogether! Now, we're ready to look at:

4. what the text teaches It teaches a:

a. FACT: it is impossible to renew actual apostates to repentance (4-6) There is no *if* in the Greek of verse 6. The person who has experienced all these things and has fallen away cannot be brought back to repentance. It's impossible! So there are some people walking around on planet earth who, despite Peter's efforts and prayers or yours and mine, just aren't coming back to Jesus, whether we like it or understand it or not. Why? Because:

(1) they experienced all God has to draw them to true salvation They tasted the work of the Holy Spirit. He has worked in their hearts. He's brought them to see and understand the truth. They know who Jesus is. They have read and known the Word of God and tried the Christian life and have seen the power of God at work in other lives and maybe even through them. There is nothing more He can do, yet in spite of everything God has done to draw them to yield their hearts truly, maybe after years, they choose to walk away and in so doing:

(2) they deliberately "re-crucify" Christ and put Him to shame In their own mind and will they choose to go back there and to shout all over again with that crowd, "Away with this man! Crucify Him! He deserves it!" They become enemies of the Gospel and in their own defection from the faith, they put Him to open shame and humiliation in the eyes of the world. And so, God says, it is impossible to bring them back. Now that goes against our grain but:

(3) it is like the Jews' eternal sin of blasphemy The Jewish leaders saw the miracles. They saw the power. They heard the wisdom. They knew Jesus was of God, that the Spirit of God worked mightily in Him, yet they called Him Beelzebub and said He drove out demons because he got his power from Satan. And look what Jesus said in **Mk. 3:28-29**. They had crossed the line. God had done all He could do. They were beyond forgiveness, beyond redemption, because they had trampled on it. Their sin was eternal. Of course, they didn't profess Christ to begin with, but their action was just the same as a person who did and then fell away.

It is a fearful thing, but the Bible seems to say that there are some people, hopefully not very many, but some people, walking around in this world who cannot be saved. Listen to the Living Bible of *Heb. 6:4-6*, *There is no use trying to bring you back to the Lord again if you have once understood the Good News and tasted for yourself the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, and know how good the Word of God is, and felt the mighty powers of the world to come, and then have turned against God. You cannot bring yourself to repent again if you have nailed the Son of God to the cross again by rejecting him, holding him up to mocking and to public shame.* That's the terrible fact the writer is conveying, but why? What does this have to do with immaturity? He's really warning of a grave:

b. DANGER: perpetual immaturity COULD prove to be apostasy (7-8) Land that produces fruit, you know is good land. But land that isn't producing any fruit is IN DANGER. It might get on the bandwagon and start producing fruit at some point and prove to be good soil after all. But if it keeps on producing nothing but thorns, it might just eventually prove to be bad soil! The person who shows no growth, who claims to be saved, but can't get clear on the most elementary truths of salvation and shows no progress in his understanding or life, could, in reality, be simply a true believer who is immature but he also could actually be an apostate in progress, a Simon or a Judas that simply hasn't hit the right occasion yet to turn away! And we have no outward way to tell which one he is! Wow, what a sobering thought! If you're not growing, you need to take a hard look at yourself! There is DANGER! Now, lest we should get the wrong idea out of these harsh words, the writer ends with:

III. A Clear Encouragement For True Believers (6:9-12) First, he says:

1. this is not intended to cause any believer to doubt their salvation (9) God WANTS us who are truly born again to have full and complete assurance, to know that we have eternal life. If you are really saved, you cannot lose your salvation. So let me point out that this warning:

a. it does not refer to a believer falling into sin (backsliding) You cannot lose your salvation by sinning. If you could, we'd all be losing it and getting it back all the time. Christians sometimes fall into horrible sin. David, whose heart was after God, fell into adultery and even murder. This is not talking about a believer who sins and knows it. It is talking about an apostate who walks away from the faith altogether forever. Further:

b. it does not refer to a believer who has a temporary lapse There are plenty who have come to Christ, particularly younger in life, and then have left the Christian way and the Church, only to come back later on in life. Some of you here have done that very thing. In the early church there was debate about whether to readmit people who had been arrested and denied the Lord when their life was threatened. Could they repent? Sure! Look at Peter who denied Him three times and came back. An apostate is somebody who never comes back, who never looks back, who has become an enemy of the true Gospel and openly continues to deny Christ. Anyone, no matter what they've done or how far in sin they are, who has even the faintest desire to come back to Christ, is not the person these verses are speaking about. And also:

c. it is not meant to cast any doubt on God's character (10) It is not intended to imply that God is unfaithful, that He doesn't always keep His own and save them to the very end. He does. It doesn't imply that our loving labor doesn't matter or that He doesn't see it. He does. This warning is not intended to take away your assurance in any way but rather the opposite:

2. it is intended to promote sure hope through diligence (11) It is intended to encourage all of us to press on and seek after God and grow, which is what in itself gives us our assurance. Peter talked about goodness, knowledge, self-control, and love, the fruits of the Spirit and wrote **2 Pet. 1:8-11**. Do you see it? If you see yourself growing, you know that you are real and that you will never fall away, that this awful thing will never be true of you, but that you will actually make it all the way to that rich welcome into the eternal kingdom. Your very growth makes the fact of your calling and election sure! The warning is to cause us to grow and be sure and finally:

3. it is intended to prevent laziness and promote endurance (12) You can't just sit around and say, "Well, I've accepted Christ and now I'm secure. My fire insurance is in place. Now I can do whatever I want; I can go play with matches!" You have to grow and you do it, not of your own strength, but by seeking after God. You have to join the ranks of those who trust Him through thick and thin, patiently enduring with their eyes fixed on the inheritance that is waiting for them. Only growth will take you there. Contentment without it is a DANGER sign!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of A Secure Hope - Heb. 6:13-20

Hebrews is a deep book, but it is definitely worth wading through and struggling to understand, because there is no other book that helps us to understand the privileges and promises we have in Jesus better than this one! In Jesus we have EVERYTHING, but Hebrews helps us realize EVERYTHING WE HAVE in Him! And just after that difficult passage we looked at in the first half of chapter 6 where we have that stern warning about apostasy, we find the author reminding us of one of our greatest privileges, the privilege of a secure hope! You know, hope is such an important thing. *Years ago, a seasick passenger was aboard an ocean liner during a long and rough Atlantic crossing. Before long, he succumbed and leaned over the rail, turning several shades of green. A steward came along and tried to cheer him up by saying, "Don't be discouraged, sir! No one's ever died of seasickness yet!" The nauseated passenger looked up at the steward with baleful eyes and replied, "Oh, don't say that! It's only the hope of dying that's kept me alive this long!"* [Servant, Sum 1995. Page 2.] That's funny, but it parodies a truth. It is hope that keeps us going; it is a secure certainty about our personal future that gives us strength to endure life, to keep going in the struggles and the suffering it brings. *1 Cor. 15:19* says, *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.* We have a hope beyond the grave, a hope that supercedes death itself. We shall be with Jesus Christ forever and it is a certain, sure hope that nothing in all creation can separate us from! Now, how do we know that we have this hope? How do we know that it's not just a wishful thinking, not just what we'd like to be true, but that it's actual true truth that we can lean on? Well, Hebrews gives us a bottom line reason:

I. God Swore An Oath To Us Through Abraham (13-15) Now before you say, "What does that have to do with me?", let's read the whole story. The promise he refers to is quoted from **Gen. 22:15-18**:

1. God made a promise to Abraham The story of Abraham begins back in Gen. 12 with God telling him to leave everything and go to the land of Canaan and giving him a covenant, an unconditional promise about the future. This promise was repeated by God and explained and expanded on several times, in chapter 15, in chapter 17 and now we have it again in chapter 22, *after* his only son Isaac was already born and he had offered him to God on an altar on Mt. Moriah. Now look carefully at what God promised. First:

a. He promised him numerous descendants, as many as the stars in the sky or the sand at the shore. This, of course, is the promise that there would be a nation of **Israel** and that nation would prosper and multiply and be victorious over their enemies. But the promise goes beyond that:

b. He promised him a particular Seed In verse 18 this is not simply a reference to Israel. It is singular and it refers to **Christ**. How do I know? Look at **Gal. 3:16**. There we have it spelled out. This is a promise that there would be a particular Seed, the Seed of the Woman from Gen. 3:15, who would come to crush the serpent's head! This is a promise that God would one day send the Christ, the Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. And then:

c. He promised through Him to bless all nations and that means **us**. Through that promised Christ every people on this earth would know the blessing of salvation. Now, just to be very clear, check out **Gal. 3:7-8**. That promise is a promise of justification, of pardon for sin, of salvation for some from every people. So, when God made the promise, it was to more than Abraham, to more than even Jesus; it was to us!

d. we are the heirs of this promise to Abraham - Gal. 3:29 If you belong to Christ, **YOU** are Abraham's spiritual child in Him and **YOU** are the heir of God's promise of salvation; it belongs to you! You are standing here today heir to a salvation based on a promise God made to Abraham nearly 4000 years ago! Now, how do we know that that promise is true, that we will receive the salvation that He has promised, that we will actually get to heaven? Well, the point of the writer in Heb. 6:13 is:

2. God confirmed that promise with an oath We read His words in Gen. 22, *I swear by Myself...* God took an oath before Abraham. He made the promise numerous times, but this time He confirmed the promise with an oath. He said, "I swear..." and then He literally said, "Blessing, I will bless you..." which the Greek translates as "I will surely bless you..."! In other words, God did everything He could to indicate that His promise was sure and could not be broken. And the writer gives us the response in verse 15:

3. Abraham waited patiently, relying on God's promise First, He waited and waited and waited at least 25 years for a child to be born (Isaac), then he waited and waited another 60 years (check it out) to see his twin grandsons Jacob and Esau born before he died. That's all he ever saw of the fulfillment of that promise in his lifetime, one son and two grandsons! So He died without receiving all that God had promised Him, but He died believing it would be, nevertheless. Check out **11: 13**. Abraham and Sarah and those like him, saw the reality of the promises from afar and embraced them as being true and that's what enabled them to live as pilgrims and strangers on the earth, to suffer through the journey of this life. Verse 16 tells us what the bottom line of their hope was: heaven! Verse 10 tells us what Abraham was looking for, a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God! Abraham had a sure and certain hope that God would send a redeemer who would make it possible for him and all of us to be with God in heaven forever! He died, standing on that hope, but 6:15 says:

4. Abraham received what was promised in God's time Abraham did receive what was promised! In due time the Savior came and in due time right now as we participate in the process, the nations are being blessed one by one and salvation is being brought to them, just as He said. And it's not only that these things happened and that the promise was kept, but that Abraham received it. Jesus said in **Jn. 8:56**, *Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad*. When he was alive on earth, he rejoiced at the thought of Jesus' coming, but when Jesus came, he saw it from heaven and was glad! He watched the fulfillment of God's promise and he's watching Him fulfill the promise to all nations right now! Abraham died in hope and that hope was and is being realized! But let's think about:

II. Why God Swore An Oath To Us It's something that would likely never occur to us, something we would hardly notice, but the writer of Hebrews makes a big point of it. First, think about:

1. the purpose of a human oath (16) The swearing of an oath is a process that dates back before the time of Abraham and is still in use today. We swear officials into office with an oath of office. We swear witnesses in to testify in court. We give written oaths on documents that we have witnessed by a notary, "Sworn to before me this day...". We still do this age-old thing. Why? Because:

a. an oath confirms the truth of what is said or at least it is supposed to. Human beings are inveterate liars! We say things that are not true. Not every statement we make can be counted on. So, we always make a way to indicate that we are absolutely, surely, telling the truth. We swear an oath. So generally speaking:

b. an oath puts an end to all argument or doubt How many scenes do you remember seeing where someone says, "Swear to me..." and the person swears and that settles it; it's done. Swearing is a human doubt-removal technique. How does it work?

c. it does so by appealing to the judgment of someone greater In the modern case, to lie under oath or perjury is punishable by the court with a fine or jail time. The idea is that nobody is going to risk that. To forge a document, to sign a false oath or to break a sworn contract; all those things hold us accountable to law enforcement and punishment. In ancient times the swearing of an oath was even a more serious matter. To swear by the gods was to appeal to them to punish the person if they lied! People were desperately afraid of the supernatural and to swear by

a god or for the Jews to swear by their Holy Almighty God was a serious thing; to violate an oath was to commit suicide, to call down divine judgment on yourself! The ancients were convinced that curses associated with oaths came true and that's why an oath settled things. But God didn't have anyone greater than Himself to appeal to, so He swore by His own self! Now what was:

2. God's purpose in giving an oath (17-18) He used an oath because:

a. He wanted to make it clear to us that His purpose will not change We are the heirs of the promise. It belongs to us. He swore that oath to us so we would know absolutely that the word of His promise of our salvation is secure and true and it will never change. Because:

b. He wanted to make it clear to us in human terms that we could understand. So He did it the way that we do it. He swore an oath. You see:

c. He wanted us to understand that it is impossible for Him to lie God doesn't need to swear. Every word of God is true. That is His character. If He says a thing, it is so. If He says yes, it means yes and if He says no, it means no. He has no need to swear; He could not do otherwise than tell the truth, but He wanted us to understand that so He gave us TWO things, not just one. He gave us His Word, His promise, and then He gave us His oath on top of it that His promise is true! So we would be double sure to understand that HE DOESN'T LIE! And why is that important?

d. He wanted us to be greatly encouraged by the security of our hope Hey, do you remember the story of when Solomon was crowned King of Israel? His brother Adonijah had tried to steal the kingdom from him by being crowned first. But when Solomon took the throne, Adonijah was terrified that Solomon would kill him and so he fled to the Tabernacle, ran inside and took hold of the horns of the altar of burnt offering. He took hold of a hope, the hope that God would save him from the death he deserved and that he would live. That's what we've done; we've fled to Him for refuge. We've taken hold of the horns of His altar; we've clung to His promise that we are guaranteed salvation in Jesus Christ and He wants us to know that hope is a secure one, that it will not fail, so that we don't have to live in fear, so that we don't have to be terrified, so that we can face anything in the security of the fact that we belong to Jesus and we will be with Him! He swore that oath to encourage us when we understand it! Now look:

III. What His Oath Guarantees To Us (19-20) That hope we have:

1. it is like a trustworthy anchor that cannot fail to hold An anchor was a very important thing to an ancient ship that didn't have a motor to fight the wind and waves. Lives depended on a safe anchorage. In Acts Paul was in a ship on the ocean being driven along out of control by a terrible storm and the crew knew they were near land and they didn't want to be shipwrecked into it at night and die, so they dropped not one, but four anchors from the back of the ship and prayed for daylight. Why did they pray? They were terrified their anchors wouldn't hold! A sailor would give anything to have an absolutely trustworthy anchor that cannot ever slip or be broken loose! Think about it, wouldn't it be wonderful to have an anchor that every time you put it in the water you know it will not move and neither will you because you're held fast to it? My friends, we've fled to God's place of refuge and grabbed hold of an anchor that cannot move! God's oath guarantees that what we've latched our souls onto is absolutely secure and trustworthy. You see:

2. it guarantees that we shall enter into the very presence of God In the inner sanctuary behind the curtain of the tabernacle was the place where God's very presence was, where He spoke from between the cherubim. And in another couple of chapters, we'll read that that earthly tabernacle was just an earthly sort of child's model of the way the real things are in heaven. You see, we're not just going to heaven, not just going to have a cabin in the corner of glory land somewhere; we're going to enter straight through the veil into the inner sanctuary of heaven, straight into the presence of Almighty God. Nothing will stand between us and Him. He will receive us and we will dwell with Him! His oath guarantees it! And here's what confirms it once for all:

3. our security is demonstrated in a Forerunner who is already there for us Jesus already went in there for us on our behalf and He's seated there right now and we are anchored to Him. Where He is, we will be also! It's guaranteed, Hallelujah!

What a privilege! If you have that, you can face anything. You can face suffering, you can face persecution, you can face hatred and bitterness. That's how Stephen could face an angry mob that was stoning him to death without denying his faith; he looked up and saw his Anchor standing up there inside the veil and said, "Lord Jesus, take me home; receive my spirit; here I come!" And he went! That's how you can face trials and discouragements and fears and diseases and death itself. You have a secure hope. You're anchored to a promise that won't let go, that won't fail, that will take you all the way into the very presence of God forever. In the old hymn I remember singing in church as a boy, Priscilla Owens asks: *Will your anchor hold in the storms of life? When the clouds unfold their wings of strife? When the strong tides lift and the ca-*

bles strain, will your anchor drift or firm remain? Then with confidence she replies, *We have an anchor that keeps the soul, steadfast and sure while the billows roll, fastened to the Rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love.* Listen to the second verse, *It is safely moored, 'twill the storm withstand, For tis well secured by the Savior's hand, and the cables passed from His heart to mine can defy the blast through strength divine.* The next verses tell us, *It will firmly hold in the straits of fear; it will surely hold in the floods of death.* Listen, we have an anchor that grips the soul steadfast and sure; we're fastened to the Rock which cannot move by the cables of a Divine promise given on oath that our anchor will hold through all the storms the enemy can send our way. We live in a secure hope, a certain knowledge that we are safe, that we are held, and as the hymn says, *We shall anchor fast by the heavenly shore with the storms all past forevermore!*

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of A Living Savior - Heb. 7

There is a profound contrast between our faith and any other religion in the world. We celebrate that great difference every Easter. The One we follow, the One we're counting on, the One we're believing in, is alive. Mohammed died and he was gone. Buddha died and he was gone. Lao Tsu died and he was gone. Jesus died and on the third day He rose from the dead and over a period of 40 days He showed himself to more than 500 people and convinced them with many infallible proofs that He is indeed alive! Then He ascended to heaven in their sight, still living! What's the point? Even though He experienced death, He was permanently victorious over it and He is eternally alive and that makes all the difference in the world. Now, the writer of Hebrews emphasizes that fact and illustrates it by comparing Jesus to an Old Testament character who appears on the scene briefly in Gen. 14 whose name is Melchizedek. He had started to talk about this subject in 5:10, saying that Christ is our High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, but then he digressed saying, "I have much more to say about this..." and went on a tangent to warn about immaturity in chapter 6. Then in the last verse of chapter 6, he finally comes back to it and repeats himself saying, "Christ has become a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." The purpose of Chapter 7 is to explain what that means. Let me break down what I think the author is trying to say like this. First of all, we learn that:

I. Melchizedek Is A Foreshadowing Of Christ's Person (6:20b-7:10) Do you remember the story in Gen. 14? Lot had been captured, along with the inhabitants of Sodom, and Abraham led a successful rescue attempt and brought all these folks back. On the way home, a priest named Melchizedek came out of nowhere to meet Abraham and he pronounced a blessing on him and Abraham gave him a tithe or a tenth of the spoils he had taken. Then he went on his way. To us it is an interesting three verse side note that we quickly forget. But the author of Hebrews says, "No, that Melchizedek is like Jesus; He is a picture of Jesus; He is a visual picture, a foreshadowing of Jesus that points out some key things about Him." Well, how does he foreshadow Jesus?

1. he is both King and Priest (1-2) He was the King of Salem, (Jerusalem), meaning the King of Peace. The name Melchizedek actually means "king of righteousness". Yet he was also a priest of God Most High. That is unusual. Most kings are not priests, but in him the two offices were combined, just as they were in Jesus. He was called "Prince of Peace" and "King of the Jews". Jesus is a King who will rule in righteousness, yet Jesus is also a priest. He offered to God a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Himself. He will literally, as Zechariah said, rule as *...a priest on his throne and the two shall be in harmony*, just as they were in old "Mel". So that reminds us of Jesus. Then:

2. he appears to simply "be living", to symbolize eternity (3, 8) Now, the writer is not saying that Melchizedek is some eternal angelic being of a different order. He is merely commenting that in the written record of Genesis, he just "shows up". It doesn't record his genealogy (which is important for a priest; if you can't prove you come from the right line of priests, you can't be a priest!); it doesn't record his birth, his parents, nothing. And it doesn't record what happened to him or his death. He just "shows up" alive and full blown, acts as a priest and disappears. So, according to the record, he was declared to be a living priest and that's how the record stays forever. And that pictures Jesus who we know is alive forever. He is the Eternal Son of God; He has eternal life. Thirdly:

3. he is greater than Abraham and all his descendants To the Jew Abraham is the greatest! "Our Father Abraham; I am a Child of Abraham; I am of the Seed of Abraham!!" They challenged Jesus, *Are you greater than our Father Abraham?* Well, He was. And that fact is pictured in old "Mel" in two ways. First:

a. they paid tithes to him as greater (4-6a) Abraham's great grandson Levi's descendants collected tithes from others. But Abraham PAID a tithe to Melchizedek, so Abraham acknowledged his greater position! In fact, verses 9-10 tell us that you could say that when Abraham did that, he was acting in behalf of all his yet unborn offspring, including Levi and all the priests of his order. So, in one sense, they were paying tithes through him to a greater priest! At the same time:

b. he blessed them as greater (6b-7) Melchizedek pronounced a blessing on Abraham and his descendants. In this formal, official sense, it is always the greater who pronounces the blessing on the lesser; it is the father or the grandfather who blesses the child, the older who blesses the younger. But Abraham didn't bless Melchizedek, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, so who's the greater spiritual authority?

The point is that a greater than Abraham is here! Melchizedek is greater and he pictures Jesus who is greater. But who cares? Why are we talking about this anyway? Well, the reason is that:

II. Melchizedek's Order Was A Foreshadowing Of Christ's Priesthood (11-22) What's he talking about? Well, did you ever wonder how Melchizedek got to be a priest of God? He just kind of showed up as a priest of God. So:

1. his priesthood was of an entirely different order from Aaron (13-14) Melchizedek didn't get to be a priest because he was of the priestly line. He was directly appointed by God to priestly service. So was Jesus. Humanly He was from the tribe of Judah and nobody from the tribe of Judah ever gets to be a priest. Jesus received a special appointment to priesthood from the Father. And here's the point this whole chapter turns on:

2. God declared His King Son an eternal priest of that order - Ps. 110:4 is quoted in verse 17 and verse 21, but let's turn to Ps. 110 and read the first four verses. This is the holy record of a transaction that occurred in heaven between the Father and His eternal Son and we are privileged to have it recorded. Jesus himself implied that this passage was talking about Him. The Father says, "Sit here at my right hand on the throne until I crush all your enemies. I will install you as My King. And I also declare that you are a Priest forever..." and then he throws in these words "after the order of Melchizedek!" Just as Melchizedek was a priest because God declared him one outside of the whole Levitical system, so now God declares His Son, the Messiah, Jesus, is a priest forever in the same way. Now notice:

a. this declaration came through David after the law (28) Back in Moses' day, the law was given; only Levi's son Aaron and his sons can be priests. But 500 years later in the time of David and through his pen, God made a new declaration. "I declare a new Priest, My King, My eternal Son. He is my priest forever!" And that declaration:

b. it was sealed with His oath (20-22) God swore it to be true to make sure we know He will never change His mind. He guarantees to us that Jesus is the only true Priest. So, what was God doing? In those words:

c. thus God set aside the Levitical system for a better one (18-19) Instead of counting on the lambs and the goats and the bulls of the Levitical system offered by a bunch of priests who die, we count on something better. We count on an eternal Priest who's been appointed forever and has offered a better sacrifice, the once-for-all sacrifice of Himself in our place! We aren't saved by the work of a priest like Aaron, but of a priest like Melchizedek who simply "lives"! So, the point is in verse 22:

3. His indestructible life and unchanging oath guarantee our salvation (22) Jesus is our guarantee of salvation. He has two things. He has an indestructible life. How do we know? Because they tried to take it from Him on the cross and they couldn't. He laid it down and picked it back up again! He is eternal and nothing can kill Him. And He has an unchanging oath from God the Father who will not change His mind that He is the only true acceptable High Priest forever. He has the permanent office of bringing men and women to God! So, when we come to God by this Priest, our salvation is guaranteed!! Now let's forget the whole example of Melchizedek and make it more personal and look at:

III. What Our Living Savior Means To Us (23-28) First of all:

1. His eternal life means a permanent priesthood (23-24) He'll never go out of office, because He'll never die. He'll never have to pass that office on to somebody else. He will always be alive to continue in His office as Priest, which for us means Savior! Second:

2. His eternal life means a permanent presence in heaven for us (25) He is able to save us all the way, forever, because He's always there in Heaven for us. Now, some have tried to paint this verse to mean that He's always there reminding and pleading with the Father, begging Him to forgive us, pleading His blood every time we sin, as though the Father still wants to punish us and Jesus stops Him all the time. Well, I know you've heard that concept preached, but that is just not biblical. Jesus doesn't have to show the Father His hands and side every time we sin to remind Him to forgive us! The Father sent the Son and installed Him as both Priest and Sacrifice so that He could forgive us. It's not His words and His pleadings that intercede on our behalf, it is HIS ETERNAL PRESENCE! He can save us forever because He lives forever. We are saved by His life and His life is eternal; as long as He lives, we live and since He lives forever in Heaven seated as a Priest on His throne, we are saved forever and live forever with Him. Thirdly:

3. His utter holiness offered a permanent sacrifice for our sins (26-27) We don't need somebody to offer some animals or go through some rituals over and over again, somebody who sins just like we do and who has to find salvation himself before he can save us. We need Jesus who is utterly holy and without sin, who is eternally separated from all sin and cannot ever be defiled, exalted High in heaven, who offered One sacrifice for All our sins forever! HE's who we need! That one act saved us forever and His living presence guarantees it! So:

4. His appointment as our Savior is eternal (28) Men are weak. The religious leaders of the world and of history are weak; they cannot save us. The priests of the Old Testament order are weak; they cannot save us. They can't be our savior because they all die. The law was weak; it could not save us. But Jesus lives forever and as our Living Savior, His appointment is eternal and He saves us forever.

You know, in our experience nothing is forever; nothing is permanent. Our bodies deteriorate, wear out and die; our house is always falling apart and needing repair. Our car rusts or wears out or gets hit and we have to get another one. Our loved ones die; our friends move away. Even empires fall apart and whole countries go through change. You can't count on anything; you may not even be alive tomorrow. James said, your life is like a vapor which vanishes away. You brought nothing into this world and it is certain that you can carry nothing out. Even heaven and earth shall pass away. But thank God, there is One who is permanent, One who is eternal, One Living Savior who saves us forever because He lives eternally. He's our only hope, our only guarantee. And He's enough!

*Rejoice, rejoice O Christian, lift up your voice and sing,
Eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King....
He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives! Salvation to impart.
You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart!*

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of A Changed Heart - Heb. 8

To understand chapter 8 of Hebrews, we have to talk about something that we don't relate to very much anymore. In our society we have lots of contracts. We have insurance contracts and contracts between businesses and service contracts on equipment. But rarely do we ever use the word *covenant*. We hardly even understand the concept. The only covenant that we commonly know is the marriage covenant. And anymore our society treats that more like a contract than a covenant. But God has always related to His people through covenants. He made a covenant with Noah and we still have the sign of the rainbow in the clouds to remind us that He has covenanted never to destroy the earth by a flood again. He made covenants with Abraham and with David, making sure and certain promises about their future. But before we go any further, let's discuss:

I. The Nature Of A Covenant

First of all, a covenant:

1. it is a sacred agreement between two parties It is far more than a simple contract where one party can cancel out any time. It is sacred and holy and binding; it takes the two parties and unites them; it is inviolable, unbreakable, something you can never walk away from. It is a tie that binds and it stands until death! That's why marriage is once for all forever; it's a covenant! Secondly, a covenant:

2. it is often arranged by the intervention of a mediator If the two parties don't know each other or are estranged from one another, to bring them into covenant requires a mediator, a go-between, someone who goes to each party on the other's behalf, someone who stands to represent the heart and soul of both parties to one another to bring them in to one. Thirdly:

3. it involves promises by each to the other Each party pledges a sacred vow to do what is required of them as party to the covenant. The husband promises to love and protect and nurture his wife, to be a husband to her. The wife pledges to submit to his leadership, to support and encourage him, to be a wife to him. And finally:

4. it is usually sealed by a sacrifice in the Old Testament era Often the covenant would be sealed with the sacrifice of an animal, with the shedding of blood and the taking of life. Sometimes the sacrificial animal would be divided into two pieces and the two parties would walk between them, signifying that through the sacrifice they are one. The point is that the covenant costs a life and it is bound through the giving of a life; it is as sacred as life itself! It is no simple business arrangement. Now:

II. Through Moses God Made A Covenant With Israel If you look in your Bible at the page right before Gen. 1, what does it say? Old Testament. *Testament* is another word for *covenant*. It is the old way that God bound Himself to His people, **The Old Covenant**. We can read that covenant in **Ex. 19:3-7**. Moses mediated that covenant. He went up on the mountain to represent the people of Israel to God and came down to represent God to the people. Through him God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel that out of all the peoples on the earth they would be His special, set apart people, belonging to Him. He would bind Himself to them. But on their part, this covenant:

1. it required obedience to commandments which He spelled out in the next chapter, the 10 commandments and then on throughout the rest of Exodus and all the way through Deuteronomy. God had a Law which he gave to His people that they must obey. As part of that law:

2. it required sacrifices mediated through a priest Every day there would be sacrifices offered to God on behalf of the people by a priest and most particularly, on one day each year, the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle where God's presence was to dwell and sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice on the

mercy seat to signify the people's repentance and God's willingness to have mercy and forgive their sins. Now this Old Covenant:

3. it offered a conditional relationship *Seminary professor Maurice Robinson tells this story about when he was a boy: "A neighbor lad gave me his pet squirrel for the very good reason that his mother had told him to get it out of the house! My parents spoke with his parents and agreed to the gift. I was quite thrilled with my new possession and greatly enjoyed the animal until the same kind and generous neighbor lad came back three days later and told me that his mother had changed her mind, and therefore I had to give him back the squirrel. I protested; I complained. A gift was a gift. I beseeched my own parents to intervene, but the decision went against me because of certain conditional arrangements made with the boy's mother of which I was unaware. So, the squirrel was gone. My parents then gave me a brief lecture concerning gifts. There are gifts that are given permanently--such as birthday presents--but some gifts come with 'strings attached,' and these might be revoked under certain circumstances. Here the 'string attached' was a reversed decision by my friend's mother, which my parents knew could occur. I learned some theology that day," Prof. Robinson explains. "God provides two types of gifts: some are absolutely free, but some have conditions attached. We speak of these as God's covenants; some of which are 'conditional' while others are 'unconditional.'" [SBC Life, Apr 1996. Page 6.]* The covenant God made with Abraham in Gen. 12 to bless him and make out of him a great nation and bless all the families of the earth through him was unconditional. It was not predicated upon his behavior. It was his regardless. But the Mosaic covenant was conditional; God gave Israel the gift of special relationship with Him IF they would obey (verse 5). But if they chose not to obey, not to do what they promised as their part of the covenant, then the covenant called for God to discipline them, destroy them as a nation and scatter them throughout the peoples of the earth. After repeated chances and mercy, they failed to obey and rebelled against their part, but God kept His and you know the rest of the story. However, if you look at the page before Matthew 1 in your Bible, what does it say? The New Testament, that is, The New Covenant.

III. Through Jesus God Made A Covenant With Us, The New Covenant At the Last Supper Jesus held up a cup of wine to His disciples and said, *This cup is [symbolizes] the New Covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins, Drink it, all of you!* On the cross Jesus was about to ratify a whole new way of God relating to man, to those who believe and become part of the Church of Jesus Christ. We stand in relationship to God today through a brand new covenant. That's what Hebrews 8 is going to show us. Now, this New Covenant:

1. it is made through a superior Mediator (1-6) The old covenant was given by Moses, but after him it was continually mediated by the High Priest who continually offered animal sacrifices and entered the Holy Place only that one day a year and then in fear and trembling. But the one who mediated our covenant:

a. He serves in a permanent position of exaltation As we saw last week, He is seated as a priest on His throne. His is at the right hand of the Father, the highest position of honor, and He's seated. He's staying there. So:

b. He enters into the true presence of the Father in heaven The old High Priest was only entering a skin tent with a wooden box overlaid with gold and a gold lid or seat with two angel statues on either side. It had a cloth curtain with pictures of angels embroidered all over on it. That's all he had to go into, a poor earthly replica of God's true presence in heaven. It was a shadow, a type, an earthly object lesson to help visualize the real thing. That's why Moses had such very specific directions to make it a certain way! But after He made His sacrifice on the cross, our Jesus didn't enter into some tent that man set up. He entered into the very presence of the Father in heaven itself, surrounded by myriads of REAL angels right up to the REAL throne where the Father sits and He sat down there at His right hand and stayed! That's what our mediator did! Now which mediator would you rather have, a frail sinful human being or the Son of God who remains seated in His very presence? I'll take Him! He is the one who created the covenant by which you and I are bound to God! Now this New Covenant:

2. it is declared to be new and superior to the old covenant (6-9, 13) Hundreds of years later after multiple violations of the Mosaic covenant, when much of Israel had been carried off into captivity by their enemies and when the other part was about to follow, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 31 and we have it quoted here in Hebrews. And He said, *There is a new time coming, a time when I will make a new covenant...* Verse 13 says that to make a new covenant means the old one is OUT! It is replaced! You see:

a. the Mosaic covenant was broken by the failure of Israel Time after time they didn't keep it. They ran after other gods; they broke every commandment He had given them. They were promised a relationship as His people, but the old covenant of laws and sacrifices never changed their hearts to become His people, to love and treasure that relationship. They did not remain faithful and He was forced to turn away from them. It failed and:

b. through that failure it has been replaced by the New It has now in Jesus been set aside and replaced. God's Son came as the Mediator of a new covenant between God and man. He offered Himself as the once and for all sacrifice to ratify that Covenant and now offers us the opportunity to enter into that covenant individually by faith, by trusting Him and His sacrifice on the cross as the only payment for our sins. Now just in case you're uncomfortable about the words Israel and Judah in verse 8, you should know:

c. this covenant will be applied to Israel in the future but NOW to us When Christ returns and sets up His millennial Kingdom on earth, the believing remnant of Israel will experience the fullness of this promise, but for right now, Jesus says and the writer of Hebrews explains, that this promise of a new covenant is for us who believe in Christ right now! We have been bound to God in an unbreakable permanent covenant through His blood. And the point of all this is that the New Covenant:

3. it provides for us better, unconditional promises (10-12) There are four tremendous privileges we have that Israel never had, promises that never were available under the old system of performance. First:

a. we have a transformed heart When we get saved, when we come to Christ and accept His death as the atonement for our sins, a tremendous transformation happens. Jesus described it with the radical term *new birth*. Paul described it in *2 Cor. 5:17*, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* The old me is put to death, the old man, the person I used to be at my core which was bound to sin. It's killed. And I'm given a new heart, a new nature, one that is holy and pure like Jesus. And the writer of Hebrews describes that same change as having His laws placed in our hearts and minds, written there. Under the old system of performance, a person would have to try to be what they were not. Inside they were a sinner and they had to act like a saint. Now we are made a saint inside, in the very core of our being by the presence of the Holy Spirit, and we obey and follow Him because we WANT to, not because we HAVE to! It comes naturally. It is natural for us to love and obey God and it is unnatural or against our nature for us to sin and rebel against Him. We are transformed. That is what God promises to do for all those who enter into covenant with Him by Christ. Second:

b. we have an unconditional relationship with God The promises of this covenant all start with "I will". There is no condition, no *if you will, then I will*. God says, "You WILL be my people; I WILL be your God." That relationship is unbreakable and unconditional. It is not dependent on my behavior, on my measuring up, on my ability to perform for God and do what He requires and if I don't, He won't. I belong to Him by an eternal covenant and nothing can break that covenant! He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you!!" I never have to worry about rejection, never have to worry about my acceptability, about the fact that if I fall or if I sin, that God will punish and send me away! I am completely and totally accepted in the Beloved one! Third:

c. we have a personal knowledge of God Young Samuel was a boy serving at the Tabernacle and *1 Sam. 16* says, he did not yet know the Lord; God had never yet spoken to Him personally and directly. That's why he didn't recognize God's voice when He called, "Samuel" and ran to Eli instead. The average Israelite was pretty much in that boat. He knew about God. He knew the law and the commandments. He offered sacrifices and he prayed to God, but he did not have a personal knowledge of God. They had to continually teach and encourage one another to seek further knowledge of God. But in the new covenant it's different. In this covenant, EVERYONE, from the least of us to the greatest of us, from the youngest to the oldest of us who believe, we ALL have the same privilege of a personal knowledge of God, a personal relationship and a walk with God, because His Spirit lives inside each one of us! We can all talk to Him and have His Spirit whisper to our hearts and His word impress His thoughts on our minds. We live in a state of communion with Him, instead of a state of obedience to His demands! What a privilege! And finally:

d. we have an absolute forgiveness The best any Israelite could hope for was to have his sins covered for another year. Each new sin was a fresh violation of the covenant and demanded a fresh sacrifice. Forgiveness had to be kept up to date; it had to be renewed often. But in Jesus we are forgiven once for all, forever. Our sins and our iniquities are remembered no more, all of them, past, present and future. *Arnell Motz writes, "The Bariba people of Benin, Africa, have an interesting custom. When two people have had a disagreement that they cannot resolve, they call in a third person to mediate. When the matter has been settled, the mediator splits a cola nut in two. (Cola nuts are chewed by the people, offered at ceremonies, and so on, so they have great significance.) He then gives a half to each person. By accepting the piece of cola nut, they are agreeing they will never refer to this argument again--it is forgiven and forgotten. When God forgives our sin 'He remembers it no more' (Is. 43:25). But how can a God who is omniscient not remember our sin? He chooses to forget. [Christian Week, Jan 30, 1996. Page 15.] Because of the sacrifice which bought us, the sin question is settled! He has "chewed the cola nut" with us! We are in a new covenant, because of what He did, not because of how I perform. Hallelujah! What a privilege!*

The problem is that Christians have a hard time appreciating and appropriating all their privileges! We always want to try to crawl back under that old system of performing and trying and feeling like God's response to us is conditioned on how well we perform! Paul chided the Galatians for wanting to go back under law, wanting to go back to a system of performance! I don't know about you, but I'll take the new deal!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of Knowing Reality - Heb. 9

Ruth Francke had a funny experience after her arm was operated on. She says, "The hospital physical therapist taught me exercises to strengthen my arm muscles. In one, called 'climbing the wall,' I faced a wall and 'walked' the fingers of both hands up it, trying to reach as far with the injured arm as with the other. I seemed to be 'climbing the wall' morning, noon, and night. After watching me for some time, the woman in the next bed said, 'Excuse me, but what religion do you belong to?'" [Reader's Digest, Mar 1992. Page 125.] That's funny, but why would she ask that? I guess because Ruth seemed to be "reaching up to God" three times a day! Probably because strange rituals and religion seem to always go hand in hand, don't they? If you think about it, when God made His covenant through Moses with the nation of Israel, a good part of what He commanded them to do was a series of strange rituals! They were to build a special tent to carry around with them and make certain special pieces of furniture to put in it. And then certain people chosen as priests were to dress in certain clothes and kill certain animals at certain times and sprinkle blood on things and make cakes of grain and pour out oil and do all kinds of things, the details of which take up about half of Exodus, all of Leviticus and the first third of Numbers! And if they meticulously did all those things correctly, in the way they were told, then they could have some sense that they were accepted by God. But I don't think they ever had much of an idea what the things they were doing were all about, do you? I don't know whether you've ever thought about it, but we as Christians have such a tremendous privilege in that we have a full and complete knowledge of the way that God went about saving us and we are not stuck repeatedly performing a system of symbolic rituals and revering material objects without understanding. And it's such a blessing because:

I. We Have A Confidence Of Acceptance That The Old Covenant Could Never Provide Under the Old Covenant that God made with Israel, acceptance with God came:

1. the Old Covenant way: through the sacrifices of the Tabernacle (1-10) God gave them this special tent where He said His Presence would dwell as they carried it about with them and all these objects and rituals to be performed. But as the writer says, let's not get lost in all the details but pull out three important facts. First:

a. the sanctuary was earthly: merely a manmade replica (1) The word used here for it is the common word for a tent and at the bottom line, that's all it was. It was cloth and wood and gold and silver. It was material objects made by the hands of human beings. It was not the real thing, but only a scale model, a replica of the real things in heaven where God's real presence is. Angels were represented by embroidered figures and statues, prayers by burnt incense, God's throne by a gold covered box, God's people by loaves of bread and God's glory by a lampstand! It was at best a poor, cheap imitation of the real thing. Secondly:

b. the sacrifices were faulty: (8-9) They were not enough; they failed to accomplish two things that the worshipper was really seeking.

(1) they gave the sinner no access to the presence of God God's presence dwelt in the inner or second tent, the Holy of Holies, and even though a sacrifice had been offered for sins, the worshipper could never go in there! It didn't take the veil away and open the door to go freely in and fellowship with God! Only the High Priest could go in, and that only on one day a year, the Day of Atonement. And even he went in there in grave terror. If he didn't do it right, he would die. I read somewhere that in later years the High Priest would afterwards throw a party with his friends celebrating the fact that he survived the danger of that Day! Can you imagine living in that kind of fear of acceptance by God? What was wrong? The whole system makes it plain that those sacrifices:

(2) they could only cover the sin, not cleanse the conscience The sin was covered in the prescribed way, but it wasn't really gone; there was always somehow guilt that stood between you and God. You could never have a sense in your conscience and heart that all was absolutely clear and clean. Even the prophet Isaiah, when He had a vision of God in the Temple, his reaction was not to run and say, "Oh, Father, I am so glad to see you at last; I love you so much!"; it was, "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." - Is. 6:5. He thought he was going to die from contact with God's holiness; his conscience was not cleansed. The Old system never did the trick. And thirdly:

c. the system was temporary: until the time of the new order (10) Everything about it was temporary. The tent itself and the curtains were made of cloth, not stone; how long could it last? The sacrifices were repeated daily and by cycles and annually. The point is that they didn't last. The whole thing, the whole system, was designed to be temporary, to be a way for Israel to obey God and wait for Him to bring in a whole new order. And we're fortunate enough to understand what that new order is. Now we approach God:

2. the New Covenant way: through the sacrifice of Christ (11-15) You see, we're fortunate enough to know that all of those things, those symbols, those rituals which stayed in place for 1400 years, were just representing ahead of time what Jesus Christ was going to do!

a. the real sanctuary is heaven itself (11) God doesn't live in a tent and sit on a box. The earth and the heavens cannot contain Him. But Revelation opens the door of vision for us and we can see God in His dwelling. It is heaven itself with all of its glories, with myriads of real angels surrounding Him, with throngs of saints before Him, and the light of His glory illuminating the whole thing! That's where our Jesus went in as our High Priest! And He didn't just run in and back out. He went in there and passed through all of heaven while the inhabitants cried, "There goes the Lamb; He is worthy!" And He took the title deed to the Kingdoms of earth from the Father's hand and the Father said, "Well done, My Son, now sit here at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet!" Now, could He do that? Because:

b. His true sacrifice on the cross was complete (12-14) He didn't offer some animals who were simply innocent victims, but had no spirit at all, no eternal life in them, no conscience of righteousness or sin. He offered Himself, put the body that contained His own eternal spirit to death on the cross and put His spirit in the Father's hands. And that one, once for all act:

(1) it provided a permanent eternal redemption It took care of sins forever. It actually removed them and sent them away as far as the east is from the west. The guilt of sin is actually gone and so:

(2) it provided an internal cleansing When we approach God through the way of what His Son did, we do get that internal cleansing. We are washed whiter than snow. We are justified, pardoned, so that we stand before God just as if we'd never sinned. We stand before Him completely different from the way Isaiah felt; our consciences are clean. Our sins are forgiven. We can run into His presence crying, "Abba Father!" You see, His sacrifice on the cross:

(3) it made us free to serve the living God, to minister to Him, to walk into His presence at any time and to go out with His blessing and power and to walk with Him and talk with him along life's narrow way! Free! The way in is clear! And get this:

c. our inheritance through Him is eternal (15a) There's nothing temporary about it. Christ has entered there for us to stay and we're going to enter there with Him one day and stay forever and everything we've been given in Him, our status as accepted, forgiven and being made His child, it all belongs to us and goes on and on and never ends!

Now somebody better shout hallelujah soon! Thank God that we know the reality of the truth in Jesus Christ and we're not stuck back there going through a bunch of rituals and symbols and wondering what it all means and living in fear! But on the other hand, I don't want you to think that God simply did an about-face in midstream here, that He said, "I used to want people to approach me that old way, but now forget all that; I'm doing something new and now I have a new way." Yes, our new way of relating to God HAS replaced the old way, but not by simply rejecting the old way. Rather:

II. The Death Of Christ Was The Fulfillment Of The Old Symbols (15b) Look at that carefully. Christ's death paid the price, not only for our sins in this age many years later, but also for the sins committed *under the first covenant*, that is, throughout the whole Old Testament era! The sins of all those generations of folks who offered sacrifices at the old Tabernacle and through the Old Testament system were not actually paid for until the cross! You see:

1. the old sacrifices taught very important symbolic lessons (16-22) They were given for a very wonderful purpose and reason. They were preparing the way for us to understand what Christ would one day do and even looking back at them now, we can see those lessons that help us to understand more about our salvation. For instance, those old sacrifices taught two things very clearly:

a. a will [testament] is only put into effect through death (16-17) Now here's something you might want to understand. Your Bible has two testaments; it doesn't say *covenant*. English has two distinct words that we use. A covenant is an inviolable agreement between two parties; a testament is an inviolable command about what to do with a person's property after they die, a "last will and testament". Greek has only one word that means both things at the same time. It means something like "an authoritative laying down of things that must be done". That word is used of all the covenants God makes with people, because they are God-determined and unbreakable, but it is also the standard word for a will, and that's how the author uses it in these two verses. Now, a will is only put in force after the person dies. While he lives, he can change his mind! He has to die to make it valid and unalterable; it was sealed by the giving of life. The same was true of a covenant under the old system. It required death; an animal had to die! A life had to be given to make it valid. And that's why we find all through the Old Testament or Old Covenant in everything this one principle:

b. without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (18-22) When Moses made that old covenant with the people and they said "we will", he sacrificed bulls and took their blood and sprinkled it on the people. The same sprinkling of blood was used over and over again on everything for cleansing. Why? It was designed to drill home over and over again, day by day, this one lesson: without death there is no forgiveness; it requires the giving of a life to purchase acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins. And you see all of:

2. those lessons pointed to the better sacrifice of Christ Himself (23-28) They all pointed the way, set the stage, made our minds ready for us to understand that the life it all pointed to was that of Christ, the sacrifice it all led up to was the one final complete sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world, the sacrifice of the ultimate lamb of God, His own Son! But His sacrifice was in every respect better and these next verses point out why. Notice that the word *appear* occurs three times. There are three facts that make what Jesus did better. First:

a. He appears for us in God's very presence forever (23-24) He didn't just go into some man-made tent on earth. He entered into the very presence of God in heaven and notice the tense carefully, *NOW to appear*. He is there in the presence of God appearing for us forever. He has entered in and sat down; He's staying. He's there for us always. And not only that, but look at verse 25:

b. He appeared on earth once to do away with sin permanently (25-28) He's not there in heaven pleading and pleading and offering Himself and sprinkling His blood on the Throne over and over. There is no continued or continual sacrifice that He offers. He did all of that just one time and He did it right down here on earth on the cross! He appeared here on earth once for all to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself on the cross and that did it, permanently, once and for all, forever, no repeats! Just like human beings get one death and afterwards one judgment. Jesus died once and took the judgment of all, past, present and future, on Him there. When He said, "It is finished!", He meant it! So, our forgiveness is permanent. And then look at this:

c. He will appear a second time to deliver those who are waiting (28b) The next time there will be no cross. The next time there will be no sacrifice. The next time He appears, He'll be riding a white horse and bringing the armies of heaven to set up a Kingdom on this earth and deliver all those who are still alive who've been waiting for Him!

Do you see, it's all done! It's over with! We're not going through rituals, hoping to achieve atonement for our sins and acceptance with God; it's already done and made. We know what all the symbols mean and we know how they were fulfilled in reality in Jesus. So, we're just waiting for the Kingdom to come. Yet do you know what is really sad? When Jesus came, Israel chose to hang on to the symbols. And what's even more sad is that such a large portion of that which calls itself Christendom has worked long and hard to effectively turn this glorious knowledge we have of Jesus back into just what the old covenant was, a system of rituals and acts which the worshippers don't really understand. Catholics do it with the rituals of the mass; the Orthodox do it with their icons and even the evangelicals like us take our faith and turn it into rituals of Bible reading and church-going, the going through of motions for acceptance, instead of celebration of what Jesus has already done for us! *Gerard Reed writes, "Religiously, we often elevate means above ends. We want to worship God, but we become obsessed with certain ways to do so--or not to do so. We devise sophisticated strategies, often of great artistic ingenuity, whereby to approach and serve God. Idolatry, rightly understood, simply means focusing on the means (how we worship) rather than the End (the One we worship). My wife Roberta is a fine cook. Just imagine, however, that she decided to demonstrate her love for me by giving herself full-time to cooking. Day after day, all day long, she'd shop for the finest foods in the most exclusive specialty shops. She'd prepare unique and tasty breakfasts and dinners. Her skills as a gourmet cook would shine like a star. In fact, she'd make sure her talents were evident to all. She'd invite numerous guests to join us as every meal--making sure they knew she was giving herself completely to cooking meals for me, showing her love for me. Further imagine that, as time went on, she became so busy preparing and serving the food, entertaining the guests, demonstrating her devotion, that she never sat down and ate with me. In fact, morning, noon, and night, she would say little or nothing to me. Should that happen, it would be obvious that my wife had become obsessed with means (the cooking that demonstrates the good wifely character) rather than ends (maintaining a warm relationship with me, her husband, for whom she was cooking). In truth, the really important thing about mealtime is that it enables us to be together, to talk together, to just look at each other. If my wife reduced our relationship to her activity (cooking), I'd soon tire of the good food and start skipping meals--knowing she'd keep on cooking and entertaining folks because she wanted to impress the world with her devotion to me. Similarly, we break fellowship with God when we get so obsessed with the ways we do things, the ways we sing or serve, that we forget why we're doing them and for Whom we're doing them. When we reduce God to human scale, focusing on our ways of doing things, we become idolatrous."* [The Liberating Law: Ten Steps to Freedom by Gerard Reed. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1996. Pages 66-67.] Or to put it another way, we go back under the Law. Listen, My Savior appeared once to settle the sin question; He's appearing every moment in heaven for me right now, guaranteeing my future and one day He'll appear to set things on this earth right! It's all done; all that's left to do is appreciate the privilege we have of knowing it and celebrate!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises (Cont.)

The Privilege Of A Perfect Sacrifice - Heb. 10:1-18

I'd like to beg you to indulge me a little bit this morning because I think that as we look into chapter 10, you'll find a somewhat:

I. A Different View Of The Christmas Story (1-10) This whole section turns on the phrase in verse 5, "*Therefore when Christ came into the world...*" And that's Christmas, isn't it? The sweet story of the baby laid in the manger because there

was no room at the inn and the story of the shepherds on the hillside surrounded by angelic hosts and running to find the babe, all those things we love and treasure most about the Christmas story are simply the minor details of that which is summed up in this overwhelming statement, *Christ came into the world!* That's what happened that night! The very eternal Son of God who was with Him in glory from eternity past, entered into this world through the womb of a virgin as a human baby. And when He did that, it changed everything. Now, the writer begins by telling us about:

1. the way things were before Christ came into the world (1-4) You see, before Christ came into the world, it was a sorry state:

a. the people of Israel had only symbols, not realities to deal with As we've studied in chapter 9, they had a tent which was a poor earthly symbol of heaven. They had a box with a gold lid as a symbol of God's glorious throne and a table with bread to represent all of God's people and so on. All symbols, only shadows that show the simple outline of the real objects. They never dealt with realities. It's kind of like always playing with toy cars all your life, but never driving a real car. And as part of the symbols God gave them:

b. they offered animal sacrifices repeatedly, year after year Every day two lambs would be killed, morning and evening, others on the holy days and still others given by individuals. Over and over again, day after day, year after year, animal after animal was killed and burned upon the altar. It went on for centuries, 14 or more of them since the law was given, but before that all the way back to Cain and Abel. Generation after generation kept up the process. But the author of Hebrews brings up an interesting point:

c. the very fact that they were repeated showed they were ineffective If they did the job that a sacrifice is intended to do, that is, if they actually took away sins and removed them, then wouldn't you stop offering them? Even if you look at just one person's life and how many times he repeatedly brought sacrifices year after year, if any one of them had actually taken away his sins, wouldn't that have been the last one? Wouldn't that have been enough? But it never was and the truth is:

d. the sacrifices never took away sins but instead reminded of them The reason they were repeated is not that this year's sacrifice took away this year's sins and next year's took away next year's sins and so on. God had them repeated over and over and over again, not to make sure that all sins were forgiven, but quite the opposite, to constantly remind people of the need for forgiveness! You're a sinner this year and next year and next year and it requires a sacrifice. The sins are not gone; they require a perfect sacrifice; learn that lesson and look forward to it. So, century after century the world trudged along in the darkness repeating symbols that only said, "we need a Savior". But then we come to verse 5 and see:

2. what happened when Christ came into the world (5) What we have here first is:

a. the author's quotation (5-7) He quotes from **Ps. 40:6-8** which is written in the first person. Someone is speaking and, the writer says, that someone is not David, but Jesus, the Son, speaking to the Father on the eve of His coming into the world. He declares that it is a glimpse of a holy conversation that occurred as He left heaven to come into the world. And in that sacred moment He says two immense things. First, "Father, you didn't want sacrifices and offerings; instead, you have prepared a body for Me."

(1) God prepared a body for His Son That's what **the Incarnation** is all about. God prepared a human body to be inhabited by and united to His own Son so that He would truly become man. When you look into that Bethlehem manger, see the body that God prepared for His Son. You see that the Son came into the world in a body of human flesh and bones and blood. That's what God had been waiting for and planning all along. Then secondly, He says, "Now here I am; I have come to do your will, Father!" You see:

(2) the Son came to do the Father's will and what was that? Well, do those words sound familiar? Aren't they the words Jesus agonized over in Gethsemane? "Father, thy will be done." And what was that will? We are not left to wonder; verse 10 tells it was to offer that body upon **the Cross**. When Christ came into the world, the Father prepared Him a body so that he could offer that perfect sinless body upon a cruel cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins! Now in the next verses we have:

b. the author's explanation (8-10) You see, these words reveal to us that:

(1) God was never truly pleased with animal sacrifices Even though He required them to be made. They never satisfied Him; they never took away His judgment upon sin.

(2) they were only symbols to picture what His Son would do As the innocent animal was sacrificed in the place of sinful people and gave its life, so His sinless spotless Son would one day come and offer His body upon a cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. And so, it follows that:

(3) they were set aside as unnecessary when Jesus came When Jesus came into the world and did what He did, that was the end of the whole system. It was a reminder that pointed to the real thing that was coming and when the real thing happened, it became unnecessary any longer! The Jews could have bulldozed the Temple

and sent all the priests home and quit making those sacrifices because what they pointed to was already done and over with. In reality:

(4) we were made holy by the sacrifice of His body once for all He came into the world; He offered His body for our sins and now it's done; it's over with. Our sins are forgiven and we are holy. That's it, pure and simple. Because of what happened on Christmas, Good Friday and Easter, we are now saints, pure and holy in spirit and absolutely cleansed from all sin, worthy to be in His presence. Our whole way of relating to God, of thinking about ourselves, everything is changed now that He has come into the world, taken the body prepared for Him and done the Father's will.

Now what's most important is:

II. The Impact Of This Knowledge On Us (11-18) It makes such a tremendous difference in our lives. Once we know this and are convinced of it by accepting what Christ has done for us:

1. we rest in a perfect sacrifice (11-14) You see:

a. the rest of the world stands daily offering empty sacrifices The Jews kept right on going, offering their lambs twice a day as long as they had a Temple to offer them in. When Jesus died and the veil in the Temple was done, God was saying, "It's done, you can come on in now!" but as I said before, they sewed it back up and kept offering their empty and meaningless sacrifices. Yet they're not the only ones doing that. Millions of Muslims will sacrifice a ram during the sacred month of Ramadan to please Allah. Millions of Hindus will offer rice and fruit and flowers to statues and to snakes, to gods that are no gods, hoping to appease them and atone for their bad karma. Millions of good-deed-doers who think the sacrifice God requires is perfect behavior are busy vainly offering Him their best performance every day in the vain hope that it will erase their bad deeds and get them into heaven. Even within the so-called church, priests stand every day and declare that they offer the sacrifice of bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ over and over again day by day and those who are counting on it hope against hope that that act will absolve their sins. That's just what the whole world does; it offers and offers, over and over, empty offerings to God that never could and never will take away sins. But that's not what Jesus did:

b. Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice and sat down to await His return He went up and sat down on the Throne in heaven beside the Father to wait until it's time to come back and vanquish all His enemies and set up His Kingdom on this earth. He's been seated there for 2000 years and He hasn't offered up one thing since the cross. Why not? Because there He offered a perfect sacrifice. What makes it perfect?

(1) He offered one sacrifice, not many sacrifices, many animals. One body, His body. That was the one and only sacrifice God wanted or accepted. And:

(2) He offered one time on the cross of Calvary. It was an act never to be repeated like the animal sacrifices over and over. He only needed to do it once. And in that once:

(3) His offering paid for all sins, not just for the ones past or for a few select ones, but for all sins, past, present, future, and not just for some people, but for all of those who will trust in Him as their Savior. It was enough to do the whole thing at one time. And so:

(4) His offering is effective forever It doesn't matter how much time goes by until He comes, how many generations pass; the blood of Jesus is still enough to save. When He said, "It is finished", it was finished. Done. Over with. Once, for all, forever! We don't count on temporary, repeated, ineffective, empty, symbolic sacrifices. The Son came into the world and did it and that settles it. We rest in a perfect sacrifice to which nothing can ever be added and so:

2. we receive a perfect forgiveness (15-18) Now the author quotes Jeremiah 31:33-34 again, as he did back in chapter 8, but this time he emphasizes the last verse to illustrate that the Holy Spirit says that in our new relationship with God:

a. the penalty of our sins is completely gone Our sins and iniquities are remembered no more. Does this mean that God has erased part of His omniscience and He doesn't know those bad things anymore? Certainly not. He knows every evil thing we ever did. But the penalty of every last one of those things is paid by the blood of His Son so that they are as far removed from us as the east is from the west. Our forgiveness is absolute and complete. In fact, the point of verse 18 is this:

b. there is nothing that can make us any more forgiven than we are! We've got all the forgiveness there is to get. It's complete! Nothing that we could do say or sacrifice can add to that forgiveness; we have it all already. It's complete! Every sin I've ever committed or will commit is taken away and nailed to the cross because I've trusted in Jesus Christ as My Savior and I'm free! There is no condemnation for me because I am in Christ Jesus. He came into the world and changed my trying and struggling into resting in His perfect sacrifice once for all forever!

It's almost impossible to describe the impact of this, to grasp what Jesus has done, what that perfect sacrifice means. Just saying it doesn't seem to do it justice. So, let me read to you this story that someone sent me and let the visual picture of it sink in: *In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in the room. There were no distinguishing features except for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones in libraries that list titles by author or subject in alphabetical order. But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endlessly in either direction, had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read "Girls I have Liked". I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one. And then without being told, I knew exactly where I was. This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the actions of my every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn't match. A sense of wonder and curiosity, coupled with horror, stirred within me as I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories; others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching. A file named "Friends" was next to one marked "Friends I have Betrayed". The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird. "Books I Have Read", "Lies I Have Told", "Comfort I Have Given", "Jokes I Have Laughed At". Some were almost hilarious in their exactness: "Things I've Yelled at My Brothers". Others I couldn't laugh at: "Things I Have Done in My Anger", "Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents". I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes fewer than I hoped. I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my 20 years to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature. When I pulled out the file marked "Songs I Have Listened To", I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly, and yet after two or three yards, I hadn't found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not so much by the quality of music, but more by the vast amount of time I knew that file represented. When I came to a file marked "Lustful Thoughts", I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its detailed content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded. An almost animal rage broke on me. One thought dominated my mind: "No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them!" In an insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn't matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it. Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh. And then I saw it. The title bore "People I Have Shared the Gospel With". the handle was brighter than those round it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than three inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards it contained on one hand. And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that the hurt started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key. But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him. No, please, not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn't bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than my own. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one? Finally, He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn't anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn't say a word. He just cried with me. Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He took out a file and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card. "No!" I shouted rushing to Him. All I could find to say was "No, no," as I pulled the card from Him. His name shouldn't be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood. He gently took the card back. He smiled a sad smile and began to sign the cards. I don't think I'll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, "It is finished." I stood up, and He led me out of the room. There was no lock on its door. There were still cards to be written. Oh, do you see, it is finished! He has washed us from ALL our sins in His own blood! Every vile thought, every heinous deed, every awful desire, all washed white as snow in the blood of the Lamb once for all! And all those cards I haven't even written yet are already signed in His blood. Does that mean I now live however I want? No, it means I now live in complete freedom from guilt and fear but in utter gratitude to the One who loved me enough to do this. I am His servant. I want nothing else in life but to please Him, to glorify Him, to see Him glorified in all the earth. You see when He came into the world, He transformed the way things work forever. And I'm so glad He did!*

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

Warning and Encouragement For The New Year - Heb. 10:19-39

The future is an uncertain thing. We are so spoiled with our prosperous American lifestyle that we easily get lulled into the false sense of security that life will always be the way we know it. But the future is not like that; it can change, rapidly. There are no guarantees of continual peace and prosperity and safety on this earth. If nothing else, history teaches us that lesson. Nations make war and topple one another. Life can change in an instant. And Jesus told us to expect that in this world we will have tribulation and to expect that as believers we will be hated by the world. The wind has blown us

some pretty fair weather as American believers in our short history, but if you're watching at all, you can see the wind shifting. Our culture is changing, morally and ethically; the forces that drive our society are driving it steadily toward wickedness and the church is standing pretty much alone against the tide. Once we're enough of a minority, it won't take much for us to become a target. The only thing certain about the future as we enter the 21st century is that the future is just as uncertain today as it was in the 1st century. Now in chapter 10, the author of Hebrews offers us some help for us as believers in facing an uncertain future. He gives us three things: an exhortation, then a warning, and finally an encouragement.

I. An Exhortation When Facing An Uncertain Future (19-25) All that we have studied and learned in this book makes a practical difference. We have this wonderful knowledge that Jesus has opened the way into God's presence with His own blood through His death on the cross and it should make a difference in our lives. Because we have it, we should use it. And the writer exhorts us to use it in three ways. Each one is a "let us" statement, a statement of resolve, of determination. In fact, they are three things I would love to see us as a church resolve to do in this New Year. The first one is this:

1. let us draw near to God in faith (22) What's that mean? It means we need **a resolve to be a praying people.**

People who know they are pure and clean and who come together to God with sincere impassioned hearts full of confidence that He will hear and answer. We need to become a people of prayer. If you read the account of the early church, you will find one thing that stands out everywhere like a sore thumb. They were always gathered together somewhere praying and worshipping. At the Temple, in somebody's house, every time they faced danger and every time they experienced victory, they prayed together. And if I asked you to name the one element in the life of the church that is gradually disappearing in our day, what would it be? Corporate prayer! Somebody said the difference between the first century church and the 20th century church is this: Of us it is said: "And when they had prayed the offering was taken..."; of them it was said: "And when they had prayed the place was shaken." We have developed all kinds of 20th century ways of fixing our problems. If we don't have enough money, we have credit. If we get sick, we have the best medical system in the world. If your car breaks down, there's a phone which will get you help. We've got services and systems for everything. And so, we've been gradually conditioned NOT to call upon God, but rather to trust in our own resources. Listen, when our van broke down in Kyrgyzstan on a road, miles from nowhere, and we knew there were no tow trucks and no phones and no houses from which to call for help and no buses to flag down, and where the police charge you money and don't help you, there was only one thing left to do; as Sergei, our driver, crawled under the van to try to fix it, we called out together to God and in five minutes the van was running. Listen, when we as a congregation saw our financial need and we knew that we ourselves couldn't meet it and we began to cry out to God together to meet that need and in just 7 weeks as we made ourselves available to Him, He supplied to and through us around \$28,000 so that we ended 1999 nearly \$2000 ahead! That's how we need to face the next century and the future, on our knees together, coming to Him boldly in confidence that He will answer. And we need to begin to apply it in all the areas of our lives. We need to resolve to boldly seek His face for our world, for the 3 billion unreached that have never heard and to cry out to Him to use us in ways we've never dreamed of to turn the world upside down. We need to resolve to boldly seek His face for our community, where 90% or more of our neighbors don't know Jesus and will go from their comfortable suburban life straight into everlasting fire at the rate we're going unless we learn to cry out to God and He shows Himself powerful through us to touch them in ways we've never dreamed. We need to resolve to boldly seek His face for marriages that are falling apart on every hand and call out to Him to bring repentance and restoration and put homes back together. We need to resolve to boldly seek His face for our children because there's a war on out there, a war for their souls and in case after case we're losing the battle and the enemy is dragging them off into the world and away from Jesus. That kind of battle can only be fought on our knees and it's time we learn to cry out to God together and win them back! In the year 2000 it's time we draw near to God in faith, actually believing that He is still the same God He's always been and calling out to Him to do great and mighty things. That's the only way to face the future! The second exhortation is this:

2. let us hold fast to our hope (23) What does that mean? It means we need **a resolve to be a pilgrim people.** A people who know and confess that they are only pilgrims and strangers on the earth, that their real home is in heaven and the things that matter are not the earthly things but the eternal things. We need to be a people like Paul described in Col. 3:1-4, *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* That's the hope we possess and it's where our lives should focus. But the catch is in one little word in verse 23; did you see it? *Unswervingly!* The word means to steer a ship on a straight course without letting it veer off in another direction. And for us it is so easy to let our ship get off course, to start getting our eyes fixed on things that are below. There are so many things that crowd into our life and crowd out the that eternal perspective. In a prosperous society like ours where so many of our needs are met even if we don't call out to God, there are so many things to take our eyes off of Him. There's the whole work and success thing, climbing the ladder, making money, gathering houses and lands. Listen, our job is a mission field where Almighty God has planted us to impact the people around us and draw them to Himself by our transformed life! Our homes and our cars and all our possessions are His, things to be used for His glory, not just to satisfy our own desires, but to be shared with others and used in ministry to draw other people to Him and to build them up in Him. So many people get so wrapped up in secondary things like hobbies, like sports, like golf, like

music, or you name it, things that are fine as activities, but which become life-consuming and take our eyes off the things that are important to God like the Word and prayer and people's souls. As we face an uncertain future, it's time to remember that we're a pilgrim people who are just passing through a world that is not our home and start seeing from an eternal perspective and making investments of our money and our time and our abilities in the things that matter for eternity. Then the third exhortation is this:

3. let us provoke one another to love (24-25) We need a resolve to be a caring people. It is so easy in the face of an uncertain future to become self-centered. At the turn of this century, you read about people moving out into the desert with their little family where everything will be OK for them while the rest suffer. You hear of people buying weapons, assault rifles, to fight off the mobs who will come to steal their water and food supplies. It's absurd. If I had ten thousand gallons of water and everybody around me was thirsty, I would hope that I would be giving out cups of cold water in the name of Jesus Christ to save them all! But self-centeredness isn't always quite that blatant and obvious. Most of the time it creeps into our lives subtly when we're doing well. We gradually lose our heart for those who are suffering and hurting and dying and lost. It gradually ceases to matter to us that others are homeless and hungry and addicted to drugs and searching for love in all the wrong places and dying with HIV or that they are lost and have nobody to tell them how to be saved and find eternal life in Jesus. We need to learn to care beyond our normal boundaries, to care for people that are not "just like us", to care for people who are hopeless and hungry and sinful and lost, to reach out to people we'd rather not be around and embrace people we'd rather avoid. How can we keep from becoming callous and cold? Well, did you see that thing about spurs in there? That's a loose translation of a word that means to provoke or irritate, but it's not a bad picture. When you sit on a horse that doesn't want to move, you dig your heels into his side and if you're a cowboy you're wearing spurs, you spur him with those heels. We're to spur one another into acts of love and caring, to provoke one another, not to frustration but to love and self-sacrifice! You see, on our own we'll easily grow self-centered; we need one another's nudging, one another's encouragement and example. And how do we get that? Verse 25 tells us that we have to stay in the habit of meeting together and that more and more as we see the day approaching, instead of running off after everything under the sun that's less important. We need to be together, to come together to pray and worship and share our burdens and our victories with one another; that's what will keep our flame of love and compassion burning!

Hey, for those who like a simple outline, that's faith, hope and love from 1 Cor. 13, isn't it! Now I know some of you are getting really worried. I'm only at point #3 on the outline and that looks like a powerful long way to go! But set your mind at ease. The outline of the second major point is below if you want to study it for yourself. It's a warning against apostasy. Because it is those times of suffering that separate the true from the false, that root out the "Judases" from the true apostles. And what's the best assurance that you're not one of those? It is that your life is wrapped up right now in the very things we've talked about, that it is vibrant in prayer, focused on eternal things and abounding in love. If these things don't matter much right now, what assurance can you have that they will when things turn difficult!

II. A Warning When Facing An Uncertain Future (26-31)

1. the serious nature of apostasy (falling away from Christ) (29)

a. it is trampling the Son of God underfoot

b. it is counting His blood as an unholy thing

c. it is insulting the Spirit of grace

2. the certain judgment of apostates

a. no sacrifice is left only the punishment of enemies in fire (26-27)

b. rejecting Christ's work is more severe than rejecting Moses (28-29)

c. God will definitely judge and it is a fearful thing (30-31)

The future will no doubt see some fall away from the faith and you do NOT want to be one of those. But let's skip now to verse 32 where we find:

III. An Encouragement When Facing An Uncertain Future (32-39) The writer points out that:

1. it's encouraging to remember the earlier days (32-34) We don't know exactly what their history was, but at some point after they had come to Christ, these believers who came out of Hebrew background:

a. these folks had stood their ground in spite of suffering They had been persecuted for their faith. No doubt some had been arrested; others had lost their jobs or been shunned by their community. Some may have been flogged or jailed, as many in the early church were. On top of that:

b. they had accepted public humiliation The whole society in which they lived rejected them and mocked them for believing in Jesus and clinging to Him. And for Jesus' sake:

c. they had been willing to lose their possessions They let their property be confiscated rather than deny the Lord that bought them. Why? Because their minds were fixed unswervingly on the eternal hope and they knew they were only pilgrims. They knew they had those everlasting possessions that no one can take away from them!

That is the history of the early church, abiding faithful in great tribulation. It sounds like the story of the church down through the ages as it has been tried by fire time after time and yet emerged victorious. It sounds like the story of the church in China today, driven underground yet flourishing, or in Sudan or in any of a hundred places where our brothers and sisters in Jesus are suffering right now just because they believe. Now, we don't have the history these folks had, but their example can be a great encouragement to us. There is nothing to guarantee that in a few months or a few years or a few decades our road will not be similar to theirs. The future on this earth is always uncertain. But if we remember the faithfulness of those who have stood the test, steadfast in faith and hope and love:

2. it encourages us to continue in that perseverance (35-39) You see, you have a promise from Almighty God who always abides faithful. Your faith and hope and love in the face of tremendous adversity:

a. it will be richly rewarded; you will receive what He has promised Eye has not seen and ear has not heard the things that God has prepared for you. Henceforth there is laid up for you a crown of glory that will never fade away and when He comes you will receive it. And remember that in eternal terms:

b. it will happen in "a very little while" comparatively It may be next week or next year or even next century but it doesn't matter; the time we spend here is still just a little while in comparison to the eternity you'll spend with Him in glory. That's why you can't get wrapped up in the things of this earth; forever is what really matters. One day soon and very soon we are going to see the King.

Let's make Him the center of our lives as we enter this New Year and resolve afresh together to be a praying people, to be a pilgrim people and to be a caring people. A friend passed this note on to me:

The Top 10 Things You Won't Have to Worry About With The Y2K Bug:

10. *The Bible will still have the answers.*
9. *Prayer will still work.*
8. *The Holy Spirit will still move.*
7. *God will still inhabit praise.*
6. *There will still be anointed preaching.*
5. *There will still be the singing of praise.*
4. *God will still pour out blessings on His people.*
3. *There will be room at the cross for His children.*
2. *Jesus loves you.*

(And the number one thing you won't have to worry about with the Y2K bug)

1. *Jesus still saves.*

Dear friend, I don't care what the future holds, what dangers and deprivations and suffering may come, these things will always be true. As we enter this new millennium let's fix our eyes on the things that are above where Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father and resolve to live for His glory.

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Life Of Faith (I) - Heb. 11:1-7

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is one of the most glorious portions in all of Scripture and, as you know, its theme is faith. All through the book we've been talking about the privileges and the promises that we have because we are in Christ, but this chapter holds the key to appropriating every one of them. They are ours only by faith! Without faith they may exist, they may be ours, but they will do us precious little good without faith on our part. Indeed, what God intends for us is to live a life of faith; a life of faith is at the very center of the way we understand and think about everything and at the core of everything we do. So:

I. Faith Is A Concept That We Must Understand (1) For all the times faith is mentioned or displayed, this is the only place in all of Scripture where it is described in a definitive way. And it is so important. Notice first of all:

1. the two realms in which faith operates First:

a. it concerns future things that have not come to pass, what we hope for... Hope is about the future. Hope is about things that we expect, that we look forward to, but we don't see them, we don't have them. So, our faith has to do with how we regard things that have been told to us about the future, things that have not yet come to pass. And second:

b. it concerns invisible things that cannot be seen There are a multitude of things which exist that we cannot see, that we cannot touch, that we cannot experience directly. Unseen things, yet they are real. And the link that connects them to us is faith. So, verse 1 is describing:

2. the reality which faith brings to things you can't see and things that are still future.

a. it is a conviction that unseen things are real God Himself, angels, heaven, salvation, the new birth, all these things which are so important to us are invisible. They cannot be proven scientifically or examined with a microscope or a telescope. The only thing that assures us they are real is faith. We have staked our lives and our eternity on them. We have chosen to regard them as being as real as the things we can see. We have a conviction, a rock-solid certainty in our hearts that these things are real. It's like Moses. Compare verse 27. At that point Moses hadn't seen God visibly. He had seen a bush burn and heard a voice and had seen a number of miracles. But the deeper fact is that by faith, he saw Him who is invisible. He was convinced at the core of his being that God was real, that God was calling him to lead His people out of Egypt and that God was at work daily in their lives making that happen. He could see that by faith! So can we. And secondly, faith:

b. it is a certainty that future things will be Our arrival in heaven, the return of Jesus Christ to this earth, the glorious millennial kingdom, reigning with Him forever and ever, these things are yet future. They have been spoken of; they have been declared and promised. But they have not come to pass. Yet we are absolutely certain that they will; we hold these things as a hope that anchors our souls. We are convinced by faith that they will occur and we live as though they will. That's why Abraham was willing to spend his whole life living as a nomad in a tent. Compare verse 10. He had his eyes on a better place. He left an earthly city to wander about because He was convinced of the reality of a future city which God built and which we call the New Jerusalem and he lived all his life in light of that. So can we.

But I need to say something very clearly here. Faith is not just deciding that something is true without evidence. Some children believe sincerely in the tooth fairy and the Easter bunny and Santa Claus. That doesn't make those things real. Some adults sincerely believed that last January 1 would bring the end of civilization as we know it and prepared for it in radical ways. That didn't make it come to pass. The world accuses us of mistakenly believing in fairy tales or myths, but the faith that the Bible is talking about is very different from blind faith in non-existent objects:

c. its root is a personal experience of the reality of God Every one of the people mentioned in this chapter had a personal experience which convinced them of the reality and character of God. *Carole Mayhall tells about the first time God proved Himself to her: "I couldn't have been more than eight years old, but I was having my first deep struggle of faith. I don't remember what set it off, but in my mind doubts and questions had been raging for several days. 'Have I been told a fairy tale? Is there really a God who looks over the world and cares about me? Does He exist? How can a person really know that He is there?' ...One night we were visiting a favorite aunt and uncle, and I was put to bed in an upstairs room located under the eaves. The roof sloped downward steeply and overhung the small window. It was there that I challenged God to prove to me that He existed...out of desperation, it was a cry which pleaded, 'Oh, Lord, I want to believe in You. I need desperately to know that You are there. Please show yourself to me.' 'But how,' I thought. I didn't feel I could ask for a vision or a voice from heaven. So, in my immature, non-thinking way, I blurted out, 'Oh, God, just prove to me that You are there by...by...by waking me up with the moon shining in the window.' Then I went to sleep. Silly girl, never thinking that God would have to bend the moonlight many degrees in order for it to shine in that window way back under the eaves. Never thinking that there might not even be a moon that evening. Never thinking. Period. But God was thinking, and preparing. First, He sent some other guests to my aunt's that night. This meant that the bed I was in was needed for an adult, so I was moved to the sofa in the living room, without even waking up. Second, God arranged for my aunt and uncle to have a house with a round window located on a landing going to the second story. He also had my aunt place the furniture so that the couch was in the exact spot it needed to be. Third, He provided a clear sky and a full moon. So, sometime that night, I was awakened as though a gentle hand had touched my shoulder. And there, framed perfectly in that port-hole window, was a full moon beaming down like a spotlight. I got out of bed, fell to my knees, and cried for joy. 'Lord,' I said, 'I promise that I will never again doubt that You exist. Thank You.' I never have. Oh, I have had my share of doubts--doubts that He could use me, doubts that He had a plan for me, doubts even about His character--but never doubts that He exists. The God of all detail had proven to me on that desperate night that He is there and He is not silent."* [Lord of My Rocking Boat by Carole Mayhall. NavPress, 1981. Pages 149-150.] Look at verse 6. That's where it all begins. The folks mentioned in Heb. 11 didn't see Him; some of them didn't hear Him; many of them never saw an on-the-spot miracle and some even died at the hands of their enemies. Yet He entered the life of every one of them and revealed Himself to their hearts in such a way that they were transformed. They knew He existed and He cared about them. And so, He became more real to them than the things they could see, than the Egyptian army or the prison cell or the walls of Jericho. His word of promise became more real to them than all the guarantees and promises of earth. Once they knew God, they were convinced that unseen things were real and that future things were certain. Their faith was in a very real object and so is ours. Once we come to know the true and living God through trusting His Son Jesus Christ as our Savior, it transforms our view of reality. We're sure of things we can't see and we are confident of things we know will happen. We have faith. Now let's skip to verse 3 for a moment and look at:

3. the example of our faith regarding creation (3) When it comes to the world around us, we believe what seems like this crazy thing:

a. we believe God formed the universe by speaking He said, *Let there be light* and light instantly came into existence. He spoke the sun and the moon and the stars and the earth into existence. He commanded the waters to be gathered and the dry land to appear and the birds and fish and animals to come into being in them. His word created it but:

b. it was not made from pre-existing matter as science often says One of the laws of physics says, "Matter can neither be created nor destroyed." That may be true in figuring out chemical reactions today, but it's not true. Matter can be and was created. Some say it just always existed in some form and then chance random events and forces solidified it and blew it apart with a big bang and evolved it into us. We are convinced that it didn't exist at all, that it came into existence instantaneously at the command of a Creator. We're sure of it. But how?

c. we are convinced of this only by faith in God's person and Word We're convinced that the One who told us this is real and that He is the kind of God He said He is who can do such a thing and that what He has told us He did is true because He cannot lie. There is no other way to know it for sure. The creation shows all kinds of evidence that points to the design of a Creator; there is good reason to believe in creation. But still, the bottom line is that our experience of God has put in us a faith, a conviction, a certainty that has made the act of creation a reality to us. It is as real as the birth of your body or the construction of your house or the pew you're sitting on. Yet it is made real to you by faith. Understand?

But faith is far more than a concept to understand:

II. Faith Is A Way Of Life That We Must Practice You see:

1. God intends that His children should live by faith The writer begins this study of faith from something he said at the end of the last chapter (**10:38**). Faith impacts our daily lives. It is a stance that affects everything we do and say. We live by it. Then we look at verse 2 and we're told that:

2. God honored this in the lives of His Old Testament people (2) The ancients, the heroes, the elders, the greats of old that God chose to put down for us in His Word so we would know and learn from them. They were not some super-race of spiritual giants; they were people just like us. What God honored in them and used in them and testified to about them in this chapter is simply that they were people who lived life on the basis of faith. And that's what God wants of us. He wants us to live in the reality of things we can't see and to function confidently on the basis of things that are yet future because we know Him. Because we trust Him. And so, as we look all through the Old Testament:

III. The Lives Of His People Give Us Lessons In The Life Of Faith and we'll just mention the first three of them this morning. First is:

1. Abel (4) You remember the story of the first recorded worship in history. Both Cain and Abel approached God and brought Him an offering. Abel brought Him a lamb he had raised and Cain brought some things he had grown. And God accepted Abel and his offering, but He didn't accept Cain. Now the question is why? And this verse has the answer:

a. God accepted Abel's offering based on his faith It wasn't so much what they brought to God or how much they brought to God. That's never what God looks at. He looks at the heart of the worshipper. 1 Jn. 3:12 says, *Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.* Cain belonged to the evil one and so he acted like the evil one. Abel experienced God and loved God and acted like he loved God. So, when he came to God it wasn't a sham or because he had to. He came in faith, trusting God, trusting that God was righteous and pure and even though he knew he had sinned and atonement had to be made, yet God loved and cared for Him and he brought the lamb not to buy God off, but trusting what God had asked him to do, trusting that God would forgive and accept Him. And:

b. God therefore declared him righteous based on his faith, not on his offering. It says *God had respect to Abel and [therefore] to his offering.* By accepting the offering God declared that Abel had come in the right attitude, the attitude of trust, of faith and proclaimed him righteous, even though he was a sinner like the rest of us. And even though he's been dead now a few thousand years, his life is still shouting out to us a very important lesson: **Faith is the basis on which we come to God!** It is the basis of all our worship. Go to church all you want. Pray and sing all you want. Give all you want. But if you are doing it thinking it will make God like you and accept you, you won't even get near Him. We come to God trusting that we are accepted by Him on the basis of what Jesus did on the cross for us, believing with all our hearts that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God and we are accepted in the Beloved. And when we come in faith, we are declared righteous and accepted and invited into fellowship with Him! Then second comes:

2. Enoch (5-6a) We don't know much about him. All we know is that:

a. Enoch pleased God by walking with Him daily It's found in one famous verse, **Gen. 5:24**, *Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.* Every day he walked with God. In whatever he did, he talked to God, he asked God for wisdom and for strength and for guidance. He depended on God in the daily things of his life and involved God in every moment of his day. And that pleased God greatly, but it was not his actions, really, that pleased God:

b. God was pleased by his faith shown in daily seeking Him earnestly Verse 6a tells us that the root of everything that pleases God is faith. What pleased God was that Enoch believed, that he believed so strongly that God was real and was a vital part of his moment by moment existence that he never stopped seeking him, never stopped crying out to Him. And so God did a wonderful thing for him, something he probably never even dreamed of asking for:

c. God translated him directly to heaven because of faith He missed out on dying. One moment he was talking to God on earth and the next he was talking to Him in heaven, body and all. And he never came back. *A little girl came home from Sunday School after hearing the story of Enoch. She said, "Mother, we heard about a wonderful man in Sunday School today. His name was Enoch, and you know, Mother, he used to go for walks with God." The mother said, "That's wonderful dear. How did it end?" "Oh Mother, one day they walked on and on and got so far, God said to Enoch, 'You are a long way from home. You had better come in and stay with Me!'"* Now don't be too jealous of him. After all, ultimately isn't that what God is going to do with you? Oh, you may have to go by way of physical death, but one day you'll be translated in an instant straight into His presence, even if it is through death. Yet there's a lesson here we don't want to miss: **Faith is the basis on which we please God!** By trusting in Him so much, by believing so much that He is and that He will reward us, we keep coming to Him and coming to Him until we are walking with in as real a way as we might walk with our spouse. That's what pleases Him. And finally, there is:

3. Noah (7) The story is so familiar, but the root of it is this:

a. Noah believed God's warning of destruction through a flood that would cover the whole earth. He also walked with God, Genesis says, and God told him this flood was coming and the human race would be destroyed. And He told Noah to build an ark to save his family. So:

b. he gave 120 years of his life to preaching repentance because God was going to destroy the world in a coming flood **and building an ark** the size of an ocean liner in the middle of dry land, hundreds of miles from any ocean. It was a massive project if you consider it. He must have had to employ others to help him build it, it was so big. The people around him must have laughed and ridiculed and called him "Crazy Noah". Yet Noah had heard from God and Noah believed God. He trusted God. He knew God wouldn't lie. And so:

c. his faith condemned the world; it stood in stark contrast to the unbelief all around him and highlighted how awful it was. It said, "You can have all that; I believe God and I'll take Him." **and so it made him an heir of righteousness.** Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Why? Because of his faith. He believed God; God declared him righteous and he set out to live his life according to what God had told him to do. There's a lesson here: **Faith is the basis on which we choose how to live!** God says there is destruction coming. The whole human race is on a broad road that leads to destruction, to a fiery pit called hell. They can't see it; they don't believe it. They go about their lives as they did in the days of Noah, marrying and buying and selling, succeeding in business and giving themselves to every sort of wickedness you can imagine, firmly believing there is no God or if there is, He will never judge me. But do you believe what God has said? And if you do, do you believe it enough to devote the rest of your life to building the ark Jesus said He was going to build, to building His church, to reaching out and rescuing souls and leading them into the refuge of the rock of salvation in Him and joining them to His body?

The world may laugh at us for believing what we believe; they'll think we're strange that we don't run with them and we waste our lives following what they call a religion and missing out on all their "good stuff". But our faith has convinced us who is worth listening to. *Al Munger writes: "It was a narrow two-lane road twisting through the hills toward Mazatlan, Mexico. The trucks were slow and traffic was backing up. Our friends, Betty and Joe, had just piloted their motor home around a big truck that was coughing diesel smoke. Now it was our turn to pass this monster. A dozen impatient drivers were behind us. "CURVA PELIGROSA" (Dangerous Curve) the sign warned. We could only see about 150 feet ahead before the road disappeared around the mountain, but I decided to go for it. Shifting into second gear, I put the pedal to the floor and we started around the truck. The drivers behind us must have thought we were crazy. An oncoming bus or truck would scatter us all over the landscape. But they didn't know that just seconds before we started to pass, Betty had called us on the CB radio saying, 'The road is clear for half a mile.' The move that appeared suicidal was safe because our friends could see the road ahead and knew there were no cars coming. I chose to believe Betty. I knew she wouldn't lie to me."* [Time Out! A Men's Devotional compiled by Clint and Mary Beckwith. Evergreen Communications, Inc., 1989. Pages 77-78.] Who are you going to choose to believe? Do you really trust God? Do you really believe what He says enough to act

on it, to live by it, to say, "Rain on what the world says! I'm doing it God's way!" Faith is a way of living. It's a way of walking, of involving who God is and what He says in every minute of every day of your life. That's what pleased God about the ancients and why He tells us about them. Will you be like them? The choice is yours.

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Life Of Faith (II) - Heb. 11:8-19

As we begin let's review what faith is from verse 1. Faith is a way of life where you're sure of things you can't see and certain about things that have not yet happened, based on your experience of the living God. All the Old Testament people mentioned in this chapter are examples for us of what it means to live so convinced of the reality and character of God that you believe and obey Him concerning things you can't see and things that are still future. And no one is more universally used as an example of this in Scripture than Abraham who is actually called in one verse, "the man of faith". The author of Hebrews gives more space to him than to anyone in this chapter and rightfully so because he draws out for us:

I. Four Faith Lessons From The Life Of Abraham There are four key occasions in Abraham's life where the lesson is so clear you can't miss it. The first one is:

1. faith is willing to obey God without knowing the outcome (8) We always want to know what will happen, the outcome, the result, before we do something. If somebody told me to just pick up and move away from my hometown and my family and my job and go somewhere far away, I'd have a few questions before I'd go, wouldn't you? I'd want to know where? And I'd want to know why? I'd want to know what would happen there. I'd want to be sure that the result of doing it would be worth the cost and the pain involved. If it was a human being telling us to go, we could understand that, but the one who told Abraham to go was God Himself. In Gen. 12:1:

a. Abraham was simply called to leave everything *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."* Everything! His home and his city and the culture he knew, the extended family he had, everything that was familiar and dear to him. And notice particularly that:

(1) he did not know anything about the destination God didn't tell him that the destination was Canaan; He wouldn't tell him where he was going. He only told him to go, to pack up and start the move. He didn't even give him a direction to walk in. And note this also:

(2) he did not know he would receive a land as his inheritance at that moment. That didn't come until he got into the land of Canaan, as we'll see in a moment. God never told him, "Leave this land and go and I'll give you another land. He told him only that He would bless him. Yet he obeyed God and went without knowing anything at all about what the outcome would be. Why? Because:

b. he trusted God who would "show him" as he went - Gen. 12:1 God said, "I'll show you as you're going" and that was good enough for him. He didn't need to know the outcome; he knew that God would guide each step of his way. LuAnn and I know a little bit of what that feels like. In 1979 I graduated from seminary. That spring God had made it clear that we could no longer continue to be in the United Methodist denomination, of which we had been a part. The reason was simple. They would not ordain me and let me serve because I held to the inerrancy of Scripture and because I wouldn't baptize infants. I wasn't willing to sacrifice my theology, so the call was simple, "Go out, leave. Leave the people you know, leave the churches you know, leave the security of the system that has cared for you and given you a place to serve." And the prayer, "Yes, Lord, but where?" turned up empty. We looked at some potential options but none seemed right. The call became for us, "Just go and I will show you..." So, when our time was up in July and we had to leave, we still had no real place to go so we went the only place we knew to go: home to parents, convinced that in His time God would show us. What we didn't know was that God planned that in late August a little church we'd never heard of in suburban Philadelphia, a place we'd never been, would call us to serve them and we'd live and serve there for almost five decades. God never told us that; if He had, it would have been easier. He just said, "Trust Me and go!" And we chose to live by faith, rather than by sight, and went. It wasn't easy. There are many times in our lives where God calls us to do things, things we don't understand, crazy things, like giving away money when we don't have enough for ourselves, things like leaving our family and our culture and moving to the other side of the world to become a missionary, things like selling our house and giving up our career in midlife to go share the Gospel in a steaming jungle where people will break into your house and threaten your life. Things like choosing to love and forgive people who have hurt you, not knowing how they'll respond. Things like taking on a responsibility or teaching a class or starting a Bible study or sharing the Gospel with someone, not knowing whether you'll be a flop or whether anyone will listen. God calls us to many things that don't come with guarantees, only with, "Trust Me and I'll show you!" And faith believes so strongly in who God is that it says, "Yes, Lord, I'll go and I don't need to know. It is enough that you will lead me." What is there in your life that you've sensed Him calling you to, but you've refused because you're scared of the outcome? Well, on to the second lesson:

2. faith is willing to give up the temporal to gain the eternal (9-10) Well, once he arrived there:

a. Abraham was promised the land of Canaan God said, "I will give you and your offspring this land." in **Gen. 12:7, 13:14-15**. He told him to look around in every direction and said, "All this will be yours and your children's." There was only one problem. At that time the land was owned and occupied by seven different people groups. They were strong people, armed people that outnumbered him. He was one man and his household. He couldn't take the land by force and he couldn't buy it. The truth is that he never owned one square foot of it except for a cave he bought to bury his wife in. In fact:

(1) he lived all his life in it as a stranger in tents, as did his sons He was the immigrant, the foreigner who didn't speak the language, who didn't have the family there and the connections. He went from living in a house in a city to a lifetime of living in tents, living off of herds and flocks, moving from place to place to find pasture, never having a place to permanently call home and settle down. He literally became a nomad the rest of his life and we're talking 100 years. That's a long time to live in a tent! Now I don't know about you, but after a while I'd have been tempted to head back to Ur. Or I'd have been complaining to God, "Hey, when do I get to own a piece of this turf like you promised! I'm tired of this tent living; I want to build a house or move into town. All those things in life that everybody else has, I don't. You promised!" But he went on living in tents and so did his son Isaac and so did his son Jacob. Three generations never saw the promise come true, never owned a square inch of real estate, even though God reaffirmed His promise to each of them. In fact:

(2) the promise was not fulfilled for more than 400 years It was not until four generations later when Joshua led the people of Israel across the Jordan into the promised land and the walls of Jericho fell that fulfillment began to come. How could Abraham do that? How could he be content to live almost his whole life on a promise of the future that he never tasted. How could he be willing to give up so much here and now to obey God? Well, the answer is in verse 10:

b. his true expectation was an eternal home designed and built by God He didn't really care about living in a city. He wasn't looking for an earthly reward. He knew that even 175 years on this earth is just a drop in the bucket of eternity with God. He was looking for an eternal city, a home in heaven, a home designed and built by God himself where he'd stay and enjoy Him forever. He didn't care about what he lost in this world because his faith was willing to trade what was temporary in favor of the things that would last forever! How many of God's servants today, pastors, missionaries, Christian workers of all types, are never going to own a house, are never going to have a secure retirement where they can travel and do whatever they please, are going to move many times during their lives and maybe be far away from their loved ones and not get to be around to hold their grandchildren very much, and yet they lay it all down willingly! They trade a lifetime of what most people call normal, because they're convinced that this world is not their home and obeying God's call on their lives is more important' they're staking their hope on a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God! What is God calling you to lay down for His eternal cause? Is it a tithe or a significant portion of your income to give to His work that may keep you from having everything you want? Is it your time to serve Him in ministry that will mean you can't be part of every recreational idea you'd love to pursue or to trade your vacation for a short-term missions trip? Is it to release your son or your daughter to leave you and go to the ends of the earth so others will hear the Gospel? Or is it to give up your career and serve Him full time yourself or retire early and give 10 or 20 years to a second career in ministry? Whatever it is, are you living by faith, willing to trade the temporal for the eternal? Now on to the third lesson:

3. faith is willing to believe God in spite of circumstances (11-12) You see, God had made a promise to Abraham way back in Ur that He would make him into a great nation, and to do that he would obviously have to have a child. God repeated that promise time after time, but 25 years went by. Abraham and Sarah prayed, they complained, they even tried having a child by a surrogate mother, Sarah's maid. But Sarah had no child to fulfill God's promise. At last, in Gen. 18 when he was 99 years old, God appeared to Abraham and said, "Next year Sarah will bear you the child I promised." But by this time:

a. Abraham and Sarah were incapable of having a child Both Abraham and Sarah were past childbearing ability. The text says they were "as good as dead" in this department. Sarah laughed when she heard it at first. So would anybody else. The circumstances said it was impossible. But Abraham's:

b. his faith in God's character was not lessened by circumstances - Rom. 4:18-21 *Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.* Abraham was of that persuasion that says, "Let God be true and every man a liar!" The impossibility of the circumstances did not matter because God is Lord of all circumstances. He was certain he heard God and he believed God, no matter how crazy or ludicrous it seemed to everyone around him. And so, through his faith:

c. God ultimately did exactly what He promised He took little Isaac and multiplied him over those 400 years into the nation of Israel that numbered in the millions and ultimately into generations of descendants that were as innumerable as the sand on the seashore or the stars in the sky.

Two children were playing on a hillside, when they noticed that the hour was nearing sunset, and one said, wonderingly: "See how far the sun has gone! A little while ago it was right over that tree, and now it is low down in the sky." "Only it isn't the sun that moves; it's the earth. You know, Father told us," answered the other. The first one shook his head. The sun did move for he had been standing there all the time. "I know what I see," he said triumphantly. "And I believe Father," said his brother. The whole human race still divides into those two camps; those who believe what they see, what their senses and their circumstances tell them, and those like Abraham, who believe what God says. How do you live, by sight or by faith? Do you trust that God will care for your financial needs when your circumstances tell you you're going to sink? Do you trust that God will make a way through what looks like an impossible situation in your life or your ministry? Do you trust that God will carry you in His strong arms through the death of that loved one you can't stand to live without, through that painful divorce you never wanted but you can't stop, through that seemingly endless battle with cancer or some other disease so that whether you live or die you are victorious with Him? When the world screams at you from every direction at you, "There is no way!", do you simply say, "I believe Father!" That is the life of faith. And one more lesson, the deepest of all:

4. faith continues to believe God when He doesn't make sense (17-19) You know this story from Gen. 22 very well. After that promised son Isaac was born and grown up, God tested Abraham. He said, *"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."* Whoa! There's an ultimate test. Now, there have been many others who have sacrificed their sons in battle to save their country or lost them on the mission field reaching the unsaved. But what makes this one tougher than all those is that it doesn't make any sense:

a. God appeared to be making an unconscionable demand of Abraham Not only is God asking him to take the life of his own son, which in itself is an unbelievable thing to require of anyone, but:

(1) He appeared to be contradicting His own promise God had said that His promise to Abraham of having offspring and becoming a nation would come specifically through Isaac. Isaac was the child of the promise, but Isaac wasn't even married yet. Isaac had no child. If Isaac is dead, there will be no offspring and no nation through him. God seems to be sabotaging His own promise; it doesn't make sense. Plus:

(2) He appeared to be contradicting His own character God never, ever wanted human sacrifice. It went on among the heathen around Abraham. Babies would be sacrificed in fire to Molech and other false gods but Jehovah never wanted that. Later on in the law He made it clear how abhorrent that is to him and how anyone who does that should be put to death! How could a God who hates human sacrifice command it to be done? What kind of fickle, self-serving, mind-changing God would do such a thing as this? But Abraham didn't think that way. He headed off to do what God commanded. He had Isaac tied up and lying on the altar and his hand raised with the knife in it; that's how far he went. How could he do that? Because:

b. Abraham applied the reasoning of faith The author of Hebrews lifts the veil and the Holy Spirit tells us what Abraham was thinking. You see:

(1) he was convinced that God could not be untrue to Himself The promise that Isaac would have children had to stand. God could not lie. He could not change His mind. He could not promise and then break it. Isaac had to live and have children, even if he had to die. So, Abraham simply:

(2) he reasoned that God had power to do the impossible He could raise Isaac from the dead, because after all He is God and He can do anything. He can flood the world and kill the entire race. He can raise someone from the dead if He needs to. So, Abraham simply figured that God would raise Isaac from the dead. He said to his servant, *"Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. **We** will worship and then **we** will come back to you."* - Gen. 22:5. He wasn't lying. He was speaking in faith. He was confident God would raise him and they would return together, because God is still a true and righteous God who can be trusted even when He doesn't appear to make sense! Of course, God didn't do it the way Abraham had imagined; He stopped him with the knife in the air and provided a ram, but still, Isaac was as good as dead; his life was forfeit, but God delivered it by providing a ram, which pictures Jesus. But the point is:

How about those times when God doesn't appear to make sense to you! Those times when you've been faithful, but you end up in misery and agony and pain or He takes you up to the door and it closes in your face, those times when everything in you wants to cry out, "There is no way that this thing works together for good. This just doesn't make sense. Why, God? You're not fair; You're not just; it's not right that you're letting this happen to me, that you're asking me to go through this thing. How can you be the kind of God that you are and let my world fall apart this way?" I'm sure in China and Sudan and East Timor and other places around the world we have brothers and sisters tempted to cry out, "How can you let me be imprisoned for my faith? How can You put me in this labor camp or let me be kidnapped and my family killed?" But the reasoning of faith says, "God's love for me never changes. He is the same yesterday,

today and forever and I don't have to understand it; it doesn't have to make sense to me. I just trust You, Lord, and I'll obey and keep on trusting no matter what." You see, through Abraham the author is really giving to ALL of us:

II. A Lesson About Faith And The Promises Of God (13-16) It is not just for these of old, but for all people who say such things, for all people who would live by faith. It's a lesson that says:

1. faith is content not to receive the fullness of God's promises in this life Faith doesn't have to have every promise already in hand. It is able to see the truth of what God has promised from afar off and embrace it, receive it and act on it and live based on it.

2. faith is convinced of our heavenly citizenship and ultimate reward Faith knows that "this world is not our home; we're just a-passin' through. Our treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue." We're waiting for a Savior who will take us to be with Him in those many mansions He's prepared. We're waiting to join Him in that New Jerusalem where the streets are gold and the gates are pearl and glory of the Lamb is the light of it. And the reality of that makes the things of earth grow strangely dim! People who say such things, who live that way of faith, that's what they long for and that's what they will get. God has it all ready as He promised and He will never be ashamed of us as His people if we stand firmly on His promise. But verse 15 reminds us that:

3. faith is a conscious choice we are free to reject If you want to live by sight, you can go back there. If you want to go back to Ur and live the way the rest of the world does, you can live that way. A lot of Christians do. Their lives are indistinguishable from anybody else around them except that they trust Jesus to take them to heaven after they die, but while they're here they depend on themselves, figure out their own problems, take the path of least resistance, strive for all the things the world has to offer and care less about eternal things, instead of trusting Him. They live by sight and not by faith like Abraham.

An anonymous author describes it this way: *At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited Heaven or Hell when I die. He was out there sort of like a president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him. But later on, when I met Christ, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike ride. But it was a tandem bike, a bicycle built for two, and I noticed that Jesus was in the back, helping me pedal. I don't remember just when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since. When I was in control, I knew the way. It might have been boring but it was predictable, the shortest distance between two points. But when He took the lead, He showed me delightful long cuts, up mountains and through rocky places, at breakneck speeds. It was all I could do to hang on. Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal!" I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand. He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine. And we were off again. He said, "Give the gifts away. They're extra baggage -- too much weight." So, I gave them away to the people we met. And I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light. I didn't trust Him at first to take control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it, but He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear over high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face, with my delightful constant companion, Jesus. And when I'm sure I can't do any more, He just smiles and says, "Pedal."*

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Life Of Faith (III) - 11:20-28

Faith is the key that unlocks all of God's privileges and promises and makes them ours. So let's review again what faith is from back in verse 1. Faith is being sure of things you can't see and certain about things that are still future based on your experience of the reality of God. I heard David Jeremiah ask this question on the radio this week, "Suppose you were an ice fisherman. Would you rather have a little bit of faith in two feet of ice or a whole lot of faith in two inches of ice? If you answered, the latter, please don't invite me to go fishing with you!" The object of our faith, our God, is real and is worthy of our trust. We're not just working up a lot of false hope in some myth. Our God has proved Himself over and over and once we know Him, once we experience Him, faith becomes a whole new way of living for us. Every step in life we trust Him. We believe what He says and we act on what He commands before anything else. The Old Testament people listed in this chapter are examples of this life of faith and the ones we'll look at today tell us that faith can triumph over two of the most powerful forces that come against us, death and fear. The three men we'll look at first all have lives that lay out for us the same lesson:

I. Faith Believes God's Promises Even In The Face Of Death (20-22) The thread that connects these three verses is dying. Isaac was dying. Jacob was dying. Joseph was dying. You know when a man is dying, what he really believes comes out. It's no time to play and pretend. And virtually on their deathbeds, each one of these looked ahead with absolute confidence that even though they were dying, God's promises would not fail and encouraged their own children to trust God.

1. Isaac believed God's promise to Abraham would come through his blessing (20) Now, if you focus on the story in the Old Testament, it's a little hard to see Isaac's faith in **Gen. 27:2-3**. You see, he's worried about dying. He knows it's coming and he wants to pass the blessing of God, the covenant and the promise God had made to his father Abraham and then to him, on to his son. It wasn't a gushy, "I love you, son" relational thing. He was really acting as a kind of prophet of God here, speaking the word of the Lord, talking on His behalf and he believed that his verbal blessing would result in the actual things God had promised being done. There was only one problem.

a. he first intended to bless Esau contrary to God's will You see, Isaac had twin boys and his favorite was Esau, because Esau was a hunter and he brought great tasting game dishes for him to eat. I don't know if that's the only reason; he came out first, so he was the first-born, and so on. But he knew full well that just as God told his father that Isaac was the one through whom the promise would be fulfilled, not through his half-brother Ishmael, so when his boys were born, God had made a similar pronouncement. Compare **Gen. 25:23**. God would multiply both Esau and Jacob into nations. But Jacob and the people descended from him are the ones God chose to be the greater and to inherit his promise. He knew it all along, but hoped to ignore it, to play his own favorite and do what he wanted. But you know the story of how Jacob put on Esau's clothes and pretended to be Esau and tricked him. So, he ended up pronouncing this grand blessing that he intended for Esau on Jacob. He used the very words of God's blessing to Abraham, "May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed!" But then Jacob left and Esau came in and he learned what had really happened. And his response is certainly not what mine would be:

b. he found God's plan can't be thwarted and endorsed it by faith Look at **Gen. 27:33**. He trembled. He shook. God got hold of his soul. In that minute he knew that God had turned the tables on him and held true to His Word and there was no stopping it. There's the faith, "I have given him God's blessing and he is blessed. I can't undo it. Sorry, Esau, he is heir to God's promise and you're not and there's nothing I can do about it. I believe it will be as God has said." And the clincher comes in **28:3-4** where he talks directly to Jacob with no tricks involved. Even though he himself would die without receiving the promises, without becoming a nation and owning the land of Canaan, that promise would hold true for his son. He believed it and he believed that nothing could stop it. And look what happened. His son:

2. Jacob believed God's promise to his fathers (21) Now Jacob is an old man and ready to die. Remember there was a famine in Canaan and now he lives down in Egypt reunited with his beloved son Joseph who is taking care of him. Life is great now. Earthwise, his needs are met; he can die peacefully. But you can tell where his heart is because:

a. he requested burial in the land of promise - Gen. 47:29-31 He believed the promise of God that the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants and he didn't want his bones to lie in Egypt. He wanted to be buried at home, in the land God promised! And when Joseph promised he would bury him there, Jacob bowed in worship and praise and thanksgiving to God! Then, a short while later he became ill and he knew his death was really near and it was time to pass on the blessing of God to Joseph and to his sons like Isaac had to him and notice that:

b. he chose God's order in blessing Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh - **Gen. 48:15-21**. By faith he saw that there would actually be a whole nation called by his name, as God had promised, and that these two grandsons would be two major tribes and again, that the younger would be greater than the older. He believed God's promise to Abraham and Isaac to make their seed into a great nation and stood by it even in the face of his own dying! And, of course, then it is no wonder that:

3. Joseph believed God's promise to his fathers (22) Now Joseph is dying. Though he'd been a slave and a prisoner from age 17-30, for the last 80 years he's been second to Pharaoh, married to an Egyptian and one of the rulers of Egypt. You would think Egypt is home; it's where the future lies. What could Canaan hold in comparison to this? Yet as he was dying:

a. he announced the exodus despite his position in Egypt - Gen. 50:24 "God will surely keep His promise. He's kept me all these years and I know He'll keep the oath he made to my fathers. He can't lie. I trust him. So, God will come to help you as a people and will take you out of this land. There will come an exodus. You'll need help. The handwriting is on the wall. You'll be oppressed and treated harshly. God said so back in Gen. 17. But He'll surely send you that help and lead you out. Believe it! I do!" And then he made his brothers swear as his father had made him swear that they would take his bones with them when they left. And so:

b. he reminded four generations of God's promise by his coffin - Gen. 50:25-26 Joseph was never buried, never put in a tomb. He was embalmed and put in a coffin and that coffin was put in a safe and a known place. And for the next couple centuries as his brothers died off and faith in God died out among their descendants, that coffin was the only Bible the people of Israel had. It was the sole reminder of the promise of God, the only way for them to remember that God would one day come to help them and lead them out to the land He had promised! What faith Joseph had!

What faith they all had! They all died without seeing God's promise of a land and a nation fulfilled, but their own death didn't stop them from believing it. They stood on the assurance that those unseen and promised things were sure and certain. And one day, it will be your turn and mine. One day, we'll be dying, staring it square in the face. And those unseen things that we've talked about all these years, things like heaven and seeing the Lord and being with Him forever, reigning with Him, walking with Him in white, things like *to depart and be with Christ is better by far, or to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord*. Those things that God has promised you will either evaporate and become meaningless as the fear of death presses in on you because they were nice to talk about but you never really believed them, or else they'll stand real and solid and sure by faith. And you'll close your eyes in confidence that in the next moment you'll see Jesus. How many of our dear brothers and sisters have we laid to rest these last few years who had full confidence in the things they couldn't see, who said "I'm ready to go; I'm not afraid." 'omorrow we'll bury another dear sister. She loved Jesus since she was a teenager. She loved His Word. She prayed and talked to Him every day. And she knew that if her body didn't beat this pneumonia, that she was ready to go and be with Jesus. She told us so. Her favorite Scripture was Ps. 91:1-4, *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart*. The specter of death did not melt away her faith. It remained strong and firm and those unseen things were real and she slipped off to experience them! You see, faith is a choice. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob chose to trust God, to believe what He said. Our sister chose to trust what He said. Will you? Now we come to Moses' life, which lays before us another similar lesson:

II. Faith Chooses God's Will Even In The Face Of Fear (23-28) The author begins at the very time when Moses was born. As you remember, the children of Israel had multiplied into a whole nation and the new Pharaoh had not only oppressed them into slave labor, but had even made a law that every Hebrew boy that was born must be cast into the Nile! However:

1. Moses' parents hid him because their faith overruled fear (23) Literally, it says they saw he was a beautiful child. Does that mean that if he was ugly, they'd have thrown him in the Nile? No, fortunately Acts 7:20 tells us more, *And it was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God; and he was nurtured three months in his father's home*. Those two slave parents looked at that baby and said, "This baby is healthy and whole and he belongs to God; he is the gift of God; God has a plan for his life; God would not have us destroy him; God will provide a way to preserve him!" And so, in faith, trusting in God, they defied Pharaoh's command, not because they had no fear of the king's command, but perhaps, more accurately, because they were not terrified by it, were not seized with fear and panic that made them rush to the Nile to save their own necks. Their faith overruled their fear and they chose God's will! Now, you know how Moses was found in the rushes by Pharaoh's daughter and was raised as an Egyptian in the very royal court. Well, when he grew up and got to the very prime of his life, Moses made a startling decision:

2. Moses chose in faith to identify himself as an Israelite (24-26) He knew he was Hebrew. And he knew about the God of the Hebrews. And something moved him to make a choice, to throw away his Egyptian heritage and throw in his lot as one of the people of God. Listen to **Acts 7:22-25**, *Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not*. He made a choice; he made a decision. God opened his eyes and he saw the inhumane slavery to which his own people were being subjected. And he chose to step in and in the process killed an Egyptian, who probably deserved it. But the punchline is that he saw himself as an instrument of God! He thought, "I am a Hebrew, yet God has put me in a high place as an Egyptian prince. I am the answer. He can use me to stop this horrible suffering. I'm going to trust Him and take a step right now!" And it changed his life. It drove him out of Egypt into the desert of Midian to become a shepherd. But he knew it had that possibility when he took the first step. In faith he made a choice:

a. he chose temporary suffering over temporary pleasure He knew what the pleasures of Egypt were, but he also knew that they only lasted for a short time. He looked at the suffering of his people and said, "These are my people; their God is my God; I need to take a stand for what is right here, for God's cause, even if that cause costs me suffering in the short run. And the author tells us that:

b. his eyes were focused on God's eternal reward He looked at what lasts forever and said, "I'm willing to trade all of this for that! I'm willing to be a disgrace and a reproach and a despised Israelite slave for that!" His faith was stronger than his fear of the consequences and he dove in and chose God's cause. Then we find that 40 years later:

3. Moses led Israel out of Egypt in faith (27) Now, since Moses left Egypt twice, once to flee to Midian and again at when he led Israel out at the Exodus, interpreters are divided over which time this verse refers to. Personally, I think this a summary of the whole experience of the 10 plagues that God brought upon Egypt and Moses' leading them out at last and Pharaoh chasing after them with all his chariots. You see, this time in his life:

a. he was not afraid of Pharaoh's anger He didn't run away in fear when the firstborn of the Egyptians were killed. He didn't say, "Let's get out of here quick while we have the chance!" God told him this in **Ex. 14:3-4**; he knew Pharaoh was going to change his mind one last time and send the royal army after him. And he knew that God was going to give a mighty deliverance. So, when the army showed up and all the people were screaming and crying in despair Moses replied in verses **13-14**. There it is, his faith. "I believe God will do what He said and I choose to follow Him." How could he do that? How could he stare in the face of certain death and not fall prey to the fear that was all around him? The text says:

b. he endured as though he saw the Invisible One He didn't see the Egyptians with death in their hands. By faith he saw God. God was his protector and preserver and so he led them out at God's command, regardless of the retaliation he knew was coming! His faith overruled his fear! And then finally we read, backing up in the story just a tad, that:

4. Moses kept the Passover in faith (28) The death angel was coming and he knew it. God had told him and it didn't matter whether it was an Egyptian or a Hebrew or even an animal, the firstborn would die. But God also made him a promise, **Ex. 12:12-13**. And Moses believed God. God had already destroyed Egypt with nine plagues, so the tenth was not hard to believe. The Israelites trembled in fear already! But he also believed God that the blood of the lamb over the doorposts would protect the Israelites as God had said, and so:

a. he made the Israelites eat the Passover meal and sprinkle the blood It wasn't simply that he personally kept it. The point is that he made them all keep it. His faith implored them all, "Get a lamb; make a feast; smear the blood on the door. Do it quickly today!" And God's point is that:

b. his faith preserved all the firstborn of Israel Because he believed God, thousands of lives were preserved. He trusted in the blood of the lamb to save them all from death.

What's the point? There are a lot of scary and terrifying things in this world. There are threatening rulers and pursuing armies and dangerous plagues. There are people and diseases and circumstances and situations that would fill us with fear. And Satan would use that fear to control us, to get us to choose wrong, to throw away that baby to save our own life, to let others be abused and mistreated and stand idly by without getting involved, to flee away and run in terror from the things that are after us, to huddle in fear in our tents in mortal terror that the death angel is coming. What kind of fearful experience has come into your life? What terror grips your soul? Is it the fear that you'll lose a loved one, fear for your children, fear that your marriage won't make it? Satan would love to use it to cause you to panic in terror, to make crazy decisions, to do things that will hurt you and dishonor the Lord. But faith chooses to believe God and do His will even in the face of fear. Jack Kuhatschek writes: *"I am afraid of heights. I have been known to crawl on my hands and knees to the edge of a high balcony in order to look down. Imagine, then, how I felt when a camp director told me I had to rappel down the side of a steep cliff. 'Everybody does it,' he said matter-of-factly. 'It's part of our program.' With sweaty palms and pounding heart, I eased backward off the edge of the cliff, supported by a rope and a safety line. In order to walk down the face of the cliff, I was told to keep my body perpendicular to the cliff. Every nerve and fiber screamed at me to straighten up, to get in a vertical, not a horizontal, position. Yet those who did so lost their footing and were left dangling high above the ground. Only by fighting my natural urges, and by trusting the ropes and those who held them, did I manage to make it safely to the bottom. What a relief! That fearful experience of rappelling has become a parable of faith to me. There have been many times in my life when God has asked me to ease over the edge of a cliff, to trust Him for something that seemed unsafe and frightening. The primary difference, of course, is that both the safety rope and the person at the top of the cliff are invisible--while the cliff and its dangers are in plain sight!"* [The Superman Syndrome by Jack Kuhatschek. Zondervan, 1995. Pages 57-58.] Oh, how many times in life are we frozen by that fear, are we almost compelled by fear of one kind or another to do the things we know are not the right things to do. The danger is all we can see with our eyes. But the lesson from Moses is that by faith we can see Him who is invisible. By faith, His presence, His power and His plan can become more real to us than the cliff or the Red Sea in front of us and by faith we can endure and choose to do His will instead!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Life Of Faith (IV) - Heb. 11:29-40

Before we move out of chapter 11 and our study of the life of faith, we need to consider a very confusing topic. Faith is often associated with miracles. Faith has to do with moving mountains, with causing things that are utterly impossible to happen. The confusion comes because, even when you read the great things in this chapter, faith is often seen as the actual cause of the miracle. So naturally, if you have enough faith, you can do anything, you can have anything happen, if you only believe strongly enough that it will. And if you don't get your miracle, it is because you didn't have enough faith. But remember the definition! Faith is a trust that the unseen things God has told us about are real and that the still future things God has promised us will happen because we know Him. Faith is trust in the nature and character of God; God is the doer of miracles according to His plan and purpose. So, the real truth is that:

I. Faith Sets The Stage For God To Do Miraculous Things as we see in the three incidents listed for us in **(29-31)** First we read that:

1. faith brought the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry ground (29) Now just try to imagine for a moment how scary that experience was. There is an army full of horses and chariots surrounding them to the west, certain death, and they have no weapons. It's night time and a pillar of fire is blazing above them and comes down behind them to stand between them and the Egyptians. Then as they look at the sea in front of them, a tremendously strong wind begins to blow into their faces and a path opens up, right through the middle of the Sea. The water stands up like a straight wall, tall and menacing on either side, yet the sea floor is dry. If they march into the waters, who knows how long they will stay parted; who can tell that the wind won't stop and the waters come crashing down and drown them? So, in that moment they had a decision to make. Do we trust God or not? Notice, they'd been complaining and despairing about dying. Their faith did not open the sea. Rather, it was displayed as they marched forward through the Red Sea. They trusted the nature and the character and the promise of God and walked into the middle and right on through to the other side. But the Egyptians did the same thing. They ran their horses and chariots right into the sea after them. Yet the walls of water fell on them and drowned them all. What was the difference? The Israelites trusted God; they trusted what God had told them through Moses, that He would deliver them and slay the Egyptians and despite their fear, they went forward trusting in Him. The Egyptians didn't believe God, because if they did, they'd never have gone in there! The Israelites' faith allowed God to save them and the Egyptians' lack of faith drowned them. Faith made the difference and set the stage for one of the greatest miracles of all time. Likewise:

2. faith felled the walls of Jericho (30) Picture the Israelite army standing there looking at a fortified city that God has told them to take. It is surrounded by walls, and excavation has shown that at one stage there were two of them, the outer one 12 feet thick. And no doubt very high. When those gates were shut, it was sealed up tight and impregnable. Anyone approaching the wall could be shot at from the top. It would take a professional army with catapults and battering rams and siegeworks and moving towers, and all Israel had was a few bows and arrows and swords and spears. But God said, "I'll knock the wall down. All you have to do is march around the city for six days and on the seventh day do it seven times. That's all." They had a choice to make, "Do we believe God or not?" And they made the choice to have faith, to trust, and it was displayed by marching around the walls for seven days. And each day it got tougher, I'm sure. You can just see the men of Jericho gathering up on top of the wall to laugh and mock and call them chicken! You can imagine that by the seventh day the crowd up there swelled and was laughing and jeering as they went around and around seven times. And then you can see their faces go white with terror and hear the screams as the walls underneath their feet begin to tremble and to sway and they fall down flat and the Israelites rush in and take the city! The point is this, the walls wouldn't have fallen if they hadn't marched around, and they wouldn't have marched unless they believed. Faith, believing what God said was true, set the stage for Him to do a mighty miracle. And then in that same city:

3. faith saved the life of Rahab who was doomed (31) God had already told the Israelites they were not to spare a single soul, not a single person or piece of plunder. The lives of the inhabitants of Jericho were forfeited, because even after knowing what God had done in Egypt and even that they had wiped out the kings across the Jordan, they still didn't believe. They resisted and fought. All but one. One woman, Rahab, of all things a prostitute, believed in her heart that the God of Israel was the true God and that Jericho was doomed. She had no hope. That is, until at the last minute God sent two men, Israelite spies, to her door. She didn't see them as customers, but as an opportunity from God. She was faced with a choice, "Do I believe God or don't I. If I don't, I blow the whistle on them; if I do, I beg them to save my life and protect them." She chose faith and **it was displayed by risking her life in receiving the spies.** Do you realize what could have happened? If she didn't turn them in and they were found in her house, she would be a traitor. She would be killed. Her family would be killed. Yet she believed that if she didn't, she would be killed by God's army when the city fell. So, in faith she chose to risk her life and hide the spies, believing God more than she feared her own people. And AFTER she hid them, they promised they would save and protect her life. She was to put the cord in the window and that was the only piece of the wall that stood and she and her family were saved; she married one of the spies and became an ancestress of David and ultimately, of Jesus. But again, faith set the stage. God miraculously saved her life, but she chose to believe Him days before.

Do you see the lesson? You trust God and God can do miraculous things with it. If you obey and step forward into that dark and foreboding circumstance that looks like it's going to fall down and crush you, if you obediently march on in what looks like that fruitless endeavor He's assigned you to, if you trust Him and do what's right no matter what suffering you know it may bring you, then the stage is set by faith. God can choose to do a miracle! Now understand, He may also choose NOT to. Faith doesn't cause the miracle; it doesn't guarantee the miracle. But unless you choose to trust and are willing to obey, He CAN'T do the miraculous thing with your life that would bring glory to His name. Do you understand what I'm saying? Now we come to the grand conclusion of this glorious chapter, the part I really love and it teaches us one wonderful lesson:

II. Faith Ultimately Results In Triumph (32-40) Everything the author has shown us so far in this whole chapter, all of these wonderful Old Testament people the Holy Spirit has pointed out for us demonstrate that:

1. some people of faith experience immediate triumph in this life (32-35a) First he tells us:

a. there is no limit to the number of people who lived by faith (32) The list is endless. There are dozens more that are actually named in Scripture and thousands more who lived by faith who are never named. There is a whole record of the thousands and thousands of folks who lived by trusting God and only heaven will reveal their number. God's ability to give triumph and victory in this life is not limited to a chosen few elite people somewhere. If you trust God, He can and often still does choose to do miraculous things. And:

b. there is no limit to the triumphs they experienced by faith (33-35a) Look at the miracles God did because they trusted. Daniel trusted God and was thrown into a pit full of hungry lions and God shut their mouths. His three friends trusted God and got thrown into a flaming furnace, but didn't burn. They walked out alive. Hezekiah trusted God and 180,000 Assyrian soldiers died in their sleep that night and the rest fled. Elisha's friend, the Shunammite woman, trusted God and He actually raised her son from the dead! There is no limit to what God can do when we trust Him! Just this week I read an account of a *Guarayo man in Bolivia who was fishing in a swamp when a crocodile crept up on him and took a bite out of his leg. Alone in a very isolated place and bleeding profusely, he realized he would die if he did not get help soon. He remembered the testimony of a neighbor who recently accepted Christ and he asked God to send someone to help him. To his surprise, a woman appeared, picked him up and carried him to the road, where a family member happened to be passing by. This angel later appeared to him in several dreams and the man soon accepted Jesus Christ.* God can do anything when we place our trust in Him and He can do it in your life if He chooses. However, even though some people of faith experience immediate and miraculous triumph over their problems and circumstances, the full truth is that:

2. yet other people of faith experience awful tragedy in this life (35b-38) For every Daniel who was saved from the mouths of the lions, there are probably a thousand early church believers who were slain by lions in the arena because they refused to deny Jesus Christ. For every Shadrach who didn't burn, there were a hundred believers lit up like torches in Nero's gardens who didn't get a miraculous deliverance. And the same thing is still true today. Just look at:

a. the range of their experiences

(1) some experience persecution (35b-36) In China today we have brothers and sisters whose faith is as real and probably stronger than ours, but they are imprisoned; they are tortured; they are starved and taken away from their families and forced to do hard labor. But they keep on trusting Him.

(2) some experience death (37a) Stephen was stoned. Isaiah was sawn in half. James was killed with the sword. And it still goes on. Roy Pontoh was a 15 yr. old boy in Ambon city, Indonesia, who loved Jesus. A mob of militant Muslims attacked his church youth retreat. They drug him out and demanded, "Who are you?" When he answered "a soldier of Christ," they hacked off his left arm and asked again. He gave the same answer and they hacked at his right arm but did not sever it completely. They demanded that he recant, but he said, "Jesus Christ is the only Lord," so they disemboweled him and threw him in a gutter. He was only 15, but was living by faith and God took him to glory to receive a martyr's crown, just like He did with some of those kids out at Col-umbine who confessed their faith at gunpoint, instead of miraculously delivering them. And:

(3) some experience deprivation (37b-38) Some of our brothers and sisters who love the Lord are doing that very thing today in parts of Sudan and elsewhere, wandering about in animal skins in deserts and caves, fleeing from persecution and starving with not enough to eat, while we eat nonstop and throw away more than would sustain them each day.

How do we reconcile this? Some trust God and He miraculously delivers them and provides for them and rescues them. Others trust God and they suffer and they hurt and they live in hardship and they die. The miracle never comes. Is something wrong with their faith or with our faith when we don't get the miracle? Is God not pleased with them; does He not love them as much as he does the others? Well, there are:

b. two things we must understand The Spirit slips in two phrases here that are just beautiful and they are key to understanding it. First:

(1) their faith in refusing release is greatly used of God (35b) In many cases they could have made their own miracle. They could have recanted their faith and denied Christ and been set free. But their faith in Jesus and the resurrection was so strong that it gave them the willingness to suffer and, if need be, to die! Their faith and their testimony in the face of death is precious to God; it's tremendously powerful and their unwavering faith in itself is often the miracle that God uses to get glory and win others to faith. Last month's Kyrgyz Chronicle told the story of the little fellowship of believers out in Naryn and how many of them used to persecute believers and it was the courageous testimony of those who suffered that led them to Christ. Throughout the history of the church, it is the faith of those who didn't get a miracle, who suffered and bled and died trusting God, that He has used to build His church. And in case you think that God doesn't care, that He just uses his followers to get His purpose accomplished in a mechanical way, look what it says:

(2) they are worth more to God than the whole world (38a) It's not just that the world doesn't deserve to have such people; it is that they are of more worth, of more value, are more precious to God than the whole world!

You know, one day God is going to throw the whole world away; in the end it all gets destroyed by fire and all the billions of people in it, and out of it all what does He keep? What is His trophy? Those who have faith! Those who trust Him. They are the precious jewels, the bright gems in His crown forever and ever who will walk with Him in white. They're all He really wants, all He really cares about! You see, the full truth is:

3. we will ALL experience ultimate triumph together in the end (39-40) We need to realize that:

a. even those that experienced earthly triumph did not receive God's ultimate promise All the people in this chapter, even the ones who did get a miracle, who did experience mighty triumphs in this life, even they did not receive the fullness of God's promise. They got only a small piece of it. Even the ones who died and went to heaven still haven't got it all! Why? Because:

b. God has reserved that for all His people to experience together at the end of the age God has a plan for this whole age. It included them and it includes us. It includes the Old Testament saints and us believers in the church age who love Jesus Christ. It includes some triumphing in this life and some displaying faith by suffering. And God has designed it that His plan culminates all at one time so that all together we will experience the ultimate triumph. What's that? Compare verses **14-16**. God has prepared for us a city, a heavenly city. And at the end of this age, when the full number of the peoples has come in, when every tribe and tongue has heard and the last person has come to faith and the last of those who are to be martyred has died, Jesus Christ is going to return. And He's going to keep the fullness of His promise. He will set up His kingdom on this earth and at that time we all together will get what we've been looking forward to. **Rev. 21:2-3** says, *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

Oh my precious friend, we just read the end of the book and we know how it all ends. We win! And God has saved the victory party for the very end so that we will all together in that one moment experience the fullness of everything He's planned for us in that eternal city with Him forever and ever. Now unless I miss my guess, you are more likely to be one of those "others" whom God uses through suffering, rather than delivering them right now. The question is, will you trust Him anyway? Will you remain faithful? Will you trust Him so that He's free to step in and do a miracle and glorify His name if He chooses, but keep on trusting Him even if He doesn't and wants to glorify His name through your suffering? *Kay Arthur tells of standing with her friends Billie and Gene at the bedside of their 41-year-old son. Mike was brain dead from encephalitis, and the time had come to remove the life-support systems. As they stood there choking back the tears, they sang and read Scripture. Billie and Gene had been confident that God was going to heal their son physically. Many others had been praying with them, but the answer God gave was not the one they wanted. It was especially hard for this couple to see their son slipping away because they had no assurance that he had ever accepted Christ as his Savior. They had a promise, but no evidence. But they kept holding on to their faith. They had trusted God for many years, and they didn't stop now...even in their pain. Kay Arthur says that this was a greater miracle than if Mike had been healed. It would have been such a joyful thing had God chosen to restore his physical health, but the steadfast hope and faith of his parents in spite of the circumstances is a greater testimony to the all-sufficiency of God's grace. She goes on to say that what we need in our nation is not more miracles and manifestations of God's power, but more people like Gene and Billie-- Christians whose faith does not waver, who don't serve God only when things are going well, who are lights in the darkness. [Letter to Precept Ministries supporters, Aug 1996. Pages 1-2.] Will you be one of those?*

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of Suffering - Heb. 12:1-11

That very title is an enigma. Who would count suffering as a privilege? Yet Paul, while himself in prison, wrote to encourage the Philippians who were being opposed by enemies of the Gospel to stand firm in their faith and said, *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him...* - Phil. 1:29. The suffering you're doing right now is a privilege that Christ has granted to you. How can that be? Who can believe that? To the Corinthians Paul wrote, *...our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* - 2 Cor. 4:17. Suffering leads to glory; it produces the glory of God's eternal purpose being achieved in and through us and celebrated in heaven forever. It achieves eternal things that can be achieved no other way. How do we know that? Well, just look at verse 1. We're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses whose lives testify to it. Who are they? *Therefore* takes us back to chapter 11! All these people of faith, almost all of them suffered, but their suffering achieved glory. Abel died for serving God, Noah endured 120 years of ridicule, obediently building the ark, Abraham struggled through uncertainty and childlessness for years and lived in tents his whole life because of God's call on him, Joseph spent 10 years as a slave and in a prison, though he loved God and had done nothing wrong, Moses was driven from his homeland for 40 years and then carried the burden of a complaining people 40 years through the wilderness doing what God had assigned him. Then there are the faithful ones in 11:35 who were tortured for their faith, who were stoned and sawn in two and killed with swords and chained and put in prison. In case after case, the people of God have suffered, yet in case after case, their suffering has produced the glory of God's eternal purpose being accomplished. Isaac was born, Joseph saved his people

from famine, God's nation was built, Israel was redeemed from the suffering of Egypt, set in the land as a light to the world and eventually brought forth Christ the Redeemer of the world! The early Christians were persecuted and arrested. Some were killed. They were driven out of Jerusalem and scattered abroad. The apostles were martyred, all but one who was exiled. Paul and his fellow missionaries were driven out of cities, beaten with rods, jailed and imprisoned. The catalog of their sufferings is unbelievable, but the result is that in one generation the church of Jesus Christ was birthed, grown and solidly planted in every part of the Roman world. Suffering produces glory and, in that sense, while it may be utterly painful and difficult to endure, it is also a privilege granted by God to advance His kingdom and glory. But how do we endure it? How do we get through it? The writer of Hebrews gives us two analogies to help us. First of all, he says that:

I. Suffering Is Part Of Running Our Race (1-4) Life is like a long-distance race. Birth is the starting line and at our death we cross the finish line and in between there is a course of events and circumstances that God has laid out for us. That course may go up steep hills and around sharp curves and over rough terrain. It may be run in the rain or in the heat or at high altitude. The runner suffers a great deal in the process of the race; at times it feels like his lungs will burst and his legs can't take another step and he may collapse across the line. Or he may fall and stumble or get pushed or tripped by another runner. All kinds of things happen in the course of the race but when he crosses that finish line he goes up to the winner's platform and there he finds his reward. Suffering is a definite and necessary part of the race of life. And the author says that we get through it the same way the athlete does. Like a runner:

1. we must throw off every hindrance (1) Runners don't run in long pants with a heavy jacket. In that day athletes would "gird up their loins", take the ends of their loose robes and tuck them up in their waistband to keep their legs untangled. Anything that would weigh them down or hinder and hold them back, they would lay aside, as any athlete does today. Look at the swimmers; they even shave their heads to reduce resistance. And in our lives, there can be weights that hold us back, things that we give our lives to, maybe not bad things, but things that take the place of or get in the way of serving God. Maybe we get wrapped up in pursuing a career for ourselves; maybe a hobby or a sport dominate our lives to the point where God's purpose is on the shelf unnoticed. In many cases it is **sin** that easily wraps its tentacles around our legs and pulls us back. We get involved in pride, in immorality, or gossip, or conflict, or jealousy, or any one of a hundred other traps and all of a sudden we're spiritually standing still, instead of moving forward in God's purpose. And suffering is often the occasion where these very things get into our lives, where the enemy grabs us and tangles us up and drags us to a spiritual standstill. So, to get through and run properly, we have to make a choice. We have to lay those things of the flesh aside for the sake of the glory of God. Then secondly:

2. we must persevere in the prescribed course no matter what it brings The runner doesn't get to lay out the course; the judges do. He can't take a short-cut or go the other way around. He has to stay on the path that was laid out for him or be disqualified. So, he either keeps on running with patient endurance, struggling up the hills, wiping off the sweat, putting up with the pain, or he chooses to quit and not run at all. You don't get to lay out your course either; God does. You have essentially no control; you don't know what tomorrow will bring. You have only one choice, be faithful and trust God and keep on serving Him no matter what comes, no matter how much it hurts, no matter how much easier it may seem to do things a wrong way, or you can quit and deny and forget Him and His purpose for your life. *Eric Lidell, whose life was the basis of the film Chariots of Fire, illustrates this principle. Just before the first turn in a 400-meter race, Eric was shoved off balance, and he stumbled onto the infield grass. When he looked up, he saw the others pulling away. With a look of intense determination, Eric jumped to his feet, and with his back cocked and his arms flailing he rushed ahead. He was determined not only to catch up with the pack but to win. And he did! That's how Paul saw himself, as an Olympic athlete competing for a gold medal, straining every muscle, nerve, and sinew to get to the finish line. After every setback or obstacle getting up and running on.* But here's the key. How is it that the runner can throw everything aside and endure all that pain all the way to the finish line? It's simple; he focuses on the goal. And so:

3. we must focus on the goal The athlete sees that finish line in his mind; he sees the victor's stand, the wreath, the crown, the medal, the cheers of the crowd, the reward and glory of enduring that makes it worth all the effort. Look at verse 2. Our goal is not a thing. It is not some heavenly money or rank. The goal on which we fix our eyes is **the person of Jesus** Himself. When we cross that line, we're going up to heaven to the Victor's stand; we're going to sit down with Him and enjoy His presence and be with Him forever in great joy. And what our hearts want most is to hear His words of encouragement, to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant, you've run the race well, you've accomplished My purpose, My glory has been advanced; I have a crown laid up for you that will never fade away and you'll share it with me forever!" And if we can look away from the pain of the circumstances we're in and keep the eyes of our mind focused on that vision of Jesus in all His glory and us sharing it with Him, then we can endure anything. Now, how do we keep that focus? The writer suggests:

a. it means focusing on the example of Jesus (2) Look at Him:

(1) He focused on the joy set before Him Jesus left heaven to be born on earth as a man. He entered that race with one goal, **our redemption**. He wanted a great multitude of once sinful human beings to be redeemed and cleansed from their sins and to be in heaven with Him and enjoy His glory forever. The joy of having you and I with Him forever was His goal, His finish line, His driving purpose. And so:

(2) He endured the cross and scorned its shame for that joy The course laid out for Him was rejection and mockery and false accusations and condemnation and beating and flogging and carrying a cross up a hill and being nailed to it and dying there. That's what it took to pay for our sins and set us free! That suffering was the price of His eternal dream. But He endured it all, He counted all of that as of no consequence because He was focused on the joy set before Him, the purpose it would accomplish, and when it was all over:

(3) He sat down at the right hand of God and we sat down there in Him, our salvation secure and little by little we're physically joining Him there. His suffering achieved its eternal purpose and so will ours if we focus on the goal and keep on enduring. But focusing on Jesus also:

b. it means considering fully what Jesus endured for us (3-4)

(1) He endured the abuse of sinful men Verbally, they said bad things about Him and to Him. They called him an agent of Satan. They accused Him of false charges. He was condemned to death for telling the truth that He was the Son of God. Physically, they plotted his murder; they abused and tortured Him in every way they could think of and ultimately nailed Him to a cross and there:

(2) He went all the way to giving His life He shed His precious blood. It was spilled and poured out for us. *He gave His life; what more could He give*, the song says. Consider it, God says; look at it, contemplate the depth of it and then verse 4 says:

(3) it encourages us to see our struggle in light of His We haven't yet stood faithful at the cost of our own life, of shedding our own blood. Some of our brethren around the world have, but you and I haven't, not yet. For all of our suffering and our pain in running this race that gets God glory, we still haven't begun to touch the depths of the suffering our Lord Jesus endured to get us for Himself. The cross is our constant reminder that, *Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe!* And when we focus on it, *the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace!*

So, suffering is part of running the race, but the second image here is this:

II. Suffering Is Part Of Our Discipline As God's Children (5-11) Now I know that as soon as we hear the word discipline, our mind equates that with punishment. But the Greek word is *paidia*, which comes from the word *child* and means the training and education of children. It includes teaching and instruction in things the child needs to know, in life lessons and principles, as well as negative consequences that fall when the child does things wrong. So, the author's point is not that when we suffer God is punishing us, but that:

1. we must remember that suffering is part of God's child-training process Suffering is painful, but it is productive, it is instructive. A child learns to walk by stumbling and falling. He learns the value of telling the truth by getting caught lying. He learns things he needs to know by years of hard effort and work in school. Likewise, we learn things through suffering and God builds things into us through suffering that can come no other way. For instance, James says, *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* - 1:2-4. God wants to develop character and hope and so many of His own other qualities in you that can only come through the enduring of trials and hardships. So:

2. we must understand the reason for His discipline (5-8) It is not a sign of His anger; it is not a sign that He doesn't really care about what we go through. Rather:

a. it comes to us out of the Father's love If you love a child, you discipline them. You instruct them and you correct them. You see that they go through all the experiences they need to grow and mature. If you don't love them, you just ignore them and let them alone! You let them do whatever they want and they grow up spoiled and selfish and sometimes criminal! A loving father cares enough to discipline and so, when hardship and suffering come into our lives:

b. it is a sign that we are truly His children He's treating us as His children. The fact that He allows the suffering and then walks with us through it and teaches us and builds us through it is the sign that we truly do belong to Him. We're true sons and daughters! He is exercising His love toward us, even if we can't understand and see it at the time. So:

3. we must react properly to discipline There are lots of reactions that people have. They become bitter and angry. They grow discouraged and depressed. But the writer tells us that:

a. we should realize its value and not give up (5b) We should not treat it lightly, but recognize it as a valuable thing that God can use in our lives. No matter what it is, we should not quit and give up and decide that our faith is not worth it. Rather:

b. we should respect His wisdom by willingly enduring (9) If we really thought about it, if we had a half-decent set of parents, we could see that they actually loved us and were instructing and correcting us out of love. And we respected them for that and took it, even if it hurt sometimes. And we should do the same with our Heavenly Father. We should tell Him, "Lord, I accept this thing as from your hand; you've allowed it; it hurts but I am willing to trust You for strength and go through it!" And we can do that because:

c. we should recognize that it is always for our good (10) Our parents made mistakes sometimes with us and fouled up. We do with our children too. But God never makes a mistake. He never fouls up. Whatever He sends our way, whatever He builds into the course of our life, is ALWAYS for our good; it is always that we may learn new ways to display the holiness and righteousness of His character. And finally:

4. we must realize the effect of discipline (11) You see:

a. it always feels unpleasant at the moment Nobody likes to brush their teeth, but if you don't, they rot. Nobody likes to get up early to make the bus or to spend hours on homework, but if you don't, you don't learn. Nobody likes to get grounded when they do something wrong, but if it doesn't happen, you keep on doing wrong. It never feels good at the moment. Child-training, even for adults, is painful in many ways. But keep in mind that:

b. it produces a future harvest of righteousness and peace In the end it produces a fruitful goal. In the end it makes us like Jesus. In the end it develops in us the very character of God. Suffering is part of that process. The bad things, the difficult struggles, the painful heart-wrenching things, the persecutions and losses and low points, they all work together for our good. They make us the people God intended us to be. The athlete endures the course, but in the end, it is also true that the course shapes the athlete. And that has value.

John Yates tells this story: "The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small uninhabited island. He cried out to God to save him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a rough hut and put his few possessions in it. Then one day, after hunting for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; he was stung with grief. Early the next day, though, a ship drew near the island and rescued him. 'How did you know I was here?' he asked the crew. 'We saw your smoke signal yesterday,' they replied. Though it may not seem so now, your present difficulty may be instrumental to your future happiness." [Leadership, Fall 1993. Page 57.] Indeed, in God's economy that's always true. My friend, I don't know what suffering the Lord has allowed into your life this morning. I don't know what pain and disappointment and hurt is in your life. But I do know that it is part of our loving Father's education process for you and I know that there is a way to endure it, if you'll look away from it and fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and the finisher of your faith who, for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God where you'll join Him one day!

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

Our Privileges Should Not Be Presumed Upon - Heb. 12:12-29

It is really easy to begin at verse 12 and treat it as though it is a separate subject and the writer is just generally telling us to help people and be nice and be good. However, the verse begins with a special word, *therefore*. What does that mean? It means that what I'm about to say is connected with what I've just finished saying. What has he just finished saying? He said that when suffering and hardship come into our lives, we must recognize them as part of the child-training process from the hand of our loving Heavenly Father. So what's he going to tell us now? That this is how we should act since we understand what suffering is about! In other words, God is saying:

I. It Is Important That We Remain Faithful When Suffering Comes (12-17) One thing I've noticed over the years is that when suffering comes into our lives, it is a very critical time. When you're hurting, the pain can cloud your vision; it can blind your eyes to the truth; it can cause you to become intensely self-centered. In fact, in these verses you can see:

1. three wrong reactions to suffering and they're pictured with visual images that really help. In fact, I'm going to preach this portion of this message at Wyncote Home this afternoon and I titled it "Weak Knees, Crooked Paths and Bitter Roots". Those are three of the potential wrong reactions you can have when you suffer. First you can develop:

a. "weak knees" - you can let yourself become paralyzed (12) This verse is not about strengthening one another. The Living Bible does a good job of conveying the thought, *So take a new grip with your tired hands, stand firm on your shaky legs*. Actually the word for "weak" knees can mean "paralyzed". Sometimes when suffering comes, especially if it's sudden or severe, it puts us into sort of a state of shock. Our hands hang limp; our knees feel weak and refuse to walk. We're numb. We just sit there. We don't want to eat; we don't want to go anywhere; we don't want to pray. And that might be understandable for a brief time, but we can't allow it to continue. For example, I remember one man who belonged to this church years ago who lost his wife and just never got over it. That loss consumed his thinking; every time we talked he would mention it and cry. And it kept him focused on himself; it kept him from growing and from being used in the lives of others. We need to set our limp hands back into a useful position and brace our weak knees and keep on taking steps of faithfulness. How do we get like this? I think verse 15

hints at it when it says, **by failing to appropriate the grace of God (15a)** *Lacks the grace of God* would be better. This is not something you can do on your own. You can't just "pull yourself up by your bootstraps and be strong and face it"; that doesn't work. You don't have the strength in yourself, but you do have it in Him, and He is in you, so that you can cry out to Him and say, "Lord, fill me with your strength to move this leg, to take this step, to pray, to be with people, to serve, to continue on." Elizabeth Elliot lost her husband to Auca Indian spears in 1957 and it was a terrible price to pay and a great loss, but by God's grace she went back and faithfully endured a long struggle there and in the end, that tribe was reached with the Gospel and the church planted among them. Corrie Ten Boom survived the horror of the concentration camps and desperately needed healing and recovery, but after a time of that, she called out to God for the grace to be faithful and tell the world that, "there is no pit so deep that His love is deeper still" and to her dying day she traveled the world faithfully speaking to all who would listen. Suffering might paralyze us for the moment, but we can't stay there. By His grace we must continue to faithfully serve Him, even if suffering continues. The second image is:

b. "crooked paths" (13) Making straight or level paths is a common image in scripture; it's a metaphor for righteous living, for walking the straight and narrow path. We need to consciously choose straight paths, because when you suffer, **you can let yourself react sinfully**. When tragedy strikes or someone comes after you and hurts you, that's the very time when the temptation is greatest to choose a sinful path. The author mentions two examples down in verse 16. The pain might cause you to react:

(1) by becoming immoral (16a) Your spouse mistreats you, cheats on you, maybe divorces you. You're hurting. What's the greatest temptation? To seek solace in someone else. Anytime someone comes to me with a marital problem or in the throes of a divorce, one of the first things I encourage them to watch out for is that Satan will often send along another man or another woman who, at the moment, seems to be everything their spouse never was and their need to feel loved is so great that they will be tempted to jump right into their arms, and even to become physically involved with them when they know it's wrong. Other people might be drawn to dull their sorrows with alcohol or drugs or by throwing themselves into their work. Another similar reaction might be to handle pain:

(2) by becoming godless (16b) like Esau. Remember the story? Esau came in from hunting and was so starving hungry that Jacob set him up. He fed him in exchange for giving up his birthright as the oldest son. Esau would have gotten a double portion of his father's inheritance one day and the position as leader and priest of the family, but he didn't care about that. He only knew he wanted his need met now. How many times in suffering are we willing to forget God, to stop caring about the inheritance He has laid up for us and to just do whatever it takes to feel better at the moment. Time after time I've watched people who are suffering withdraw from the body of Christ, run away from people, stop exercising the means of grace, stop reading the Word of God and praying, quit serving, and in general just stop caring about God and what He wants in their lives and absorb their lives in other things, things that are here and now, things that are material or temporary. In effect they take God and put Him on the shelf and say, "What He wants doesn't matter to me anymore."

And there are other crooked paths that suffering can drive you to: anger and retaliation, getting even, lying, stealing, cursing, hurting others, lashing out, and the list goes on. When we suffer, we need to call out to God for His grace to keep our feet walking in straight paths. And the third image is:

c. "bitter roots" (15) *Bitter* is a word often used to describe suffering or sorrow. It tastes awful and unpleasant. And that suffering can have the same effect on you. It can become a root that springs up and bears fruit in the way you act and think. That is, **you can let yourself become bitter**. Suffering sometimes sours people and changes their personality. They become sad and angry and complaining and grumpy and hateful. They may become bitter toward God himself. Remember Naomi in the book of Ruth? Her very name means "pleasantness," but after she had lived in Moab and lost her husband and two sons came back and complained to her friends, *"Don't call me Naomi." she told them. "Call me Mara, {bitter} because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."* - Ruth 1:20-21. "God doesn't love me; God doesn't care about me; He's still God and all, but I don't like very much how He's handled things; they're not the way I want them..." Do you know folks like that? And some become bitter at other people; nothing and nobody suits them; they complain and lash out at those around them. They're just unpleasant people. But the Lord says, "Don't go there! Don't react that way. Cry out for grace not to let suffering do that to you." Why? Why does it matter? Well, here's:

2. why a right reaction is so important You see:

a. each of these paths impacts, not only us, but others (12b) If you choose crooked paths, it's not just you who'll stumble, but other people who are already lame, who are already having a hard time, will stumble there with you and fall off the path. **(15b)** When you become bitter and hateful, it doesn't only affect you, but it causes trouble and it impacts lots of other people The Living Bible says, *...Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives*. Bitterness is contagious. It is epidemic. You drag other people with you and mess up their spiritual lives, just to have the company! And if you choose to

stay paralyzed, think how many people in your life are affected by the lack of your love and care for them. There's no question that when we choose weak knees, crooked paths and bitter roots it touches everybody around us. And you know what else?

b. once damage is done we may not be able to undo it (17) Esau lost, not only his birthright but his father's blessing. And when he went afterwards to get it back, even though he was sorry and sought it with tears, he couldn't. When you lose the Father's blessing in your life by choosing to react wrong, you do damage. You hurt yourself. You create consequences in your life that you can't escape. You hurt others. You do damage to them. You do damage in the church. And later, when God brings you around and you see the damage in you and others and the church, it's too late. You can't go back and undo it. It stands and you have to go on from there. That's why it's better to guard our hearts on the front end and remain faithful to the Lord in suffering. That's why we need the accountability of belonging to each other so we can guard each other against it. And that's why in verse 14 we find:

3. two deep concerns that demand our every effort (14) Our key concerns need to be:

a. pursuing peace with everyone Paul says in *Rom. 12:18*, *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*. It's not always possible. There are people who will be mad at you, who will be down on you, who will not want peace with you, but from your end this verse says literally, "Pursue it. Hunt it down. Chase it until you can't run and it can't hide. Do whatever it takes and whatever you can to build a relationship of peace and harmony with the people around you, believer or nonbeliever, instead of walling yourself off from them." And the second concern is:

b. pursuing holiness before God Doing things that are pure and holy and right and being that way in your heart. Pursue that, hunt it down, chase it and don't let it go. If those two things are our goal, meaningful relationship with people and hearts pure before God, then we can't go wrong. It's a litmus test, a way to measure whether we've succumbed to weak knees, crooked paths and bitter roots. If relationships and God matter most of all, we're on the right track. Now here is:

II. Our Motive To Remain Faithful When Suffering Comes (18-24) Let me try to make some sense out of this. He says two things:

1. you have NOT come to Mt. Sinai... (18-21) Remember how it was for Israel when God gave them the law? It was terrifying and they were afraid, even Moses. The motive to obey and do the right thing at that moment in their lives was fear of punishment. If they touched the mount they would die. If they broke the law they would die. But you haven't come to that. That is, **your faithfulness is not born out of fear of punishment!** You don't obey God and react right when you suffer because you're afraid that if you don't, that God is going to be angry with you and hurt you.

2. instead you HAVE come to Mt. Zion... (22-24) If you know Christ, you have a guaranteed citizenship in heaven, a mansion waiting for you in the city of gold. You'll stand there with thousands of angels in joyful assembly worshipping God. Your name is written in heaven and you enjoy all of the things Esau missed, the rights and privileges of God's firstborn. All that is His is yours. You've come to God the Judge and lived, because your sins were taken away and you've been made righteous and perfect in Jesus Christ. He made a new covenant that seals you for eternity with His blood which has cried out from the cross for your forgiveness, instead of for justice and punishment, like Abel's blood cried out for from the ground. That's why you should stand faithful, even in the face of suffering, because **your faithfulness is born out of a relationship of privilege!** It's not because you have to, but because you want to! God has done all this for you and it's permanent. No suffering on earth can take these things away! They're yours! When you suffer, just look at all you've come to! Look at all that's yours and know that nothing in heaven or earth can take it away from you; nothing can separate you from the love of Christ. And in gratitude, stay firm and remain faithful! But finally, as we close the chapter, we have, not just encouragement, but:

III. Our Warning To Remain Faithful When Suffering Comes (25-29) First, there is a grave:

1. warning against becoming apostate, against turning away from Jesus (25-27) We saw it back in chapter 6 and in other places in Hebrews. Some people, when they suffer, turn completely away from Jesus, throw away their faith and never go back. Suffering refines them and proves that they never really genuinely knew Him in the beginning. They were shallow soil, not good ground. Listen, the blood of Jesus is speaking to you, calling out, "I died for you" and if you, in your suffering, can just turn and walk away from Him and stay there and give up your faith, you just might be one of those folks and don't forget there's another day of shaking coming. For folks who don't really know Christ, there's a day of reckoning when He returns and you don't want to be standing there. But for us who know for sure that we are saved and that we belong to that heavenly kingdom and nothing can shake that, there is still a:

2. warning against presuming upon our privilege as believers (28-29) Even in the midst of our suffering we are still to be thankful and to serve Him and worship Him with reverence and awe and not to presume that we have a right to our weak knees and our crooked paths and our bitter roots and to wallow in them because we're suffering. If you're in suffering and you're reacting wrong and you know it, it is a very foolish thing to stay there. Our God is not only a loving

Father who disciplines His children, but a consuming fire who refines us and burns up all the impurities in our lives. If you're going to stay there, He's going to find a way to move you out of it and back where you belong and it's liable to be even more painful. You have all these wonderful privileges; you've come to all these wonderful things in the heavens; they're yours. For you to presume upon them, to go on sinning because you know about grace, is a very dangerous thing!

Billy Graham's daughter Anne tells the life story of a man she met in a country that is hostile to the gospel. She calls him "Professor Hill" but that's not his real name: "[Many years ago] he was serving on the staff of a church when he was turned in to the authorities by another staff member for preaching the gospel. He was imprisoned for 25 years, much of it in solitary confinement. During his imprisonment, the manuscript of the New Testament commentary that had been his life's work was seized and destroyed. When he was finally released from prison, the authorities declared him a 'nonperson,' which meant it was impossible for him to find a job. He was effectively stripped of everything and lived in poverty. His testimony, as well as his life, seemed insignificant. Then the same church where Professor Hill had previously served and been betrayed reluctantly invited him to come back on staff because he was the only one the church could find who knew Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and English, as well as his native language. The professor agreed, and when I had the privilege of meeting him 15 years later, he was still serving in that church alongside the same staff member who had turned him in to the authorities 40 years earlier! I looked at Professor Hill and knew I was seeing someone who had been afflicted, who was poor, who had been slandered by the religious community--yet he was rich! The smile on his face went from ear to ear! His eyes sparkled with the joy of the Lord! He told me of the peace in his heart, of his renewed sense of purpose in ministry, of the fresh vision he had for reaching his people for Christ! He was committed to being faithful to Christ, even unto death!" [Vision of His Glory by Anne Graham Lotz. Word, 1996. Page 80.] What an example! How easily he could have lost all passion for anything, fallen into sin in order to survive, or become bitter and vengeful. But he understood the grace God had given him and it sustained him and he pursued peace with others and holiness before God. Your suffering may not be the size of His, but the grace available to us is no less.

Hebrews: Our Privileges And Promises

The Privilege Of Loving - Heb. 13

As the writer comes to the end of his letter to the Hebrews, he comes down out of the heights of the theological grandeur he's been dwelling on and closes in chapter 13 with a series of very practical exhortations to his readers before signing off. He never does give his name, but he does mention in verse 22 and on his dear brother Timothy and his location in Italy, which is enough to tell you who I think the author is. Anyway, the exhortations may seem to be unrelated, but actually they're not. To me, everything that follows is simply a fleshing out of the principle in verse 1 which says literally, "Let love remain," that is, always. The whole epistle has reiterated to us how God has loved us with His great love and showered on us all the awesome privileges of a child and an heir of God; now he explains how that love should fill us and overflow so that we exercise the awesome privilege of loving others and God. John says, *We love because He first loved us!* and when we comprehend the length and the breadth and the depth of His love, then God is able to build in us a life that is characterized by two things:

I. A Life That Is Continually Filled With Love For Others (1-7) and that manifests itself in six specific areas. First we'll have:

1. a genuine love for the people of God (1) Literally, the verse says "Let *philadelphia* remain". Let the love of the brothers be continually present. It's like Paul said in *Gal. 6:10, ...let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.* We love everybody, unsaved people, even our enemies, but there is to be in our hearts a special love, a special bond for those who are our spiritual family in Christ. And what does that kind of love look like? Well, check verse 16; it is **...one that shares heart and possessions (16)**. It's the kind of love that not only rejoices and weeps with the other person, but also the kind the early church had where they shared all their possessions as anyone had need. It's the kind that doesn't simply say, "I wish you well, I hope you'll be warm and well-fed," but says, "What do you need? What I have is at your disposal!" I read a story about a group years ago that had gathered to pray for a family who were in great financial straits. While one of the deacons was offering a fervent prayer for blessing upon the family, there was a loud knock at the door. The door opened, and there stood a farmer's sturdy boy. "What do you want, boy?" asked one of the elders. "Pa couldn't come, so I brought his prayers in the wagon." said the boy. "What do you mean?" asked the astonished elder. "Yes, I've brought his prayers, just come out and help me, please, and we'll bring them in." On reaching the wagon, they discovered that "Pa's prayers" consisted of potatoes, flour, beef, oatmeal, turnips, apples, jellies, and clothing. The prayer meeting adjourned on short notice. The point is not that we shouldn't pray, but that as we pray, we should also love through sharing what God has given us with one another, money, a ride, our home or whatever it is. Secondly, God's love will manifest itself in:

2. a hospitality that cares for strangers (2) We'll have *philadelphia* and *philoxenia*, the love of strangers, a heart that goes out to people we don't even know and is willing to help them. In that day there were not a Holiday Inn or a Marriott in every town. What few inns there were, were the kind Jesus was almost born in. When you would travel, you would walk or ride as far as you could get by dark to whatever village there was and you often had to depend on

someone to open their home to a stranger or spend the night in the street. When Paul traveled in his missionary enterprise or when Christian teachers went from place to place to encourage the church, they were dependent on people they didn't know to open their homes. The same principle still works in many parts of the world today and caring for strangers is a cherished value in society. Our self-sufficient suburban world may be different, but it doesn't eliminate God's desire for us to love people we don't know and come to their aid. And the writer comments **...some have even entertained angels without knowing it.** I'm sure he's thinking of Abraham, who in Gen. 18 saw three strangers coming to his tent and he invited them to rest and fed them and it turned out that though they looked like men, that one was the Lord and the other two were angels who went down to Sodom and rescued his nephew Lot who also took them in as strangers and protected them. The point is not that you should care for strangers in case one turns out to be an angel; it is that your love should care for strangers and you never know what God is up to in those you're helping and how you will be used by Him in the process! Thirdly, His love will manifest itself in:

3. an empathy with those who suffer (3) I chose the word *empathy* rather than *sympathy* because in English, *sympathy* is more like a feeling of pity for someone in trouble, while *empathy* means to really identify with the person in their suffering, to go through it and endure it with them. Even to say "as though you were suffering" sounds like you're pretending. It really means, **as suffering together with them**, allowing your heart to feel their pain and walking through it together. *Those in prison* in that day were not the bad guys, but the good guys, believers who had been arrested and jailed for their faith. And in the ancient world, prisoners often didn't get food, clothing or medical care unless friends and family brought it to them. It's still that way in much of the world, not just in jails, but also in hospitals. In Kyrgyzstan, my host Andre went to see his friend in the hospital and took him ham and other food because patients don't get enough to eat to grow stronger. Family will often do nursing duty, change bedpans, bathe the person and whatever, because there is no care. Our institutions may be different, but we still have lots of people who are in a place of suffering in their lives, whether they struggle with a disease, whether they struggle with the inability of old age, whether they have been in an accident or experienced a deep loss. And our love compels us to enter into it with them and walk through it with them, to hurt with them and suffer with them and pray and talk and comfort and hug and whatever else will help them. Fourthly, God's love will manifest itself in:

4. a commitment to honor the sanctity and the purity of marriage (4) The inherent danger in caring for people at a deep level is that if it involves a male and a female, it is possible to be drawn into an emotional romantic involvement with them or even to be tempted to sexual sin. But those who are genuinely filled with the love and the Spirit of God believe with the very core of their being that God has instituted marriage between a husband and wife as a sacred inviolable bond and they honor it, whether it's their own or the other's, always and in all circumstances. Sex belongs only in marriage and there it is an honorable God-given gift, pure and holy. But when a husband or wife seeks romance or sex outside the marriage bond with someone else or when two people, young or old, seek sex without the bond of marriage, it's wrong and evil, not to mention immensely destructive in their lives. And, contrary to the message our culture sends us, the author reminds us strongly of a general principle, that **...God will judge those who violate either the marriage bond through adultery or His boundary that sex belongs ONLY in marriage.** Fifth, God's love in us will manifest itself in:

5. a contentment with the material because of the eternal (5-6) We had *philadelphia* and *philoxenia*; now we have a warning against *philarguria*, the love of money, which, Paul writes to Timothy, is the root of every kind of evil and causes people to stray from the faith and to pierce themselves with many griefs and sorrows. It's so easy for covetousness, the desire to have more, to creep into our lives and become an idol. But the antidote is a spiritual contentment. By that I mean, not simply kind of an iron-willed, self-disciplined "I will be content with whatever I have and suffer for God!" attitude, but an attitude that says, "I have a God who has promised never to leave me nor forsake me, who has called Himself in the Psalms my helper, the one who hears and answers my cry!" I have a never-ending Resource, a source of supply that will never dry up, who can feed a widow and her son and a prophet for a year on a handful of flour and a little oil or feed 5000 with five loaves and two fishes! I can be content with what He's given me because He always knows what I really need and gives it to me. The point is **God will never abandon you, so why be anxious?** Why worry about material things and seek after them and live for them? Why sell my soul to work night and day, to climb the corporate ladder, to make a better lifestyle, when I have Him and He's all I need and people are what's really important! Then sixth, God's love will manifest itself in:

6. an attitude that respects the integrity of our leaders (7) It's sad to say, but we live in a culture that plays right into the pride of our flesh because we've lost the sense of valuing and respecting authority. We have an attitude that says, "I know more than my parents. I know more than my teachers. I know more than older people. I know more than my boss. I am the center of my life and I know what's best for me and what's right. I am my own ultimate authority." We sit in judgment over the authorities in our lives all the time, pointing out their failures instead of valuing their wisdom and appreciating them and learning and growing. And that carries over into the spiritual realm as well. God's desire for us is that we understand and respect the integrity of those who led us to Christ, those who teach us the Word of God, those who are more mature in the faith than we are and have walked with the Lord through years of the refining pro-

cess, those who in the church are our teachers and our elders and our pastors. His desire is that we trust them and value them and honor them in two ways. First, in verse 7 by:

a. seeing God at work in their lives and imitating their faith I look at the gentle persevering patience without complaining that God has built into one brother, at the deep wisdom that God has built into another through years of facing difficult problem situations in leadership, at the tears of compassion and the teachability that God has built into another, or the giving heart of still another. There are so many who've been a tremendous example, both men and women who are here in this body, that I can't name them all, including many that are now in heaven. Yes, they're human beings who have flaws, but when I look at what walking with Jesus Christ does in them, I want to be like them. I want to imitate their faith. I want to live like they live and trust like they do. I want Jesus to produce that fruit in my life. That's the first way we value and honor them, by imitation. The second is by:

b. willingly submitting to their leadership (17-18) Regard them as a gift from God and listen to them and follow them; take their advice. Make their work a joy, not a burden. Gary Corwin wrote this, *You can only exercise and sustain personal leadership to the extent that you can bear pain*. He adds that the pain of leadership often comes from fatigue and being overwhelmed with an avalanche of conflicting duties, from being the bad guy who has to convey bad news or settle a difficult problem, from the self-centeredness of people who want their own way, from the burden of making decisions in times of crisis and from entering into the pain of the multitude of those under their care and being deeply involved in their crises. And on top of that they have to account to God for how well they handled it; they have the burden of not failing Him as an example and a leader. Think about it. People are not standing in line to be leaders. The pattern is that people break down under the burden of leadership. They quit the ministry; they step down from their positions in the church because it's too much; they give up teaching. It's a whole lot easier to be a follower! But you can love them and make their task a whole lot easier by willingly listening to them and submitting to them and following them as they follow Jesus. When you resist and complain and criticize and generally act like Israel did toward Moses in the wilderness, you not only make leadership an intolerable burden but you shoot yourself in the foot! You keep them from being used in your life the way God intends them to be!

Well, that's loving others. Now, in the second part of chapter 13, the writer tells us that when we comprehend the length and the breadth and the depth of God's love, then He is able to build in us:

II. A Life That Is Continually Filled With Love For Jesus (8-16), and that manifests itself in four specific ways. First, in:

1. rejecting the strange teachings that abound (8-9a) They abounded then and they do now. This group says Jesus was just a great religious teacher of the past, just a man. That group says that we should emphasize the angels and try to get "our personal angel" to reveal himself to us instead of worshipping Jesus Christ as God. The next group says He died so that you could have anything you want, that new car, that healing for your body; it's yours. Another group knocks on your door to tell you that he is coming back again and only those that belong to their group can survive to be in the new world order. None of this is new. These things are winds of doctrine that have been blowing this way and that way for 2000 years but Jesus Christ is the same then as He is now and always will be. Stand by the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints, that was passed on to you through your leaders and bore such fruit in their lives. If you genuinely love Him, nothing will move you from your faith. And secondly, you'll be:

2. clinging to grace instead of legalism (9b-10) In that day and out of their Jewish background it was the dietary laws; some foods are clean and others are unclean, so as long as you don't eat them, you're OK. In this century it has been at various times and places things like movies and dancing and smoking or women wearing pants and makeup and jewelry or men with beards and long hair or using a certain Bible translation or music styles. There is always some cultural thing, some tradition that somebody wants to elevate into a law. "To please God, you MUST...." But a heart that really loves God clings to grace, clings to the freedom which was bought for us on the altar of the cross and refuses to think that keeping a bunch of man-made rules makes us acceptable to Him. Thirdly, if you love Him you'll have a:

3. willingness to bear rejection for leaving the old system (11-14) Now keep in mind that this letter is written to Jewish believers, people who were Jews before believing and still have strong ties to the Temple and the sacrifices. The author has a special message for them. "Our Lord Jesus was the great once-for-all sin offering. And He died on a cross outside the camp, outside the city on that hill called Calvary. The Temple kept on offering its sacrifices as usual. Don't be afraid to go out there to Him; don't be afraid to leave behind the Temple and the sacrifices and all the trappings of the Jewish religious system for Jesus. Let it go; give it up. Yes, it will be seen as a disgrace and bring rejection to you by religious people who don't understand, just like they rejected Jesus, but go anyway!" If you love Him, you'll cling to Jesus alone and let go of any false religious system, whether it's Judaism, or Islam or Buddhism or whether it's some dead form of Christianity that is just a bunch of rituals and rules without Christ. Yes, your family will get upset; yes, your friends and neighbors may get upset. But go anyway! If you love Him, being true to Jesus means more than anything. And finally, if you love Him, you'll be:

4. offering to God the sacrifices He desires (15-16) You won't be offering animals on an altar of stone, but sacrifices in the temple of your daily life and the author names three. We'll worship Him by:

a. the speaking of praise with our lips continually. Every day, in every circumstance, we repeatedly come to Him and in our hearts and with our mouths tell Him how wonderful He is, how great He is, how much we love Him, how worthy He is and how much He deserves all the glory. If you really love Him, you can't stop marveling at Him and telling Him so with your lips. Secondly, we'll worship Him by:

b. the practice of good in our deeds Jesus went about doing good and so will we. Our life will overflow with deeds that are right and good and kind and loving. Each one is an act of worship. And thirdly, if we love Him, we'll worship Him by:

c. the depth of fellowship in our relationships That word *share* is literally, *koinonia*, or *fellowship*. It's that depth of love for our brothers and sisters that shares not only our heart, but everything we have with them as we spoke of at the beginning.

Those are the sacrifices God really wants. And if we love Him, those are the sacrifices that will flow from our lives.

Well, we can't leave the book of Hebrews without a benediction and in verses 20-21 the author gives us one. It sums up what we've seen throughout Hebrews, but it's a prayer. And I'd like to pray it for you and with you right now.

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

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A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Love (Vs. 1)

If you know anything about Hebrews, what you likely remember is that it's deep stuff. The first 12 chapters present a cogent, well-thought-out doctrinal argument that Christ is superior to angels, superior to Moses, that He is a superior High Priest, that He made a superior sacrifice and served in a better sanctuary, all to prove that Jesus is sufficient; He is ALL we need! And then, tacked on the end of it all, comes chapter 13, which seems at first glance to simply be a list of 11 different and randomly arranged exhortations about various points of living the Christian life. It's so different from the rest that some commentators have gone so far as to suggest that it was added by a different author or that the author needed to make the whole thing into a letter and so appended this onto the end. But let me tell you what I think; *Hebrews 13 explains Heb. 12:28*. That phrase *worship God acceptably* is literally *serve God in a well-pleasing fashion*. It is not a phrase about bowing down with proper reverence; it is about living *a life of service that is well-pleasing to God!* What does a life lived in true reverence and awe look like? What is *A LIFE WELL LIVED*? The first answer the author gives is in verse 1. It is *A LIFE OF LOVE!* The main Greek word is *philadelphia* and the verse says literally, *the philadelphia continue*, that is, *the-loving-of-brothers continue*. You sure can't miss the main point:

I. Our Lives Should Be Filled With Love For Our Fellow Believers Now as soon as I say that, it sounds like another "to-do" thing that I have to accomplish. I have to make sure that I love everybody. But actually, it's not that at all. It's an easy thing and let me show you why:

1. there is a special bond of love between believers in Christ - Gal. 6:10 says *...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers*. The bond that we have with fellow believers is different from the relationships that we have with others all around us. Through our salvation we were born again into a new family, the family whose Father is God, the family of believers, the household of faith. And just as being born into our earthly family implanted within us a special kind of family love for our siblings and parents, even so when we were born into God's family, a special love for that family was implanted:

a. it was placed in us during our regeneration Look with me at **1 John 5:1**. John says it's automatic. It's not something you have to work up or generate on your own. When you believe, you're born again and because you're born again, you love God and EVERYONE who loves God loves his brothers and sisters in the family. It's automatic! It's a consequence of spiritual birth. In fact, look at **3:14**. It's one way you can tell that you're saved. Saved people love their brothers and sisters in Christ. If you don't love them, you're still spiritually dead; you haven't really been made alive in Christ! Love for our brothers and sisters:

b. it is the natural fruit of being born into God's family Paul put it like this in **1 Thes. 4:9**, *Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other*. Literally, the Greek says you've been *GOD-taught* to do it. How? Not in word, not by hearing a command. The Spirit of God who lives in you built it right in! You instinctively know it and do it, the same way that you instinctively love your natural parents and your brothers and sisters. Nobody has to teach you to do that. It's built right in and so is the love of your spiritual family. It's inside you, a part of your Christ-like new nature, whether you happen to feel it at this moment or not. Now, what's it like?

2. it is a tender love like that of parent and child - Rom. 12:10 says in Greek *In philadelphia, philostorgoi* The Literal Version translates it, *In brotherly love to one another, loving fervently*. *Storgos* is the tender, deep affection that a parent has for a child. Paul says, *in loving your brothers and sisters in Christ, love them like that!* This love we have for one another is not merely a mechanical commitment that says, "I'll help you" or "I'll take care of you", the fulfilling of a responsibility. It is an emotional thing, a fervently passionate thing, a bond of the heart, not simply of the mind. And because it is of the heart:

a. it is multi-faceted and all-encompassing Look with me at **1 Pet. 3:8**. All of those things spell out the results of *philadelphia*, brotherly love. That tender love of our brothers:

(1) it results in harmony with one another. What's that? Does that mean we always agree on everything? No, it means **having a like mindset**. We're not adversaries with different goals, each trying to get our own way. We're brothers and sisters who care deeply about each other, who value each other more than self and always want what's best for one another and for our Father! We're a unit, a family that operates in togetherness out of love. Then notice that:

(2) it results in empathy. The NIV uses the word *sympathy*, but we so often take that to mean feeling sorry for someone. Empathy means what the original means here, **sharing in the other's experience**, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, because their joy makes you happy and their sadness makes you sad. You suffer together with them and you rejoice together with them. Love makes you enter into what they are experiencing and go through it with them. And similarly:

(3) it results in compassion, which in the Greek language is literally about feeling it in your gut. True compassion is actually **feeling what the other feels**. Scott Bessenecker wrote this about his daughter: *"Across the street from us there lives a girl who is a year and a half older than our daughter Hannah. Hannah really looks up to this neighbor and loves to play with her. The problem is this girl's friends are all eight or nine, and when they're around, she really doesn't want anything to do with little Hannah. Now Hannah is fairly shy, and normally she wouldn't be caught dead knocking on someone's door for fear that someone might actually answer it. But, for love of this neighbor, she will walk excitedly up to her door and knock, albeit gingerly. Once, looking across the street, I could see that this neighbor was inside with some friends and obviously in no mood to play with Hannah. I think Hannah must have stood at the door for fifteen minutes, knocking politely every so often. I suffered with Hannah. As I watched, I entered into Hannah's rejection more than she will ever know. In fact, I experienced the sting of her rejection more profoundly than she did because I could see her friend's face through the window of the other house, but Hannah couldn't. [Student Leadership Journal, Winter 1996. Page 11.]* If we love one another, we feel the depth of each other's pain. We can't help it! In fact, **1 Jn. 3:17** says, *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?* If the love of God is really in us, we can't watch our brother sitting there hungry with nothing to eat or our sister unable to pay her electric bill in a dark house. We can't see these things and pass by like the Levite and the priest on the other side! No, love:

(4) it results in kindness. I'm not sure how the NIV got *humble*; the Greek is another *philo* word, *philophron*, a loving mind, a loving attitude, or what we would call kindness to the other. In Acts 28 Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta and verse 7 says, *Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously [same word] three days*. Publius saw them cold and wet and hungry and treated them with kindness. His welcoming attitude fed them and clothed them and sheltered them. Love results in doing something, in **meeting the other's needs**. And then we read that this love for our brothers and sisters:

b. it is filled with patience and forgiveness Listen to **Eph. 4:1-2**, *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love*. Patience is literally, *longsuffering*, being willing to put up with things, to suffer for a long time without retaliating. Bearing with each other is putting up with each other's faults and flaws and failings because we love each other. Peter wanted to know how far this goes and asked Jesus how often he should forgive his brother who sinned against him. He generously suggested 7 times. But Jesus said, "No, 70 times 7!" You do it over and over and over again! If we love each other, we put up with each other and forgive each other over and over again because that's what love does!

It might really help us to look at this kind of love in a real life setting, so if you think about where we really see this in the Bible:

3. one example of that love would be Jonathan and his love for David. Turn with me back to **1 Sam. 18:1-3**. Now why did that happen? Jonathan is the firstborn son of the king; he is next in line for the throne. He grew up in the palace as royalty and he is well-to-do. David is the last-born son of a common shepherd. He's been a harpist and a servant in the castle at times and on this day, he killed Goliath with a sling and a stone; he doesn't own a sword. Of course, he's been anointed by God to be the next king, but Jonathan doesn't know that at this point. What on earth produced

this sudden deep love for David in Jonathan? Nothing I can think of; this was a God thing! God put it there and Jonathan was overwhelmed with it. He loved David as himself, as his own soul! He looked at him, listened to him talking to his father, and his heart said, "This is my brother; I love him!" Just like God plants this special fervent love for our brothers and sisters in us! Now look how that love played out in Jonathan's life. Immediately:

a. he gave David what he needed - 18:4 David had nothing. He had come to the battle with only the clothes on his back and didn't get to go home. He didn't have a robe or a cloak or a weapon or even a belt. And Jonathan immediately said, "Here, take mine!" Of course, as the king's son he probably had double of everything anyway, nevertheless that's what love does. It sees a brother or sister in need, looks at what I have and gives it without hesitation. Whether it is items like this or money or a place to stay or a ride, when your heart is knit to a brother you say, "Here, let me help!" in any way you can. Then we read that:

b. he protected David - 19:1-2 By this time Saul is jealous of David and wants to kill him to make sure the kingdom stays with him and his son. But Jonathan defied his own father and warned David right away. He protected him, even though it meant betraying his own blood father. His bond to David was deeper. If you remember, one day Jesus was teaching inside and somebody told him that his mother and his brothers were outside and wanted to see Him and He pointed to His followers and said, "Behold my mother and my brothers!" The bond that we have through the Spirit of God living in each of us is deeper than flesh and blood. It is not merely a bond of flesh and blood; it is a bond of the spirit. I have often confessed that I am so much closer to many of you than I am to a number of my own relatives. You really are my true family. We protect our brothers and sisters however we can, no matter what other obligations we may feel. And Jonathan went further:

c. he interceded on David's behalf - 19:4-6 He went right to his father and challenged him with the injustice of it. His father was an angry man and had a temper problem. He knew there was a risk involved, but he jumped right in with both feet and went to bat for David. Loving our brothers means getting involved, doing whatever we can to intercede on their behalf, stepping in front of them to protect them if there's a way to do that. I always remember that love that our elders have shown to me over the years when we've had some incredibly difficult things to face; they would say, "No, we don't want you to be the one to go; we want to protect you. We will go and face this!" And they did. Of course, Saul's promise didn't last and he ended up hunting David with an army for 10 years while David hid in the wilderness. But even there, Jonathan:

d. he encouraged David - 23:15-18 Oh listen to that! No jealousy! "You will be king and I will be under you!" This was the hardest time of David's life. He was a hunted outlaw hiding for his life. And Jonathan's love so encouraged him to keep on and wait patiently for the Lord! Oh, we are there for each other in the hardest of times, in moments of great loss, of tragedy, of suffering and pain. Our brothers and sisters are there and walk through it with us because they love us. It is no wonder that after Jonathan died in battle:

e. David mourned deeply for Jonathan - 2 Sam. 1:25-26 That's the love, the love of brothers and sisters, that God puts in us; it truly is a wonderful thing. It's an unnatural thing. It's something you don't find out there in the world. There everyone chooses themselves above others. So, naturally:

4. it is this bond of love that identifies us to the world Jesus told his disciples in the upper room, *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* - **John 13:34-35**. For years before he came to Christ, the husband of one of our dear ladies used to say, "I never saw anything like that church of yours. They bring us meals, they give us rides, they visit us. They do so much for us!" He saw that love in operation, saw us loving our own as we loved his wife, and by extension himself. And I think that's a big part of what prepared him to receive Christ. This depth of love we have for each other is simply unnatural and it makes the world sit up and say, "I want in on that!"

However, what the writer of Hebrews is pointing out to us is that even though that love is divinely placed within us:

II. Staying Filled With That Love Requires Continual Effort The Amplified version reads, *LET LOVE for your fellow believers continue and be a fixed practice with you [never let it fail]*. It is a passive command. You can't generate that love; God has put it there. However, you have to make every effort to sustain it. Look with me at **1 Pet. 1:22**. You have a choice to make. You see:

1. our flesh constantly pushes us to limit our love Everything about how we were raised and the culture that we live in and the power of sin that still lives in us pressures us to go against our new nature. It pressures us:

a. to choose who we will love, to love the ones who are more lovable or perhaps the ones who love us back. As we look around the body of Christ there are brothers and sisters who we don't really like, who bothers, who talk too much, who dress funny, who keep to themselves, who...you name it. It's so easy and natural to love the ones we like and ignore the rest. That's called **partiality**, choosing one above another. James wrote, *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.* - **James 2:1**. Love them all alike! And our flesh pressures us:

b. to choose how much we will love, to set limits and say we'll help this much, but no more; we'll get involved this far, but no farther, especially if there's risk involved. At the bottom line we'll take care of ourselves first. That's called **hypocrisy**, saying that we love but not really meaning it. Again, James wrote, *Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?* - **James 2:16**. The words are empty; the love is hollow.

Our flesh is continually whispering, "Don't love! Don't love! Look out for yourself!" What can we do to keep our love from fading out, from being pushed aside by the tyranny of our self-centered thinking? Try harder? Work at it more? NO! This love was put in us by the Spirit; it is the fruit of the Spirit at work in us, so the only way for it to rule in our lives is, **Gal. 5:16**, *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*

2. we must continually live by the Spirit to exhibit His love! It's simple! We just realize our own reluctance and call on the Holy Spirit to love the brother or sister in front of us and HE will do it! He will give us the love we need!

As you know, Corrie ten Boom suffered terribly in a concentration camp in Nazi Germany, but after the war traveled the world preaching the depths of the love of God. Yet even she had trouble loving. She writes: *It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there--the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!" His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? "Lord Jesus," I prayed, "forgive me and help me to forgive him." I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. "Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness." As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so, I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself. [The Hiding Place - Corrie Ten Boom - p. 238] When He tells us to love our brothers and sisters, He gives, along with the command, the love itself! To never let love fail, you must call on Him!*

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Hospitality (Vs. 2)

In verse 1 of Hebrews 13 we learned that a life well lived, a life that is well-pleasing to God, is filled with *philadelphia*, a deep, passionate love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Now look at verse 2. Not only should we love our brothers, but:

I. Our Lives Should Be Filled With The Love Of Strangers The words *to entertain strangers* are really one word in Greek, *philoxenia*. It is usually translated *hospitality*, but it literally means *the love of strangers*. That same passionate love and caring that we have for each other as family in Christ, we are also to have for strangers, for people we don't even know. The word *stranger* refers primarily to a foreigner, an alien, someone whose home is somewhere else, but finds himself here among us for some reason and so has no family, no support system here. We're to include them in ours, to become their caring support system, instead of leaving them to flounder helplessly. We have numerous:

1. some examples of it in Scripture, but I'll just mention two. First is:

a. Publius, whom we mentioned last week, the guy that took care of Paul and his companions after their shipwreck. **Acts 28:7**, *There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably.* Here are some 200 people who have crawled out of the ocean after a shipwreck, wet, cold and hungry, and this guy opens his estate and cares for them all somehow for a couple of days until other arrangements can be made! Now that's hospitality! Hospitality is hundreds of churches like ours sending teams to Gulfport Mississippi and other Gulf cities after Hurricane Katrina destroyed thousands of homes and doing our best to rebuild because we saw people in trouble. The other example I'll mention is:

b. Job, who characterizes his own life this way, *...no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler* - **Job 31:32**. Hospitality is what some of our missionary friends did in New York City some years ago, when a Russian family from Kyrgyzstan arrived there assuming they would find fellow Russians to take them in. Our friends found them in the park and took five adults into their two bedroom apartment for two days until we could find a house here in Glenside to put them in. And many of you helped them in those days in so many ways. That love of strangers, of people who are out of their element, who desperately need help, that's hospitality. Now this:

2. it was an absolute necessity in the ancient world In that day there was no Marriott or even a Motel 6 in every town. What inns there were, were the kind that Jesus was *almost* born in, there in Bethlehem, just a building to take shelter in with a stable for animals attached. No food services or bathrooms! So:

a. almost any extended travel depended on hospitality You would walk or ride as far as you could get by dark to whatever village there was and you usually had to depend on someone to approach you and open their home to a stranger or else you spent the night in the street. There are numerous examples of this practice throughout the Old Testament. And it is still a common value and practice in many eastern cultures today. When Jesus sent out his disciples to preach, He depended on this principle, that they would be taken in by someone and should stay with that person and if no one would take them in, they should wipe the dust off their feet as they left town. The missionary work of Paul depended on it. He traveled from town to town and in each place counted on finding someone who would take him in. In fact:

b. Christian mission and growth depended on it Turn with me to **3 John 5-8**. In these early years missionaries and evangelists would often travel in an itinerant fashion doing the work of church planting and building up the churches. And faithful folks like those John was writing to would take them into their homes and feed them and stock them up with what they needed for their journey and send them on their way. John says that when we do this, we are sharing with them in their ministry, partnering with them. We are co-laboring with them. This is what we do with our own missionaries when they come to town. When we send them on their way in a manner worthy of God, we please Him greatly. The Amplified version of Heb. 13:2 says, *Do not forget or neglect or refuse to extend hospitality to strangers [in the brotherhood--being friendly, cordial, and gracious, sharing the comforts of your home and doing your part generously]*. That's what these brethren were doing and this gift of loving strangers is what grew the church all across the Roman Empire! Now the Scriptures go a step further. It is not just necessary or even commendable:

3. it is a mark of spiritual maturity that can be applied to us and used to evaluate us across the board. It is a mark of maturity:

a. for men The men you pick to be elders of the church **MUST** be people who have this kind of heart. *Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable [that is, a lover of strangers]! - 1 Tim. 3:2. Titus 1:8 repeats it, rather he must be hospitable...* You don't put a man into leadership, you don't elect him to the elder board, you don't call him as a pastor, unless he is a man who has a love for strangers and is willing to open his heart and open his home to them! Why? Because it's a mark of what it means to be mature, a mark of being Christlike and ready to lead! I don't think I've ever heard an ordination council ask that question! But you women are not off the hook, because the same thing is commanded:

b. for women - 1 Tim. 5:10 says the church shouldn't support and take care of a widow unless she... *is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds*. Loving strangers with a heart of compassion is a mark of spirituality for women as well as for men. Why? Because:

4. it is a reflection of the heart of God Turn with me back to **Deut. 10:17-19**. Did you see that? God loves aliens! Not little green Martians! God loves strangers, foreigners, refugees, travelers, people who are out of their element, who are stuck away from home and have needs, just like He loves widows and orphans who can't provide for themselves. He is the Champion of the needy. His heart is touched with their needs and He gives them food and clothing. And because of that, we are to love strangers also! Israel had a very personal reason for this that was still fresh in their minds when Moses wrote this. They were to remember what it felt like to be strangers because not long before, they were strangers themselves in the land of Egypt! They were to remember what it was like to be an oppressed, powerless minority that was taken advantage of and not repeat that kind of treatment to others in that situation! So, if we are maturing and our heart is becoming like God's heart, we are filled with mercy. We simply love people whether we know them or not and are touched with their needs and want to meet them.

Now wouldn't you know it, as I'm sitting at my computer on Friday working on this paragraph, the phone rings and on the other end is a single father with two sons who's construction business has gone under from the recession and he's desperately trying not to be evicted from his rented house on Monday. He has another job lined up but needs about 2 months before he can make a go of it. The churches of the Willow Grove Ministerium are trying to help him. I don't know him from Adam and it would be so easy to make excuses. Our Elders Fund only has \$67 in it today. We helped keep a single mom from being evicted last month with a couple hundred. We helped save another man from eviction in January. We have some of our own people who are out of work and are going to need help. But what good is any of that to a guy who doesn't know where his kids are going to sleep next week. My heart just couldn't walk away from it. God just kept pricking my heart to look at his need compared to mine, so I wrote him a check. I tell you that, not to blow my own horn, but to try to illustrate for you what hospitality really is. It's not having your friends over for a nice meal or graciously inviting them to stay with you while they're in town. It is to see the need of anybody, even a complete stranger to you, and to have compassion on them and meet their need. Jesus said that the second greatest commandment in the law is to *love your neighbor as yourself*. But immediately the religious people asked him, "Ah, but who is my neighbor??" And in response to that

question Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, the point of which is that your “neighbor” is any old guy that you find lying in a ditch in need of help! The question is not WHO you should help, but whether you will be a HELPER or not! And that’s the second thing that our text is trying to point out:

II. Staying Filled With That Love Requires Effort Because We Forget Inside us is our flesh, our life-programming that is centered around “the big I”. It screams, “But what about MY needs, MY wants! If I help somebody else it will keep me from this or that!” The culture around us is constantly urging us to look out for ourselves, telling us that we deserve things for ourselves. These voices will combine to drown out that love of strangers, to make it fade out and wax cold. That’s why the writer says, *Do not forget...to entertain strangers, to show hospitality....*

1. we’re forgetful If we don’t do something, make some conscious effort, this attitude will fade away and be forgotten. That’s why Paul wrote in **Rom. 12:13** that we ought to, *Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.* Literally, *PURSUE hospitality.* **We must consciously pursue it**, chase it down. Sharing with God’s people is a more natural thing for us; that love for them comes built in and it flows more naturally because of the joy that we get from the relationships we have with our fellow believers. But loving strangers brings no such personal reward. In many cases we may never see them again. It is always easier to walk by on the other side, to not get involved. Helping people is messy; it’s dirty; it’s time-consuming and costly. Sometimes it’s unappreciated or you get taken advantage of. It’s easy to learn to walk by the guy lying in the ditch. And every time you walk by, it gets easier to walk by it the next time. Love and compassion for people you don’t know must be deliberately pursued; it must be intentionally cultivated and carefully grown. We must make the effort to develop a mindset to practice it. Look with me at what Jesus said in **Luke 6:30-38**, “Give to everyone who asks you, even if they’re your enemies. Give because you’re merciful like God is and you have pity on them in their situation. Give because you’re a child of God and you trust Him to meet your needs even as you do it!” When’s the last time you heard a message on that text? It’s not a very popular sermon text, is it? We don’t like to hear it, but that’s the attitude that JESUS commands us to have. It is totally opposite everything that we would naturally be and we won’t develop it unless we pay attention to it, unless we wake up and deliberately stay in touch with the Lord and listen to Him and choose that path! Then the other thing that tends to keep us from loving strangers is that:

2. we grow tired of it The requests never seem to end. The needs are endless. We help and we help and afterwhile we find ourselves helping, but not really wanting to. We find ourselves helping as a duty rather than a desire and we do it with an attitude that begrudges the very help we’re giving. That’s why Peter says, *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.* - **1 Pet. 4:9**. Literally, *without murmuring*, without muttering under your breath, without secretly begrudging what you’re doing. He’s saying that **we must choose to have a right attitude** as we do it, the first time and every time! I’m sure you know some of those people who somehow always need help, who never seem to have it together like you do. Oh, how easy it is to judge them, to think we’re better than they are and to begrudge them the very help we give them. All I can say is that it’s a good thing God is not like that, because we’re back to Him every day with our list of needs! Yet He LOVES to meet them. We’re talking about the LOVE of strangers here, not the duty to help them. Ask Him to grow that LOVE in you! Now lastly, here’s an exciting thought in our Heb. 13:2 text, *...for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*:

III. Exercising That Love Leads To Incredible But Unrecognized Opportunities You see:

1. the strangers you help could turn out to be angels That was the case for Abraham way back in **Gen. 18**, wasn’t it? Three strangers came walking up to his tent in the heat of the day and he showed tremendous hospitality. He invited them in and had Sarah kill a calf and make a meal for them. He refreshed them and it turned out that two of them were angels who were on their way down to Sodom to rescue Lot and destroy the city in chapter 19! And the third stranger was the Lord Himself in human form! And ultimately this act of hospitality led to the opportunity for Abraham to intercede with the Lord for the city of Sodom in that famous interchange, “But what if only 5 righteous are found there?” Remember? Sure, the strangers you help, that you entertain, that you give to, could turn out to be angels, but the point is not that you have to make sure you always help strangers because one of them could turn out to be a literal angel and if you didn’t help him, you’d be in trouble. The point is that God is at work doing something in and through those strangers and through your act of giving. God is up to something, He’s doing something. The strangers could be His messengers in some fashion, people He’s planning to use in some way for some purpose unknown to you and if you don’t help them, you miss out on being a part of something incredible that God is doing and wants to do through you! I remember a little boy one day who was the only one in a whole crowd who was smart enough to bring his lunch. He could have kept it and eaten it himself, but he gave it to Jesus to give to a bunch of strangers and Jesus multiplied it to feed all 5,000. That act of love gave Jesus the opportunity to show His glory to a whole nation that day and has kept on doing that for 2,000 years as the story has been read over and over again. You see, Jesus is always up to something. Jesus is out to get glory for Himself, to make Himself known. And this person He’s set in front of you to help is His invitation to you to get involved, to participate in whatever He is up to in that person’s life and far beyond! You may never get the privilege of being made aware of exactly how He used it, yet you can always rest assured that He did. But even if the strangers you help don’t turn out to actually be angels, don’t be disappointed; I want to let you in on a little secret:

2. the strangers always turn out to be “Jesus” Turn with me to **Mat. 25:35-40**. Jesus says, “I was the stranger! When you loved that stranger, you loved ME!”

An American poet, Edwin Markham, told about a cobbler, a godly man who made shoes. One night the cobbler dreamed that the next day Jesus was coming to visit. It seemed real and he got up early to decorate his shop for his Guest. He waited, but the shop remained quiet, except for an old man who limped up to the door asking to come in for a few minutes of warmth. While the man rested, the cobbler noticed his worn shoes and gave him a new pair. In the afternoon, an elderly woman came, and seeing her struggling earlier under a heavy load, he invited her in to rest and gave her a nourishing meal. At night, a child was heard crying outside his door, lost and afraid. He went out, soothed the child, and took the child home. When he returned, the cobbler was sad, convinced the Lord had come while he was away. Now he lived through the moments as he had imagined them: the knock, the latch lifted, the radiant face, the offered cup. He would have kissed the hands where the nails had been, washed the feet where the spikes had entered. Then the Lord would have sat and talked to him. In his anguish, the cobbler cried out, “Why is it, Lord, that Your feet delay? Have you forgotten that this was the day?” Then, soft in the silence a voice he heard: “Lift up your heart for I kept My word. Three times I came to your friendly door; Three times My shadow was on your floor. I was the man with the bruised feet; I was the woman you gave to eat; I was the child on the homeless street.” Hospitality, the love of strangers, boils down simply to this: I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me.

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Empathy (Vs. 3)

The life that God wants His children to live is, first of all, a life filled with love for our Christian brothers and sisters, as we saw in verse 1. Then in verse 2 we saw that it is a life filled with love for strangers too, for anybody whose life intersects ours. Verse 3 continues that same theme and applies it to another specific group of people and at the same time explores something of what the depths of that love is like. I’ve tried to express the concept by using the English word *empathy*. The life our Father wants us to live is a life filled with empathy. I deliberately avoided the word *sympathy* because to us that word too often means simply pity for others. We send sympathy cards to people who have lost a loved one, but too often that’s all we do. Doctors and all kinds of other professionals are taught to say, “I’m sorry for your loss.” We say it too, and then walk away and go on with our lives. We feel sad for somebody; we pity THEM, but it doesn’t change US. Empathy is different than that. Empathy is deeper than that. Empathy enters into their suffering. One online definition says, “*Empathy is the capability to share and understand another’s emotion and feelings. It is often characterized as the ability to “put oneself into another’s shoes,” or in some way experience what the other person is feeling.*” [Wikipedia] A little girl was so late coming home from school that her mother began to worry. Finally, when she got home, her mother asked her what happened. “I stopped to help a little girl. She was crying because her doll had broken,” said the child. “That was kind of you,” the mother said. “Did you help her fix the doll?” “No,” replied the girl. “I stopped to help her cry.” [Love in a Lunchbox by Elaine M. Ward. Abingdon, 1996. Page 96.] That’s empathy! She entered into her friend’s world of suffering and joined her. Now, the root of the process of empathizing with others for us is this wonderful truth:

I. God Empathizes With Us Turn with me to **2 Cor. 1:3-4**. Now notice in verse 3 who God is:

1. He is the Father of compassion, the Father of mercy. He is touched by the feeling of our infirmities. In other words, **He is deeply moved by our suffering**. A father or mother enters deeply into their child’s suffering. Imagine Mary by the cross, watching Jesus suffer. Zacharias predicted exactly what would happen in that moment, ...*a sword will pierce your own soul too.* - *Lk. 2:35*. As her Child was dying, she was dying with Him on the inside. She entered into His suffering with her whole heart and that’s how God Himself enters into ours! He is with us every moment, not out there somewhere distantly watching us go through it, but right here IN us, experiencing it with us. He feels what we feel and He is deeply moved by it! But that is not all. Verse 3 says further:

2. He is the God of all comfort That root in the Greek is the word *paraklete*. It means that He does more than just feel our pain with us; **He comes alongside us to help**, to DO something about it, to comfort us, to meet the most immediate and pressing needs we have as we go through it. If the need is emotional comfort and peace, He will often speak to us through His Word. If it is financial trouble or a lost job, He provides for us in ways we couldn’t begin to expect. If we face disease or physical pain, He makes a way through and brings either healing or homegoing or the strength to endure for the long haul. He comforts us in every way that He knows we need it! But now look at verse 4:

3. He does this for us, intending that we do the same for others He is the Comforter and He intends that we will be like Him, that we will become comforters. He wants us to learn through Him empathizing with us in our suffering, entering in and walking through it with us and meeting our needs, to do the same for others. Paul put it like this in **Gal. 6:2**, *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*. You know how much easier it is when you’re carrying something heavy and somebody says, “Here let me help you!” and they grab hold of one end and bear the weight with you. You also know what it’s like for someone to watch you struggle past and say, “Man, that must be heavy!” Empathy is getting involved, entering in with all your heart, sharing the load, just the way God does with us! Now, back in our text in verse 3, the author begins by telling us:

II. Who We Should Empathize With and he mentions two particular groups of people, those who are in prison and those who are mistreated. Neither of those designations seem to be part of our American suburban experience, so let's try to paint the picture of what he's talking about by turning back to **Heb. 10:32-35**. We don't know exactly who the author is writing to; it's a general letter. But it IS written to believers from Jewish background and you know what happened to them when they believed, almost from the very beginning. Paul himself was the chief culprit who would hunt these defectors down and get them thrown in prison, even killed. After he came to Christ, he became the victim of the very same things everywhere he went. He was thrown in jail first in Philippi, then later for two whole years in Caesarea and still later for two years and more in Rome. As he traveled about, he was spoken against, threatened, beaten with rods, stoned and left for dead. And he was not the only one to whom all these things happened. Many believers in that early day had been thrown in prison for their faith and a great many had their homes and property confiscated and had to flee for their lives. And other believers had stood side by side with them as they were ill-treated or had ministered to them while they were in prison. That's why the writer says to remember:

1. those in prison The Expositor's Bible Commentary says, *In the world of the first century the lot of prisoners was difficult. Prisoners were to be punished, not pampered. Little provision was made for them and they were dependent on friends for their supplies... But there was some risk, for the visitors became identified with the visited.* You can see that in **Acts 24:23** where Felix, *...ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.* They didn't give you an orange jumpsuit to wear; you wore what you had on until it went to rags and then you were naked. They didn't give you a blanket to keep you warm and a mattress to lie on; you laid on the cold stone floor in whatever clothes you had. They fed you barely enough food and water to keep you alive. If your friends didn't bring you something to wear and something to eat and a blanket to wrap in, you might well die in that prison and nobody would care! So, when believers were arrested and thrown in prison, you can see that it wasn't simply a nice thing for their brothers and sisters to remember them; it was a necessity! To visit those in prison was literally to give them life! But it was risky, because visiting them exposed you; it identified you as one of them and if somebody was taking note, you might be the next to join them. So, it was a brave act. And that is still true in many places in the world today. There are believers in prison as we sit here enjoying our freedom and the prisons haven't changed much since Paul's day. Here are some headlines from the persecution.com website: *Converted Christian blogger released from prison in Saudi Arabia, Iran – Christian released after 27 Days in Prison, Pakistan – Young Christian Woman and her Father remain in Prison, China – Christian Released after Two Years, Three Christians Dead in Eritrean Prisons*, and the list goes on and on. In country after country our brothers still are arrested and imprisoned for their faith. And other brothers and sisters are faithfully empathizing with and remembering them, visiting them, bringing them food and medicine and comfort. Then the writer says to remember:

2. those who are ill-treated, who receive bad or unjust treatment. Some of the believers were publicly denounced; some had their homes or lands confiscated. The word is used back in **Heb. 11:25**. Mistreatment is what the Egyptians did to the Israelites; they forced them to work as slave labor; they made their lives miserable with brick and mortar. And Moses is our example. He was a prince of Egypt and free from all of that, but he chose to enter into their suffering, to join them, to be mistreated along with them. Brothers and sisters around the world are still mistreated today. When a new religion law was passed some time ago in Kyrgyzstan, two registered congregations that had nice completed buildings like ours had them confiscated by the government. Can you imagine if next Sunday you would show up to a chain through the door handles and a sign that says, "Government property"? It's not right, but it happened. Another church was renting a public facility and they were suddenly told they could not meet there. God had the last laugh on that one; they began renting in the evening from another church and now even more people are coming! Still another church had a bunch of Bibles and Christian literature in their building and the authorities came and put it all in a room and padlocked the door until it could all be "approved" by the Religious Affairs committee. Injustice against believers occurs around the world and people are left, not merely churchless, but often homeless, jobless and desperately in need of help. If other brothers and sisters did not empathize with and remember them, they would be in dire straits and many would die. Now, of course, here we don't see much persecution and ill treatment, YET, but the principle of empathy and comforting and coming alongside to help extends to:

3. those in ANY trouble, as we read a moment ago in **2 Cor. 1:4**. Those who are literally, *pressed, squeezed, pressured*. Some of our brothers and sisters face the hardship of disease. They may be in the hospital or end up having to live through a year's regimen of chemotherapy, or be in a nursing home to be cared for where nobody who was part of their lives comes to see them. I visited one brother in the rehab hospital some weeks ago who fell off a 2 ½ story roof and lost all movement below the neck. He's got a wife and 8 kids; imagine the need in that family! Glory to God, a good bit of it is now coming back, but he'll probably never be normal. Others are grieving the loss of loved ones and the painful adjustment to life without them. Still others face economic woes. At one point the number of people who were laid off was up to 6 or 7 in our little congregation this winter; praise the Lord a number are working again, but just last week two more lost their jobs. People are finding themselves unable to pay their mortgages or keep their cars. Older people living off their investments have seen what they labored for their whole lives dwindle in half and along with it their income. Our brothers and sisters everywhere - and right here - endure all kinds of suffering. And the Spirit's command to us through the Word is, *Remember them!* So let's talk about:

III. What It Means To Remember Or Empathize With Them

First of all, and most simply:

1. it means thinking about them frequently, that is, not forgetting about them God forbid that any of us would adopt the attitude, "Oh well, that's their problem; I've got enough troubles of my own." Or that we would pray for them once and then forget them. But even if our intentions are good, it is so easy to forget people, to get wrapped up in our own life and our own affairs and forget those who are suffering, to not even have them enter our minds. Out of sight is out of mind for many of us, including me. It requires making a conscious effort of some kind to remember. I don't know about you, but I need a prayer list, a written reminder, or I'll even forget to pray. And that leads right into saying that empathizing:

2. it means praying for them continually When Paul wrote the Colossians, he closed his letter in **Col. 4:18** by saying, *Remember my chains*. What do you think he meant? "Think about me now and then; don't forget that I'm chained to a guard 24 hrs. a day here in Rome." No, he meant, "PRAY for me!" To the Ephesians he wrote, *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.* - Eph. 6:19-20. Many of the New Testament churches spent regular time praying for Paul during his imprisonment in Rome a thousand miles away! That brings up the concept that even though we can't do much to help our brothers and sisters around the world who are imprisoned or mistreated, we CAN pray for them! We do it regularly in our Wednesday night prayer group. You can enter into the sufferings of faraway brothers and sisters by prayer. You can go to persecution.com and pray and even write letters to imprisoned believers. But we must also pray continually for those who suffer near at hand. That's why we put a list of congregational concerns in your bulletin every Sunday and in the newsletter, so you'll take them home and pray for suffering brothers and sisters. That's why we put out prayer needs each week over our email chain, because we're commanded to remember those who are suffering. But empathizing is more than not forgetting and it's more than praying:

3. it means entering into their feelings I'm sure you've heard **Rom. 12:15** quoted a hundred times, *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*. That doesn't mean, "Say, 'I'm so glad you're happy, that this good thing happened.' or 'I'm so sorry you're so sad, so sorry this bad thing happened!'" It means get in there and sit with them and feel their feelings; let what affected them affect you and when they laugh and rejoice, do it with them and when they cry, do it with them. Enter in. Feel their joy and their pain. Share in it. But on the other hand, empathizing isn't truly genuine unless it moves you to action:

4. it means helping them practically If you read **Phil. 4:14, 18** you'll see how the Philippians shared in Paul's troubles, that is, his imprisonment; they sent one of their number all the way to Rome to deliver him a gift of money they collected. For those two years in Rome, Paul was chained to a guard in a rented house for which he had to pay and for his own food and so on. Their gift really helped! Listen to Jesus' list in **Mt. 25:35-36**, *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me*. Those are the things that real empathy does! When someone is suffering, it meets their need. Here's a neat story I read: *"One afternoon Betty picked up the phone and heard her mother say, 'Betty, you need to fly out here tomorrow. Your sister, her husband, and both children were killed in a car wreck and hour ago.' Betty hung up the phone and turned to walk to her bedroom. She couldn't find it. She bumped into furniture and injured herself. With blood trickling from her head, she sat on the hallway floor in a daze. After a while she managed to call a friend. 'Hello, Rachel? My sister and her family just got killed and I have to fly to New Jersey,' she said. 'Can you help me?' Betty sat in a living room chair and waited. A few minutes later the doorbell rang. 'I've come to pack your clothes,' Rachel said as Betty opened the door to her. Rachel found some suitcases in the garage and selected appropriate assortments of clothing for Betty, her husband, and their daughter. She spent two hours packing everything neatly. During this time, Betty slowly regained her ability to think clearly. Her husband and daughter would be home soon. Rachel finished packing, hauled the luggage to the front door, and said, 'I'll be back in the morning.' 'How did you know to pack my bags?' Betty asked. 'When my father died last month,' Rachel responded, 'I was so overwhelmed that I didn't know what to do. A friend came over and packed all our suitcases so we could fly home for the funeral. I figured that would be a help to you, too.' Rachel's personal loss strengthened her empathy for people like Betty. She learned that the loss of a loved one is addressed more meaningfully through an act as simple as packing clothes."* [Power for Living, Dec 1995. Pages 6-7.] True empathy helps people who suffer in simple, practical ways. But before we leave this verse, don't miss the real point of it which is:

IV. The Manner In Which We Should Empathize With Them

The Spirit says literally, *remember the bound as bound-with-them*. We are to remember them:

1. as if we were right there with them and it was happening to us The NLT puts it, *Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies*. We say, "Put yourself in their shoes." We're not to have sympathy from afar or remain detached from suffering people, but to enter right in and feel what they're feeling with them, let their experience deeply, deeply impact our lives. Then the next

part in the NIV says, *as if you yourselves were suffering*, however, the NAS says more literally, *since you yourselves are also in the body*. It means that we are to empathize with those who suffer:

2. realizing that we are also in the body and it may be our turn next We might be the next to be imprisoned. We might be the next to be ill-treated or to suffer in some other way. But for the grace of God, I would be in those same shoes right now and I still might be tomorrow. And when I am, I desperately want somebody to remember me, to empathize with me, and to come alongside me in my suffering. So that's what I should do for others now.

In his book God Is Closer Than You Think, John Ortberg tells of a Catholic priest named Father Damien who became famous for his willingness to serve lepers. In 1873 he moved to Kalawao, a village on the island of Molokai, in Hawaii, where nearly 900 lepers had been quarantined in a colony. For 16 years, this Christian man lived in their midst. He learned to speak their language. He bandaged their wounds, embraced the bodies no one else would touch, preached to hearts that would otherwise have been left alone. He organized schools, bands, and choirs. He built homes so that the lepers could have shelter. He built 2,000 coffins by hand so that, when they died, they could be buried with dignity. Slowly, it was said, Kalawao became a place to live, rather than a place to die, because Father Damien offered hope. But, Father Damien was not careful about keeping his distance. He did nothing to separate himself from his people. He dipped his fingers in the poi bowl along with his patients. He shared his pipe with them. He did not always wash his hands after bandaging open sores. He got close. For this, the people loved him. But one Sunday he stood up and began his sermon with two words, "We lepers..." Now he wasn't just helping them. Now he was one of them. From this day forward, Father Damien wasn't just on their island; he was in their skin. He had chosen to live as they lived; now he would die as they died. Now they were in it together. Of course, you don't have to get leprosy to minister deeply to lepers, any more than you have to be divorced to minister to divorcees or to have cancer to minister to cancer patients. What you DO have to have is that oneness of the heart, that Divine empathy that enters into the other's situation, just as God does into ours. Only He can give you that. Only He can build that in you and fill you with it. Why not ask Him?

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Purity (Vs. 4)

The life God wants His children to live is a life filled with love for our brothers and sisters, a life filled with love for strangers and deep empathy for all who suffer. That's what we learned in the first three verses. Today we come to verse 4 where the author moves on to talk about another kind of love, the kind of love that is expressed in marriage and in regard to this kind of love, God wants His children to live a life filled with purity! God begins by telling us that:

I. We Should Hold Marriage In The Highest Regard It should be regarded as an honorable thing, a precious thing, a thing of great value. But the society we live in doesn't do that. This quote from the web says it well, *Marriage was devised in the past to keep a check on immoral conduct in society. Traditional people cherished their marriage all their life and attached several religious values to it. They nurtured their relationship to strengthen the marital bond between them and passed on the same values to their children. They strongly believed in the sanctity of their marriage. However, the concept of marriage has undergone a sea change over the years and people today marry for practical purposes. Marriage statistics reveal that marriages no longer last for life. The "until death do us part" syndrome is no longer valid. Some marriages may survive for a few years, while some die off within a few months of marriage... Although most people relish the idea of a steady marriage, very few are willing to work towards it. Differences of opinion, financial independence, and reduced tolerance levels lead to marital disputes. People get bored of their spouses easily resulting in lack of communication between the couple. Surveys reveal that owing to the growing number of divorces, there is a considerable drop in the number of marriages. Many men are scared of the financial damage that may result from divorce and alimony. This has led to the new trend among couples, which is "living-in." This form of relationship fulfills the physical needs of partners and offers companionship as long as they are in the relationship. The modern society is very accepting and offers freedom to individuals to lead the kind of life that they like....* [<http://ezinearticles.com/?Marriage-Statistics&id=429302>]. Our society no longer honors marriage and because we are raised in this society and live in it every day and are bombarded with its values daily through the media, it's rubbing off on us! Our children are deeply impacted by it! But even for many adult believers, marriage is no longer the high and holy thing that God says it is. Back in 1999 a George Barna study found that, *Divorce rates among conservative Christians were significantly higher than for other faith groups, and much higher than Atheists and Agnostics experience.* [www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm] It appears that there is a glaring need today for us in the church to hear all over again the clarion call of this verse! Marriage is a precious, sacred thing because:

1. God created and instituted marriage directly We could go back and read about it in Genesis, but I'd rather have us turn together to **Mat. 19:3-9**. Evidently times were changing in Jesus' day also. Marriage was losing its sacredness then also and when asked about it, Jesus took His reasoning all the way back to Genesis. God created humans male and female. He said, that it was not good for Adam to be alone and created Eve to be His complement, His partner and completer. And HE brought her to Adam and said, "This is how it's supposed to work for all time; a man shall leave his parents and be united to his wife. God joins them together and they become one flesh. So, what God has joined, human beings should never take apart! All this other stuff that's happened since is NOT the way God meant it to be from the beginning."

a. He declares it to be a life-long union The attitude today is, "If it doesn't work, I can get out of it. I can break this one and go find someone else." That's what people do, but that's not what GOD created it to be and it's not what He wants.

b. He declares that it should not be broken by divorce Paul explained what Jesus taught on this subject in **1 Cor. 7:10-11**. This is a command and believers are subject to it. If we are married, as believers Jesus says that we are not to break our marriage! Now Paul goes on to recognize that there can be extenuating circumstances. Your spouse may be an unbeliever and desert you or they may commit adultery and break their vow to you or violate their vow by abuse and so you end up divorced, when it was never your intent. Does God love divorced people? Yes! If you're divorced, can you remarry? Yes, under Biblical circumstances. If you've been divorced and remarried, are you a second-class Christian? NO, you're a married Christian and see that you hold it in high regard! Divorce happens because of the hardness of human hearts, but it was NEVER His design. And:

2. He intends for its sacredness to be universally recognized *Marriage should be honored by ALL!* Now, of course that applies to:

a. the sacredness of marriage generally The whole society should honor marriage. Our country should honor marriage. Our laws should honor marriage. Our TV programs and movies should honor marriage, because that's what God intended from day one! But they don't and probably never will again. We can work for change, but at the bottom line we can't control what our society does, HOWEVER we can control how we view marriage in the church! *ALL* here means all of us, all believers, the church. *WE*, in contrast to the whole world around us, are to be different; *WE* are honor marriage as the sacred thing it truly is, and not just our pastors, not just our leaders, not just our teachers, but *ALL* of us! And the way we honor it is not just in our doctrine, not just in our sermons and Bible lessons, but primarily in honoring:

b. the sacredness of our own marriage I've read you previously the letter that James Dobson's father wrote to his mother before they were married, but it bears repeating: *It reads in part: "I want you to understand and be fully aware of my feelings concerning the marriage covenant which we are about to enter. I have been taught at my mother's knee and in harmony with the Word of God that the marriage vows are inviolable, and by entering them I am binding myself absolutely and for life. The idea of estrangement from you through divorce for any reason at all (although God allows one-- infidelity) will never at any time be permitted to enter my thinking. I'm not naive in this. On the contrary, I'm fully aware of the possibility, unlikely as it now appears, that mutual incompatibility or other unforeseen circumstances could result in extreme mental suffering. If such becomes the case, I am resolved for my part to accept it as a consequence of the commitment I am now making, and to bear it, if necessary, to the end of our lives together."* [Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives, James C. Dobson] Young people, that's how you go *IN-TO* marriage and no other way! Married people, that's how you live with your spouse every day, absolutely committed with no thought of anything else. It's the only basis on which a marriage can succeed. Your marriage is a sacred union created by God; honor it and honor the spouse God has given you!

Now, we could talk all day about the "how-to's" of marriage. The Bible has a lot to say to husbands and wives, but that's not where the Holy Spirit is going in our text. The greatest and most obvious way we can honor our own marriage and our spouse is in the next phrase, *and the marriage bed kept pure*:

II. We Must Maintain Sexual Purity Would you turn with me to **1 Thes. 4:1-8**, which I think spells out in clear detail everything Heb. 13:4 is briefly summarizing? Wow, that's strong, isn't it! If you want to live a life pleasing to God, God's command and God's clear will is that you should stay sexually pure, and he spells out exactly what that means! When you reject this, you reject GOD Himself and His Spirit who lives in you who is Holy! Now the first thing we have to notice is that if the marriage bed is undefiled, then:

1. sexual activity within marriage is pure In some generations sex has been regarded as a bad thing, a necessary evil to perpetuate the race, a shameful thing to mention or desire, but the Bible never says that at all. Just read Song of Solomon! God made us to be male and female and invented the marriage union. We were "Intended For Pleasure", to steal the title of Ed Wheat's book. It is a pure and high and holy and wonderful thing, the deepest sort of human communion, knowing another person. So, in marriage sex is a gift to be enjoyed by husband and wife; in fact, **it is actually commanded!** **1 Cor. 7:3-5** says, *The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.* God created sexual desire and He actually commands us to see that we fulfill that desire for our spouse! And we can do that all we want, in all the ways we want, and it is absolutely pure! You see, marriage is like a box. God created sex to occur inside that box. Inside that box sex is pure and wonderful and holy. But that box forms for us an absolute boundary:

2. there is to be NO sexual activity outside of marriage The writer mentions two types of sexual sin in the next part of our text. The one we translate as sexual immorality. The Greek word you'll recognize; it's **porneia** and it refers to

sex of any kind that occurs other than with a person you are married to. I apologize that I have to take the time to explain this so explicitly, but you would not believe how many people 30 and under simply do NOT understand what I'm saying. I know it because I've talked to them and nobody has ever spelled it out for them! The word *immorality* doesn't even sound that bad; it sort of sounds like simply less than perfect behavior. Maybe being a *pornos* or committing *porn-eia* gets the concept across better. Immorality means:

- **casual sex** It is portrayed to us time and time again that it is normal when two people have passionate feelings for each other, they sleep together. Wherever you work or go to school, there are peers all around you who practice this. Everybody is hoping to meet somebody and "fall in love", by which they mean to meet somebody that is as turned on by them as they are by the other. Young guys, in particular, seem to be always looking for the opportunity to find a good-looking girl and have sex. Listen, to God that is wickedness; that is an abomination! Now somebody will say, "Yes, but we are committed to each other, we are planning to get married..." We call it:
- **premarital sex** "We're an engaged couple; soon it will be legal; we just can't help ourselves!" Yes, you can! And UNTIL you are married it is no different and just as wrong as casual sex! And since I've gone this far out on a limb, I might as well add that over the years I've heard all the varieties of questions such as, "Well, what if we don't go all the way? What if we just have oral sex or if we just touch each other or..." and the list goes on. Listen, I don't know what textbook you've read, but sex is a process and all those things you're tempted to do are very much a part of that process. When you get into passionate kissing and heavy making out, your sexual drive is aroused and you're well into the process of sex. Hear me: **SAVE IT FOR MARRIAGE!** You may think I'm old or at least old-fashioned, but if you don't end up marrying that person, you will absolutely regret that you gave yourself away to that degree **TO THE WRONG PERSON!** And if you're young, I guarantee that you don't know all that you **THINK** you know, so listen to God! Then, of course, sexual immorality covers:
- **living together** So many couples today forego the commitment of marriage and simply move into the same place and **ACT** like they're married, but they are not! They are openly living in immorality. Now I'm not saying that you need to be rude to them and be stand-offish. They probably don't know the Lord, so befriend them and win them to Christ, but don't ever let it enter your mind that **YOU** as a believer can do this. In God's eyes it is no different than the thing we usually think about with the word immorality which is:
- **prostitution**, which is paying someone to have sex with you or being paid by them for it. Every pagan temple had this available in the Roman world; it was part of many pagan religions. It should never be part of ours. And of course, *porneia* includes its namesake:
- **pornography** Looking at pictures in magazines or on the internet and fantasizing about sexual acts. Listen to this: every second (second, mind you!) \$3,075.64 is being spent on pornography. It was a 97 billion dollar industry worldwide in 2006. Plus, every second 28,258 Internet users are viewing pornography! And believers are among them! People say, "But it's harmless, it's victimless; there's no real person!" Yes, but the person in the picture is somebody's daughter and she's not your wife! You have taken sex out of God's box; it will affect you deeply and you will pay dearly. Turn it off! And I hardly need to mention that:
- **homosexuality** is not a biological difference, as we are constantly being taught. It is a choice of lifestyle that a person makes for a whole bunch of reasons and the word of God says the practice of it is immoral and an abomination to God, even though He dearly loves the people who practice it!

Do you see? Marriage is such an important, precious thing that **ALL** sexual activity should be kept within it! That's how we honor it! Now, the second word in verse 4 is *moicheia*, adultery, and that means that if you **ARE** married:

3. there is to be no sexual activity that violates marriage Of course, it means that:

a. we are not to commit adultery with our bodies We've known that from way back in the 10 commandments in **Ex. 20:14**. But we've given it a nice name to make it sound better; we call it "having an affair". God calls it "adultery" and you can easily gather from what I said earlier that it doesn't only include having intercourse with someone, but any and all romantic activity with someone other than your spouse! If you call it what it is, it will help you to stay pure, but so far, a good many of us may feel like we're "off the hook"; "I don't do any of that stuff!" Oh, but God takes it one step deeper and says:

b. we are not to lust with our minds The tenth commandment, **Ex. 20:17**, was, *You shall not covet [desire] your neighbor's wife!* Jesus explained what it meant in **Mt. 5:27-28**, *You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* Married men say things like, "I can't touch, but I can look!" NO, you can't! That's not honoring marriage and it's not honoring your wife - or your husband! Simply thinking about and desiring to touch or to have sex with someone else **IS** adultery in God's book! And if we would be blatantly honest, there's hardly one of us that has been completely pure in our thought life! We are constantly guarding and shielding our eyes and our minds.

You see, God wants our life to be filled with purity at every level, not just in actions, but in words and even in thoughts. And verse 4 leaves us with a final sobering thought:

III. God Will Judge Those Who Practice Sexual Impurity Sodom and Gomorrah are a testament to that as they lie entombed in ash at the south end of the Dead Sea!

1. this is a serious warning for nonbelievers Immorality and adultery are not just failings, not just weaknesses; they violate a primary law of God and they will send people to hell. Listen to **Rev. 21:8**, *But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.* They will keep people out of God's heavenly city; **22:15** says, *Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.* This is serious. If you don't know Jesus and are involved in immorality, don't think you're just going to appear before God and He'll say, "Oh, you're a pretty nice guy; you're responsible and you help people and all, so come on in!" It doesn't work that way! These sins, ANY sins, will separate you from God forever! But here's the good news:

2. God can completely cleanse us from impurity! Turn with me to **1 Cor. 6:9-11**. I love this passage! Such were some of you! But you came to Jesus and He washed it all away and made you white as snow! He pardoned you completely and He sanctified you. He made you holy, pure, fit to be in the very presence of Holy God! Hallelujah! Now He says, "Live like what you are! Let me fill your life with purity by the power of My Holy Spirit! Be holy because I am holy! Be like Me!"

Samuel Logan Brengle wrote: "A spark from the fire is like the fire. The tiniest twig on the great oak, or the smallest branch of the vine, has the nature of the oak or the vine, and is in that respect like the oak or the vine. A drop of seawater on the end of your finger is like the ocean, not in its size, of course, for the big ships cannot float upon it nor the big fishes swim in it, but it is like the ocean in its essence, in its character, in its nature. Just so, a holy person is like God. Not that he is infinite as God is; he does not know everything; he has not all power and wisdom as God has, but he is like God in his nature. He is good and pure and loving and just, in the same way God is. Holiness, then is conformity to the nature of God. It is likeness to God as He is revealed in Jesus." [Fulness, Jan/Feb 1980. Pages 4-5] If you want to live your life well and be pleasing to God, fill it with purity.

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Contentment (Vs. 5-6)

God knows that there are two things which, if we would fill our lives with them, would really make us stand out in the world as being totally different from those around us. The two items which so clearly drive the value system of our society are sex and money. Last week in verse 4, we saw that God wants us to fill our lives with purity. That makes us stand out like a shining island of integrity amid the filthy ocean of sexual immorality around us. The other malignant disease infecting the world, and specifically our American culture, is materialism. Laura Wilkinson wrote to Louisiana State University Students, *America is no longer the land of the free; it's land of the bling. You name it, we want it: new plasma televisions, Christian Dior sunglasses, Xboxes, Citizen Jeans, MAC makeup or the latest iPod. We love stuff. It's amazing how much stuff we can accumulate in the cramped residence halls.* Let alone in our houses! People live lives of always wanting something different, something more, never satisfied, never enough. That's why in verses 5-6 God tells us that the life that pleases Him is a life that is filled with contentment. If we live that way, we'll stand out like a match in a totally dark room! Our life will be a true advertisement for His Name and what He can do. Now, the Holy Spirit begins his approach to this subject in verse 5 with:

I. A Warning About The Love Of Money (5a) The KJV translates that phrase, *the love of money*, as *covetousness*, but it is literally in the Greek, *the love of silver*. It reminds you of Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* who loved his money; you picture him sitting at his desk counting his coins, don't you? But that is a caricature, an exaggeration done on purpose. The love of money in most people is much more insidious and difficult to spot than that, however, the symptoms of it can be easily recognized. Paul's statement on it is probably the best known one where he said:

1. the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil But let's turn to **1 Tim. 6:10** and read the whole verse. The desire to accumulate money, to get more things for ourselves, has been the root of every kind of evil from murder to theft to betrayal and it's end result has been terrible in lives. The prophet Balaam ended up standing with Moab against Israel, despite God's miraculous warning through a donkey, because he wanted the money Balak offered and later died in their invasion of the land. Achan coveted a bar of gold and some fancy clothes and took them for himself against God's orders, even though he had seen the walls of Jericho fall and, in the end, it cost both him and his family their lives. Elijah's servant Gehazi couldn't resist the temptation to take the money his master had refused from Naaman and ended up living out his life as a leper. In the church Ananias and Sapphira lied about the price of some land they sold when they gave the money to God, because they wanted to both keep some of their money AND look spiritual and they dropped dead! God's people are not immune to the love of money. James warns us that:

a. we are tempted to get it through dishonest means - James 5:4 says, *Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.* Business is rife with the temptation to love money. All you need do is read in the news the stories about CEO's taking home salaries in the millions of dollars while their companies are going bankrupt, plants are closing and workers are being laid off by the hundreds! It's easy to blame those high visibility few, but any time you don't pay your employees a fair wage for what they do, or you lay them off as they approach retirement so that you can hire younger ones for less, or you withhold payments or benefits that are due to them because it's to your advantage, the love of money is at work in you. Whenever you charge an exorbitant price just because you can get it without regard for the suffering of the people who need what you're selling, but can't afford it, the love of money is at work in you. On the other hand, any time you charge your employer for invalid or unnecessary expenses or try to get by with doing as little as possible while getting paid for it, or take things home from work simply because they won't be missed, or cheat on your taxes by hiding income that should be reported, the love of money is at work. The temptation to get money by dishonest means is proof that the love of money is trying to creep into your life! But it also comes at us through a second angle:

b. we are tempted to hoard it when God wants us to give You know what Jesus said in **Mt. 6:19-21**, *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Your heart follows your treasure. If you give yourself to accumulating stuff here on earth, your heart will become entwined with that. It will love that! But if you value heavenly things like God's Kingdom and His glory and seeing human beings blessed and saved in His Name, your heart will love that. Now, saving up for foreseeable needs and wise planning ahead for known expenses are wise biblical concepts, but the key thought in that verse is, *for yourselves*. When the thought becomes, "I have to accumulate money for myself; I have to take care of me; I have to make sure that I'm secure!", the love of money is at work. God is continually putting before us an endless string of needs that others have and often, He is blessing us with what we have simply so we can meet them! I heard the director of Gospel for Asia, Brother K.P. Yohanan, on the radio last week tell this story: *A man called on the phone weeping in tears. He said, "I've worked hard all my life and I've been really successful, but I'm growing old and a few days ago the Lord showed me a vision. He let me see heaven and all the multitudes from every people and language group there and I realized how little I have done for Him. My life is wasted! What can I do about it?" I advised him, "The first thing you must do is make a choice: do you want to obey God all the way or not! When you have settled that, then resolve to live a simple lifestyle and give all you can to God's work as He leads you!" Several months later our office received a check from this man for \$235,000. He had researched and prayed about it and designated this money specifically for the purchase of a projector and equipment and the support of native workers we were requesting to travel and show evangelistic films in city after city in India. Some months after that, I wanted to give him a report on what his gift was accomplishing and I was shocked at what my staff reported to me! More than 100,000 people were believing in Jesus Christ every month through this ministry! This man brought more people into the Kingdom in his last years simply by giving than well-known evangelists do in a whole lifetime! Do you have open hands before God with what He gives you; can you say that you are willing to do whatever He tells you with your money? If you can't, the love of money is at work. But here's a third angle from which it comes at us:*

c. we are tempted to spend it without paying back Paul wrote this in **Rom. 13:7-8**, *Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another....* Debt is almost endemic in our society. The advent of easy credit has nearly ruined us. Young couples run up debts in the tens of thousands of dollars buying things they have no realistic hope of being able to pay for. We buy houses, we buy cars, we get ourselves all these things that we think are so necessary like HD TV and high-speed internet and iPhones and spend all kinds of money eating out, but we spend what is not really ours and then default on paying it back. Now I'm not saying that those things in themselves are wrong (I have or do 3 out of the 4 of them!); I'm saying that when you borrow and spend money and don't pay it back, unless there is some sort of unforeseen catastrophe, the love of money is at work. Now the Bible says that:

2. the desire to accumulate money is idolatry - Col. 3:5 says, *Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.* The love of money, the strong desire to get and have it, is what we call greed and greed is a form of idolatry. The desire for money is more important than the desire to please God, so money is an idol, a false god, something that takes His place in our lives. And Jesus Himself drew the line in the sand by declaring that:

3. we can't serve God and money - Lk. 16:13-14, *"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."* The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. They wanted both. They wanted to serve God, but they loved money. They let the desire for their own prosperity, position and power be more important than

their love for God and ended up crucifying His own Son! Now hear me: you can HAVE money and love God, but you can't LOVE money and love God! That's why God warns us in Heb. 13:5 that:

4. we must guard ourselves against this creeping into our way of living We have to work at keeping our lives free of it, because creeps in almost unnoticed. It starts in little things, little decisions we make here and there, and almost before we know it, it has become a way of life. That's why, in the second clause, God gives us the "antidote", the "vacine" to keep that from happening which is this:

II. God's Design Is For Us To Live With An Attitude Of Contentment (5b) So what does that mean? Well, first notice that this principle is not talking only about money:

1. this attitude is toward our present state of life, whatever it is Contentment is an attitude that we display in our job, in our class, in our home. We display it about our house, our car, our lifestyle and all our material possessions. We display it about our health, our opportunities and whatever circumstances life may send our way. Contentment is an overall general attitude toward the way life is for us.

2. it is an attitude of peacefulness and acceptance Paul talked about this attitude very specifically. Turn with me to **Phil. 4:6-7**. You know these verses. Paul says that whatever comes, whatever circumstances you find yourself in, God has a goal for you. It's simple. Instead of being anxious and worrying as though everything depends on you, simply come to Him in prayer and lay all your needs before Him, trusting in Him for everything and you will know this incredible peace, a peace like nothing else in the world, a peace that only God can give. In fact, it is the very peace that God Himself has! You can accept your financial situation; you can accept your health; you can accept the loss of your job; you can accept that your retirement fund has lost half its value. You can accept whatever comes, whatever is, and have total peace as you walk through the midst of it. But how? Well:

3. Paul learned the secret of this contented attitude - Phil. 4:11b-12 Remember Paul's life. There were days when Paul was hungry, when he had to skip a meal or two. He was shipwrecked three times and on one occasion floated loose in the open ocean for a night and a day before being rescued! There were days when he was arrested and threatened and beaten. Once he was stoned and left for dead, you can only imagine how that hurts! He even wrote this letter during a two year imprisonment in Rome! But then there were days of plenty, days when there were good meals with good friends and days when people were listening and coming into the Kingdom by the dozens. Our usual pattern is that we praise God when things seem good and complain when things are bad. But Paul said, "I've learned how to fill my life with what God wants; I've learned how to be content no matter what is going on on the outside. There's a secret that you have to know; there's a truth that has to get all the way from your head deep inside your heart!" And what is it? Verse **13**! Literally, *For all things I have strength, in Christ's strengthening me*. He's the Secret! I'm content, I have peace, I accept whatever God allows to come my way, because I KNOW that Jesus Christ has put the power in me to endure it! I don't have to scrape and scratch and store up and climb up and work out and get around and accomplish it all myself. He has promised me the power and strength to face anything, so I am content. I don't need to have anything more, anything different, anything better. I don't need more money, more stuff, to be content. Why? Look at the third clause of our text where the writer gives:

III. The Reason For Our Contentment (5c) Almighty God Himself has given us a promise, an unchangeable thing in which it is impossible for God to lie. He has spoken to us and:

1. we know what God has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you! These are the words that God spoke to Joshua in **Josh. 1:5b** when he was ordered to go into the promised land and start a war with its inhabitants! But they are not just for Joshua. God was saying to Joshua, *As I was with Moses, so I will be with you!* The writer of Hebrews is saying that those same words were given for all of us! "As I was with Joshua, so I will be with YOU, with ALL of God's people! I will never leave you nor forsake you!" Oh, we have quoted that so often, but I wonder if we've ever considered deeply what it means. It is not that God is simply "always around somewhere" or "always at work in this thing somehow". It is a very personal, one-to-one promise given directly to you. The first phrase means:

a. "I will never detach Myself from you!" "I'll never be away from you, not for a moment!" A few weeks ago, a doting mother was holding her little toddler and showing me a bruise on his face. When I asked what happened, she pointed an accusing finger at her husband and said, "HE wasn't watching!" Now don't worry; they were visitors and aren't here today! But we've all been there, haven't we? You turn your head for ten seconds and the child is out of sight or you answer the phone and when you turn around they're standing up on the kitchen table or running toward the street. You can't be at a child's side 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and, even if you could, you probably aren't fast enough to grab him if he trips on a lip in the sidewalk! But GOD can and GOD is! The God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps! He doesn't take vacations. He doesn't take days off or turn His back while attending to something else or wander out of earshot! In fact, the Bible says that He Himself has come to literally dwell INSIDE of us and He has joined Himself to our very being so that we are one with Him in Spirit. So, there is never a single second when He is detached from us, when we're out of His sight, out of His mind! And the second part of His promise means:

b. “I will never abandon you!” “I’ll never break that bond and go away and leave you on your own, no matter what you do, no matter how you fail Me or how badly you sin! I’ll never say, ‘I’ve had it with you; I’m done with you; I’m outta here!’” And I wish you could read Greek, because you could see how:

c. He declares this emphatically: There are at least four negatives in this clause,, something like, **No, I will not leave you, No, nor forsake you!** God Himself said that; “No, no, no, no! No I won’t! YOU HAVE ME!”

Thus, the secret of contentment is this; we know what GOD said so:

2. here is what we must keep on boldly saying (6) These are the words of **Ps. 118:6-7**. The Lord is WITH me and:
a. the Lord is my helper Literally, the word means, “he runs when I cry out!” He’s with me and He responds to me. He has committed Himself to help me at all times, in all circumstances, under all conditions! Therefore, I have a choice to make. Either I look at the winds and the waves and my feet sinking into the water and doubt Him, or:

b. I choose not to be afraid and trust Him completely to make me walk on the top with Him. I choose not to look to money to meet my needs, not to look to people to fix my problems, but to rest in the knowledge that I HAVE HIM and HE IS ENOUGH! The last phrase is actually a bit sarcastic, “I’ve got GOD; what’s man going to do to me?!”

c. nothing can touch me without going through Him Nothing takes Him by surprise. Nothing end-runs His plan. Nothing gets to me without His Divine permission and purpose, which is always for my good! I rest in that! I am content in that!

I’d like to close with a letter from Peng Ming who, after he had been granted asylum by the United States, was lured back to Burma where he was kidnapped by Chinese agents and has been held in prison in Hubei province since 2004. Officials have ignored his medical needs which have included a heart attack and a severe case of kidney stones. On January 22 of this year, he wrote this letter: *Dear Dad, Mom and friends, How are you doing? I am so glad to say “Happy Chinese New Year” with Spring Festival on the way. I hope you have good health, happiness and great faith. God has always been blessing you and me. My dear parents requested that I should possess a positive attitude to deal with my current situation. I have completely eliminated anxiety and loneliness from my heart, and I am now enriched to spend every day peacefully. As my father said, this is a learning opportunity, a special school, to study hard in order to learn lessons and to ultimately choose the right path for my future. As for my suffering, in fact, God put me to the test.... I firmly believe that He will use me. Regarding the current economic crisis in the United States, I read an article a few days ago entitled “The more intense the economic recession, the more Americans believe in Jesus.” This confirmed my point of view: God is giving a wake-up call to the world through the economic crisis, especially to Americans. An extravagant lifestyle is not pleasing to God and it is not sustainable. God’s authority is in charge of the entire world. People may be enriched to a small degree by material possessions, but we must never forget God’s will and His work on the earth.... God be with us, Peng Ming [Asia Harvest, May 2009 Newsletter, p. 2-3].* Beloved, we have HIM and HE needs to be enough for us. He wants our lives to be filled with contentment IN HIM.

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Respect (Vs. 7, 17)

We’ve already looked at five things that characterize the life that pleases God, the life that God wants His children to live. He wants our lives to be filled with *love for each other*, with *love for strangers* and with *compassion* for those who suffer. He wants them to be lives of *purity* in the sexual realm and lives of *contentment* in the material realm. Today we come to verse 7, to a subject that must be important, because the author returns to it again in verse 17. God wants us to live a life of respect and by that, I mean specifically that:

I. We Are To Have An Attitude Of Respect Toward Our Spiritual Leaders Before I preach this message, I’d like to make a bit of a disclaimer just in case you might be thinking, “Gee this works out nicely for you, since you’re one of those leaders! You get to tell us to submit to you and obey you; isn’t that a bit self-serving?” I want to assure you that’s not the point of this message at all and even if it was, it wouldn’t work. Ask any wife whose husband tells her, “The Bible says you have to submit to me!”, how much respect she has for him. True respect can’t be commanded; it must be earned! And it is only earned by a track record of genuinely and sacrificially serving those you’re trying to lead. Furthermore, this applies to all of us, to me as well as you. We ALL have spiritual leaders and our text seems to recognize that they fall into two categories, those who played a key role in our lives in the past, who perhaps brought us to faith or shaped our lives when we were teens but may be gone now or at least may no longer be geographically near, and those who are part of our daily lives now. Verse 7 seems to be exhorting us that:

1. the ones who have impacted us in the past must be remembered (7) A young pastor in my home church by the name of Bob Zweitzig led me to Christ when I was 15 years old. He was instrumental in God calling me to the ministry when I was 19. He baptized me. He and his wife Ruth also led LuAnn to Christ, introduced us and he eventually married us. For the first years of our marriage and ministry we looked to them for help and advice all the time and they were again instrumental in bringing us to Glenside in 1979. They served Berean Bible Church over on Byberry Road,

but life has taken us on different paths and made each of us busy with our 4 and 5 children respectively and now we're doing well if we connect once a year through our Christmas letters. But where would we be today without them? For the first years of our ministry here, Dr. Clarence Mason and his wife Lois were true mentors to us, introducing us to the world of the independent church and to independent faith missions; our kids called them Grandma and Grandpa. But now they're in heaven. We've all got folks like these, pastors, Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, professors or even family members, people who were an important part of our lives, who led us to Christ, who played a deep role in changing us or molding and shaping us into the followers of Jesus that we are today and God wants us to remember them! He wants us to think about them purposefully, so that their influence continues in our lives and he gives us three exhortations about them. First:

a. we should value what they taught us They spoke the very Word of God to us! In the case of the readers of this letter, there was a missionary like Paul or Silas or Barnabas who was the first to come to their town and tell them the story of Jesus for the first time. For the Sougb people of West Papua, Indonesia, it was Dan and Barbara Lunow who showed up and taught them the Word of God and it transformed their lives and their entire tribe. And somebody did that for you too! Somebody delivered to you the very Word of Life that changed your eternity, that lifted your future out of the flames of hell and fixed your seat with Christ in heaven. Somebody invested themselves in you and taught you the principles of God's Word that have become part of your life now. And we should always value what our leaders taught us; we should treasure it and live by it! Second, the writer says:

b. we should appreciate the example of their lives and some commentators believe that since that NIV word *outcome* literally means *to exit*, it may refer to how they actually died, or perhaps it refers to the overall "manner in which a well-spent life ended" [*Strong's*]. Nero's persecution of Christians had begun several years before this letter was written and it is very possible that some of these early leaders that brought them the Gospel were martyred like Paul and Peter and stood firm and faithful to the end and the writer is saying, "Value that example and take it to heart!" The only reason we are sitting here today is because so many faithful brothers and sisters like John Hus and William Tyndale and John Wycliffe "loved not their lives even to the death" in order to preserve the Word of God and give it to us. Lately I've been reading some of the accounts their lives in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, and every time I finish one, I feel compelled to stop and say "Thank You" to God for the example and dedication of that life. But there are many others who went to glory before us in a quiet manner, yet leaving the legacy of a life with tremendous spiritual impact. And I'm confident he means more than just the famous people that stand out; he's talking about ones that you've known personally! Remember them and think about what an example they were for us, about how they lived, and then the writer says:

c. we should imitate their faith Not their flaws, not their mistakes, not their human failings, but their faith. Believe what they believed and live it out! That's how the faith works. It is passed on from one faithful life to another. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, ...*You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.* - **1 Thes. 1:5b-7**. Imitate those people who laid such a great example of life to you; respect their investment in you by modeling your life after theirs! And others will do the same with yours!

But there's a slight invisible hitch in verse 7. All the verbs seem to be past tense; they seem to be talking about leaders who have impacted our life in the past. Except for the fact that the Greek literally says, *Remember those LEADING you...*, present tense and a participle, meaning those who are doing it right now. So, the point is that:

2. the ones who are in charge at present deserve the same respect as those who impacted you in the past! Some believers have an awful lot of respect for the "Percy Crawfords" and the "Bill Brights" and those who are now long gone, but when they look at the people that are their spiritual leaders now, they are full of criticism and contempt instead! Did you ever notice how people always seem to become perfect after they die? They were great! It's the living ones we have trouble with! That's why the writer went back to the subject in verse 17 to make it clear. However, before we study that, look with me at what Paul wrote over in **1 Thes. 5:12-13**. There's what God really wants; He wants you to respect your spiritual leaders who are among you in the church, not only your pastors, but those who are your mentors and your Sunday School teachers and small group leaders and elders. He wants you to hold all of them in the highest regard and love them for the work they do in your own lives, even if they have to admonish or chide you sometimes and you don't like it! Go back with me to **Heb. 13:17b** and look at why they deserve that respect:

a. they have been given a serious responsibility You know what **James 3:1** says, *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.* It is one thing to misunderstand or to disobey something for yourself, but when you step into the role of leading somebody else, whether that is being a parent or a teacher or an elder in a church, the stakes go way up! God says the standards are higher, the consequences are more serious and the responsibility is greater. Listen, we who are leaders are not just playing around here; this is serious! If we mis-step, we can take all of you with us and who would want to stand before God with that on his conscience! Then notice the writer says that spiritual leaders:

b. they keep a constant tireless vigil over you They are “sleepless” like a shepherd watching over his flock. In fact, that’s the very image Paul used to admonish the leaders of the church in Ephesus in **Acts 20:28**. He said, *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.* They have been entrusted with an invaluable treasure. Imagine that the Smithsonian designated you to take care of the Hope Diamond for them while they remodeled. It’s worth \$350 million dollars. What would you do? You would put it in the safest place you could find and you’d never take your eyes off it day and night! Well, what’s the most precious thing in the entire universe? YOU are! YOU are the Pearl of Great Price which the Son of God sold everything He had to purchase. Believers are bought with the precious blood of Christ and any leader, any elder who takes their responsibility seriously, recognizes the value of a human life in God’s eyes and keeps a constant watch over it! Yes, that’s horribly convicting to us as leaders; we fail so often at it. Nevertheless, as a whole, your leaders are keeping watch over you, praying for you, caring about you, seeking what’s best for you. And here’s another thing you can’t see in the NIV. The KJV translates it more literally, *they keep watch for your souls!*

c. they nourish and protect your very soul, your spiritual life It’s not just your bodies they’re concerned about, not just to see that you have food and clothing and a place to live. They are God’s means of preparing you for the life to come, of leading you to store up heavenly treasures instead of wasting your life storing up things on earth. They guard you from falling into error and encourage you when you are weak and pull you back to the Lord when you fall away. Your soul’s well-being is literally impacted on a regular basis by those who lead you! That’s why the writer explains clearly:

II. How Respect For Spiritual Leaders Is Displayed (17a) **1 Tim. 5:17** says, *The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.* In that text the double honor has to do with meeting their physical needs as well. But there is a double honor here as well. We show respect for our spiritual leaders first of all:

1. by obedience and the Greek word here is not the word that simply means “to take orders”; it means “to be persuaded” and it is closely related to the word for belief or trust. Obeying your spiritual leaders is not blindly doing what they tell you; it means **trusting them and acting on their direction**. You know their way of life. You know their hard work and how they watch continually over your soul, so you trust them and when they lead, when they give direction, even when they correct you, you trust them and you listen, you follow, you act out of that trust and obey. The second way that we honor our spiritual leaders is the reverse side of the coin; we honor them:

2. by submission The words *to their authority* were added in the NIV; they’re not in the Greek. It has nothing to do with authority. The word simply means to surrender, to give up and stop resisting. So, we honor them by **yielding to them without selfish resisting**. If you put the two thoughts together, the writer is saying, “Trust them and follow their direction without balking at it!” You remember how Israel balked all the time. Moses faithfully put himself on the line time after time for them and led them out of Egypt at Pharaoh’s command, but when they got to the wilderness they repeatedly grumbled and complained about Moses. When they got to Kadesh Barnea and he went to lead them into the Promised Land at God’s direction, they balked and said, “We won’t go!” Repeatedly they challenged his authority as though he was being selfish in leading them. At one point in Num. 11 he was so troubled that, *He asked the LORD, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?....I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.”* - Num. 11:11-14. The Lord called Israel in Hos. 4:16, “a backsliding heifer”. That’s a very graphic picture. When I was young, we had three ponies and one of them was a colt that was never really broken or trained. When the time came to sell them, we had to load them onto a truck, so the truck backed up to a raised area and tilted its bed up. The man put a lead on the mare and walked her up into the truck and tied her lead off, no problem. But that colt was afraid. He didn’t trust those men and he didn’t want to get on that truck in the worst way, so you know what he did? As we pulled forward on the rope, he folded his back legs, sat down on his back-side and planted his front legs in the dirt at an angle against us and three guys couldn’t budge him forward. That’s literally what backsliding is, stubbornly resisting the will of God, refusing to follow and obey His will as He has given it through the leaders He’s chosen. The Spirit is saying, “Don’t do that! Trust your leaders. You know their lives; you know their love and care for you. So trust them and follow them as they discern My leading. Don’t dig in your heels and stubbornly resist them!” THAT’S truly how you honor your spiritual leaders! It’s not with a respectful tone or a nice compliment or a gift that makes them feel appreciated, as wonderful as all those things are; you honor them by letting them fulfill their calling and lead you! You honor them by following!

Now, as we finish verse 17, we are given:

III. The Reason For Respecting Our Spiritual Leaders (17b-c) We already saw that:

1. they must give an account to the Lord for how they led you And please be clear, they don’t have to give an account for how you responded, for how you followed, for how you turned out. That’s your choice! The old saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink!” is true in the spiritual realm. Spiritual leaders can show you

and tell you and plead with you and beg you to do what God wants you to do, but the choice to do it still lies with you. You can refuse it outright and many do. That's not their fault. We can only be faithful to our individual assignment and if I have led, if I have shepherded, if I have fulfilled all my responsibility to tell and explain and plead and warn, then that's all I can do, but still, I must give an account of doing that! Our spiritual leaders are trying to fulfill a grave and serious responsibility and we should respect them for that! The second reason is:

2. when you follow them, you make their work a great joy There is nothing more wonderful than seeing someone come to Christ and seeing them choose to grow and obey God and come to maturity where they are reaching out to others and knowing that you played a role in helping them get there each step of the way! It's a true joy that thrills our souls! But conversely:

3. when you resist them, you make their work a grievous burden You saw how Moses felt at that one point, how the continual resistance of his people drove him to utter frustration, to say "I can't bear this anymore!" Listen, pastors get to that place too! And so do elders and teachers and youth leaders and even parents. I can testify that we've been very blessed here. You have been a wonderful people to lead and leading has been a great joy most of the time for me and our elders. Not everyone and not always, but most of you and most of the time, you make our work a great joy! But I know one pastor right now who is looking for opportunities to leave his flock because they've dug in their heels and don't want to change anything, even though their church body is dwindling to nothing. They don't want to follow and it is a sad and grievous and hurtful thing. To be obeying God and not have those under you recognize it really breaks your heart. But the Spirit's last point is actually the most practical reason to respect your leaders:

4. when you resist them you actually damage yourself You think it's to your advantage, that it's better for you to not follow, but you're really hurting yourself. God gave us spiritual leaders because we need them! He did not intend for us to walk alone with Him through this life. He gave us other believers because He knows that we need the ministry of their gifts just as they need ours. And He gave us spiritual leaders to be our shepherds because He knows that we are sheep and we need help and direction to be safe and to find nourishment so that we can grow a healthy crop of wool for Him. The sheep who runs away from the shepherd may break the shepherd's heart, but unknowingly it imperils itself. It places itself in tremendous danger.

Any good doctor would probably testify to the truth of this statement: *"The doctor's most annoying patient (except for the one who doesn't pay his bills) is the one who doesn't follow his orders."* Such a person comes into the doctor's office with a complaint, submits to an examination, hears the diagnosis, and is told what to do. But that's as far as it goes. The patient either cheats on the recommended diet, doesn't take the prescribed medicine, continues to smoke, or doesn't return for a checkup. In so doing, he not only frustrates the doctor but also may hasten his exit from this world. We know we need doctors. We trust their knowledge. We are so glad for them when we are sick. We run to them and put our lives into their hands. But when they offer us their guidance and direction, sometimes we simply balk because we, selfishly, don't want to do what we know we should and that stubbornness, that resistance, can be deadly to us. During World War II a German officer was treated for his wounds in a British field hospital. He desperately needed a blood transfusion but stubbornly refused to accept it, saying he would rather die than have enemy blood flow in his veins. We'd call him a fool, wouldn't we? The mere fact that the blood came from a citizen of England wouldn't change the man's personality nor adulterate his German ancestry. He had everything to gain and nothing to lose, but his stubborn refusal cost him his life. Likewise, wouldn't you say it was foolish to have God go to all the trouble of putting godly spiritual leaders in your life and then go to all the effort of trying to care for you, only to resist their care and damage your own life in the process?

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Truth (Vs. 8-9a)

So far, we have learned that a life well lived, a life that truly pleases God, is a life filled with love of the brethren, with love for strangers and with compassion for those who suffer. It is a life filled with moral purity and contentment about material things. Last week we saw that it is a life filled with respect for the spiritual leaders that God has given us, but there is one issue we failed to raise as we studied that verse which is, "What if those spiritual leaders are off or misguided somehow? Does this mean we are to have a blind loyalty?" Well, as we consider verses 8-9 today, we have the answer to that question. God wants His children to live a life of truth. Jesus told Pilate, *...I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.* And Pilate replied by sarcastically asking that age-old question that secular people are always asking: *"What is truth?" [Jn. 18:37-38]* And the reason they're always asking it is because they're looking for the answer in the wrong place. Truth is not found in a proposition, in a particular collection of information:

I. Truth Is Found In A Person and that person is **Jesus Christ**. Turn with me over to **1 Jn. 5:20**. The information that God used someone to give to us ABOUT Jesus led us to KNOW Jesus in a personal relationship. It led us to an experience where we came to Jesus to ask forgiveness for our sins and He, in turn, came into our lives. We met Him! For us, it is not a question of whether what Jesus said is really accurate or whether the stories of what He did actually happened. We experienced Him and that settled it. Think of Paul, at that time called Saul, the enemy of Christ and Christians. He

was traveling along the road to Damascus when something happened. Jesus appeared to Him. A great light blinded him and he fell to his knees as he heard a voice from heaven that said, *"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!"* From that moment on he knew the truth! In that instant He knew that Jesus is the true God and I must serve Him! And that's what he did with every day of the rest of his life. Our missionary Dan Lunow grew up as a Hitler youth in Germany. After WWII he came to the US bitter and disappointed and worked on a farm in Wisconsin. When the farmer invited him to church, he clearly told him, "There is no God. Jesus isn't real and I don't want any of it!" So, he stayed home to relax that Sunday morning and turned on the radio and what came on, but a church service! But he was too lazy to get up and turn it off and as the pastor was preaching, he heard a voice in his heart that clearly said, "I am Jesus, do you want to sign up with Me?" Dan signed up and in that moment all his intellectual propositions went right out the window. He KNEW the truth and spent the rest of His life telling the Sougb people of West Papua how they could know it too. And what happened to us was exactly the same thing these two experienced, even if it was not nearly as dramatic. We came to Jesus and He came into us and ever since that moment, we KNOW the Truth. We know the two things that John specified at the end of the verse. We know that Jesus:

1. He is the true God No matter who else or what else claims to be god, they aren't. You see, when you actually meet God you realize something: there's only ONE of Him by definition. There aren't 20 or 100 more out there like Him to compete with Him. It's like Elijah challenged the worshippers of Baal, "Either the Lord is God or Baal is God. You can't have both. So, if Baal is god, then follow him, but if the Lord is God, then follow Him! The test is who answers by fire!" The test is who changes your life in an unmistakable way. When Jesus does that, you know there's nobody and nothing else like Him. He is the true God and:

2. He is eternal life Eternal life is not a state or condition. It is not simply equivalent to an existence in heaven forever. Life is the attribute of self-existent being that Jesus Himself has as God **and He gives it to us by personally entering us**. John wrote *...God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.* - 1 Jn. 5:11-13. You know it because you have Him! He is God; He is life, and:

3. He is the only way to the Father You know what Jesus said in **Jn. 14:6**: *...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* Christianity is exclusive. If He is God and He is life, then there is no other way to God but Him. That is the essential core of our faith. That's where it all stems from and starts from and that means that:

4. He is the only true foundation for what you do with your life. **1 Cor. 3:11** says, *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* He's the only foundation, not only in the whole development, but in the whole planet! He is THE TRUTH, the only solid Rock to build on. So you either build your life on that foundation or you build on sand, you build it on a lie, and watch your life collapse and wash away the instant it is all over. Now the point the writer is making in verse 8 is that:

II. Jesus Does Not Change Oh what a reassuring statement that is!

1. He is the same today as He was "yesterday" Now when is that exactly? It could be the day before this one or last week or last year or last century. It could refer to the days of the early church that we read about in Acts or specifically to that time 2000 years ago now when He came to live and walk upon this earth for 33 years and died for us and rose again. And if we push it, it could mean the time when He created the universe by His powerful word or even eternity past. Essentially, I think it means that He has always been the same! He has NEVER CHANGED! And if we turn around and face the future, the text reassures us that:

2. He will be the same forever as He is today, not just tomorrow or next year or next century, but literally, *to the ages*. Forever! He HAS never changed and He WILL NEVER CHANGE! A million years from now when this old world is gone, He will be the same. Now let's think:

3. what this means Most obviously it means that:

a. who He is doesn't change He has always been the true God and eternal life. He is the true God and eternal life and He will always be. The essence of His nature and His character will never be altered. He will always be loving, merciful, kind, righteous, good and everything else that He always has been. He will never wake up tomorrow and decide He doesn't want you anymore. That is our sure hope. **Mal. 3:6** says, *I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.* If we had a God who changed, who was fickle, who could be one way yesterday and another way today, we would be doomed! Secondly, it means that:

b. what He says doesn't change Jesus didn't have one message back then and a different message today and another tomorrow. For instance, He didn't say that divorce was a bad thing back then, but today He says it's OK. Jesus said that from the very beginning of creation God has always made husband and wife one flesh and they should not tear it apart, not in AD 31 nor in AD 2009. He didn't say that immorality was a bad thing then but today

it's all right to live together as long as you go to church. **Num. 23:19** says, *God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind....* What Jesus says IS the way things are. Truth is not relative; it does not depend on the values of the society around us. Truth is what HE says it is and it doesn't change. Thirdly:

c. what He does doesn't change Any time you hear the phrase "Jesus doesn't do that anymore," it's some degree or other of a lie. Jesus transformed people back then and He still transforms people today when they meet Him. Jesus healed people back then and He still heals people today. Jesus appeared to people back then and He still appears to people today! In Jordan where our children served there is an older widowed lady we'll call Sarah who was truly seeking after God. A younger friend was slowly telling her more about Jesus but she just could not believe that He was the Son of God. *Then one night God gave her a dream, and in it, Mary was holding a baby who was God's Son. Then Mary asked her to take care of the baby for her. She took the baby and was filled with joy. This was a really sweet thing for God to show her, because she and her husband were unable to ever have children. When Sarah woke up, she had no doubts. She said, "Jesus is the Son of God!"* Listen, Jesus provided for His people back then and He still provides for them today. He waited for them with open arms at death back then and He still does today. **James 1:17** says, *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.* He is still giving His children good gifts like He always has but He also chose to let His followers suffer and be persecuted and endure terrible things back then! And likewise, He chooses to allow the same today.

Jesus IS the Truth and He does not change! But to see why the writer tells us that, look at the first part of Heb. 13:9, which is really part of verse 8, *Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings!* You see:

III. People Teach Many False Things About Jesus When He walked on earth, they said all kinds of false things about Him and they have been doing it ever since. And our text actually uses two adjectives to describe these false teachings: *varied and strange.*

1. some are "variations" of biblical concepts For instance, I was at a retreat one time and the speaker was emphasizing the point that Jesus was like us, a true human in every respect, even to the point of saying that He was born with a sinful nature like ours, yet **CHOSE** not to sin. It had to be or His temptation wouldn't have been real! It sounds so good! And it comes from someone who genuinely believed. But that was a heresy, a false teaching, spawned out of a truth. Christ knew no sin, period! But many false teachings are like that, human departures that vary the original truth to end up with a "different Jesus". But He doesn't change! On the other hand, the word *strange teachings* means "foreign" or "new". So:

2. some are "new" teachings replacing biblical concepts To give an absurd example, Jesus promised that He would come again in the same manner in which He left, visibly, descending from heaven. In the early 1700's a man by the name of Emmanuel Swedenborg decided that HE knew what that meant. He wrote 18 theological books and he ended up declaring to his followers that the second coming of Christ had occurred in his own writings, that his new message WAS Christ returning! His followers became what we know today as The Church of the New Jerusalem whose headquarters is right here in Huntingdon Valley and virtually every one of us has been by to admire their Bryn Athyn Cathedral. The record of history is strewn with stories of religious teachers who came up with some "new revelation that replaces the old". But Jesus never changes! Let me just mention a few:

3. some examples of false teachings we encounter today The most common is that:

a. Jesus was NOT God "He was only a man. A good man, yes. A godly man, a great teacher, a wonderful example, a prophet of God, the founder of a world religion, but still only a man. Or maybe more than a man. Maybe He was God's Son or somehow more than we are, but not fully and completely God!" You hear this in the secular world, in the university classroom, and sometimes even in churches. But friends, you can't have it both ways. Jesus claimed to be God. They nearly stoned Him for it and in the end, they crucified Him for it. If He is not God, then He was the biggest liar and fraud in history or He was insanely delusional! If anyone today said what He said, what would we think? But He proved His claim by rising from the dead! Any "Jesus" who is not God is NOT the Jesus of the Bible. And here's a similar popular teaching:

b. Jesus is one god or one way among many "There are many ways to God; all paths lead to Him. Jesus is ONE way but not THE way!" This is the politically correct way to think. It's how the news media treat the subject. It's all around us in both the secular and religious worlds. But again, if that's true, then Jesus was a liar and a fraud, because He claimed to be the ONLY way! If He really is God, then there can be no other. Now here's a teaching that many people subscribe to:

c. I must believe in Jesus but also work for my salvation This is the popular American version of Christianity. "Everybody knows you have to believe in God and Jesus, but the bottom line is that when you die God weighs the good you've done against the bad and if the scale tips in the good direction, you're in!" Everybody from sweet old ladies who've never allowed a bad word to escape their lips to members of the mafia are hoping to get into heaven on that one! It is the watered-down version of Christian faith that you find proclaimed and believed even in many of

our churches, God help us! But if that's true, then why did Jesus have to die for our sins! We wouldn't need HIS life; we could do it on our own! But then, some churches on the other end of the spectrum who really believe that Jesus is the true God and the only way to eternal life turn right around and teach their own variation of faith, saying that:

d. Jesus died to give us physical healing and material prosperity They tell us, "Claim your healing; it's all yours; Jesus died to give it to you. If you're not healed then you don't have enough faith!" In that case, I guess Paul's faith was weak because he never could get rid of his thorn in the flesh! Or they say, "God wants you to prosper. He wants you to have a nice car and a nice house. Just believe Him for it. Whatever you can believe Him for He will give you!" Tell that to our dear brothers and sisters in Kyrgyzstan, most of whom are out of work and only a few of whom are fortunate enough to own an old car and if they do, they support their family by charging people for rides! These things are false teachings by good people who sincerely love Jesus! But they do so much damage to His Kingdom and hurt and disappoint so many people! And finally, there are some out there who claim that:

e. Jesus gave us new information that only my group has Charles Taze Russell studied the Bible and the Great Pyramid of Giza which he believed was built by the Hebrews and he taught that Christ had returned invisibly in 1874 and that He would return to set up His Kingdom in 1914. His followers became known as Jehovah's Witnesses and to this day they believe that only they have the true knowledge and represent true Christianity, even though they don't believe that Jesus is Jehovah! In 1827 Joseph Smith claimed he found a set of golden plates describing a visit of Jesus to the native American peoples. This ended up being published as the Book of Mormon and his followers organized as the Church of Jesus Christ - Of the Latter Day Saints! All of these are good, moral, religious, and probably wonderful people but they follow strange new teachings about Jesus which say He is different from what His followers have always believed and that's what the writer of Hebrews is warning us about!

IV. We Must Guard Ourselves Against False Teachings When he says *Do not be carried away* by these things, it literally means, "Don't let yourself be tossed around and carried about". Paul said the same thing in **Eph. 4:14**, *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming*. We have to grow up and become mature in Christ so that every teaching, every TV program, every radio broadcast, that comes our way doesn't toss us in some other direction than after Christ. And it's our responsibility to do something to prevent that! But what? Two things:

1. we must carefully scrutinize what we hear Turn with me to **Col. 2:8-10**. Those words *See to it* literally mean, "See! Perceive! Discern! Scrutinize carefully what people teach you." These are the verses the Lord used to get me safely through a very liberal college that taught all kinds of false things and led many students away from Christ. I saw verse 8 written on the cover of somebody's philosophy notebook one day and God struck me with it! Circle it; underline it; highlight it; memorize it! Don't believe everything you hear! Test it against the Word of God. Jesus is God and you have experienced Him in all His fullness; anything contrary to that is somebody trying to take you captive and lead you away from Jesus! And guess who that would be! Which brings me to the second thing:

2. we must test the spirits operating through those we hear Turn back with me to **1 John 4:1-3**. Prophets teach because they are moved by spirits. True teachers are moved by the Holy Spirit of God who lives in them and they teach truth. False teachers are moved by demonic spirits who have gained control over their minds and led them astray and through them they want to do the same to you. Test what you hear. Test what you're taught, even by me! Job said, *The ear tastes words as the tongue tastes food*. Taste it before you swallow it! Is it really the truth of God? Anyone who doesn't teach you that Jesus Christ really did come and that He was fully God and fully man is being moved by the wrong kind of spirit, they're being used by Satan and you don't want to follow them!

At the New York Butchers' Dressed Meat Company many years ago, they kept an animal they called a "Judas goat." He started work at 7 o'clock every morning, escorting sheep from the unloading pens on the river front to the slaughterhouse. There the unsuspecting creatures were killed and dressed. He made eight or ten trips a day, leading two to three hundred ewes and lambs each time. It is estimated that he became an accessory to the death of about four and a half million of them. Sheep are not easily driven but they will follow a leader, especially if he is a white animal. Because this "Judas goat" was so handsome, bright, and commanding in appearance, the sheep eagerly trailed after him, only to meet their doom. Jesus said that we're His sheep and His sheep know His voice and they follow Him. They don't follow a stranger because they don't know his voice; they run away from him! So BE His sheep. Listen carefully! Hear HIS voice and only follow it! Run away from everything else.

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Grace (Vs. 9b-14)

So far in this series, we've seen that God wants our lives to be filled with seven things: love, hospitality, empathy, purity, contentment, respect and truth. Today we'll add an eighth; a life well lived, a life that truly pleases God, is a life that is focused on and filled with GRACE. And we're going to see that in the section of verses from 9 to 14, however, unlike the

previous verses in this chapter, these are not so easy to understand, even though they make a very simple and straight forward point, once you understand them. That's why I'd like to begin by giving you a bit of:

I. Important Information For Understanding This Passage First of all, think about who this entire book, or letter actually, was written to. It's called Hebrews for a reason:

1. the recipients were Jewish persons who had come to believe in Jesus Even though all of us can benefit tremendously from it, it was written originally to a very specific portion of the church, to ethnic Jews who had come to believe in Jesus as their Jewish Messiah and Savior. These are people who were taught from little on up and practiced throughout their adult lives the worship of God as it was taught in the Old Testament. They offered animal sacrifices to God; they kept a cycle of 7 feasts like Passover and Tabernacles every year. They never worked on Saturday like everyone else did and they kept strict dietary laws which prevented them from eating things that everyone else ate. The Temple was the center of their world and they went there to give offerings and went to the synagogue every week to listen to Rabbis teach. The whole family participated together in all of this; the whole community participated together in all of this. It was a culture that bound them all together. To be "put out of the synagogue" was their greatest fear; it meant to be shunned as an outcast by their entire community and family. So, it is not surprising that after the day of Pentecost when Jews by the thousands began to come to faith in Jesus:

2. it was very hard for ethnic Jews to leave Jewish practices They saw Jesus as the fulfillment of everything they already believed, but they still went up to the Temple at the hours of prayer and even offered sacrifices in thanksgiving. They still circumcised their children and didn't eat unclean foods. In short, they lived much the same, but now with a passion for Jesus and telling others about Him. However, this presented a problem as soon as they began to go to people of other nations. In fact, at first it was hard for them to believe that people of other races could even BE saved, that God would ever want them! That's what the story of Cornelius in Acts 10 is all about. God had to virtually smack Peter over the head with a vision and a miracle to show him that He wanted Romans and Greeks and all people to believe in Jesus and He would accept them as part of His Kingdom! But then what? These folks didn't do ANYTHING that the Jewish brethren did. In fact, they did LOTS of things their Jewish brethren would never do! They didn't circumcise their children. They ate unclean foods. They worked on the Sabbath, and so on. So now what? The big battle in the church became: "Do these folks have to do all these other things that God told us to do in the Old Testament or not?" Well, many felt they did and this:

a. it resulted in a false teaching that was promoted all over the Roman world by people we've come to call "**Judaizers**". They taught that a person must believe in Jesus **AND** keep the Law in order to be saved. They were for educating the nations to essentially become Jews in order to follow Jesus. The young church wrestled with this for almost 10 years until finally there was a big conference held in Jerusalem in Acts 15 about AD 49 where the apostles, the leaders of the church, settled the issue once and for all. They said, "NO! We are saved by grace and so are they! They do NOT have to keep the Law; it was given to Israel alone!" However, in spite of this, Judaizers continued to spread their false teaching for many years and you can listen to Paul combat their heresy in Galatians and some of his other letters. So, this is definitely one of the "strange teachings" the writer is warning about in verse 9. But even if they understood the principle of salvation by grace alone, this Jewish heritage:

b. it also resulted in believers living in Israel keeping the law voluntarily to be accepted by the community Even if they didn't believe that they HAD to do these things, they still chose to do them anyway, first, because they had always done them and felt they were a right way of living, and second, because if they didn't, it would set their families and community in an uproar and they would face rejection and persecution. When Paul arrived back in Jerusalem after his third mission trip, the apostles told him, in essence, "Listen, there are thousands of Jews here who believe and they're all zealous about the Law. They think you teach Jews who believe out where you were NOT to keep the law and they'll be furious. So, to keep the peace, why don't you go through a vow of purification at the Temple and show them you as a Jew still do these things! Yes, we know what we told you about the Gentiles that they don't have to..." [Acts 21:20-25] Do you see that even though they embraced GRACE with their hearts, their law-oriented background STILL had a profound grip on their lives! Now, why am I telling you all of this? Because:

3. many of us come from similar religious backgrounds, even if we're not Jewish.

a. some of us were taught to believe in Jesus AND work to be accepted by God For instance, a number of us were raised in Roman Catholicism and there, of course, you were taught to believe in Jesus, but in practical terms, you were probably also taught that to be accepted by God and go to heaven that you had to be baptized, attend mass, take the eucharist and perhaps go to confession. It is very much like a Jewish background. Did you ever notice how the church is set up pretty much like the Temple? It has an altar and a sacrifice is offered by a priest and incense is burned and it has a holy area where you can't go, and so on. The whole process is trying to take faith in Christ and incorporate the Old Testament sacrificial system. Now please understand that I'm generalizing; I know there are true believers and leaders in the Roman Catholic Church; I even pray with some of them monthly. But generically, that's what most Catholics I meet on the street believe. And when one has a genuine experience with Christ, it's hard to leave that thinking behind. It's drummed in that you have to do all these things, plus if you, for instance, get baptized now as a believer and join another church, your whole family could ostracize you! Do you

know what I'm talking about? It's hard for us to stop thinking that we have to DO certain religious things and we often hold back from going all the way with Jesus out of fear. Then way on the other end of the spectrum:

b. some of us were taught to keep a set of rules to be accepted by the church We grew up in a religious culture of our own, a church culture where men wore suits and women wore dresses always. Where men's hair was always short and women's was long. Where you never drank alcohol of any sort, you never went to movies and you probably didn't grow a beard! You were at church morning, evening and Wednesday or you just plain weren't a good Christian. It was a culture that the American evangelical church cultivated during the first 3/4 of the last century and many of us were raised in it! It actually was in some ways like what we read about the Pharisees in Jesus' day. Oh yes, you were saved by faith, but if you dared to break the rules, even these secondary type ones, they frowned on you and sometimes threw you out! To teach some of the things I teach you would have cost me the pulpit 50 years ago in some places! But even when you understand GRACE, it's hard to get that thinking out of you and so often we put up with things we know aren't really true on these issues, just to be accepted. Does anybody know what I'm talking about?

Now listen to the message of our text **(9b)**:

II. Grace Is The Only Thing That Can Truly Establish Our Hearts In salvation, God does it ALL! We do nothing to add to it!

1. all practices done to impress God or the community have no true value God is not impressed because you eat a ceremonial Passover meal. He is not impressed because you take Communion or get baptized. He is not impressed with your impeccable dress and religious habits. As long as the thought of your heart is that God will somehow be moved by this thing and I will be more acceptable, it's useless and worthless! No work that we can do, no action we can take, has even one iota of value in saving us. Isaiah said, *All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags...* even though to us we think they look so good and make us holy or at least make us more holy than the rest of the world! Look what the author reminds us in verse **10**. We have an altar! What altar?

2. our true sacrifice for sins was offered once-for-all at the cross There on a hill outside of Jerusalem 2000 years ago, the Lamb of God was offered up as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world! The Cross is our altar; it is where His blood was shed and our salvation was bought and sealed forever. And we are so blessed because:

a. God has graciously given us the right to partake of this sacrifice He offered it to us, though we didn't deserve it at all. *Guilty, vile and helpless we!* And He offered it to us demanding nothing in return. Our sacrificial meal is Jesus; we partake of His sacrifice, not at the communion table, but in our hearts by faith that rests on what He did there and we are accepted, we are included, we are saved. What a privilege! But note the reverse:

b. all who depend on their own works are totally excluded from it The Jewish priests who offered sacrifice in the Temple have no right to what we have, until they accept it by grace! The most religious Catholic or Baptist or Jehovah's Witness or Mormon, for that matter, has no right to what we have, until they accept it by grace! Grace is what saves us and grace is what establishes our hearts firmly in the assurance of eternal salvation. Therefore, if our hearts are to be captivated by grace and established firmly by grace so that we live a life that is filled with the recognition of His grace in everything that we do:

III. We Need To Leave All Forms Of Works-Oriented Legalism (11-14) That's the point of this paragraph. In fact, that's the point of this entire letter: "Leave it!" The writer begins with:

1. an illustration from the Old Testament law (11) He's talking about Yom Kippur, a very special ceremony that happened every year in Israel and is still celebrated today:

a. on the Day of Atonement the body of the sacrificial animal that was offered to make Israel holy was burned "outside the camp" To cover over Israel's sins, the priest would kill a bull and sprinkle its blood in the Tabernacle to God, but the carcass was taken outside the camp of Israel to an unclean place and burned up completely. Now why did He want them to do that? Well, because it was a picture, a way of showing something that was to happen later:

b. this is fulfilled in Jesus suffering "outside the gate" of Jerusalem to make us holy (12) It was by design that Jesus was crucified, not at the Temple, but outside of the city gates on a hill called Golgotha. Now why on earth does that matter? Well, **(13b)** gives us a clue when it says *Jesus suffered outside the camp, bearing the disgrace...* What is:

2. the meaning of Jesus suffering "outside the camp" You see:

a. to the Jews this was a reproach, a mark of utter disgrace and disdain Normally, if the Jews killed you, they would stone you to death right there. But they didn't ask Pilate permission to do that. They wanted Jesus crucified. They wanted him handed over to unclean Gentiles. They wanted Him to die outside the city like the worst criminal,

to die lifted up on a tree so it would be plain to every Jew that He was under God's curse, so that no one would be tempted ever to believe His words again! So, looking at it from Jesus' side:

b. Jesus endured this complete rejection by His own people to save us It was not just the pain of the scourging, not just the nails, not just the agony of the cross. It was the rejection, *He came unto His own and His own people received Him not! He redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us! And for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God!* He was willing to be rejected by men in the most absolute way, to suffer any disgrace, any shame, to be regarded as the refuse of the world to save us! And the point is in **(13)**:

3. the point: we must leave any "camp" that insists on works instead of grace and be willing to bear the rejection this will bring for Him To the Jews who believe, He says, "Leave it! Let go of all the trappings. Give up all the rituals. Stop trusting in any of it and stop trying to hang on to it. Come on out here with Me! I'm outside that camp! So what if you get thrown out and persecuted or even jailed and killed! I was, for you!" To the one whose life was full of religious rituals He says, "Leave it! Let go of all that stuff that is of no value. Don't put any trust in any of it and stop clinging to it as if it's doing you some good! Come on out here with Me! So what if your family gets mad! So what if they criticize you and chastise you or even disinherit you! Look what they did to Me for you!" To the evangelical Pharisee, Jesus says, "Leave it! You believe in GRACE, not works, now ACT like it. Throw away all those man-made rules and traditions that can never make your heart godly and come out here with Me! So what if they talk bad about you or throw you out of membership; look what I endured for you! Any 'camp', any 'community', any 'subculture', any 'cult' that insists that works contribute to your salvation and your acceptance, stand for GRACE ALONE and leave it and rejoice that you are counted worthy of suffering shame for Me!" Look at verse **(14)**. You see:

4. on earth we have no lasting "city" anyway. There's no hope in anything we trust in on this earth. Two years after these words were written, the Roman general Pompey invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, killed or sold much of the population as slaves and destroyed the Jewish nation. From that day to this there is no priest, no sacrifice, no Temple; all those objects of false trust are gone and God was warning believers ahead of time in this letter. Nothing you trust in on this earth lasts. That's why **our hearts are set on our eternal home to come with Jesus**. And if they are, then what does it matter what some religious community thinks of us, what names we're called, what persecution we might endure. We live forever with Jesus, by His GRACE and nothing else. So in light of that:

How then are you going to live? Here are the lyrics to a song, *I Then Shall Live* by Gloria Gaither:

*I then shall live as one who's been forgiven.
I'll walk with joy to know my debts are paid.
I know my name is clear before my Father;
I am His child and I am not afraid.
So, greatly pardoned, I'll forgive my brother;
The law of love I gladly will obey.*

*I then shall live as one who's learned compassion.
I've been so loved, that I'll risk loving too.
I know how fear builds walls instead of bridges;
I'll dare to see another's point of view.
And when relationships demand commitment,
Then I'll be there to care and follow through.*

*Your Kingdom come around and through and in me;
Your power and glory, let them shine through me.
Your Hallowed Name, O may I bear with honor,
And may Your living Kingdom come in me.
The Bread of Life, O may I share with honor,
And may You feed a hungry world through me.*

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Praise (Vs. 15)

We have already looked at eight things that God wants to characterize our lives in this chapter. I won't repeat them but if you do look back at the first 14 verses, you might notice that each of them has to do largely with our relationships to other people or external things. This ninth one focuses directly on our relationship to God Himself. A life well lived, a life that truly pleases God, is a life that is filled with praise. Right off, I want you to notice two things. The first is the term *sacrifice* and the second is the word *therefore*. These two words connect this verse with the whole previous section that we studied last time and if you recall, the point of verses 9-14 was to tell believers from Jewish background to leave all of the sacrific-

es and rituals and the Temple which were so much a part of their lives culturally and go "outside the camp" to Jesus. There's no longer a need for the sacrifices offered in the Old Testament; they were only shadows anyway, pictures that pointed ahead to Jesus and the tremendous offering He would make of Himself. We don't offer them anymore; that's why none of you brought a lamb to church today! However, we DO still offer God sacrifices, only they are *spiritual sacrifices*. Turn over to **1 Pet. 2:4-5** and let's talk in general about:

I. The Concept Of Spiritual Sacrifices Now here's a different image to describe what God is doing this church age in which we live. We usually talk about the growth of the church and its spread to all the nations and the great multitude in heaven. But Peter describes it by saying God is busy building a building, an *oikos*, a dwelling place, a Temple. But it's a living Temple built out of living stones and one by one He's adding to it. You see:

1. we (that is, the church, all believers) ARE the temple of God Paul said, *Don't you know that you yourselves [plural, which means "all of you together"] are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?* - **1 Cor. 3:16**. Oh, God is building Himself a great, grand, glorious temple in these days in which we live, a temple made of millions of living people in whom He dwells and new sections of that temple are being added and rising up all over the earth. Just this week I heard of an expedition that takes off the end of this month by a young couple and their kids who are going to the remote Wakhan corridor of northern Afghanistan for 5 weeks. This area is so remote that on their initial trip in 2007 they drove 3 days past the end of the paved road, then hiked 3 1/2 days to the nearest settlement and another 2 1/2 days to the main settlement, all to reach a group of 3500 Kyrgyz people and for the first time in all of recorded history they told them about Jesus! Now they're going back and taking local believers with them, opening the door for some to come back and stay! Listen, the Temple is going up in new places all over the world! Hallelujah! And, of course, every temple has a priesthood, right? Well, Peter says:

2. we are a priesthood that has been made holy by Christ's sacrifice In the Old Testament He singled out and chose Aaron and his descendants to be the priests, but in this age, He has chosen US! In that day the priests were set apart and made holy by the sprinkling of blood so that they could approach and serve God. But we have been sanctified and made pure and holy by the precious blood of Christ so that we can serve Him. And that's what priests do; they serve God. How? By presenting Him offerings. So:

3. as priests our responsibility is to present offerings to God The Jewish priests presented animals and grain offerings and drink offerings to Him every day. These were pleasing to Him when sincerely offered because they were reminders of His Son to come, but:

4. the offerings that we present are spiritual in nature They are not animals, not things, not material in nature. And that's what God really wants! Even David recognized that after his great sin. He said in **Ps. 51:16-17**, *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* God looks on the inside, not the outside. He doesn't want the outward things we bring; He can get all of those He wants. He doesn't lack anything! Rather He wants our hearts to be in the right place. He wants our spirit to respond to His Spirit by offering ourselves to Him in ways that please Him. That, my friends, is a description of what the Christian life really is! It is us, continually handing over, continually offering ourselves, to Him from the heart. Now look at the end of verse 5:

5. it is with these spiritual sacrifices that God is truly pleased That word *acceptable* is in a strongly intense form in Greek; they are *well-pleasing*, extremely favorably received. They are what He really, really wants and He is really, really pleased when we are offering them to Him!

So now that we're thinking in the right framework, let's go back to our text in Heb. 13 and read verse **15** again. Here we are told about:

II. The Spiritual Sacrifice Of Praise You see, now we're looking at this from a new direction. Praise is not simply a bunch of people singing songs or raising their hands. Praise is a spiritual act where we offer something up to God, something that floats upward like the holy incense offered on the altar, a pleasing aroma that He enjoys, a fragrance that blesses His heart and brings satisfaction to His very being. Now, what is praise? We have a definition of it right here:

1. praise is simply our lips giving glory to His Name My Bible dictionary says praise is *an act of worship or acknowledgement by which the virtues or deeds of another are recognized and extolled*. When we praise God, we recognize and we extoll or brag on or shout about all the good things about Him. Like what? Like His glory and splendor, His strength and power, His holiness. The New Topical Textbook lists 27 different things that Scripture says we should praise God for in specific verses: *His majesty, glory, excellency, greatness, holiness, wisdom, power, goodness, mercy, lovingkindness and truth, faithfulness and truth, salvation, wonderful works, consolation, judgment, counsel, fulfilling promises, pardon of sin, spiritual health, preservation, deliverance, protection, answered prayer, the hope of glory, all spiritual blessings, all temporal blessings and the continuance of blessings!* The list is endless! The things that are excellent about God are without number; and every interaction of His with our life becomes another reason to praise Him. However, simply telling God a list of His good points is not in itself praise. Our text says that praise:

a. it is a fruit of our lips, not merely an act. When I hear that phrase, I think naturally of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Love, joy, peace and so on are not things we do; they are things that naturally grow out of us from the Spirit being inside us and in control of our lives. Praise is like that. **It is something that flows from our spirit out through our lips.** Praise is the deep inner joy of our heart overflowing, bursting forth in expression to God. Remember Mary, when it was confirmed to her that she would be the mother of the promised Messiah? *Luke 1:46-47, And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* It involves all of me. It involves my spirit which is joined to God. It involves my soul, my mind, my understanding, what I know about God. It involves my emotions, the feelings of gratitude, awe and affection that well up inside me toward God. It involves my will; I choose to praise God. And it even involves my body; I speak with my lips, I sing with my vocal cords, I lift my hands, I close my eyes or whatever I do. It is all of me responding from the depths of my being to who God is and what He has done. Now praise can be pointed in one of two directions:

b. it can be offered directly to God Listen to **Ps. 96:1-2a**, *Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name...* Sometimes we tell Him to His face, as it were. We go straight to Him in an attitude of worship and express our joy directly to Him in praise. Or at other times:

c. it can be directed to others about Him - Ps. 96:2b-3 *...proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.* Proclaim it to others, say it to the nations, the peoples of the earth. If I want to praise you for the way you are or something you've done, I can tell you directly or I can talk about you to others and praise you to them. I can express my joy directly to God in praise or I can express it in vibrant testimony about Him to others! When someone gets up and sings to us about God from their hearts or testifies to us about what He has done or tells us how much they love Him and we respond and join them, that is praise. Praise is the fruit of our spirit through our lips confessing His Name, giving credit and glory and thanks to Him, whether directly to Him or to others. Now look again at our text. How often should we priests make such an offering? *Continually!*

2. our praise should come forth in a constant stream You know **Phil. 4:4**, *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* At all times, ever, never stopping, never ceasing. Just as the Jewish priests presented their offerings and burned their incense over and over again, day after day, morning and evening, so our offering of praise should flow out of our lips perpetually, over and over day after day. Now, of course:

a. it will be expressed in a variety of forms If you read the Scriptures, you'll see it in all kinds of ways. Sometimes it is exuberant and loud, just like a football game, like the crowd of people who shouted "Hosanna!" to Jesus at His Triumphal Entry. Sometimes we might lift up our hands to Him or even dance before Him like Miriam after the Red Sea! Sometimes we clap our hands like the Hebrews were told in Ps. 47. Applause is not a 21st century invention. We can clap and say, "Yay, God!" Just look how excited people act when they win money on a game show! They scream and jump up and down for joy! Shouldn't we be like that sometimes? Sometimes it is singing. Oh sure, we do it together here, but don't you sing to Him in the shower, in the car? Don't some of these choruses stick in your head and you just have to sing them to Him? **Eph. 5:19-20** says, *Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Sometimes we speak to each other or sing to each other about Him; sometimes we tell others how wonderful Jesus is and what He did for us; sometimes we quietly tell Him in our hearts. Sometimes we simply sit and let thoughts of Him fill our mind and tell Him in our thought life how much we love Him. Sometimes we reverently kneel or bow down to Him. Praise may come out of us in a thousand forms, but the point is that it should never stop:

b. it should be a continual way of life, even in trials Look with me at what Paul wrote in **1 Thes. 5:16-18**. That phrase *in all circumstances* is the tough part. Praise and thanksgiving should be flowing to God, even in the midst of difficulties and trials. The most extreme example that I can think of is, of course, Job. In one day, he lost all 10 of his children in a tragic "accident" and lost almost all of his servants who would have been his closest associates, not to mention all of his earthly wealth. Imagine how traumatic that must have been; it's not just a story but an event that happened to a real man and his family. And yet this man walked so closely with God day by day that here is his reaction, *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."* - **Job 1:20-21**. His praise didn't stop! He praised God even in the midst of his suffering, like Paul and Silas did in the Philippian jail at midnight after being beaten! Yes, I know that after a few days and prodding by his friends he voiced a lot of complaints and blame toward God, but in the end of the book he came back to his true heart, which is what was showing in the very beginning. Praise is to be a way of life for us, in good times, in bad times, in wonderful blessings and even in tragedy. It does not require a good circumstance to be generated; it comes out of our love for God Himself and all He has done for us. I always think of the words of the prophet Habakkuk, *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.* - **Hab. 3:17-18**. Let me paraphrase that, "Though I lost my job and

the unemployment isn't enough to cover my bills and there doesn't seem to be one anywhere, though I've had to live on my savings and drained them and I lost half the value of my investments, YET I will rejoice IN THE LORD!" Jesus is still my Savior; my salvation is still intact and all His promises are still mine. I have a glorious future and even if they shoot me here, all they can do is send me there faster! Hallelujah! We give Him this offering of praise in ALL circumstances, at ALL times, in an ever-flowing stream. Why? Have we lost our minds? No, look back at our text. It's because:

3. our praise is really pleasing to Him - Heb. 13:15-16 With such sacrifices, with this continual incense of praise being offered up, God is not only pleased, but literally *well-pleased*, greatly pleased, infinitely pleased. God delights in our praise, not in some self-centered, self-loving kind of way. He does not need our praise. He can get praise out of stones, if He wants it. He doesn't need it, but nevertheless He delights in it. **Ps. 22:3** says, *But thou [art] holy, [O thou] that inhabitest the praises of Israel.* God lives in, He dwells in, He abides in the praises of His people. Not in a selfish, self-centered way that thrives on being flattered, but in a way that responds to us with joy and delight as well. It is natural for us to delight in God so much that we praise Him and it is natural for Him to respond to our praise with His own joy and delight. Don't you enjoy being loved and adored sincerely? Why is that? Because you're made in His image. He delights in your expression of love and joy toward Him as much as you delight and joy in His toward you! Then notice lastly that:

4. our praise involves a choice The words *let us* tell me that it is not automatic. It involves a choice on our part. We can live as priests offering up a continual sacrifice of praise to God or we can choose not to do it. If you want to be bitter and complaining, you're free to choose that, and many believers do. But that's being a priest who fails to do the very thing he was chosen to do! It's missing our calling! So what will it be? In closing, I'd just like to share:

III. A Simple Exercise That Will Increase Our Praise that I ran into recently. I'm going to call it **The Daily Review**. I didn't invent it. In fact, way back about 1500 AD a priest we refer to as St. Ignatius Loyola developed and wrote about it. In the literature it's called "The Prayer Of Examen", but I like "The Daily Review". And it's really simple. At the end of your day, before you go to sleep at night (or for some of you before your head hits the pillow because once it does, you're gone!), you simply quiet your mind and go back and remember each of the events of your day that come to mind and talk to God about them. For example, "Lord, that was a really good breakfast this morning, thanks for that; I enjoyed it. And, oh yes, it was really good that I ran into George down at the store; that was so encouraging. I'm sure you arranged that. Thanks Lord! Jesus, you know it was kind of tough when the boss chewed me out today and it wasn't really fair and it made me angry. I pray for him to be saved, because he's lost, Lord, and I thank you for helping me control my temper. Use that as a witness to him. Oh Lord, I remember that guy that pulled out in front of me as I was driving. One more second and I'd have been smashed up. I praise You for protecting me. Oh, and then my boy gave me the best hug after school today; that really felt good. I praise you for my family and you know we sure had a lot of fun playing ball tonight. Jesus, you fill my life with good things. Praise you. Good night." It's just a simple exercise that takes a couple minutes before you fall asleep, but if you try it, you'll find that it really gives perspective to the day's events and helps you really give God a lot more praise.

Stanford Cobb, who was a missionary to the Middle East, once asked a friend, "Do you feel good when God blesses you?" "Always!" "When you're pleased with what He has sent you, do you take time to praise Him in prayer or song?" "Come to think of it, I don't often do that." "Try it, my friend, the Lord wants us not only to feel happy in our hearts, but to take a cue from the psalmist who exclaimed, 'His praise shall continually be in my mouth' (Ps. 34:1). If you do that, you will receive a fresh blessing!" Later his young friend confessed, "I took that dear brother's advice, and I've been telling the Lord ever since how much I appreciate His love and goodness. My soul has found much help and comfort in this practice." So will yours! IF you choose to take that advice and live a life of praise.

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Goodness (Vs. 16)

If you recall, last week I introduced to you the concept of spiritual sacrifices as we studied verse 15. We saw that as believers, we are priests who minister to God by offering up things to him, not animal sacrifices like the Old Testament priests, but spiritual sacrifices like the spiritual sacrifice of praise mentioned in the text. The life God wants for His children is a life out of which continual praise flows upward to Him in a never-ceasing stream. Now as we move into verse 16, we find that there is another spiritual sacrifice that God wants us to offer perpetually. Today we're going to study:

I. The Spiritual Sacrifice Of Doing Good Notice the two key actions in that verse, *to do good* and *to share*. Let me suggest to you that these are not meant to be thought of as two different individual actions. Rather, in the original meaning, they appear to be the same action directed toward two different groups of recipients. Turn with me to Paul's command in **Gal. 6:10** and you'll see what I mean more clearly. Paul says almost exactly the same thing that the writer of Hebrews says. Doing good is something that:

1. we are to exercise it continually toward all people We are to do good to people at every opportunity, every chance we get, to everyone we encounter. Now what does that look like? Well, if you remember, the Bible says that:

a. our Example, Jesus, went about doing good Peter was telling Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, about Jesus and he said, *[You know] how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. - Acts 10:38.* Think about Jesus' life on earth. Everywhere He went, He simply did good things to and for people. He went to a wedding as a guest and when they ran out of wine, He made them some more! When he was teaching the crowds, He saw that they were hungry and had brought no food with them, so He fed them. When he met sick people, He cured them and when He met demonized people, He set them free. When He ran into a grieving widow, He even stopped the funeral procession and gave her her son back! You might say, "Yes, but He was God and had Divine power! All those were miracles! How am I supposed to imitate that?" That's missing the point! He did good to everyone He encountered because the power of God was with Him and in Him; that was the focus of His life. And what did God say about you? *You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you....* The very same power of God is with you and in you too! Why? The point is NOT the miracles; the point is that you can do what He did, you can go around throughout your entire life doing good to the people you encounter by meeting their needs through His strength and provision, thus pointing them to Him! You can feed hungry people and care for sick people and free people from spiritual bondage through the Gospel and deliver them from eternal death! Think about it this way; reading the Gospel accounts is like watching the life of Jesus compressed into a two hour movie. Do you know what I mean? All you get is the high points! There is so much that is missing by necessity. A lot of Jesus' days were just like your days and my days! He got up and got dressed and ate breakfast and shopped in the market and washed His robe and walked on the roads and sat down for lunch. And along the way He stopped and talked to people and whenever He did, He always did something good for them. He gave gifts to some who were poor and encouraged some who were sad and smiled at and played with little children. Paul is not saying that you should sell your house and become a wandering itinerant doer of good deeds; He is saying that in the process of living your life, you should continually be doing good things for the people you encounter every day by God's power so that they are drawn to believe in Him through you! Jesus put it like this, *...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. - Matt 5:16.* Your doing good by His power points people to Him. Now what does this "doing good" look like? On a day to day basis, it may be as simple as holding a door for someone at the bank or letting someone who's in a hurry get ahead of you in line at the grocery store. It may be speaking to a confused looking person in the hospital and asking if they need help finding something or asking a handicapped person if they need a hand putting their things into their car. It may be spending an hour in the yard listening to your neighbor talk about the pain their rebellious teen is causing them or putting an arm around a co-worker who lost a parent or cooking a pot of chicken soup and taking it over when you hear that a friend is sick. Doing good certainly refers to a life that is filled daily with random acts of kindness toward others, but it goes much deeper than that. Turn with me to another key passage, **1 Tim. 6:17-19.** Paul says:

b. we are to be rich in good deeds, particularly in sharing generously to meet the needs of others Please don't dismiss that first phrase by thinking that *those who are rich in this world* are the Trumps and the DuPonts and the Rockefellers, the CEO's of huge corporations and the like. The world has very few of those and the church has almost none of them. YOU and I ARE "those who are rich in this world"! The average per capita income in the US is \$46,850 per year. That's \$128 a day. Half of the world or 3 billion people live on less than \$2.50 a day and 80% live on less than \$10 a day. In the US we may be middle class, but in this world, we are the rich! Now the point is not to make you feel guilty because you have an iPad and a laptop or because you're going out for supper tonight; the text says that God richly provides us the things we have so that we can enjoy them! The point is that God expects rich people like us to do good by sharing generously what He's given us with others who are in need instead of heaping it up for ourselves! Doing good for people like us who have things is very often an act of the pocketbook! It is being ready and willing to open our wallets and share liberally with someone when they need it, when they're in trouble or out of work or sick and can't work. So often in our culture we expect that social systems like unemployment and welfare and disability insurance take care of people's needs and thank God those things do make life easier for many (much of the world has NONE of those helps!). But needs still persist, even with all those helps, and God has commanded us to be people who do good and meet them as we have opportunity! In fact, Jesus was even more radical about this. He said that:

c. we are even to do good and give to our enemies Listen to **Luke 6:33-35.** Now that's radical! We're not just to love our enemies, but we're to do good to them, to help them when they need it regardless of how they've treated us. And that means we're to give to them when they're in trouble and have a financial need without expecting them to pay it back! In fact, Jesus said, that is when you are the most like your Heavenly Father! He is always giving nice things to people who are ungrateful and don't thank Him and even to people who are wicked! When you do good and give to people you don't even like, to people who don't like you or even hate you, that is when you most resemble Him and when He is most pleased! You'll like this story: *During the 19th century, the tribespeople of New Zealand were often engaged in conflict with the occupying British troops. One day, while resting from an exhausting skirmish, a general named Cameron and his men camped on the banks of the Waikato River. His soldiers were*

short of provisions, and they expected the Maori warriors to attack. Suddenly, a man who was stationed as a look-out signaled that several large canoes were coming up the river. Cameron and his forces expected the vessels to be full of warriors, but were surprised to see the boats loaded with milk goats and potatoes. The Maoris said, "We heard you were hungry, and the Book missionaries brought us says, 'If enemy hunger, feed him!' You enemy; you hunger; we feed you; that is all!" The Maoris quickly came ashore, unloaded the goods, and returned quietly to their village. They had taken Romans 12:20 to mean exactly what it says. And that IS exactly what it means!

Paul says, as we have opportunity we are literally to do good to ALL men, but then he adds this:

2. we are to especially exercise it within the family of believers Back in Heb. 13:16 you see in the NIV the words to *share*. In the Greek that is the word *koinonia* which is usually translated *fellowship*. So the phrase literally says, *do not forget to do good and to fellowship* (the words *with others* are not in the text). Fellowship is more than coffee and donuts in the hall talking with each other. It is more than sitting with your friends and chatting during a church dinner. Fellowship is a term that refers to the bond that we have with one another as believers. I would suggest that it is **a oneness of heart and mind that leads to sacrificially sharing all that we have to help one another**. In this:

a. our example is the early church Turn with me to **Acts 2:42**, a verse you know so well. We know what it means to listen to teaching, to eat together and to pray. But the text says they devoted themselves to the practice of fellowship. What is that? Well, it's explained in **44-45**. You can see it again, perhaps even more clearly in **4:32, 34-35**. That doesn't mean that everyone surrendered all their possessions to the group and they lived together as a commune or a monastery. That wasn't even remotely possible for thousands of people to do. It means they got together a lot, as often as they could, and that they were so bound together as one in their hearts and minds that they stopped thinking about their possessions as being solely for their own use! They saw them as gifts that God had given them to bless their brothers and sisters. So when they saw or heard that others in the body had needs, they liquidated some of their assets. People back then didn't invest money in banks or stocks and bonds like we do today; they bought material things that had value like houses or fields and kept them. So when they saw brothers in need, they had this open-handed attitude that these things I have are gifts from God for the good of the body and they sold things and gave the money to meet those needs! So much so that there were no needy persons among them because they took care of each other! That's what fellowship at it's deepest meaning is! In fact:

b. the term can literally mean an actual offering given to other believers In **Rom. 15:26** Paul says that believers in Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. That word *contribution* is literally a *fellowship*. Again in **2 Cor. 8:4** Paul says [*The Macedonian churches*] *urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints*. That word *sharing* is literally *fellowship*. Fellowship is being so bound in our hearts to our fellow believers that we give all we have to meet their needs. It is doing good to them in an even deeper way than we do to everyone in general.

So, going back to our text, this goodness that God wants our lives to be filled with is a generous and kind spirit that is touched by the needs of others and gives sacrificially whatever we have that can meet those needs. And notice that it says that:

II. God Is Well-Pleased When We Do Good You see, doing good is a spiritual sacrifice which means that:

1. our gifts to others are really offerings made to God Listen to how Paul described the gift that the Philippians had sent to him. He said, *I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* - **Phil. 4:18-19**. When we give to one another or give to a stranger or even an enemy, these gifts:

2. they are a sweet-smelling fragrance that brings Him joy, just like the incense floating up before His presence in the Tabernacle. It means that:

3. they are more than acceptable; they please Him greatly They delight His heart. He sees them and His very soul is satisfied in us! With such sacrifices as continual praise and continually doing good and giving generously to all men and especially to our fellow believers, God is well-pleased! A life well lived, a life that is truly pleasing to God, is a life filled with the goodness of giving to others in every way possible.

But in verse 16 the writer also warns us about:

III. The Danger In Doing Good: We May Easily Neglect It! He warns, *Do not forget this!* Now honestly, I don't think it means *forget* as in "Oops, I forgot to do good!"

1. the danger is not that we unintentionally "forget to do it" the way we might unintentionally forget to put our gift in the offering when we go on summer vacation. How do you "forget" to give your brother some help when you learn he doesn't have money for groceries this week? If you don't give, it is not an oversight, is it?

2. the danger is that we may selfishly "neglect" doing it because we want to hang onto our own treasures! We may walk by the need and say, "I just can't afford to help everybody with everything!" We may see the man lying in the

ditch beside the road and walk by on the other side because we “don’t have time to get involved” or “have other things to do that are more important” or “don’t have money to spare”. *I remember a friend sharing how she was going into a bank one day in the city and was approached by a man at the door asking for some change for food and she brushed by him and on up to the teller window because she just didn’t want to be bothered and as she stood there at the window, the Spirit of God spoke words into her mind as clear as a bell and said, “HE’S HUNGRY!” So, on her way out she took him across the street to McDonalds and bought him some food.* That day she listened to Jesus and “went about doing good” like He did! But oh how easy it is for us to brush on by people with deep needs and even by our own brothers and sisters in the church, to grow selfish and see what we have as our own instead of being for God’s use! James said, *Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.* - Jas. 1:27. Pure religious worship that hasn’t been tainted by the world, the kind that is acceptable and pleasing to God, is being touched by the needs of others and caring for them with what you have. And remember this:

3. God will never “neglect” rewarding and blessing our sharing Look back to **Heb. 6:10**, *God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.* Paul said that because we give to the needs of others that God will supply all of our needs according to His riches in glory. God will not neglect our needs; He will not “forget” us! That would be unjust! And that is why it SO pleases Him when we intentionally refuse to neglect doing good to others and meeting their needs.

Novelist Saul Bellow tells this traditional Jewish folk tale: *There was once a rabbi in a small Jewish village in Russia who vanished every Friday for several hours. The villagers boasted that during those hours their rabbi ascended to heaven to talk with God. A skeptical newcomer arrived in town, determined to discover where the rabbi really was. One Friday morning the newcomer hid near the rabbi’s house, watched him rise, say his prayers, and put on the clothes of a peasant. Then he saw him take an ax and go into the forest, chop down a tree, and gather a large bundle of wood. The rabbi proceeded to a shack in the poorest section of the village where an old woman lived. He left her the wood, which was enough for the week. The rabbi quietly returned to his own house. The newcomer stayed on in the village and became a disciple of the rabbi. And now whenever he hears one of his fellow villagers say, “On Friday morning our rabbi ascends all the way to heaven,” the newcomer quietly adds, “If not higher.”* [Christianity Today, Dec 13, 1993. Page 37.] The sacrifice that really pleases God is not religious words and pious prayers, but a life filled with deeds of goodness and giving to others in need.

A Life Well Lived - Hebrews 13

A Life Of Prayer (Vs. 18-21)

With this brief message, we'll conclude our study of Hebrews 13. In it we've seen that a life well lived, a life that is truly pleasing to God, is filled with ten things. He wants our lives to be filled with love, hospitality, empathy, purity, contentment, respect, truth, grace, praise and goodness. Today in verse 18, we find that the writer has one last thing to add, the eleventh. A life that truly pleases God is a life of prayer! He simply says, *Pray for us!* And by *us*, he means *Pray for ME*, because in the very next phrase he switches to the pronoun *I*. We have a name for that. When you pray for yourself and your situation, we call it petition; it is you making your requests known to God. But when you pray for somebody else, we call it intercession. It means literally *to go between*. You take hold of that person and their needs with one hand and God with the other and bring them together through prayer. Paul exhorted us clearly that our lives should be filled with it. Look with me at **Eph. 6:18**. He commands us to be praying all the time, on every occasion with all kinds of prayers and requests. To the Thessalonians he put it like this, *Pray continually! Or Pray without ceasing!* - 1 Thes. 5:17. Our life should be a continual communication with the Father, but a huge part, if not the largest part of that, should be intercession...*always keep on praying for all the saints!* "Intercede for others all the time!" And then he adds verses **19-20**. Paul says, "Pray for ME! I need your prayers!" Paul was in a difficult situation; he was in prison at Rome when he wrote this and he honestly believed, just like the author of Hebrews did, in:

I. The Importance Of Intercessory Prayer (18) It's a cry of the heart, "Pray for me!" Now we honestly don't know who wrote Hebrews. In the early centuries many believed it was Paul himself; others have suggested Barnabas and people like Apollos, Luke and even Peter, but we don't know. However, we CAN say with certainty that this writer was a Christian leader known personally and respected by the church, a Christian worker. In fact, all of those guys mentioned were missionary church planters! And if you check out the little postlude that follows our text in 22-25, whoever it was was probably in Italy and the Jewish believers to whom he's writing are probably back home in Palestine. There is something that has kept him from being "restored" to them, that is, from being able to come back and visit them. His coworker Timothy has just been released from prison, so I'm guessing that maybe he was there too until recently! And maybe that's why he was so urgent with his plea, *Pray for ME!* If nothing else, his cry is a reminder that:

1. Christian workers need intercessory prayer It is not a luxury that would be nice to have, but they can live without. It is not something they can do by themselves alone; God has designed the church so that we need one another's intercession. We literally need one another's prayers. Of course, God could do whatever He intends to do without us praying, but He has chosen to include us and make us a part of everything that He does in the world by calling us to

come to Him in prayer and intercede and as we intercede, He works! Jerry Falwell was quite fond of saying, *Nothing of eternal importance is ever accomplished apart from prayer!* Hans von Staden who inspired Patrick Johnstone to do the book *Operation World* used to say simply, *When man works, man works; when man prays, God works!* So Christian workers, whether planting and growing the church overseas or planting and growing it right here in this community, NEED you to pray! We have a dear family of 22 long term missionary partners all over the world to whom we are deeply committed. They NEED you to pray! And we have 5 national partners in difficult places around the world. They NEED you to pray. Why? Because your life is intertwined with theirs and when you pray God works in and through them where they are! Secondly:

2. Christian workers need prayer personally, that is, specifically. "God bless our missionaries!" won't cut it. That's not intercession. Paul told the Ephesians: "Pray that God will give me the words to say and that I'll be bold in testifying to the faith here in Rome in my chains!" He was specific in what he needed prayer for and when we intercede, we need to pray specifically. Every week we list the current needs of our missionary partners in your bulletin. You need to be familiar enough with what's going on in their lives so you can intercede specifically for their needs. Thirdly:

3. Christian workers need prayer continually This *Pray for Me!* is a present imperative command and it has the force of continuing action. When Jesus said, *Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and you shall find...*, it doesn't mean once. It means "Ask and keep on asking and it shall be given..." So *Pray for me!* means *Pray and keep on praying for me!* From early in my ministry I've had a team of people that I call my Prayer Team. They are older people and shut-ins who love to intercede. I send them a letter every two weeks with specific needs in my life and ministry here and they pray EVERY SINGLE DAY! Christian workers need that kind of continual intercession and that's what should characterize our lives. Fourthly:

4. Christian workers need prayer desperately In verse 19 the writer implores, "I particularly urge you to pray, I beseech you, I BEG you to pray for me!" The need is urgent. Why? Because, like this writer, Christian workers are in some of the most difficult and desperate places and situations there are. Some time ago a group of 9 hospital workers in Yemen were kidnapped. Three women were summarily executed and their bodies left by the road. Absolutely nothing was heard about the remaining six, a German family with three children and one Brit. Oh, how they needed our prayer and how others in similar difficult places need prayer for protection against such things! Of course, these are some of the more dramatic things that go on, but workers both here and around the world face insurmountable challenges and have huge glaring needs, medical, financial, physical, legal, and logistics needs that can only be solved by the hand of God through intercessory prayer! Finally, verse 18 tells us that:

5. Christian workers deserve prayer *Pray for us.* Why? For...*We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.* In other words, "I am not a fake! I am not some guy out here having a good time and living for himself! I've sold out to Jesus and I'm for real. I DESERVE to be prayed for!" Listen, the workers who are out there in ministry around the world and even right here are the cream of the crop. Sure, you can find a few knuckleheads among them, but by and large they're the best we've got! They're sincere; they're dedicated; they're sold out for Jesus; they've sacrificed a lot to serve and the least we can do is stand with them regularly in intercessory prayer! They deserve it!

But does it work? Does it really make a difference? Let's look in verse 19 at:

II. The Power Of Intercessory Prayer (19) Put simply he says, "I beg you to pray because if you pray, I'll be restored to you! I believe your prayers will move God and He will move the obstacle out of the way!" You see:

1. God's work is impacted when we pray Why? E.M. Bounds put it like this, *Prayer moves the hand that moves the world!* But don't think it's a manipulation; it doesn't mean that when we pray, we get God to do what we want. It means that God waits for us to get on board and ask Him for what HE wants before He will do it, so that WE can be included in the process of moving and changing the world together with Him! Does that make sense? God has set it up so that when we pray, He does the most incredible and wonderful things all over the earth to glorify His Name! I'll share just one. For months leading up to last Christmas, Bible Mission asked people around the world to pray for their 1:10 Campaign. They were asking God to mobilize 50,000 believers from the Baptist Churches all through the former Soviet Union to each share a personal Gospel testimony with 10 people and give them a Gospel of John and other materials. God answered with both the people and the funds for materials. More than 500,000 people received a Gospel witness in about a month's time. A few months later they surveyed 18,000 of the people who were witnessed to at Christmas and found that more than 6% made first time decisions for Christ. Twice as many began attending church or small group. Extrapolating the results to all 500,000 people means that probably some 30,000 people received Christ and more than 60,000 have begun to seek out Christian fellowship. Hallelujah! What a party heaven is having and what an example! Thousands of people in churches all over the CIS prayed for those who would share; people all over the world prayed for them and God moved in an incredible, unprecedented way! When we pray, God works! But then, you should know that the NIV doesn't exactly reflect what the writer really said. He actually wrote, "If you pray, I'll be restored to you the sooner! It'll happen quicker if you pray for me than if you don't!" Here's a neat truth:

2. God's work can be hastened when we pray It can be advanced faster, get done sooner. Often, He waits for us to get around to praying before He sends the breakthrough, so if we get on our knees quicker, the answer comes more speedily! In fact, consider this; Peter says, ...*You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.* - 2 Pet. 3:11-12. How on earth do we "speed its coming"? How do we hasten Christ's return by our lives? Well, to my knowledge, the only verse that specifies when Christ will come is *Mat. 24:14, And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* He's not coming until His work is done, until all the peoples of the earth hear the Gospel, but when that's done, He will come. So, as we intercede for Christian workers and God answers and His work gets done all the sooner, Christ's coming grows all the closer!

So pray, my dear brothers and sisters! Intercede for the work of God and the workers of God both here and out among the nations. Fill your life with intercession so that His work on earth may get done and His Kingdom will come in all its glory! Intercede every day, intercede passionately and fervently! Pray specifically for the workers who are doing His work! Oh, that will please God! Now the author closes his epistle with:

III. A Fitting Benediction To This Chapter And Our Study (20-21) This beautiful benediction has been repeated countless thousands of times at the close of worship services. You've surely heard it, but look closely at what the writer deeply and sincerely hopes for all of his readers, including us. He says two things:

1. may God equip you with everything you need to do His will That's what our lives are to be about, doing His will. May He equip and prepare you to do it! And then He adds:

2. may God do in and through you all that is well-pleasing to Him

May your life be filled with all these 11 things that please and satisfy Him so well. May they be the things that completely characterize your life so that your life be truly a life well lived. God grant it, I pray.

James: Living Out Our Faith OUTLINE

Genuine Faith Perseveres Through Trials - 1:1-8

Genuine Faith Conquers Temptation - 1:9-18

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Genuine Faith Relies Upon Prayer - 5:13-20

James: Living Out Our Faith Genuine Faith Perseveres Through Trials - 1:1-8

Let me begin by giving you a brief:

I. An Introduction To The Book Of James (1) There are at least four men named James in the New Testament, but this letter:

1. it was written BY James, the Lord's brother Paul met him in Jerusalem on a visit three years after his conversion; he says, *...I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.* - **Gal. 1:19**. Yes, according to Mark 6:3, Jesus had a brother named James, the first son of Joseph and Mary. His brothers did not believe in Him during His years at home or His 3 years in ministry, but Paul says that Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection and Jesus' brothers are listed among His followers in Acts. It appears that within a few years he was considered one of the apostles and became the acknowledged leader of the mother church in Jerusalem. As to his character, Eusebius calls him *James the Just* and early tradition says that James was such a man of prayer that his knees had large, thick calluses on them and he became known as *the man with camel's knees*. It also says that James was martyred in Jerusalem in 62 or 63 AD by being pushed from a high point of the temple. Yet the fall did not kill him and on the ground, he was beaten to death as he prayed for his attackers. But in spite of his respected position, he calls himself a *servant*, literally, a *slave* of, not his brother Jesus, but, of *the Lord Jesus Christ*. Secondly, this letter:

2. it was written TO Jewish believers scattered by persecution There were thousands of believers in Jerusalem in those early days after Jesus ascended, but after Stephen was stoned, **Acts 8:1** says, *there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles*. They were eventually dispersed even further throughout the Roman Empire. Later on, Peter wrote his first letter to the same group, *To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia* [the Roman provinces that made up Asia Minor or modern Turkey] - **1 Pet. 1:1**. So this is written to believers who are Jewish by background and have suffered a lot, probably at the hands of zealous Jews, and perhaps became what we'd call refugees in their early years because of their faith in Jesus, even though they now have settled lives in communities across the region. Thirdly, this letter:

3. it is the earliest written New Testament letter Most scholars think it was written between **45-50 AD**, only some 15-20 years after Jesus' ascension. That would make this the very first piece of what became regarded as Holy Scripture in the New Testament era. It was a general epistle, a general letter written, not to a specific person or church

group, but to the whole church scattered throughout the nearby provinces in those early days. And what does he naturally write to them about? Trials! Verse (2). He declares what:

II. Our Attitude should be When We Experience Trials Now what exactly does he mean by trials? The Greek word used here has two shades of meaning depending on the context. It can mean to prove or test, to demonstrate the reality and trustworthiness of something. You often see car commercials where car manufacturers put their automobile through rigorous tests to prove that it is built well and able to stand the rigors of driving for tens of thousands of miles or keeping passengers safe it crashes into a cement wall. The trial proves the quality of the car. That is its primary meaning in verses 1-12. In verse 13 you have the same word with its second shade of meaning, to tempt or solicit someone to do evil, which is another way of testing us. That's what James talks about in the next section. In life, James says:

1. we fall into and are surrounded by a variety of multi-faceted trials Again, the Greek word here translated *meet* or *face* means literally, to fall into something that surrounds you. Picture Daniel being tossed into the den of lions with the lions all around him. We don't seek out difficulties and suffering; we simply fall into them! They happen to us because we live in a fallen, broken world and they often surround us on every side because they're variegated, like Joseph's coat of many colors. They come in all kinds of shapes and forms like physical injuries, diseases, job loss, unexpected bills, loss of loved ones, even persecution. And they swirl all around us. Think of the refugees in Athens. Many of them faced war, personal danger, were forced to flee their homes, lost everything they had in life, lost people they loved and are now living in a camp or a crowded building with no job and no prospect for the future. Here a person may be injured and out of work and have bills pile up and face foreclosure and have a child on drugs or a spouse with cancer. Many times, we feel like Job with trouble surrounding us on every hand. And just as they were for him, all these things are trials; they test our faith. Will we continue to believe in God and trust God or will we give it up and throw our faith away? But James wants to tell us the attitude we should have in the midst of all these things. He says:

2. we are to count this as full and complete joy Of course, that is the exact opposite of what is normal for us. I've felt surrounded by difficulties a number of times in these last few years and I can assure you that's not my first reaction! When we face difficult situations that cause suffering, it makes us sad. We feel depressed. We see all these things as bad, and most of the time they actually are. We complain about going through them. But James says we are to count going through these as joy! And note that the Greek word is not a little bit of joy, but it means a full and complete joy! Of course, that's not what we feel as we're in the midst of it; we have to COUNT it all joy as we go through them, **even though we don't feel it!** Nobody is telling you that you have to jump up and down and applaud when you're in an auto accident or a steel bar falls on your toe (like happened to me when I was 17). You won't *feel* joy, but you are to consider it, to reckon it, to regard it as a joyous thing when you go through difficult trials. Well how on earth can you do that? James goes on in verses (3-4) to explain:

III. The Knowledge That Enables Us To Count Trials As Joy Here's what we know. We know that:

1. going through trials demonstrates that our faith is genuine When Job lost all his wealth and all his children in one day, he bowed down and worshipped. Then he lost his health and finally his wife told him to curse God and die, and his response was basically, "I STILL believe!" His trials proved that his faith was genuine, that it was real. *Dave Roevers was an army sergeant stationed in Vietnam during the war. He was on the bank of a small river when his "combat sense" warned him that the enemy was nearby. So, he reached down and picked up a white phosphorus grenade to throw into the vegetation and burn it away so he could see clearly, but as he pulled the pin and lifted his arm to throw it, a sniper's bullet went through his hand and the grenade a few inches from his face. It exploded white hot phosphorus all over his face and body and he fell into the water. Through sheer adrenaline he made it somehow to the far bank, dragged himself out of the water on his knees. In gasping a deep breath, he inhaled some of the still blazing phosphorus into his mouth and throat and quickly spit it out and the first words out of his mouth were a shout, "God, I still believe!" He says, "I wanted the men to know that my faith was real, that it was still intact!" Dozens of surgeries and decades of years later, Dave has an amazing, huge ministry countrywide to the children of Vietnam! His faith has been proved genuine because it survived an awful trial. That's what our trials do for us! Secondly, we know that:*

2. going through trials produces steadfastness (NIV perseverance) in us The King James translates it *patience*, but it is much more than the ability to wait through unpleasant things until they pass. Thayer says it is *...the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings*. Picture it like this. If you watch the weather channel, sometimes when there's a hurricane, in order to show the force of the high winds the reporter will make his way out a door and lean forward almost at a 45 degree angle, the wind holding him up, trying with all its force to push him backward and tear the very clothes off his body. Yet there he stands leaning into the wind with all his might, not giving an inch! That's steadfastness; it is the absolute determination to stand firm no matter what. That's a characteristic that God wants to cultivate and grow in us. But He can't do it if there's no wind! He can't train us to stand firm in the storm if there's no storm. He can't make a Job as he appears at the end of the book, without allowing him to fall into the pit of multiple adversities. The adversities shape his character! Now James reminds us in verse 4 that, unfortunately:

3. steadfastness requires time to have its intended effect in us It doesn't arrive in our lives all at once in a nice package. It's like a muscle; it grows by exercise, by being used. It is developed by standing firm in the first thing, then in the next thing, and the next, from the little thing to the bigger thing, until it becomes just part of you. It becomes an aspect of your character, of who you are. You stand steadfast no matter what comes! You spit the fire out of your mouth and shout, "God, I still believe!" But you can only get there through the long process of enduring a bunch of trials. What can you do to make it happen faster? James says, **Cooperate!** "LET steadfastness do its work fully, let it have its full effect!" Cooperate with the process! How do you do that? You stop complaining when trials come and questioning God and blaming Him and saying, "Where are you, God? Why don't you help me? If you love me, why are you letting this happen to me?" You stop complaining to others, "I don't understand why I pray and nothing happens!" You say, "God, You know how much I hate this; You know how much this hurts! But I recognize that YOU let this thing come into my life. You let me fall into this situation and I know that through it You are building steadfastness and trust into me. Therefore, I will choose to regard this thing as a JOY, because I know You are at work in me through it!" You see, James says that:

4. steadfastness makes us mature and complete God is in the process of growing us spiritually to maturity, and steadfastness or perseverance is one of the most important qualities of a mature believer; they don't fold under pressure no matter how severe it gets. It's like as we learn to stand firm in our difficulties, God is putting the finish coat on us, building into us the most important quality so that we won't be lacking in any way. Endurance is what allows the entire process of maturing to work; without it the whole thing stops dead in its tracks when trouble comes. Paul wrote the same thing to the Roman believers, *...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope - Rom. 5:3-4*. Endurance, the same Greek word, is what produces a proven character, a trustworthy dependable character, a mature character! And what does maturity look like? It looks **like Jesus!** God is shaping us stage by stage into the image of His Son. In fact, Romans says God has *predestined* us to be conformed to the image of His Son. Endurance of difficulties and counting them joy is a necessary part of that process and:

5. our example is Jesus Himself Look with me back a page or two at **Heb. 12:2**. Jesus ENDURED the cross. He did it in the right attitude, not regarding the shame of it or the pain of it or the awfulness of it, because He looked ahead at what it would accomplish, the salvation of a great multitude that no man could number of souls from every tribe, tongue, people and nation gathered into His eternal Kingdom, and He said, "I know what this suffering will accomplish and THAT gives me JOY!" He counted it all joy, even though He fell into troubles that surrounded and overwhelmed and killed Him, because He knew what it would accomplish in the end! He endured and we must be like Him! Now back to our text. Perseverance means even more than still believing; it means continuing to do the right thing. But often when we're in the midst of trials, it's hard to know what the right thing is. Trials are often times of confusion. So, in verses 5-8 James reminds us that:

IV. God Offers Us His Wisdom To Help Us Endure Trials (5) There is a wonderful, wonderful promise, one that we need to remember and use every day and especially when we are in the midst of difficulties:

1. God promises to give us wisdom if we ask Him If we don't know what to do, if we don't know what to say, if we don't know what our next step should be, we simply need to ask God, our Heavenly Father, and that wisdom WILL be given to us. How do we know that? Easy, because it's God's nature:

a. He delights in giving us or anyone wisdom He is a generous God. He loves to bless His children and He loves to bless even nonbelievers when they genuinely ask Him for guidance. What father, when his son or daughter comes to him seeking the wisdom of his years of experience asking, "Dad, I don't know what to do; this situation is so confusing to me. What's your advice?", would NOT answer them? God ALWAYS wants us to be dependent on Him for guidance and to seek it and He's always more willing to give us wisdom than we are to ask for it! Sometimes we may think that we're bothering God or that our troubles may seem small to Him, but don't hesitate to ask because:

b. He will never reprimand us for asking! An earthly father may respond wrong and say, "How stupid! Can't you see... Quit asking dumb questions." But our Heavenly Father won't! When you come seeking His wisdom, He will NEVER turn you away, never reproach you for asking. He WANTS you to ask. However, when we ask, James says:

2. we must absolutely believe that God will give us wisdom (6-8) You can't come thinking, "Well, maybe God will show me. I'll try Him." You can't come thinking, "I'll see what God says and then decide whether I'll do it or not."

a. the person who doubts God will not receive anything from Him God doesn't cast pearls of wisdom before swine, to use Jesus' metaphor. He doesn't give His precious guidance to people who doubt Him or who aren't committed to follow Him. You can't come to Him with a back and forth mind that debates whether He can help you one moment and then despairs that He can the next, like some wave that is driven by the wind in whichever direction it blows. In fact, James says that:

b. the person who doubts will prove double-minded in all areas of life He'll be faithful one day and doubt the next. He'll obey one day and disobey the next.

If you want God's wisdom and guidance, you've got to come to Him with steadfastness, with perseverance, standing firm in faith, saying, "God, I believe; please show me what to do and I'll do it!" And every time you come to Him in that attitude, the Word of God promises through James that *it WILL be given you!*

So, brothers and sisters, count it all joy when you fall into a maze of trials that surround you, painful though they may be. Trust God to guide you through and ask Him for wisdom. And always remember what Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:16-17, *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* In looking back over his life, the late British journalist and Christian scholar, Malcolm Muggeridge, wrote this: *Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my experience, has been through affliction and not through happiness. [Malcolm Muggeridge, in Homemade, July, 1990].* Look at the things that are eternal. Look at what God is doing through all that surrounds you. Fix your eyes on that and you'll be able to count your trials as joy.

James: Living Out Our Faith

Genuine Faith Obeys The Word - 1:19-27

The overall theme of the Epistle of James is "Living Out Our Faith". In the whole of it, James is urging believers, especially those who are enduring suffering, to live out in practice what they believe and that is what proves their faith is real and genuine. In the first part of chapter one he says that genuine faith perseveres through trials; in the second part he says that genuine faith conquers temptation to sin. Now in the last part he lays out the overarching principle that genuine faith obeys the Word of God. And he spells this principle out for us in two stages. First:

I. We Must Be Committed To Hear And Receive The Word Of God (19-21) *Know this...* is like the old railroad crossing signs you used to see in the country that say *Stop, Look and Listen!* It means, "Pay attention to what I'm about to say! Make a special note of it; it's important!" Moreover, he says:

1. this is a universal instruction for all believers It's for every person, every one of us without exception. You don't get to say, "This is for everybody else but it doesn't apply to me!" And then he gives that wonderful principle that we so often repeat, *be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.* That's a great general principle that advances real communication in any circumstance, in a marriage, in your family, with your brothers and sisters in the church or in any situation. However, as you can tell from verse 21, James is really talking specifically about the way that we need to be committed to hearing and receiving the Word of God. First:

2. we must develop an attitude of eagerness to hear what God says We must be *quick to hear* it, anxious and eager to listen to it as it is read or preached. We must desperately want to know what God says. During Passion Week, the last week of Jesus' life on earth, He was teaching daily in the Temple and Luke 19:48 says that the Jewish leaders couldn't find a way to do anything to Him because *...all the people were hanging on His words.* They couldn't get enough. They listened for hours and drank in everything He said and kept coming back for more. That's the attitude we must develop, a deep thirst to hear what God is saying. Second, James says:

3. we must learn to wait before we speak You can't hear very well while you're talking, can you? Often when I've gone to Kyrgyzstan and sit in a worship service, some kind person will sit next to me and translate what's being said into English and it always amazes me that he or she can be talking in English to me while at the same time listening to what's being said by the speaker. But they can't do it perfectly and almost none of us can do it at all. To really listen you have to learn to be quiet and really hear what someone is saying before you talk and give your opinions. Solomon said as much, *If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.* - **Prov. 18:13.** And he added, *When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.* - **10:19.** In any conversation it's wise to learn to wait to speak. It gives you time to really think about what you heard and respond wisely. And this is even more true when we hear the word of God. We so often want to interrupt our hearing of it by talking about what we've heard and telling what we think. If we really want to receive the Word, we need to learn to be quiet and sit with it, to let it sink in deep, to let it soak into our understanding before we respond and say anything. Third, James says:

4. we must learn to be slow to become angry And notice this does **not merely mean to restrain anger**, to hold back from lashing out. It means that it should take a lot for us to get angry in the first place! This is one of the characteristics that God declares about Himself repeatedly through the Scriptures, *The LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness* - Ex. 34:6. Because of His great love and mercy, it takes a lot to rouse His anger, to stir up His wrath. He is patient a long time before becoming angry and we should be like Him! And the reason, James says, is **because when we are angry, we do not act righteously as God desires.** When we're angry we say things that are evil and we do

things that are evil. We lose control of ourselves and let our flesh control what we do and say and that always leads to sinful words and behavior. As the NLT puts it, *Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires*. If we really want to receive the Word of God, it will never happen while we're angry and it will never happen if what God tells us makes us angry! We must learn to be slow to become angry. Then in verse 21 James tells us that if we want to receive the Word:

5. we must put off immorality and every sort of evil behavior *Filthiness* primarily refers sexual sin, inferring it makes us unclean before God, and the following phrase is a catch-all for every other kind of sinful behavior. Many years ago, I had a friend who I am convinced was a believer at the time, but he had a continual habit of being sexually involved with women. On one occasion I felt convicted to honestly challenge his behavior and his reply was angry, "Sure, I know it's wrong, but I'm not giving it up!" And when I asked where God was while this was going on, he said, "He's nowhere to be found and I know it!" You can't hear God when you're willfully and stubbornly persisting in ANY kind of sin. We have to choose to put it off like a dirty, filthy garment, to cast it away from us if we want to hear Him. Fortunately, my friend did just that a bit later on. But I don't want to mislead you into thinking that you can just do ANY of these things, whether it's waiting to speak or becoming slow to anger or casting away evil habits, in your own strength, by just trying harder to make them happen! Most times you can't "just stop". You need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and call on Him to do this work in you. And often habitual sins are rooted in emotional damage that occurred earlier in your life and you may need special help from someone else, like a wise counselor, to understand and break the hold that they have on you before you can let go. Yet all of these things block our hearing and they have to go, no matter what it takes. And then James concludes verse 21 by saying:

6. we must accept the Word in an attitude of humble submission As God speaks to us through His Word, we must humbly accept it and say, "Yes, Lord." *A member of the British Parliament whose name was Neil Marten, was once giving a group of his constituents a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament. During the tour, the group happened to meet Lord Hailsham, then Lord Chancellor, wearing his full uniform and regalia. He recognized Marten among the group and shouted in greeting, "Neil!" Instantly the entire band of visitors fell to their knees, thinking it was a command! [Today in the Word, July 30, 1993].* That should be our attitude when God speaks to us. Heb. 4:12 says, *...the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.* God's Word is not all wonderful promises of hope for the future and peace for the present. Much of what He has to say is convicting; it cuts and pierces us like a sharp sword to the very core of our being, all the way down to our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us and that hurts, yet we have to meekly agree with God that He is right instead of resisting and protesting and making excuses for ourselves. James says the Word of God **has been "implanted" in us and has power that saves our souls**. When we trusted in Jesus and were born again, God's perfect law, His Word, was written on our very hearts. It became part of our very nature to know the righteous life that God desires. So now, as His Word speaks to us and we humbly receive it, we allow that implanted Word to mushroom and take over our lives and mold and shape them into the image of Jesus. It's a powerful thing, mighty enough to save us and mighty enough to transform us, IF we hear and receive it with meekness. And if we do, we move into the second phase that James wants to impress on us:

II. We Must Be Committed To Obey And Do The Word Of God (22-27) Hearing is good; it is vital, but James says:

1. if we hear without obeying, we deceive ourselves that we believe it (22-24) In other words, we don't really believe something unless we act on it. If we say we believe something but we don't act on it, we don't truly believe it. We're fooling ourselves. James says **we are like a person who scrutinizes his face in a mirror but then walks away, immediately forgets what he saw and does nothing about it**. This is a great picture. Suppose you get up in the morning and go into the bathroom and as you pass it, you look in the mirror and you panic. You don't like what you see, so you stop and stare at it. Your hair is all messed up from sleeping on it. Your eyes have sacks under them. There's a big zit on your chin and maybe nose hairs are protruding from your nostrils. Your shirt's on backwards and there's a huge spot on it. But instead of doing anything about it, you leave the bathroom and eat breakfast and go out the door and forget all about what the mirror showed you. However, your fellow workers or your fellow students won't forget! You'd never do that, would you? When you look in the mirror and see that you're a mess, you do everything you can to fix it! Yet so often when we hear or read the Word of God and it shows our hearts that our lives are a mess, we go on out the door to a watching world and forget all about it! We don't really believe what we saw in the mirror; if we did, we'd do something about it. Instead, we fool ourselves; we tell ourselves we look fine, at least as good as everyone else, and after all, nobody's perfect! If we hear the Word, but don't DO what it says, we don't really believe it. Verse 22 is the theme verse of the whole letter so let me read it one more time. Now on the contrary, James says:

2. God blesses us as we obey His Word (25) Notice that there's a four-fold process outlined in this verse. First:
a. we peer intently into God's perfect Word By *Law* he doesn't mean the Old Testament law of Moses; he means the entirety of the Word of God, including the Good News of Jesus and the teaching of the apostles, the *perfect law that brings freedom*. Like the man at the mirror, we peer into it with focused attention, looking at every detail, scrutinizing ourselves in light of it carefully. Second:

b. we continue to do this perpetually We persevere in it; we keep on doing it as a continual habit. Like the man in **Ps. 1:2**, of whom it says, *...his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night*. He's always looking into the Word, thinking about it, constantly pondering it. Third:

c. we do not forget what we see and hear like that messed up guy who walked away. We apply what we hear from God to ourselves. We see what God shows us about ourselves and take it to heart and determine that things cannot stay the way they are. Then fourth:

d. we act on what we hear and put it into practice We obey what it says; we actually DO what God tells us; we practice what we say we believe and our behavior changes; our lives change.

THIS is what God is pleased with. This is what God wants and this is what He blesses. He blesses us in the very doing of it. He gives us grace and strength to carry it out and fills us with joy and peace and a real sense of His Presence as we DO what He tells us! Now James closes this first chapter by highlighting:

3. three practices which demonstrate genuine devotion to God's Word First of all, if we are actual doers of the Word:

a. we control our speech (26) He'll have a lot more to say about this in chapter 3, but here he summarizes it briefly. He's using the word *religious* much the same way we might use it when we say someone is "religious"; they go to church, they read the Bible, they pray, they give. They do all the outward religious acts that seem to indicate that they believe in the Lord. But the hypothetical person in this verse doesn't bridle his tongue; one scholar says, "He lets his tongue go like an unbridled horse!" An unbridled, unrestrained horse goes wherever he wants and does whatever he wants. Perhaps this man's tongue lies when it suits his purpose; he doesn't tell the truth. Or maybe this man's tongue speaks filthy words, telling dirty jokes, making sexual comments about women or racial slurs about black people or Latinos. Or it makes cutting, critical remarks that tear down family members or coworkers. Or it shouts angry, hurtful words that wound others. If we genuinely receive and obey God's Word, we control our speech! And James says:

(1) if we do not, our external religious acts are worthless They're empty, vain; they prove nothing about who we are. And what's worse, they're not acceptable to God. You can't offer God the sacrifice of praise with your tongue and then turn around and use it to abuse someone and call them names. Would He be pleased with that? You can't pray asking Him for things one moment and then turn around and use the same tongue to curse others or take His Name in vain and expect Him to overlook it. You can't read His Word with all it says about controlling your speech and then lie or speak filthy words and expect Him to bless you for it. We must control our speech and James says further:

(2) if we do not, we have deceived ourselves into thinking we are religious We have fooled ourselves into believing that externally religious acts make us the person that God wants us to be. And that's true whether we don't control our speech or whether we fail to do the next two things he mentions.

The best example of this I can think of is the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They were outwardly religious; they prayed, fasted, went to Temple, wore phylacteries and prayer shawls and actually believed they were devout and even righteous. Yet they continually plotted to murder Jesus and had no concern for the poor and needy. Small wonder that Jesus repeatedly called them hypocrites! But James is saying that when we fail to control our speech, we're being just like them. Then he goes on to say that if we are genuinely devoted to the Lord and His Word:

b. we care for the needy (27a) Widows were some of the most needy people in society in that day and still are in many places in the world. Without a husband to protect them and to provide for them, a woman can barely survive unless there are relatives who will care for her. And if she has children, it is especially hard and their life is really hard too. James says that if our religion is genuine that our heart will be touched and we will sacrificially care for needy people like this. I'm reminded of the words of Jesus, *...I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me*. - **Mt. 25:35-36**. Those are the things that mark a genuine follower of Jesus! In fact, John says, *...if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?* - **1 John 3:17**. You can't be real; you can't be genuine if you close your heart against the poor and needy! And lastly, James says if we are truly devoted to the Lord and His Word:

c. we keep ourselves unstained by the sins of the world around us (27b) We don't get involved in immorality like the people around us do. We don't lie and cheat like they do. We don't hurt others for our own benefit like they do. We don't let any of the world's sinful behavior rub off on us; we keep our garments unspotted out of love for the Lord Jesus and respect for what He has done for us.

If our faith is genuine, we are doers of the Word and not hearers only. We obey the Word. Chuck Swindoll writes, *Imagine, if you will, that you work for a company whose president found it necessary to travel out of the country and spend an extended period of time abroad. So he says to you and the other trusted employees, "Look, I'm going to leave. And while I'm*

gone, I want you to pay close attention to the business. You manage things while I'm away. I will write you regularly. When I do, I will instruct you in what you should do from now until I return from this trip." Everyone agrees. He leaves and stays gone for a couple of years. During that time, he writes often, communicating his desires and concerns. Finally, he returns. He walks up to the front door of the company and immediately discovers everything is in a mess--weeds flourishing in the flower beds, windows broken across the front of the building, the gal at the front desk dozing, loud music roaring from several offices, two or three people engaged in horseplay in the back room. Instead of making a profit, the business has suffered a great loss. Without hesitation he calls everyone together and with a frown asks, "What happened? Didn't you get my letters?" You say, "Oh, yeah, sure. We got all your letters. We've even bound them in a book. And some of us have memorized them. In fact, we have 'letter study' every Sunday. You know, those were really great letters." I think the president would then ask, "But what did you do about my instructions?" And, no doubt the employees would respond, "Do? Well, nothing. But we read every one!" [Charles Swindoll, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, p. 242.] One author in *Our Daily Bread* put it like this, *A single revealed fact cherished in the heart and acted upon is more vital to our growth than a head filled with lofty ideas about God.* [March 4, 1993] and then he quoted Oswald Chambers who said, *One step forward in obedience is worth years of study about it.*

James: Living Out Our Faith

Genuine Faith Treats All Equally - 2:1-13

One of the most prevalent evils throughout the history of mankind is prejudice. Prejudice is a pre-formed opinion that leads to Merriam Webster's third definition: *an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics.* It comes in many forms: racial prejudice, religious prejudice and even social prejudice. The Jews of Jesus' day regarded all Gentiles (non-Jews) as unclean and even referred to them as dogs. Of course, the Romans despised the Jews and had little regard for their lives. There have been similar prejudices in every country of the world, in every era of history. It has led to everything from ethnic cleansing in Sudan to the policy of apartheid in South Africa to the persecution of Christians in China, but it is also found in much more subtle forms, forms that creep even into the church and into all of our lives, no matter how much we deny it. In his letter, James is telling us straight up how to live out our faith in very practical terms and, as we enter chapter 2, he tackles this very issue head on with a bold statement:

I. Genuine Believers Do Not Discriminate Between People (1) The sense of the Greek as well as the whole passage is that this was something that James saw already going on and he was saying, "STOP displaying favoritism! Stop discriminating between people by your preconceived opinions! That is something that has NO place in you because you profess faith in our glorious Lord, Jesus Christ, who loved the whole world and sacrificed His own life so that people of every tribe, language group, ethnic group and nation could be saved from their sins and spend eternity with Him." The founders of our country wrote, *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...* They certainly didn't get those truths from looking at the history of the world; they got them from the Bible! Our God creates and values every single human being alike; He loves them all and if our faith in Him is real and genuine, we will do the same, even though we have failed miserably in this area many times. Even in church:

1. we often discriminate based on outward appearance (2-3) James says, "Suppose some visitor walks into your meeting all dressed nice, with hair done up right and wearing nice jewelry, your natural reaction will be to say, 'Hey friend, we're so glad to see you! Come on and take my seat right up here in the front.' But if another guy walks in and his hair is all messed up and his clothes look like he slept in them and he doesn't smell too good, you're liable to say, 'Hey buddy, you stand in the back of the room or sit on the floor someplace.'" Of course we'd never act like that... Oh come on, yes, we would! We do it all the time! It's just that we hide it here in our minds so nobody else can hear what we're really thinking! We do it naturally, even subconsciously without thinking about it. Even out in public:

a. we act graciously toward people with a "fine" appearance according to our preconceived standards. If they look like us and talk like us, we think good thoughts about them and greet them and act warmly towards them. But:

b. we act rudely toward people with a "shabby" appearance When you see a guy with long hair and a beard in a black leather jacket and boots, what do you do? Your brain says, "He looks like he's part of a motorcycle gang" and you avoid him if possible or walk right by him without acknowledging him. If we see a woman whose dress is somewhat immodest, we make assumptions. If we see someone who looks Chinese or Korean or if we hear some guy with a beard speaking some middle eastern language, we hesitate to speak to them. Even if we see someone who is in a wheelchair or has an artificial limb, or is extremely overweight, we tend to avoid them out of embarrassment unless they seem to need our help.

We tend to not treat all people the same, simply based on their outward appearance. It is part of our flesh, the habits of life that we have picked up from the world around us. And, James says, we do it even in the church, among ourselves **(4a):**

2. we make distinctions among ourselves when there are none I'd like you to turn with me to **Gal. 3:26-28**. As believers we all have the exact same status; we are all sons and daughters of God, genuine brothers and sisters in one family, the family of God. All of us who were united with Christ (he's not talking about water baptism) have put on

Christ; that is, we all have Christ living in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. We all have one and the same nature and are joined at the core of our being by the same Spirit and therefore:

a. there are no ethnic distinctions in our status in Christ Once we come to Jesus, we aren't Jews or Greeks or Romans or Europeans or Kyrgyz or Russians or Indians anymore; we're CHRIST-ians! Physically we're all of one race anyway, the human race; the difference in our color is simply due to the amount of melanin we have in our skin cells. The difference in our languages we've absorbed from whatever culture we were raised in. But spiritually, we're all one and the same in Jesus! Refugees in Greece from Syria or Afghanistan living on the street or in a cramped tenement, if they have come to Jesus are one and the same with us in Him. Persecuted Chinese believers who right now are having their churches destroyed and their leaders imprisoned by the hundreds are one with us! We're all God's children and equally loved. There are no ethnic distinctions before Him in the body of Christ. And, Paul says:

b. there are no social distinctions in our status in Christ The slave who believes is one in Jesus with those who are free, even with his owner if he believes. The poor Yenadi tribal believer who lives in a mud hut in 4th Mile village outside Nellore and catches rats in the fields for a living is one with the richest of us American believers who comes to visit him! Yet we tend to think of ourselves as superior because we have education or because we have a better standard of living. Even here we tend to look down on brothers or sisters because they're emotionally needy or because they struggle and need help all the time or because they struggle with temptations that we don't. But we're all God's children and equally loved; there are no social distinctions in the body of Christ. Then Paul says:

c. there are no gender distinctions in our status in Christ It is almost universal throughout the world that women are regarded as having less value than men. It is tragic that in Central Asia or in India when men come to Christ, they often have to be taught NOT to beat their wives! Sadly, when I preached about honoring your wives in India some years ago, one of the pastors actually got up and walked out of the meeting. In Jesus men and women are all the same spiritually before Him. And even though the Bible establishes male leadership in the church and in the home, Peter urges husbands, *...live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel [that is, physically], since they are heirs with you of the grace of life... - 1 Pet. 3:7*. In Jesus there is no difference between us! Men and women, we are all heirs of Christ, children of God, valuable to Him and equally used by Him to advance His Kingdom!

So, when we look down on or feel superior to another believer because they're a different color or speak a different language or are richer or poorer or are more or less educated than we are or because they're of the opposite gender, we're creating distinctions in the body of Christ that don't exist and what's worse, James says, **(4b)**:

3. we make ourselves judges who are not just, but have evil thoughts A judge is supposed to be absolutely fair and impartial. If you're on trial for something, you don't want a judge who already doesn't like you or who already believes you're guilty, do you? You want a judge with no preconceived notions about you. But when we treat others with partiality and favoritism, first of all we make ourselves judges of them (which we are not), and what's worse, we are judges who are not acting or thinking justly, who have evil thoughts toward the person they're evaluating without any valid reason! Here's the principle we all need to remember:

4. God looks at people's hearts, not appearances You remember the story of how God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's seven sons to be the next King of Israel. So, when he saw Eliab, Jesse's oldest son who was tall and strong and handsome, Samuel thought, "Surely, THIS is the one the Lord has chosen!" But God immediately chastised him saying, *...“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” - 1 Sam. 16:7*. We see the outside of a person and we judge people by their outward appearance, but the Lord looks at their hearts! He chose David, the youngest and least prepared by outward appearance, because of his heart! James points out that:

a. He has chosen to call many poor to be His heirs (5-6a) Around the world, who is it that responds to the Gospel? Is it the rich, the educated, the powerful? No, it is the poor, the simple, the ordinary, the powerless, who respond, by the millions! Paul exhorted the Corinthians, *Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. - 1 Cor. 1:26-28*. God delights in calling the poor and the simple to faith and using them to advance His Kingdom, because He gets all the glory for it! Besides, James points out, **(6b-7)**:

b. it is often the rich, educated and powerful who blaspheme Christ and persecute believers Around the world and even here, that's been true. The ones who stand against us, against our faith, are usually people with money and education and political power.

So why would we want to be predisposed against people with a “shabby” outward appearance and toward people with a “fine” appearance? God is much more likely to be at work in the heart of the “shabby” appearing person! And think of the damage that our prejudiced treatment of others can do. *In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu.” [Our Daily Bread, March 6, 1994].* That usher’s prejudice not only betrayed Jesus, it kept a precious eternal soul out of heaven, but what’s even worse, Gandhi went on to lead his nation to independence and become known as “The Father of India”; think how many millions would have been influenced toward Jesus if he had become a Christian! The damage we do to other people by our prejudices! That’s why James not only says that genuine believers do not discriminate between people, but conversely:

II. Genuine Believers Fulfill the King’s Law By Loving All Their Neighbors (8) The “royal law”, the law of our King, is Lev. 19:18, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* In **Mat. 22:36-40** Jesus told a religious leader that this command to love your neighbor was not only the second most important commandment, but that all of the rest of the commands in the Scriptures concerning the treatment of others were based on it or derived from it. But when He spoke about this with another leader, that guy asked, “Who is my neighbor?” and in answer to that, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in **Lk. 10:29-37**. His punchline was, *Go and do likewise!* That is, go and love anybody you find, even the people you are prejudiced against! Everybody is our neighbor, anyone we meet, and Jesus’ “law” for us His followers is, “Love them ALL!” James goes on to point out that:

1. the command to love is equally as binding as the 10 commandments (9-11) You see, everybody knows that famous Ten, the “Do Not’s”. Well, maybe that’s not really true anymore, but it’s easy to say that we don’t murder or commit adultery or steal or lie. But the same God who commanded us NOT to do those things also commanded us TO love our neighbor; it’s not any less binding or less important; in fact, it’s the very basis for not doing all those things! Therefore, James says:

a. when we discriminate, we commit a sin against God, not just against the person. In doing it, we cast God and His rule aside and do what we want, just as Adam and Eve did in the garden. We say, “Jesus, I don’t care that You died for my sins; I’m going to go ahead and do what I want instead of what You say and sin against you anyway!” So:

b. when we discriminate, we become law breakers before God We like to look at people who do what we consider serious things like murder and theft and say, “They’re law-breakers!” But when we break God’s law of love, WE’RE lawbreakers just as much! That’s why James tells us that:

2. we must speak and act as people subject to the law of love (12) The phrase *law of liberty* is another way to refer to the law of love he’s been talking about. If you live by the principle of *Love your neighbor*, it’s freeing. You just love your neighbor and know that God is pleased with it; you don’t have to worry about keeping all the 613 commandments of the law like the Pharisees did. We’re those who are going to be judged by whether we loved people or not. But wait, how can we as believers be judged? Well:

a. while the eternal penalty for all our sins has been paid, we are still accountable to God for our behavior as His children The eternal penalty for every sin we ever have committed or will commit was paid for by Jesus at the cross and is forgiven once, for all, and forever. There is NO condemnation for us in that regard. We have become God’s children and that is that; it can’t be undone. But our Heavenly Father still wants us to please Him and obey Him and, like any father, He’s upset when we don’t and what we’ve done becomes a barrier in our walking and talking together and, if we persist in it, He’ll have to do something to correct us because He loves us! So, if we fail to love our neighbor, at the very least our fellowship with our Father will be hindered and at worst, He may have to take some drastic actions to break us of that. Now James reminds us of the principle that we find a number of places in Scripture **(13a)**:

b. judgment without mercy is shown to those who show no mercy That’s true in human interaction. If you don’t show any pity and compassion for people in their situations, don’t expect anybody else to have pity and compassion for you in yours. Ebenezer Scrooge showed no mercy all his life; no wonder when he saw a vision of his future grave there were no mourners! Nobody cared because he didn’t care! But it’s also true in the spiritual realm. Jesus said, if you don’t forgive those who sin against you, how is God going to forgive you? He told a story about the man who had been forgiven a huge unpayable debt and then wouldn’t have mercy on someone who owed him a small amount and His point was how displeased God is when we who have been forgiven so much won’t turn around and show mercy on others. Don’t expect God to do all kinds of merciful and kind things for you if you’re not loving others in the same way. On the other hand look at **(13b)**. In other words:

c. mercy joyfully removes all fear of judgment If you're loving your neighbor, you're keeping the royal law and you're pleasing God; you don't have to be afraid that He may not be pleased with you. Instead of being afraid all the time that you've displeased God, you can live in joy, knowing you've kept the most important thing He wants you to do.

Loving your neighbor is a powerful lesson God needs to teach each one of us and sometimes He does it in incredible ways. *Back in 1984, Focus on the Family broadcast a powerful true story (that became both a book and movie) by Mike Adkins titled "A Man Called Norman". Norman was the town weirdo. No one in his small town would have anything to do with him. He was elderly and unkempt, hadn't taken a bath in years, wore smelly overalls and talked to himself. But God moved Mike and his family into a house across the street from Norman. At first Mike thought he was weird and avoided him just like everyone else in town, but one day the Holy Spirit spoke powerfully to Mike and told him to cross the street and help Norman with his broken-down lawnmower. Before he knew it, the Spirit of God had moved Mike to invite Norman into his home for a movie, to take Norman to a ballgame, to take him on their family vacation and ultimately even to fix Norman's dirty toilet which was the hardest thing for him. And Mike shares how, as he was lying on his back under that dirty toilet trying to get a stubborn seat bolt loose, a glob of rust and grime fell right on his face. That was the last straw for him and as he lay there complaining to God, the Spirit spoke to his heart right there on the floor and said, "When you do it unto the least of these, you do it unto me." He was undone. He saw his pride and repented and was changed. He'd been in ministry for 35 years and he says it was only after that night that it began to take off. Radio stations began to play his songs and speaking engagements came in all over the country and then record sales. But he says, "God didn't give me any of that until I learned what it means when He said 'Love your neighbor as yourself', through my friend Norman." Somewhere in the midst of this process, Norman asked Jesus into his heart and the two men became best friends until Norman went home to be with Jesus some 15 years later. You can still get the book on Amazon and the DVD from Mike Adkins' website or you can listen to the whole thing free on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/rigeTsJNd8o> [in 4 parts]. Just search for "A Man Called Norman" in quotes. I challenge you to take the time to find it and listen to it; I promise you won't be able to stop. But most of all, don't miss the lesson from it: God doesn't want us to discriminate against ANYbody; He wants us to love EVERYbody the way we love ourselves.*

James: Living Out Our Faith

Genuine Faith Is Confirmed Through Deeds - 2:14-26

Did you know that Christianity is the largest religion in the world? No other even comes close. Some 2.3 billion people claim to hold the Christian faith, about one third of the earth's population. Yet the strange thing is that within that number who would say they are Christians, are people whose lives seem to contradict that fact. For example, a good many members of the mafia world and mob bosses are strongly Catholic in their beliefs and it's not just a pretense. They are actually very sincere in believing the truths they have been taught and receiving the rites of the church. They believe there is a God, that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for our sins. Yet their lives are filled with extortion, drug deals and other crimes of various sorts, up to and including murder. To us there's a pretty obvious contradiction there somewhere. But is that so strange? All around us everywhere are people who would just as sincerely state that they believe those same things, yet they never mention Jesus, seldom go to church, never pray unless they're in a crisis, never read the Bible, have no hesitation about living with a partner or having babies without getting married, and generally do whatever they want to in life without giving any thought to God or what He might want them to do. But if you confronted them, they would say, "Sure, I am a Christian; I believe in Jesus!" and they would mean it. Now how do you view faith like that? That's the question James is addressing in the second half of chapter 2 of his letter. And he begins with this statement in **(14a)**. He asks a question that expects a negative answer; he's really declaring that:

I. Faith That Does Not Result In Deeds Is Of No Value And by *works*, he means deeds that line up with and are the result of what the person believes. If a person says he believes something, but doesn't act according to what he believes, then his belief doesn't benefit or help him. It's a useless concept that has no bearing on his life. If a person says, "I believe in God," but acts like God doesn't exist, his so-called faith is purely an academic concept that is useless in his life. If He says, "I believe in Jesus," but does none of the things Jesus told His followers to do, his "faith" is of a different sort from the kind of faith that the Bible talks about. It is useless in his life, James says at the end of the verse **(14b)**. The answer to his question is "No!"

1. such faith cannot save a person's soul Simply believing that Jesus existed, that He was a real person in history, that He was crucified and even that He rose again is not enough to save a person. Giving mental assent to the teachings of Christianity is not enough to take a person to heaven. It is not the kind of faith the Bible talks about, the kind we often call "saving faith". And not only that:

2. such faith does not help other people either. James gives this example in **(15-16)**. Now that's not so far from home, is it? An author in a devotional I read wrote, *The other day I was at a gas station when a man approached me asking for money. At first, I simply blew him off, as I cast judgment that he was probably not going to use the money for what he said he was going to use it for. As soon as he walked away, my stomach became knotted. God was working on me. Finally, I realized that regardless of what he used it for, it was not my place to judge and after all, it is just mon-*

ey. Once I gave him the money, he asked for my info so he could pay me back. I simply replied, "Pay it forward or put it in an offering plate...." Now, Jesus said that we are to love those who are poor or in need and care for them, especially those who are our brothers and sisters. We believe Him, don't we? Yet if we never reach into our pocket and do anything to actually help when we see them, our "faith" does them no good. It doesn't help them any more than it helps us. John wrote, *...if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? - 1 Jn. 3:17*. If a person has genuine faith, God's love is actually IN him in the person of the Holy Spirit and he CAN'T close his heart and refuse to help. James says in verse (17):

3. such faith is dead It's a mere sham that gives the appearance of faith, but it is not a living reality. Real faith, genuine faith, is life-giving; life flows out of it to nourish the life of that person and of others through the good, kind and righteous deeds it produces. Remember what Jesus wrote to the church at Sardis in **Rev. 3:1**? He said, *I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead*. "You talk like you believe in Me. Other people hear what you say, so you have a reputation that you have a living faith in Me. But I know what you DO! And you don't ACT like you have faith in Me! You are dead! That is, your faith is dead, because it doesn't produce the works that a real, genuine faith would. It's a false appearance, not a spiritual reality." And the second major point James goes on to make is that:

II. Faith Cannot Be Proven Genuine Apart From Deeds (18) Faith and works are not two disconnected things. Faith is an inner thing, an attitude of the mind and heart. It can't be seen with human eyes. How can you know a person has it? They can tell you they have it, but how can you really be sure they have it? How can you verify what they say? The only way is by observing what they DO, their works! Jesus said, *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. - Mt. 7:15-18*. The same is true, not only of false prophets, but of ordinary people who profess to have faith and say the right things. The only way you can tell if what they say is genuine is to see the fruits they bear in life, the things they DO. There is no other way to tell if their faith is real. James says:

1. faith requires more than believing that the LORD is God (19) There is something going on in this verse that you may not recognize; I didn't at first reading! Remember that James is writing to believers who are from Jewish background, so every day of their lives for years they said the *Shema*, the defining statement of Jewish faith from **Deut. 6:4**, *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*. LORD in all capital letters is the indicator for the proper name of God, Yahweh or Jehovah. It is to say, "Our God, Yahweh, is the true God, the only God; there is no other." James says believing that is not enough.

a. religious Jews confess faith in the One True God daily The Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees, the Elders, the most deeply devoted and religious among the Jewish people believed this very thing strongly and repeated it every day as a creed. Yet they are the very ones who persecuted believers! They drove these folks to whom James is writing out of Jerusalem and in all the places where they went, religious Jews are the ones who continued to make life hard for them! Just look at Paul's later journeys; everywhere he went it was people who believed that *The Lord is One* who beat him and stoned him and rioted against him! Their faith was real; it was deep! But, James comments:

b. even demons know and believe who God is Did you ever think about that? Demons have faith. They believe; they KNOW that Yahweh is the one and only true God. And it is a real faith, so real that James says **they tremble** in fear of Him! But that kind of believing is not enough! The true kind of faith that James is speaking of obviously requires more than that. In fact, the very next verse, **Deut. 6:5** goes on to say that:

c. faith requires loving Him completely, *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*. Believing WHO He is is necessary, but loving Him is what makes it real! And loving Him with our whole being always results in obeying Him. If you truly love Him, you obey Him and DO what He says. Look with me at what Jesus said in **Jn. 14:15, 23, 24**. In other words, true, genuine, saving faith in Jesus is the same as loving Him with all your heart. And if you love Him with all your heart, you will obey Him and DO what He says. Your deeds will prove the reality of your heart faith. If you don't do what He says, you don't love Him and you don't genuinely trust in Him, any more than the demons do.

What a strong statement! But now James goes on to give two examples of how:

2. biblical characters demonstrated their faith by their deeds (20) He says, "Let me show you from the Scriptures that faith that does not result in deeds is worthless. First let's look at our own ancestor, the very one from whom all of us with Jewish blood come, Abraham" (**21-24**). You remember that amazing story in Gen. 22 of how God told Abraham to go to the land of Moriah and offer up his son as a sacrifice, and amazingly:

a. Abraham obediently offered his son Isaac on the altar He had the knife in his hand and was about to take Isaac's life when God stopped him and substituted a ram instead. Now James points out that:

(1) he believed God's promise and was declared righteous way back in **Gen. 15:6**, some 25 or more years earlier. God took him outside and said, *"Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number*

them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. Abraham believed God would do what He said; he believed God would give him offspring as numerous as the stars, even though he and Sarah had no child for many years. God validated his faith as being real and genuine by counting him as being righteous right then. Well, 20 years or so later God gave them a child, Isaac and a few years after that:

(2) he demonstrated that faith by offering Isaac He didn’t argue with God and say, “But God, you said my descendants would come through Isaac. How can You keep your promise if I kill him!” The thought that God would not keep His word never entered his mind. Look with me at **Heb. 11:17-19**. He just figured that God would have to raise Isaac from the dead because He would never break His Word! So, James is saying that:

(3) his faith was ultimately fulfilled in his deeds, showing it was real He was “justified by works”, not in the sense that his works saved him, but in the sense that his trusting deed proved that his faith was real. The faith he had inside of him produced the fruit of obedience and trust in the most extreme situation. And to all future generations Abraham:

(4) he became known as “the friend of God” The Jews came to call him that. He is called that in **2 Chron. 20:7** by King Jehoshaphat, and in **Is. 41:8** God Himself refers to the offspring of ...*Abraham, my friend*, just as Jesus calls us His followers His friends. They were bonded in a real relationship. So, James’ point in verse 24 is that:

(5) like him, we are justified by the kind of faith that results in deeds, not by faith alone, that is, not by the kind of faith that is professed, but does not work itself out in a person’s life in the appropriate deeds that should accompany it.

Then James moves on to a second example, this time a woman **(25)**. You remember the story of how:

b. Rahab boldly protected the Israelite spies who came to Jericho to find its weaknesses. She took them up on her roof and hid them and lied to the soldiers who came looking for them and sent them off in the wrong direction. Then she let them down the wall out her own window on a rope. In doing so, she risked her own life. If she had been caught, she would have certainly been executed for treason immediately. Why would she take such a risk and do such a thing? Because:

(1) she, who had been not only a pagan idol worshipper, but also an immoral woman, a prostitute, **professed faith in Israel’s God**. She had heard how Israel’s God had dried up the Red Sea for them to cross and how they had defeated the two kings across the Jordan and she said to the spies, *And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.* - **Josh. 2:11**. She put her faith in the God of Israel instead of in her own gods of Jericho. But simply saying that was not all:

(2) she demonstrated that her faith was real by risking her own life to protect the spies She sided with Israel against her own people and did this bold thing because her faith was more than words, more than mental assent; it was genuine faith in God rooted in her heart and she is such an example that the writer of Hebrews lists her right along with Abraham and Moses and other biblical heroes, saying, *By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.* - **Heb. 11:31**. Her deed was just as valiant and just as much an act of faith as any of theirs and by it:

(3) she saved herself, her family, and became part of God’s people She and her family were the only survivors of the fall of Jericho because of her faith. But not only that, one of the spies named Salmon married her and she became the mother of Boaz, Ruth’s husband, and the great, great grandmother of King David!

She too was “justified by works”, again, not in the sense that her works saved her, but in the sense that her trusting deed proved that her faith was real. If she had not done what she did and protected the spies, her faith would only have been meaningless lip service.

Now James concludes with this final word:

III. Faith Apart From Works Is Dead Like A Corpse (26) To be more tasteful, I’ll use the same illustration with animals. You’ve all seen a road-killed squirrel. The body is lying there; it’s lifeless. It can’t move or eat or make noise because there’s no life force, no spirit in it. It’s just the empty shell with the appearance of what was a squirrel. That’s what faith is like when it has no resulting deeds. It’s lifeless, just an empty shell that looks like faith, but really isn’t faith at all. The two things, faith and the works it produces, must be united as one in order to be living and genuine, the same way that our body and our spirit are joined to make us a real, living human being.

So, what does all this mean? Look with me at **Mt. 7:21-23**. Not everyone who professes to have faith in Jesus will be saved; only those whose faith is genuine and results in them actually **DOING** the will of God, not their own will. If it doesn’t

result in that, Jesus will say, “I never knew you”. That is what James has been telling us. Let me make two applications. First of all:

1. there are a lot of people who think they are saved but they are really not There maybe someone here today thinking, “I prayed a prayer to receive Jesus when I was a kid. I believe Jesus died for my sins.” But you’re living for yourself, doing what you want to do. Your profession of faith is disconnected from the rest of your life and you’re living just like all the people around you. If that’s you, only God can judge your heart, but I can simply say you’re on shaky ground. Empty words and head knowledge beliefs won’t get anyone into heaven. When Jesus comes in, he transforms your life and you live for Him and His things! Then second:

2) there are a lot of people YOU may think are saved but they are really not Family members, loved ones, neighbors, close friends, even our own children. Because they say, “I believe in Jesus” or because you know of a time when they did say that or perhaps prayed a prayer years ago, does not mean we can assume their faith is genuine. If their lives do not bear the fruit of faith in the way they live every day, something’s wrong; their “faith” might not be real faith, life-altering heart faith that saves and we need to pray for them.

Saritha shares her testimony online: *I was born in Hyderabad, India. I grew up going to church all my life. I learned all the Bible stories at Sunday school and VBS. As a teenager, I participated in youth camps and youth retreats. I always believed the Gospel as a general thing that Jesus died for my sins. I made a profession of salvation and was baptized. No matter how I appeared outwardly, there was neither change nor fruit in my life. I could never read my Bible, learn from it nor apply it to my life. Realistically, I was not growing at all, but was backsliding. I was living a dual life – one at church and one at home. I was a temperamental person, spent much time on fashion and make up, and enjoyed watching and listening to worldly movies and music. I had no burden for lost souls and was living a meaningless life. In May 2009, I moved from India to the USA and got married to David. I had everything in life I ever wanted, and I should have been happy and thankful, yet I was frustrated and was angry at all the problems. Meanwhile, I was attending [a new church], which was a huge blessing to me. God was opening my eyes to the truth, and everything started to make sense. Through the Bible studies, I was able to understand the difference between Christianity as a religion and salvation of the Bible. God’s objective was not merely to bring people to a mental belief of the Gospel, but prior to our belief there should be REPENTANCE. A genuine repentance in a person results in a change of life and brings about the right motives in how he/she lives for Christ. [At last] I figured out that I never turned away from my old, sinful ways. I realized that my own life had never really changed after my earlier profession of salvation. I had always lived selfishly for myself and not for God. Instead of being saved, I was actually a condemned, unrepentant sinner. Finally in December 2012, I gave up my hypocrisy and cried out to the Lord, truly repented of my sins, and surrendered my life to the Lord. I chose to turn away from my sins and my own way and trusted in Jesus to save me and forgive me – and He did! Since that time, my life has not been the same. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” I am totally different from what I used to be. Today, I can say that Jesus is the Lord of my life, and I have a personal relationship with Him every day. He speaks to me through His Word – the Bible. He is changing me and has given me a new purpose in life and victory over my old sins. I avoid carnal and worldly living, and my sincere desire is to serve and obey Him. www.lvbaptist.org/smanohar Her life spells out what James is saying to us. Faith that does not result in a changed life is not true faith.*

James: Living Out Our Faith

Genuine Faith Controls The Tongue - 3:1-12

James’ letter is about living out our faith and the one area where I guarantee that ALL of us have the most trouble doing that is with our mouths, in the way that we talk and the things that we say. I read somewhere that *the average person spends one-fifth of his or her life talking! If all of our words were put into print, a single day’s words would fill a 50-page book, while in a year’s time the average person’s words would fill 132 books of 200 pages each! [Today in the Word, June 15, 1992.]* We talk ALOT! And wise old Solomon reminds us, *When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise. - Prov. 10:31.* It’s tough to do and that’s why James begins the first two verses of chapter 3 by talking about:

I. The Solemn Responsibility Of Teachers (1) We don’t often think about it, but:

1. teachers wield powerful influence through the use of their tongue They not only talk more than the average person does because, well, that’s their job, but their very words shape, mold and change people’s minds and therefore their lives. We have all observed how easily the words of a well-spoken school teacher or college professor can lead young minds away from faith in Christ and the Bible or can lead them toward it. James, of course, has the church in mind and is pointing out the influence that those who teach the body have. It was the teaching of a pastor that brought me to Jesus. But I’ve also heard pastors say things that I cringe at from their pulpit, things that should never have been said. Being in front of people to teach provides a great opportunity to influence them, but, on the other hand, it provides a huge opportunity to mislead them or offend them by letting your flesh take over your mouth. So, James warns us that teachers:

a. they have a greater accountability to God because of this God holds us accountable for what we say! And those who say the most and have the biggest opportunity to influence people by what they say, are held to the

highest standard. Their Heavenly Father expects more of them because of the trust they've been giving in teaching others! God sees what you say when you preach or teach a class as extremely important. I've told you before that my goal is that on my tombstone, they can legitimately put John 10:41, *John did no miracle but everything John said about this man was true!* I spend a lot of time researching carefully what Scriptures really mean before teaching them and I even do as much as I can to check and verify illustrations I use, because God expects what I say to be absolutely truthful. But He also expects it to be kind and loving and to represent the character of Jesus well. That's why James warns that:

b. no one should seek to become a teacher for the prestige of the position Evidently this was a problem in the churches. Everybody wanted to be a teacher, whether he or she had the gifts and maturity for it or not. Some people want to be noticed; they want to be up front. They want to be the one to instruct others because of the respect they get or the power they feel, because THEY get something out of it that makes them feel good about themselves somehow. James says, "No, no; that's the wrong motive! Think about how responsible a teacher must be and how accountable you are to God. Don't do it unless HE convinces you that you should!" Why? Because:

2. no one (not even teachers!) can control their tongue completely (2) We get it. We all know that:

a. we all sin in many different ways but James says that to keep from sinning with our tongue is the most difficult of all. He says:

b. if we could control our tongue, we could keep from every other sin It's a lot easier to keep from lust and greed and envy and jealousy and hatred and anger than it is to keep from saying wrong words! If we could do that, we could potentially be perfect, but of course, we can't.

Then in verses (3-6) James goes on to impress upon us:

II. The Incredible Power Of The Tongue Even though it is such a small part of our body:

1. small things often have great power and he goes on to give three illustrations from everyday life. You may have noticed that in verse 2 he intentionally used the phrase *bridle the whole body*; that's because his first illustration is that:

a. a small bit controls the body of a huge horse (3) Do we have any horse lovers or horseback riders in here? You know some horses are really big; their back can be as tall as my shoulder and draft horses get even bigger. But you take a bridle that has a metal bit on the front and you slip that little bit into the horse's mouth and you can put a little kid up there on the horse's back and that kid can make that huge horse go anywhere he wants by using the reins to pull on that little bit in the horse's mouth. Or if you're into the ocean, think about this:

b. a small rudder controls the path of a giant ship (4) Think about a huge sailing ship of that day or even a giant ocean liner today. A vessel bigger than this building can be turned left or right or in a circle by a small vertical piece of wood or metal underneath its rear called a rudder. Use the wheel to turn it just a little and the whole giant craft turns where you want, even if the wind or waves are trying to push in the opposite direction! Or if you love the mountains, think about this:

c. a small fire (actually a tiny spark!) can set a whole forest ablaze (5b) Look at the humongous wildfires this year already. As of July, more than two million acres have burned in 108 large fires across the western states and Alaska! And each one begins with one lightning strike, one little campfire, even one spark sometimes, and soon thousands upon thousands of acres are uncontrollably on fire. Something very little can have great power and a huge impact in the world and likewise, James says in (5a) that:

2. the tongue is a small member of the body but...

a. it makes great claims that influence many people Just think about how Adolph Hitler was able to use his tongue to transform his nation through Naziism and drag the whole world into war. It was largely his ability as a powerful orator, his speeches, that caused all that. Jim Jones was a religious leader, a cult leader, who convinced almost 1,000 of his followers to move with him to Guyana and ultimately to commit suicide in 1978. How? By his tongue, his convincing speeches. Yet consider Billy Graham, who used His tongue to lead literally millions of people to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation all over the world! **Prov. 18:21** is true when it says, *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits*. What people say with their mouths can have tremendously powerful impact and when it is negative:

b. its damage spreads widely like a fire (6) Just like those spreading wildfires, when we use our mouth to speak evil things:

(1) it creates all kinds of damage everywhere around us, literally a *kosmos of injustice*, a whole world of bad things of every sort. Rehoboam, when he became the new King of Israel after Solomon's death, gave his people a tough, proud speech, *My little finger is thicker than my father's loins!*, meaning "I'm going to be tougher than my father was and you'd better do what I say!" His words lost him most of his kingdom; 10 of the tribes left and formed their own separate nation and it remained that way for 400 years! Oh, how we can drive people away by the way we talk! In 1 Kings 13 one prophet lied to another and got him to disobey God and those lying words

cost the second man his life! Ananias and Sapphira lied to God about the price of their land and were struck dead! Oh, the damage we can create in other people's lives and in our own when we lie! And when we use our mouth to speak evil things, James says:

(2) it damages the entire course of our life The entire course of our life can be powerfully damaged by simple words. I counseled with a lady some years ago who, when she was five or so, dawdled in the house and didn't get into the car fast enough when her daddy told her to. So, as she was finally climbing in, he yelled "Get in the blankety blank car!", using God's name as a curse word toward her. She told me that all of her life she had felt condemned by God, unworthy to come into his presence, unable to be close to Him. She was about 45 years old! Her husband was in the ministry! She had done everything she knew to try to fix this feeling until that day God led her back to that childhood memory and during a time of prayer showed her how much He loves her and she was released! Do you have any idea how much damage evil words do to children? How many women today are struggling with their weight, are even anorexic or bulimic, because when they were young their peers or someone significant told them they were fat? Others have struggled because they were called stupid by insensitive parents or peers. If we use our tongue wrongly, we can impact the entire course of a person's whole life! You see, the tongue:

(3) it is a powerful tool energized by Satan Just as *heaven* is sometimes used in the Bible as a synonym for God, here *hell* is a synonym for Satan himself. Satan starts that fire! His demons plant wrong thoughts in our mind which, before we know it, pop out of our mouths as wrong words and sometimes create irreparable damage! How many things have you blurted out in anger or frustration that you didn't really mean and hurt people deeply! Words are a powerful tool that Satan uses to drag us into sin all the time.

And that leads James to talk about:

III. The Awful Problem We Have With Our Tongue in verses 7-12. He says, "You can tame and control almost any kind of wild creature..." You know that; you've seen tame grizzly bears attacking people on TV and know that they're not really hurting them, but just acting out what their trainer tells them. You've seen tame lions and tigers and leopards who would normally kill a person immediately. We can tame almost anything, James says, but:

1. we are unable to control our speech apart from Divine help (7-8) Nobody can do it, no matter how hard they try! It's an unrestrainable source of evil that just keeps cropping up over and over again. Our tongue is like a cobra; it's got all this deadly poison in it and is always swaying back and forth ready to strike! And yet James tells us that:

2. we must stop being inconsistent in our speech (9-12) He says:

a. it is hypocritical to bless God and then speak evil to people We thank the Lord and praise Him in flowery language and then turn around and say to our neighbor "Why don't you shut up!" a minute later. We tell somebody they need to believe in Jesus one minute and then turn around and gossip about a mutual friend the next. These things shouldn't be if our faith is genuine, if we really love Jesus! Look back with me at what James already said in **1:26**. If you can't bridle your tongue, if you can't control your speech, all your religious acts are worthless before God! You're fooling yourself! You're being a hypocrite.

b. godly speech should flow consistently from our godly nature Like a spring, our mouth should only bring forth drinkable water, not good water one day and undrinkable salt water the next. Like a fruit tree, it ought to bear the kind of fruit that its nature is made to bear. A fig tree can only produce figs, not olives, because it's a fig tree; that's its nature. An olive tree can only produce olives, because it's an olive tree; that's its nature. And we ought to produce only the fruit of the nature that's inside of us. Jesus said in **Lk. 6:45**, *The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks*. That's how it should work! If we've been made new on the inside and our heart has been made clean and pure by the Holy Spirit, then our mouth should speak out of the abundance of that in pure and true words!

Yet, so often it doesn't. So often it speaks out of our flesh, the sinful set of habitual ways that we have learned to think and speak, instead of out of our heart, our nature. If no man can control his speech perfectly, how on earth are we ever going to do it! The answer is clear:

3. we must ask the Holy Spirit to control our speech Turn with me to **Gal. 5:16**. Say it with me, *...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh*. Walking implies a continuing action, a new habit to build into your life. Let the power of the Spirit control you and you won't do what your flesh wants you to do! And the *not* in that verse is a double negative. You won't ever, never, no way, say what your flesh wants you to say! If the Spirit has your tongue, you'll speak right. Now what does that look like? It's pretty simple really. When I get out of bed in the morning, I put my hand in His and say, "Holy Spirit, take control of me today." When I get to the breakfast table and the baby dumps the bowl of cereal all over the floor, I say, "Spirit, control my mouth". When I'm driving down the freeway and some guy cuts in front of me and nearly runs me off the road, I say, "Spirit, control my tongue". Then at work when I have a difficult decision to make or I have to talk to somebody about a difficult matter or I'm having trouble getting along with

somebody, I say, "Spirit, control my tongue; give me the words." And I do the same thing moment by moment through the day until I close my eyes at night. And I get up tomorrow and do it all over again, and the next day and the next. That is walking in the Spirit and if you do that, the Holy Spirit will be in control of your mouth and your flesh won't get its way with your mouth! You'll be like Job, of whom it was said after ALL his great losses, ...*In all this Job did not sin with his lips.* But the minute you fail to ask for His control, your flesh will take over, wrong words will fly out and you'll have to confess your wrong speaking later.

Corrie ten Boom is well known for surviving the notorious Ravensbruck Concentration Camp; her story is told through the book and the movie, "The Hiding Place". After the war Corrie traveled the world speaking and one of her favorite illustrations was to use a glove that would lie limply on the podium until she was ready. In her book "Messages Of God's Abundance" she shares it. She would pick the glove up and say, 'I have a glove here. It can't do anything but if I put my hand in it, it can do a lot, writing, sewing and much more. Now I know, of course, that it isn't the glove; it's my hand in the glove. You and I are like gloves and the Holy Spirit is like the hand - it can do a great deal. If I ball my fist in the middle, the glove flops limply. Each finger has to be filled. Thus, the Bible says with practicality, 'Be filled with the Spirit'. Then Corrie goes on to pray, 'Thank You, Lord, that the fullness of the Spirit is for every child of God. Please show me if there is a small part of my life, or perhaps even a big part, that is not open to Your Spirit. Thank You that Your Holy Spirit is willing to fill my life to the fullest, just like sunlight fills a room that is open to its light. Listen, Lord, to anyone who says: 'I am throwing the curtains wide open! Fill every corner and make me like a glove that is able to do anything through Your strong hand that fills every finger. Thank You so much. In Jesus' name, Amen.' [Messages of God's Abundance - Corrie Ten Boom - p.59-60] One of those fingers that desperately needs to be filled is our tongue, our mouth. Let's resolve to ask Him to fill it, every day.

James: Living Out Our Faith

Genuine Faith Does Not Slander Or Boast - 4:11-17

As James continues to challenge us to live out our faith, in chapter 4 he is addressing secular ways of thinking and acting that creep into our lives as believers. In particular he's pointing out that pride seems to somehow infest our minds and control our actions and our words. *I'm sure you heard the one about the frog who was envious of the ducks in his pond who flew south for the winter and wanted to go with them. So he convinced two of the ducks to fly side by side, each holding on to one end of a stick and he would hold onto the stick in the middle between them with his mouth. The plan was working splendidly until they flew over a group of people and one of them said, "Wow, look at that! Two ducks carrying a frog south with them! I wonder who thought of that!" And immediately the frog shouted, "I did!"* We're like that frog. That pride of life thing is in our flesh. We think that WE are always right, that WE are better, that WE are in charge of our lives, and James warns us strongly to stop thinking like that. In verses 11-17 he returns to the subject he addressed briefly in chapter 1 and at length in chapter 3, the way that we use our mouths. First of all, he says that:

I. We Must Stop Arrogantly Speaking Against Our Brothers (11-12) The NIV translates the Greek verb as *slander* but it literally means *to speak against* which is an even deeper concept. Let's think about:

1. what it means to speak against someone Of course:

a. it can mean making false accusations that damage a person's reputation That's the definition of slander, falsely accusing someone to defame them. "Joe is so rude. He drove right by me and refused to wave or even look at me." Now the truth is that Joe never saw you, but you want other people to think badly about him because you do. That's a silly illustration, but we can get much more serious than that. When we get upset, we want people to think well of us and be on our side, so we can accuse a brother or sister of lying, of not caring, of being greedy or a host of other things, just to damage what other people think of them and get them to pity us or agree with us. Or *speaking against* someone:

b. it can simply mean speaking about them in a harsh, critical fashion to others "That Susan, she is so dumb. She flunked that quiz we took, but it was so simple! What a moron!" We criticize people to others for all kinds of things in all kinds of ways. We criticize their intelligence, their behavior, their clothing, their hair style, the way they talk, the way they take care of their kids; you name it, we criticize it. It comes so natural to us. And the reason again is that it makes us better than them; it elevates us above them in the eyes of the person we're talking to. But *speaking against* someone:

c. it often means condemning them for not following our own standards We're notorious for this in the church! "Those Presbyterians, they drink like fish!" "Look that pastor who wears a collar and a black suit; he even wears a robe when he preaches. He must be liberal!" We condemn each other over a thousand things that are really just things we don't like, not things that are biblically wrong, things like doctrinal positions on the end times or the music we like or worship with, or working or not working on Sunday, or whether we wear pants or a dress or a suit and tie or shorts, or over what we eat or don't eat. The list is endless. We feel like we're right and we think everybody should be like us, so we criticize them if they're not. In essence, we appoint ourselves the judge and judge them. Now I want to be extremely clear about one thing. This:

d. it does NOT mean we can never rebuke someone for sin People who are involved in things the Bible specifically calls sin often want to say, "You're judging me; you think you're better than me!" Maybe the person has revealed that they're homosexual or they're involved in an adulterous affair or sleeping with their boyfriend or girlfriend. And when you try to tell them the Bible says what they're doing is wrong, they instantly say, "You can't judge me!" You're not judging them; you're telling them the truth and trying to warn them that they are sinning against God. Paul told Timothy, *As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.* - **1 Tim. 5:20**. We are supposed to rebuke and correct one another in love. But that is not what James is forbidding here. He is forbidding unjust, unloving, harsh, critical speaking about people for our own benefit. But he goes on to tell us:

2. why we must not speak against our brothers and his logic goes like this. First of all, earlier in his letter James told us that:

a. God has given us a law of love that is a law of liberty Look back with me to **1:25**. Now what is that perfect law, the law that gives liberty? Look at **2:8**. It's the law that we are to love our neighbor and it was specially given to us by Jesus as a new commandment, *Love one another!* Our law is not dozens of prohibitions that bind us, but one command that frees us. If we simply and genuinely love one another, we will have kept the law and done everything God intended for us to do toward each other. Therefore, says verse **12**, we're to speak and to act according to this royal law. But where we get into trouble is when we insist on trying to enforce standards on others that are based on our opinions and preferences. Look with me at **Rom. 14:1-3**. How many vegetarians do we have in here? It's OK, you can safely admit it. How many omnivores; you eat ANYthing? That's me! Now my flesh would dearly like to make fun of people who don't eat like me for whatever reason, but the Bible says I can't! And you who stoke up on broccoli can't judge me for eating a juicy cheeseburger! These things are opinions and preferences and if we genuinely love one another, we won't pass judgment on each other for what we eat. We have liberty to choose! Then look at **5-6**. Our Seventh Day Adventist brethren say that we worship on the wrong day, that we should keep the Sabbath by worshipping on Saturday. We say that changed after Jesus' resurrection and the church has always worshipped on the first day of the week, on Sunday, and they're wrong. Jesus says, "Worship on whatever day you sincerely feel in your own mind is right, but don't judge each other for it!" Either group is sincerely worshipping and choosing their day to please the Lord! Whether we're talking about foods or days, we have been given liberty in all these kinds of things; the only thing we're obligated to do is to love each other by not speaking critically of each other. So, when we do speak against brothers or sisters:

b. our speaking against them is speaking against and judging God's law When we accuse them falsely or speak about them critically and harshly or condemn them for doing things that are against our personal preferences, we are saying that God's law is not good, that we don't HAVE to love them. We're like judges that we hear about in our American legal system today who believe that their job is to interpret law to determine what is really best instead of enforcing the law as it exists. And we weren't even elected or appointed to that position! James says:

c. God is the only One with the right to establish law and judge people Only HE gets to make the rules. He is the one with the power and the right to save people or to destroy people. People belong to Him and He's the only one who can truly judge them. Therefore:

d. we have NO right to judge our fellow believers, no matter how justified we may feel we are. Literally, the Greek expression is more like the NIV, *But you--who are YOU to judge...* I love **Rom. 14:4** (if you're still there), *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.* We have no right to judge one of God's servants; that's His job, not ours. It's our pride that makes us think we have that right.

Well now in verses **(13-16)** James moves ahead to a second exhortation:

II. We Must Stop Arrogantly Planning Our Own Future (13) Now James seems to have in mind believers who are businessmen. Many of Jewish background were merchants and tradesmen who were involved in extensive commerce, like Priscilla and Aquila in their tentmaking trade with Paul. And some of us today travel all over the place representing our company or making deals, building the business we're part of. But the principle found here applies to all of us:

1. it is arrogant to boldly declare what we will do or what will happen You've heard people talk like this. "Yeah, when I finish school, I'm going to move to Redmond WA and get a job with Microsoft at headquarters. I figure I'll be in management within five years and then I ought to be able to afford a nice house, settle down, get married and have two kids." You laugh, but we do talk like that all the time. We declare what we're going to do tomorrow or next month or next year, without giving any thought to the Lord in all of that. We plan on what we think is going to happen, when the truth of the matter is that:

a. we have no certainty about our future, even one day in advance (14) Our neighbor was in his 50's and in very good health. He was a teacher here in town and loved to work in his yard. One summer day a few years ago

he was trimming the lawn with a weedwhacker, had a heart attack and fell over dead in the bushes. We all have stories like that to tell or stories of people who said goodbye, went out the door like normal, and were involved in an accident and killed instantly. The truth is literally that you do not know what will happen tomorrow. And if you know what you think will happen or what you want to happen, you have absolutely no control over it to make it happen! James says:

b. our lives are temporary like a morning mist that vanishes quickly I love being in a little fishing boat on a calm pond early on a summer morning when the water is warmer than the air and seeing the mist that rises off the water in the glow of the first sunlight of the day. But sadly, in an hour it's gone. The vapor literally disappears into thin air and James says that's how life on this earth is, vaporous and inconstant, here and then suddenly gone. Solomon said in Ecc. 6:12 that, *Our lives are like a shadow. Shadows grow and shrink and change shapes and vanish.* And David said in Ps. 90:10 in the NLT, *Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to eighty. But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble; soon they disappear, and we fly away.* Ernestine Ulmer said, *Life is uncertain. Eat dessert first!* Seriously, our earthly lives are filled with uncertainty that we can't control. That's why James says:

2. we must always factor the Lord's will into our plans (15-16) Now please understand:

a. this means more than adding the phrase "Lord willing" to what you say That's what we tend to do, to make our plans and then tack a "Lord willing, of course" onto the end, as though we recognize that God might possibly have other ideas, though we hope not. Do you know that's what Muslims all over the world do? The Quran says, *And do not say of anything: Surely I will do it tomorrow, unless Allah pleases... [Surah 18:23-24].* Gee, I wonder where Mohammed got that? At any rate, because of that verse, Muslims all over the world (and even Arabic Christians) say *Inshallah, God willing*, whenever they speak of future events. But they do it mechanically, as a command to speak a set of words. James is not interested in your phraseology. To him:

b. it means genuinely trusting the Lord to guide and direct us What he's got in mind is more like **Prov. 3:5-6**, if you'll turn there with me. Don't trust in you to plan your future! Trust in God. Pray about it. Ask Him what He wants you to do instead of expecting Him to bless whatever you want to do. Acknowledge Him and His right to control your life constantly and trust Him to guide you in the right paths for the life that He intends for you. The better attitude toward the future would be to say, "I think the Lord is showing me that I should do this or that. I've been praying about it; will you join me?" James says in verse 16:

3. boasting about the future is both arrogant and evil It is arrogant, prideful, thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think. And it is evil; it is thinking less of God and His importance than you ought to think. It is, in essence, taking glory to yourself that belongs to Him and worshipping yourself in this arena of life rather than Him. Now James concludes with this warning in verse (17). Let me rephrase that this way:

III. Knowing What God Wants Us To Do Obligates Us To Do It If your child doesn't know they're supposed to do something, do you hold them responsible? Do you punish them for not doing it? Of course not! If they were prevented from doing it by some circumstance, do you blame them? No. But if they KNEW they were to take out the trash on Sunday night and chose not to do it or if they KNEW their curfew was 10:00, but they didn't come home until midnight, then what? Knowing brings the obligation to act on what you know. Knowing what God wants you to do obligates you to do it! Of course, the immediate thing James has in mind is that:

1. this applies to speaking against our brothers and planning our future James says, "Now that you KNOW you shouldn't talk in these ways, you're responsible to God. You KNOW better than to do these things. You've been warned. So if you do DO them, if you do speak against a brother or sister or boast about the future in a way that is irreverent toward God, you are accountable!" And obviously:

2. this principle applies to every area of our lives, not just the way we talk about others or about the future. It applies in every situation, in every temptation that we face. If we KNOW what God wants us to do, we are obligated to do it and are held accountable to do it. Whether the issue is sexual morality or helping others or praying or giving or anything, if you know what God wants you to do, you're obligated to do it! And if you don't, you're accountable to Him! And what James is pointing out is this:

3. to refuse to do what God tells us is deliberate sin against Him Joseph realized this when Potiphar's wife was begging him to sleep with her. He said, *...How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.* - Gen. 39:9. David realized this after his great sin in taking Bathsheba and having Uriah murdered. He said, *Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.* - Ps. 51:4. And I would hope that most of US would realize it when we're talking about such huge issues as adultery and murder. But do we realize it in what we regard as smaller issues such as the way we use our mouth? Do you realize that when you say things that are evil and prideful that you are sinning against God, that you are doing something that very moment that Jesus had to die on the cross to pay for, that you're acting as if it

doesn't matter to you that Jesus died for your sins?! You are gravely disappointing your Heavenly Father who loves you so much!

Years ago, when speaking at an Urbana conference, Elisabeth Elliot told a story about her brother, Thomas Howard, when they were children. Their mother let Thomas play with paper bags that she'd saved, as long as he would put them away afterwards. But one day their mother walked into the kitchen to find the bags lying everywhere all over the floor. And Tom was in the other room at the piano with his father singing hymns. When she confronted him about not putting the bags away, he protested, "But Mom, I want to sing!" Immediately his father replied, "Son, it's no good singing God's praise if you're disobedient." [Elisabeth Elliot]. You see, we don't realize how offensive our behavior or our speech is to God. We think it's a little thing and we want to do what we want to do. But to God it is an important thing because it demonstrates how we regard the relationship we have with Him. Our praises mean nothing without our obedience. May the Spirit of God help us to comprehend this and to recognize when we're displeasing and disappointing our Heavenly Father, especially when we're doing it with our mouth.

James: Living Out Our Faith

Genuine Faith Looks For The Lord's Coming - 5:1-12

Of all the things we believe, there is one truth that is becoming more and more neglected in our day and it is this: **Jesus is coming again!** When He said, *...if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself...* He wasn't referring primarily to us dying and going to heaven, but to Him coming again for His church. He talked about His coming repeatedly throughout His teaching and at His ascension the two angels said, *"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."* The New Testament is filled with references to His coming and the Book of Revelation describes it for us visually. Yet to our modern scientific western world two millennia later, this seems merely like some ancient myth. Even we believers in the church confess it as a doctrine, but seldom have the thought of it in our minds. So, before we get to James, read with me 2 Pet. 3:3-11 NLT, *Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created." They deliberately forget that God made the heavens by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed. But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment. Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live!* Friends, this is important! This is true! Jesus is coming again! His Word, His Promise, stands unbreakable, no matter what scoffers may say or how much time has passed! And the truth of it ought to affect our lives! That's what James is saying in chapter 5 to his readers and to us. First, He gives:

I. A Strong Warning To Evil Rich People About The Lord's Coming in verses (1-6). Now who is he talking to? Suddenly he doesn't seem to be addressing believers anymore, but rather, he's calling us to realize the awful fate that will befall nonbelievers, and particularly the rich and powerful ones, when Jesus comes. Of course, not all rich people are evil; some are wonderfully kind and benevolent, but Jesus said it is still pretty hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God because of the strong pull of the love of money. However, much of the world, both then and now, is controlled by people who gain a lot of power and make a lot of money in very evil ways. And for them James declares that:

1. His coming will bring horrendous miseries! Miseries so horrible that, if they really knew and believed the fate that awaits them, would make them weep and wail uncontrollably! Look at:

2. the types of sins for which they will be punished (2-3) James says:

a. they are hoarding wealth in the last days They are storing up so many possessions that the closets of fine clothes they have socked away are becoming moth eaten and the barns full of grain they have stored are rotting. Even their vaults full of unused silver and gold are tarnishing and corroding, while all around them are poor, struggling needy people whom they could be helping! Since I'm just back from India and it's so obvious there, let me share some examples from that culture. I can't verify it, but I was recently told that the majority of the wealth in that vast country is in the hands of the members of one extended family! In our nice hotel we saw the upper crust of society coming and going in nice cars, having expensive banquets for birthdays, ordering room service, and yet you can look across the street and see poor dirty little shops and streams of people going by for whom a dollar is a large expenditure. In the villages some people are still living in thatch-roofed mud huts with dirt floors or little concrete one room box houses with one bare light bulb, cooking over an open fire outside. The contrast is extreme and James declares that the rich will lose everything they have, including themselves, in eternal fire when Jesus comes!

To those who did not have mercy on the poor, at his coming in Mt. 25:41 Jesus says, ... *'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.* Then James says (4):

b. they are withholding wages from poor laborers who don't eat that day if they don't get paid! In India wealthy landowners will loan the illiterate day laborers who work their fields a few rupees they need for a wedding or a funeral - at 100% interest. They put a thumb mark on a paper accepting the debt, which, of course, they don't make enough to pay, and that debt forces them to keep working for that owner and is passed on to the next generation, when a few dollars would free them! Taking advantage of powerless poor people is endemic in this world, but James says that those who do so will face the Lord of Hosts, that is, the Lord of Heaven's armies! You can see Jesus at His coming in **Rev. 19:11-15** as He comes riding a white horse with all the armies of heaven following Him to make war against and destroy all the powerful of the earth! That's what's coming! Next, James says (5):

c. they are living in luxury and self-indulgence but in reality, they **are fattening themselves to be slaughtered!** Like the thanksgiving turkey or the fatted calf, they're being fed only to be killed in the end. **Rev. 19:21** says Jesus will destroy them with the word of His mouth when He comes. There will be a great reaping, a great sacrifice, a great slaughter, at His coming of all those who have refused His rule! And finally, James says (6):

d. they condemn and murder the righteous who do not resist That is, they are the very ones who persecute believers and do unthinkable things to those who don't even put up a fight! CBN reports: *According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India, a total of 77 incidents were documented against Christians between January and February 2019. Referring to two murder cases in two different Indian states in February, EFI General Secretary Rev. Vijayesh Lal said, "We have reasons to believe that both men, who were in their 40s, were killed because of their faith. We have recorded cases where Christians have been facing social boycott and have been excommunicated from their villages, and in a few instances have had to flee to save their lives," Lal said.* [<https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/cwn/2019/march/pastors-knocked-out-christians-killed-as-persecution-spikes-dramatically-in-india>] Around the globe it's the rich and powerful who persecute the church, but James says when Jesus comes they will face the vengeance of God! In **Rev. 6:10** those who were martyred ask, ... *"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"* It will be done when Jesus comes!

Oh, what a strong warning for those who don't believe; it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God! (*Heb. 10:31*) But now James turns around and gives:

II. A Strong Encouragement To Believers About The Lord's Coming in verses (7-11) He means that:

1. we must patiently endure suffering until He comes That word *patient* means more than simple patience to wait for something; in Greek it is *makrothumeo* which means longsuffering, to put up with suffering and mistreatment for a long time! And around the world it is us believers who have to endure the mistreatment of the rich and powerful, who end up being poor, who end up being cheated, who end up being persecuted. Many times, we want to ask David's question, *O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?* - *Ps. 94:3.* "How long before you come and set this world straight?" And His answer to us is, "Be patient a little while longer! Keep on enduring until I come!" Now, how can we endure the sufferings of this world until Jesus comes? James mentions three things. First:

a. our hearts must be firmly devoted to Him (8a) That word *establish* means to firmly set something in place, to fix it solidly so that it cannot be moved. The neighbors behind my house put in a wooden fence for their dog some years ago. The installer dug the holes, put the posts in and packed them with dirt. Today you can see the fence leaning here and there as something presses against it. When we put the chain link fence around my yard 30 plus years ago, we dug the holes, put the posts in and dumped a bag of wet cement in the hole. Let me tell you, they don't move! They're firmly fixed and that's how our hearts must be, firmly fixed on Him, firmly devoted to Him. You'll never endure the suffering of this world without collapsing under the pressure unless your mind is made up and your heart is so steadfast that you're in love with Jesus and going to follow Him, no matter what. Second, James says:

b. we must be constantly aware that His coming is drawing near (8b) *At hand* literally means drawing near, approaching. But, you say, it's already been 2000 years; how can every generation that reads this still say it's true that His coming is drawing near? Look with me at **Rom. 13:11-12.** His coming is nearer now than it was when we believed; it is nearer now than it was yesterday! We don't know the day or the hour, all we know is that it's coming and we have less time than we did, so it's time to wake up and get busy. The long night of this age is far gone and the farther it goes, the nearer we must be to the coming of the light! Jesus wants us to live with an awareness that He's coming, that time is short, that there is an urgency to our lives, that there is so little time to do so much in our Master's service. The suffering of this world is a light and momentary trouble that will soon be over because Jesus is coming. Third, James says:

c. we must not grumble against each other and become divided (9) Satan's most effective strategy is to get us fighting and arguing with each other so that we become divided. We're like a roomful of school children when the

teacher is out of the room. If she stays gone long enough, the kids stop doing their assigned work and end up talking or picking at one another and soon the room is chaos. But, friends, the Teacher is about to come in the door! If the kids know that, if they hear her footsteps in the hall, everybody flops into their seat and gets quiet and does what they're supposed to do. Nobody wants to get disciplined. Jesus is approaching the door! When He steps into the room, we don't want Him to find us in a chaos of division occupied with our own differences; we want Him to find us doing what He assigned us to do! So, we must work hard to maintain unity, to stand and serve together if we're to endure until the end. And, fortunately:

2. we have examples to encourage us to be longsuffering. James gives three of them. The first one is pretty ordinary (7b):

a. a farmer waits patiently for the rains to produce the precious crop In Israel farmers plant about this time of year and the early rains come in October and November to nourish the young seedlings. Then the latter rains come in April and May as the crop is maturing and THEN comes the long hoped for harvest. So, the farmer has to patiently endure through 9 or 10 months of weeding and insects and all kinds of sun and wind and weather; he has to wait for the latter rains to finish their work so the precious crop will grow and the great harvest can be brought in. Likewise, God is growing a precious crop, a tremendous harvest of people from every nation, tribe and language of the earth and we're in the time of the latter rain, a time when God is bringing more people to Himself in more places than in all of history before! But we have to be patient and wait until the rain of the Holy Spirit has completed its work and then the Lord will return for the final harvest! So, we endure the difficulties and the trials and the heat of the day; like the farmer we wait patiently for the harvest. Then James gives a second example (10):

b. the prophets of old kept speaking God's word patiently through suffering Just take Jeremiah as an example. Jeremiah was beaten and put in the stocks by the chief priest for preaching in 20:2. Then he was shut up in the prison that was made of the palace courtyard in 32:2. And in 38:6 he was thrown down into a deep cistern and sank in the mud. Yet He kept declaring the word of the Lord. It happened to many of the Old Testament prophets. Look what the writer of Hebrews says, *...But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.* - **Heb. 11:35b-39** NLT. Many of the Old Testament men and women of faith had to wait and endure through great suffering and be faithful and they did! Jesus said, *[When you're persecuted] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* - Mt. 5:12. When you're suffering for your faith and enduring, you're in good company! You're just like them, imitating their worthy example! And finally, James gives the example of Job (11). Even though he complained to God in the process, still:

c. Job remained steadfast through great suffering He lost everything he had, including his 10 children and then his health and he still bowed down, worshipped God and blessed His Name. He still believed even though he was greatly upset, but James says:

(1) we see God's purpose in it and how it ended We see how God made Job even more of a righteous man through suffering, how He molded and shaped Job's character and brought him to a place of humble submission. We see how God used him as an example to his friends and how God has used him as an example to millions down through the ages through the record of his story in the Bible. And we see the end of the story, *...the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.* - **Job 42:10**. Twice as much wealth and a whole second set of 10 sons and daughters! And in that:

(2) we see how compassionate and merciful God is Our Father has great compassion on His children when they suffer and in the midst of it, He showers them with many actions of tender mercy, like He did with Job the rest of his life. He does not watch us suffer and remain unmoved. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; He feels our suffering right along with us and He blesses us with many good things in spite of our difficulties. But Job is an example to us:

(3) we consider him blessed because he remained steadfast and did not curse God and die as his wife suggested. He said, *Though He slay me, I will hope in Him...* (13:15). He said, *...I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.* (19:15-17). He is blessed because, in the midst of all his suffering and even in his complaining, his heart continued to trust in God. But even Job was looking forward to the future coming of His Redeemer!

And so must we! We look for the coming of our Lord Jesus to put an end to the awful sufferings of this world and set things right! *Greg Fisher was teaching a class of West African Bible College some years ago when one student asked, "Reverend, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that Christ will descend from heaven with a loud command. I would like to know what that command will be. What will he say when he shouts?" Greg says: "I wanted to leave the question unanswered, to tell him that we must not go past what Scripture has revealed, but my mind wandered to an encounter I had earlier in the day with a refugee from the Liberian civil war. The man, a high school principal, told me how he was apprehended by a two-man death squad. After several hours of terror, as the men described how they would torture and kill him, he narrowly escaped. After hiding in the bush for two days, he was able to find his family and escape to a neighboring country. The escape cost him dearly: two of his children lost their lives. The stark cruelty unleashed on an unsuspecting, undeserving population had touched me deeply. I also saw flashbacks of the beggars that I pass each morning on my way to the office. Every day I see how poverty destroys dignity, robs men of the best of what it means to be human, and sometimes substitutes the worst of what it means to be an animal. I am haunted by the vacant eyes of people who have lost all hope. 'Reverend, you have not given me an answer. What will he say?' The question hadn't gone away. 'Enough,' I said. 'He will shout, 'Enough!' when he returns.' A look of surprise opened the face of the student. 'What do you mean, enough?' 'Enough suffering. Enough starvation. Enough terror. Enough death. Enough indignity. Enough lives trapped in hopelessness. Enough sickness and disease. Enough time. Enough!'" [Gregory L. Fisher in Leadership - Vol. 12, #4]. Oh friends, one day Jesus will say, "Enough of this world's sinful mess; it is time for Me to reign!" and He will come again! Believe it! Look for it! And let it make you steadfast to endure whatever you must until He comes!*

James: Living Out Our Faith

Genuine Faith Relies Upon Prayer - 5:12-20

This morning we conclude our series of studies through the book of James. And I want to start by mentioning verse 12 which doesn't really fit with the previous focus on the Lord's coming or with what follows; it is a stand-alone exhortation. James says:

I. We Must Be Truthful In Speech (12) In biblical times it was common practice to declare the truth of a statement by sealing it with an oath. We use the same custom in courtrooms today, requiring people to be "sworn in", but this whole notion implies that unless there is an oath before God, what you say MIGHT not be guaranteed truthful. James says, "Don't do that! Let your 'yes' always mean 'yes' and your 'no' always mean 'no'. Always speak truthfully! Don't make promises you don't mean. Don't lie by promising something you don't fulfill. Lying is a sin!" He's actually repeating the exhortation of Jesus in **Mt. 5:34-37**, where Jesus said exactly the same thing. Don't swear to verify you're truthful; simply ALWAYS speak the truth, so people know they can believe what you say! That is so necessary for all human relationships to function! Now James gets to his main exhortation at the end of his letter, urging us that:

II. We Must Be Fervent In Prayer in verses **(13-18)** The Christian life is a life of prayer, because it is a life of dependence upon God. It is not a life of believing doctrines; it is a life of trusting in a living God to be at work in and through you and in everything around you every day. That's why James tells us that:

1. we must pray in all circumstances in verses (13-16) For instance (13a):

a. when we're suffering, we should pray When hardships and struggles and troubles enter our lives, we should pray. We should not depend on our own strength to endure them; rather we should lean upon God and His power to carry us through them. Suffering should drive us to Him like a child runs to his Father when he's in trouble or hurting. Most of the time, we do this pretty much automatically; when we begin to sink like Peter, we naturally cry out, "Lord help me!" Yet it always amazes me that when trouble comes, some people seem to STOP praying, stop reading their Bibles, stop going to church, stop doing all the very things that God has provided to sustain them through the trouble! The best way to make sure that doesn't happen to you is to have a vibrant prayer life BEFORE trouble comes; then when it arrives, your praying will only become MORE vibrant! We should pray when we're suffering:

b. when we're happy, we should praise (13b) Instead of simply being happy and cheerful and enjoying what's happening in our life, we should thank God and praise Him for the blessings that we're enjoying! It is when things are going well that we so often forget to pray! We forget to be grateful and acknowledge that every good and perfect gift we enjoy comes down to us from our Heavenly Father. It is not by chance; it is not by our own doing; it is all His gracious blessing showered upon us and we should praise and thank Him for it. And now, James says:

c. when we're sick, we should call our leaders to pray (14-15) These verses have been the subject of a lot of controversy over the years. On one hand, some have tried to use this as a formula to guarantee healing, while on the other, some have tried to explain it away by saying James is not talking about actual sickness or disease. So, let's take a balanced look. It is true that the word *sick* James uses in the Greek is *asthenes*, which literally means *weak* or *feeble*. So, this exhortation does not only apply to those who have a sickness but also to those who are weary and depressed or weak in faith, and it is used that way in some of Paul's letters. Yet it's translated as *sick* or *diseased* time after time through the Gospels and Acts where Jesus or the apostles heal people who obviously

have physical sickness and that is probably its meaning here. Certainly, we should resort to prayer when we're weak and tired and depressed, but James is telling us plainly that when we're sick, we should pray and we should call the leaders of the church to come and pray with us. Of course, I don't think he means every time we have a cold or a sprained ankle, but any time we have a serious illness or disease of some sort, prayer should be our first recourse, not our last! Now in the second clause, *anointing him with oil*, James does not use the Greek word for formal ceremonial anointing, say of a king or a priest, but rather the common ordinary term for rubbing oil on someone. Applying olive oil was a common practice among the Jews in cases of sickness or wounds; it was believed to have a healing effect. The Good Samaritan poured oil and wine on the wounds of the man that he found alongside the road and bandaged them up in **Lk. 10:34. Mk. 6:13** says Jesus' disciples *...cast out many demons and anointed [or rubbed] with oil many who were sick and healed them*. So, it was not a ceremony where they applied a little dab and prayed; it seems they actually applied an oil rub to the sick person as they prayed over them and many got well. So, my conclusion is that:

(1) rubbing with oil is secondary and is probably medicinal in nature Prayer is the thing of primary importance in James' sentence and he's probably thinking of the applying of oil as a medical practice to help the sick. By way of application, I would take it to mean that we should both pray AND go to the doctor or seek medical treatment for our illness. Now, that said, oil is not a common medicinal treatment for us today and I don't think we're doing something wrong if we apply a little oil to someone's forehead to honor the literal wording of this passage. When we do it, we do it clearly as a symbolic act, like communion; we see it as something to remind us that it is the power of the Holy Spirit that does the healing that we pray for and nothing in ourselves. But I don't think we HAVE to physically use oil to satisfy the intent of this passage. And the oil was not his point anyway; he was saying that we should call people, particularly our leaders, to pray with us when we're seriously ill and that:

(2) we should do both things in the name of the Lord Jesus Jesus is the One with the power, the One who brings healing. When Peter and John healed the lame man in Acts 3, they said to the crowd, *...Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham... glorified his servant Jesus... and his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all*. When we pray and when we use medicine, we do it in absolute dependence upon Jesus! There is no power in us to heal and no piety about us that merits it; we depend with all our hearts on Jesus and Him alone and, James says in 15:

d. prayer offered in faith brings healing Sometimes it happens instantaneously. Twice in my life and only recently have I seen God heal someone immediately as I prayed for them. Sometimes it happens more gradually over a period of time. A few years ago, we prayed over a man whose legs were paralyzed in India. Friends carried him into the meeting in a plastic chair and we laid hands on him and prayed. He didn't jump up and walk, but when we came back two years later, he walked to the front and testified to everyone how God had healed him beginning with that time of prayer. It was gradual and most healing is, whether it's through medical treatment or directly in answer to prayer alone. However:

(1) this verse is not an unconditional guarantee God does not always choose to heal. Paul prayed for God to take away his thorn in the flesh three times and in **2 Cor. 12:8-9**, God basically said, "NO! My grace is enough for you! My strength will be more perfectly displayed through your weakness!" Sagyn was the manager of a project being done by believers in Kyrgyzstan, though he himself had not yet believed. He contracted cancer of the spine and it grew worse and worse. They prayed over him repeatedly, but in the end, he died. However, prayer was answered in that, when he was still able to communicate, he said that Jesus came to him in a dream, so we hope he believed and is with Jesus. We cannot demand healing from God as though He owes it to us because of this verse; it is a statement of what God very often does as we cry out to Him. Praying in the Name of Jesus is not a formula to use; it means asking according to His will and for His glory and acknowledging that:

(2) the Lord is the source of all our healing In his old age Asa, who had been a godly king of Judah, became diseased in his feet, but **2 Chron. 16:12-13** says, *Yet even with the severity of his disease, he did not seek the LORD's help but turned only to his physicians*. And he died from it. Doctors are great; they're a wonderful gift from God. I'm walking today without pain through the giftedness of one of them, but doctors can't heal. Only the Lord makes the healing process happen. Don't turn only to the physicians; turn first to the Lord and acknowledge that any healing you get is from Him. Then James adds that:

e. if the sickness was disciplinary as the result of sin, God will forgive Sometimes, not always and not even often, sickness is something God sends because we're involved in sin. Some of the people in the church at Corinth were disrespecting the Lord's supper, treating it with contempt, and Paul warned them that because of this many were sick among them and some had even died. Never think that if you're sick, you must have sinned; that's a lie. However, in some cases God does allow sickness to discipline His children and James says, IF that's the case,

praying together will bring that sin to light and will result in confession and repentance and ultimately in forgiveness. That barrier will be removed so God can heal. In fact, James goes on to say **(16a)**:

f. confession and prayer for one another promote healing in the body Both things ought to be regular practices among us; both of them bring about healing in people's lives, physical and spiritual healing!

Now we get all wrapped up in this subject of praying for the sick, but the point James is really trying to make is in **(16b)**:

2. the prayer of a righteous person is very powerful A person who walks closely with God and prays can see amazingly powerful, miraculous answers to prayer. And as an example, he chooses Elijah **(17-18)**. We might think of Elijah as some spiritual giant, but:

a. Elijah was an ordinary human being just like us Even after calling down fire from heaven, when Jezebel threatened his life, he ran away in fear and tried to give up ministry to Israel. He got weary, tired, depressed and afraid at times, just like we do. He was not different from us, yet when he prayed it would not rain:

b. his fervent prayer caused a 3 ½ year drought in Israel It didn't rain in the whole land, not just temporarily, but for years! It reduced a whole nation to a state of near-starvation famine so they would be ready to seek God! And after that period:

c. his fervent prayer brought rain to end the drought When he prayed fervently a little cloud appeared on the horizon and soon a great storm arrived and there was a downpour. Prayer can change the very course of nature if it is according to God's will! I know it's a small thing, but when we were in India, we had 1300 people basically living under a tent for two solid days and we prayed repeatedly that it would not rain. Well, the first night it rained a good deal over an area that covered five villages all around us, but right in the middle of it, there was NO rain on the land where we were! Glory to Him!

The point is PRAY! When someone's sick, when they're in trouble, when you want to see God move in people, PRAY! It doesn't matter how little, how insignificant, how ordinary you are, PRAY! God does mighty things when we pray! Genuine faith relies on prayer! Now in closing, James has one last thing to say:

III. We Must Strive To Bring Back Those Who Go Astray (19-20) Let me be quick to say plainly that:

1. a genuine believer cannot lose his salvation If Christ truly lives in us by His Spirit, **John 10:27-30** says Jesus gives us ETERNAL life and we will never perish and NO ONE can snatch us out of God's hand. We're secure; we belong to Him forever. However:

2. some who have been among us may actually denounce faith in Christ You've seen this, I'm sure. You've known somebody who seemed to be a believer and was part of the church just walk away and denounce it all. It actually happens pretty frequently. Recently Josh Harris, the guy who wrote the popular book "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" basically renounced everything he once taught and now says he is "deconstructing his faith", that he has "fallen away in biblical terms" and that "by all the measurements I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian." Wow! We ponder, "How can this be?" and the only answer the Bible gives is that people who leave the faith:

3. they were not genuine believers in the first place. They were the shallow soil or the weed-infested soil of Jesus' parable in **Mt. 13:20-22**, where the plant grew up for a while but then withered and died. He's saying people like this **are spiritually lost**. **1 Jn. 2:19** says, *They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.* They weren't real; they weren't genuine, yet that does not absolve us of responsibility. We need to go after them; we need to seek to win them back and James says:

4. we may save them from eternal death and all their sins may be forgiven We ought not throw up our hands and say, "Oh well, they know the truth; that's on them!" God doesn't want anyone to perish and there is yet a chance that we may rescue them. We all probably have people that we care about who fall into this category. Keep on reaching out to them! Pray fervently for them! Prayer is effective and powerful!

Gladys Aylward had served as a missionary to China for nearly six years when the Japanese army invaded Yangcheng in 1938. In her care at the time were more than a hundred orphan children and she was eventually left with no choice but to flee with them and one assistant. Unable to use roads or transportation, she was forced to lead the children, on foot, over the mountains to safety in the province of Xian some 100 miles distant. The trek took twenty seven days. Through little-used trails and over high mountains she led her children; their cloth shoes wore out, the small children began to cry, and all were hungry. She herself became ill en route and when they finally arrived safely, she collapsed. Doctors were amazed by her feat as they found she was suffering from typhus, pneumonia, a relapsing fever, malnutrition, and supreme exhaustion. On the twelfth day of that grueling trek, Gladys and the children arrived at their greatest obstacle, the crossing of the Yellow River, which is a mile or more wide, with no way to cross it. All boat traffic had stopped, and all civilian boats had been seized to keep them out of the hands of the Japanese. The book "The Hidden Price of Greatness" tells what hap-

pened: "[Gladys] grappled with despair as never before. After passing a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A 13-year-old girl in her group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. 'But I am not Moses,' Gladys cried in desperation. 'Of course, you aren't,' the girl said, 'but Jehovah is still God!'" They all knelt and prayed and then they sang. A Chinese officer with a patrol heard the singing and found them. After hearing their story, he said, "I think I can get you a boat." He did and, though it took three trips, they all crossed safely. [Compiled from several internet biographies].

Listen, you don't have to be Moses! You don't have to be Elijah! You don't have to be a Gladys Aylward! They were just people with feet of clay like ours! But they prayed and God answered in miraculous ways and God is still God! He still answers when His people pray! He can still do amazing, powerful, miraculous, life-changing things when we pray! So, when you're suffering, pray! When you're happy, pray and praise! When you're sick, pray and call others to pray! And when you want to see lives changed and brought back to Christ, pray! As Paul put it, *...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.* - Eph. 6:18. Why? Because God is still God and He still answers prayer!

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING OUTLINE

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1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING 1:1-2 Our Situation As Sufferers

Let me tell you why I chose the book of I Peter to study. I look around and see a number of you that are suffering. Some of you are suffering every day in your home situation with an unsaved spouse who makes things difficult. Others of you struggle in caring for a loved one who is ill or you face illness and pain of your own. There are younger people suffering through the stress of waiting for God to work out details in your life and there are those suffering the loss of loved ones. Suffering is something that touches all of our lives and 1 Peter is God's answer to suffering. I almost called this study "Enduring Suffering," but then I thought about it. For some of us that's how it is, we simply endure suffering, plod our way through it somehow. But that's not what God wants at all. He wants to see us triumph over our suffering, to have a victorious Christian life in the midst of suffering. We all suffer, but God is concerned with HOW we suffer, whether the suffering wins over us and defeats our faith or whether we win over suffering and live for Jesus Christ through it. I've given you a simple outline of the book:

<i>I. Our Identity In Suffering</i>	<i>1:1-2:10</i>
<i>II. Our Actions In Suffering</i>	<i>2:11-3:22</i>
<i>III. Our Attitude In Suffering</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>IV. Our Responsibilities In Suffering</i>	<i>5</i>

The apostle Peter wrote this book probably in 65 AD. Nero, the madman, was the Emperor of the entire Roman world. Through his own craziness, Rome's problems were multiplied and he was taking the heat for it. He needed somebody to blame, a scapegoat, and he found it in the Christians. The year before, he began a great wave of horrible persecution against Christians, throwing them to the lions, using them for human torches to light his gardens, and so on. This wave of persecution was sweeping eastward through the Empire and was now reaching the churches of Asia Minor. Peter was concerned and wrote this letter to be circulated among those churches to encourage and strengthen these believers in their new ordeal of suffering. And you might be surprised to notice that he spent the first chapter and a half of it reminding them that in the midst of suffering, they had to remember their IDENTITY, who they were. That's far more important than

knowing what to do. If you know who you are, then what to do comes naturally. When you face suffering, you are not just Joe Anybody suffering, you are a Christian, a person who belongs to Jesus Christ. And that makes a difference. Now, right in the greeting of his letter, in verses 1-2, Peter sums up everything He's going to say by reminding us of our situation, of who we are while we are suffering. In verse 1 you'll find:

I. Our Relationship To The World We Live In (1) There are two key words that you'll notice that tell us about it; both are "S" words.

1. we are strangers Some are stranger than others! The Greek word is *parepidemois*. *Demos* means the population of a city. *Para* means parallel or alongside. It refers to someone who comes and settles down alongside of the rest of the population, but is different. Two English words come to mind, resident alien. We've had international students in our church at times. They can stay here only so long, because the US is not their home; they are not citizens. They will have to go home sometime. Yet for months or years, their home will be here. They are resident aliens, citizens of some other place who live alongside the people of this place. And you know, that's what we are too, strangers, resident aliens.

a. our stay is temporary The real pain of suffering occurs when a person has no hope of anything better. The average person suffers and if it's bad or continues, he might think, "Is this all there is for me? Is this all my life is going to be? Isn't there something any better?" But when you're suffering, remember this, it is not forever. There IS something better for you. You are not home yet, but you are a citizen of heaven if you know Christ. Here you have no continuing city, as Hebrews says, but you look for one to come! You may suffer here for years and years, but you'll enjoy eternity forever.

b. our status is alien We're here, but we don't belong. Just think about how the world treats those who don't belong. Think how tough immigrants have it many times. They are looked down on and made fun of and mistreated by many. It shouldn't be that way, but it is. And we have the same problem. We are different from the people we live among. We don't look different (at least from many of them), but we act different; we live by different principles, have different priorities. You can just expect that's going to bring on some suffering, some mistreatment, some persecution! Jesus warned His disciples, "If you were of the world, the world would love you, but you are not of the world and the world will hate you as it hated Me." We're "E.T.'s", extra-terrestrials. We're from heaven. We must expect that some trouble will come our way and if it doesn't, then count it a blessing!

2. we are scattered At the time when Israel was taken captive to Babylon, Jews were dispersed from Palestine all over the place. Some were officially deported; some simply fled for their lives. By Peter's time 600 years later, there were little colonies of Jews in every major city of the Roman world. They were known as the Diaspora, the dispersed ones, the scattered ones. Yet you know God was in that, because they were the first people Paul went to in every city where he preached, to people who had the background and were prepared for his message. The believers Peter was writing to were scattered through the five provinces of Asia Minor, in modern Turkey. But they were also "scattered ones" in another sense and so are we:

a. we are a minority in the world Christians always have been and always will be a minority group. In many cities and towns there are little groups of Christians like us, but we are always the minority, the little guy, the lesser force. That brings on suffering. In the human race, the stronger always picks on the weaker. It is not strange that they took our Bible out of the schools and we couldn't stop it! Just be thankful you live in the USA; it could be a lot worse! And it's a world full of crazy, mixed up, and wicked people and a lot of them hurt other people, either for fun or as a byproduct of the selfish way they live. So, one way or the other, we're bound to suffer but:

b. we have been planted by God The root of the word *scatter* means to plant seeds. God has planted us where we are, even if it is in suffering, because He has a plan and purpose for us. We did not get into our circumstances by accident. They did not just show up by chance and we happened into them. God put you here and me there, and so on because He, like a good farmer, knows what He's doing! That's our relationship to the world we live in. When you suffer, remember it's only temporary, it is to be expected, and God put you here for a purpose. Now, expanding on that in verse 2, you'll find:

II. Our Relationship To God (2) This is what will really help you to triumph over your suffering. First remember:

1. what God did for us: He chose us We are the elect. Out of all the people in the human race, 7 billion at present, we are the ones God has chosen for Himself! Now we get into some theology. That choice involved three things. First there was a:

a. decision: according to the Father's foreknowledge Way back in eternity past, before the world was created, and long before you or any other human being existed, God made a decision, a choice. He chose you. Why? Well, don't get all puffed up; it wasn't because you were any great shakes! Those who are more strongly Calvinistic than I, say it was just His pure choice; He simply planned me. I would say that He knew me even then and knew that I would respond to Jesus Christ and He chose me in Christ according to His foreknowledge. But that isn't the point. Either way, He chose me. How do I know? Because in time there came about the:

b. process: through the Spirit's sanctification The Holy Spirit worked in my life and drew me to receive the Savior and regenerated my vile heart and set me apart unto God, that is, He sanctified me. That's the evidence that I am chosen. And why did He do it? There was a:

c. goal: for the Son's service I was chosen and set apart, not only to be sprinkled with the blood of Christ and forgiven of all my sins, but for obedience to Jesus Christ, for His service. Did you get that? He chose me, yes me, not just to belong to Him, not just to spend a glorious eternity, not just to have an inheritance incorruptible, but to be planted in this world, His little seed, right where I am, right in the midst of my difficulties and my problems and my suffering. Listen, wherever you are, child of God, you are not an accident blowing in the wind. He chose you and He chose to put you right where you are so that in this set of circumstances you might be obedient to His Son and serve His purpose. That's what suffering is all about! But God does not decide and choose and then leave us. Look:

2. what God provides to us: He supplies us with two things and Peter wishes that they might be multiplied to each suffering one. They are:

a. grace, which is Divine strength to endure suffering in this context. Compare 2 Cor. 12:9. If I might paraphrase it, "When you are weak in enduring suffering, then I will infuse into You my mighty power; the weaker you are, the more My power will be made manifest". And Paul learned, "I can do (endure) all things (even suffering) through Him who strengthens Me". Whatever God puts into your life, He provides you with strength to endure, if you look to Him for it. And then He also gives:

b. peace, which is Divine confidence to face suffering God knows that the problem is not just the physical strength to make it through, but the ability to take it mentally, to stand the strain, to bear the grief, to not flip out under the stress. And so, when you take it to Him in prayer regularly, He floods your heart and mind with His peace that passes all understanding. Whatever God puts into your life, you can handle. He will see to it that you have a portion of His confidence to handle it. So, hang in there my suffering friend. Keep trusting God. He who has chosen you and placed you will strengthen you and one day He will reward you.

The story is told of a little girl whose prize possession was a cheap necklace of worthless beads. The tarnished chain discolored her neck and the piece of cheap jewelry was unattractive. But the child loved it and wore it always, in spite of the remonstrances of her parents. The day before her birthday, her dad insisted she give him the necklace. Tearfully, she did and her mother held her close, knowing how much it hurt to give up her treasure. Next day, after cake and ice cream, she opened her gift--a string of beautiful pearls from her father! She had not known it, but he had been to the jewelry store the day before to purchase it. Before he took away her treasure, he had already planned to give her something far better. And sometimes our loving Father plans for us to suffer today. It may be loss; it may be pain; it may be illness or persecution. And today, down here, we don't know why. But there's tomorrow up there! And I can assure you that God's already been to the jewelry store. He has a wonderful eternity in store for us. Won't you trust your Loving Father for today?

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

1:3-5 - Our Promise In Suffering

Here is a little outline of the first major section of the book of 1 Peter. The theme of the section is knowing who we are, our identity. Last time in the first 2 verses of the book we saw our situation: we suffer as people who are chosen by God and planted in this world as scattered strangers.

I. Our Identity In Suffering 1:1-2:10

1. our situation as sufferers 1:1-2
2. our salvation as sufferers 1:3-12
3. our sanctification as sufferers 1:13-2:10

The next subsection talks about our salvation and how that enables and prepares and equips us for suffering and later we'll look at how who we are affects how we react to suffering, at our sanctification as sufferers. But for today let's look at verses 3-5 and talk about our promise in suffering. What is it about our faith that helps us to stand up in the midst of suffering, to not throw it all away and give up? What is there for us that keeps us from doing what Job's wife told him to do, from cursing God and dying? Well, I told you last time, if we are believers in Jesus Christ then we are saved people and saved people have an advantage over other people when they suffer. That difference can be summed up for us in a four letter word found in verse 3, **HOPE**. Compare **Eph. 2:12**. An unsaved person is a person without hope, who has no hope. And therefore, when he suffers, he suffers without hope. However, the Christian has hope and especially when he suffers, he suffers as a person with hope. Now, just what is hope. Hope in the Bible is not merely a wish. Lots of people that are unsaved are hopeful people; they always look on the bright side and are confident that things will get better. But that is an unfounded hope, a mere wish with no basis. It won't get you very far and it wears thin when the suffering drags on. What is:

I. The Nature of Our Hope (3) Compare **Rom. 8:23-24**. Our hope is simply this, one day we are going to be placed as God's adult sons in His presence in brand new resurrection bodies free from all sin and suffering. That is not a wish, not a fond desire, not some pie in the sky. That is a fact. It is an absolute truth. Every follower of Jesus Christ will be with Him and be like Him one day. It is an absolute certainty. But it hasn't happened yet and we don't even see it starting to happen. So, we are eagerly, but patiently, waiting for what we absolutely know is going to happen. That is the kind of hope we have while we are suffering. No matter how bad it gets, no matter how bad the pain, how heavy the drain on our poor resources, one day we will be with Jesus and all suffering will be gone. An unsaved person doesn't know that, but we do. Now let's talk more about that hope. First, in verse 3 we have:

1. its quality: living It is a living hope. It is not a static thing, a so-so thing that has no effect on us. It is a living thing, a principle that energizes and transforms and affects our lives. Let me illustrate. You can send a workman out to dig a hole and tell him how deep to dig and he'll dig a hole, probably at a rate based on the temperature and humidity! But if you tell him that at the bottom of that hole is a chest of treasure and it's his, then he'll DIG a hole! The knowledge of that treasure is a living thing, it vitalizes and energizes and affects his life. So does our hope. We know what lies at the end. This world may be a real pit for us, but we know what comes next and that it's ours. And that makes us live and suffer far differently from the person without any hope. Now how do we get this hope:

2. its source: the new birth It came with our new birth, our regeneration, when we received Christ. It was born in us right along with our new nature. We didn't just decide to have it; we didn't just make up our minds that there is a heaven and we're going there. The Holy Spirit came into our hearts and planted in us a new nature and part of that new nature that we have is an absolute assurance and unshakeable certainty in our hearts that we belong to Jesus Christ and that we'll be with Him one day. But it's not just a feeling:

3. its basis: the resurrection of Christ It is based on an indisputable, historical fact. Jesus Christ lives! He died, but He rose the third day and He's alive right now! That's why it's a living hope. Jesus lives and so shall I! Jesus lives and He came into my heart and saved me and gave me the assurance that one day when this is all over, I will be with Him in glory. Now if you think about it, just knowing that much is enough to change anybody's life. But we're fortunate. We know a lot about:

II. The Content of Our Hope We know a lot of the specifics about what it's going to be like for us in that day. Peter mentions two things in particular that we know are part of that sure hope:

1. we have a guarded inheritance (4) Now, if I told you that you were going to inherit a thousand dollars, how would you react? 10,000 dollars? 1 million? Compare **Rom. 8:17**. If you are a child of God then you are an heir to God, to everything God has, an-equal heir to Jesus Christ Himself. Everything that is His is yours! Everything that He enjoys you will enjoy. Every bliss He knows, you will know, even though right now you may have to endure suffering, even as He had to for a time. We have an inheritance that is laid up in heaven for us that is far beyond anything we can presently imagine. But there are three things we know about it:

a. it cannot perish It can't be destroyed. No enemy can come along and steal it or burn it or vandalize it. It is an eternal inheritance. Why not? The end of the verse says that it is *kept* (guarded or watched). By whom? By God! You take your valuables down to the bank and put them in the safe deposit box and are confident they are secure. But they aren't. Yet the things God has prepared for you are secure because He watches over them. Nobody and nothing can touch your inheritance. And:

b. it cannot spoil It can't be contaminated. You can buy 1,000 acres of pristine wilderness and somebody will throw some trash on it and spoil it. And if they don't, the factories will pollute the air so bad that acid rain will fall on it. Nothing in this world is free from being spoiled. But your inheritance is. Jesus said to lay up treasure in heaven where the moths can't eat it and the rust can't corrode it. Nothing can spoil it; it will be absolutely perfect. And:

c. it cannot fade The Greek word relates to the dying out of a fire. It may be wonderful and warm and nobody comes to put it out and nobody throws any green wood on it to make it smoke and ruin it, but it eventually just wears out, loses its energy and dies. Everything we know is like that, temporary, it only lasts so long. Life. People. Even the sun is burning out. The prettiest flowers all fade. The loveliest ladies all get wrinkled and old. But not our inheritance. It is eternal. It will never diminish, never wear out, never fade away. That's what's laid up and waiting for us, a wonderful eternal reward of immense magnitude with our name already on it, kept and guarded under the watchful eye of God. So, it is sure. Or is it? If I told you that you'll get 1 million dollars twenty years from now, what will your first thought be? "Will I live that long?" It may be guaranteed, but I'm not, or am I? You see, verse 5 tells us:

2. we have a guarded existence (5) It is not only that our inheritance is guarded by God until we get it, but that:

a. we are kept by the power of God We are shielded. The Greek word means "to garrison about", "to guard by surrounding with soldiers". God's power is around us like an army and I'm reminded of Elisha with his servant and the horses and chariots of fire surrounding them. But what are we guarded against? Against suffering? No. Against having any trouble? No. Look what it says:

b. we are kept unto final salvation He's talking about the day when Christ returns, the end and completion of our salvation when we'll be glorified and get our inheritance. He's saying that our souls are guarded by God's power so that they cannot be lost and our inheritance cannot be lost. Paul put it this way, *I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.* That's my soul, my very being. Jesus said **Jn. 10:27-30** that nobody can take us out of God's hand, not the devil, not suffering, not any enemy in this world. We belong to God and we are shielded by His power all the way through to that moment when the glorious inheritance is ours and our salvation is complete at last! That's why Paul could say, *I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me at that day. And not to me only, but to all those who love His appearing!* Listen, you can fight a good fight. You can make it through suffering. You can triumph. You're a saved person. You have a guaranteed future that is certain. You have a sure hope. This vale of tears will only last so long and then it will be glory!

A preacher went overseas many years ago to work for the Lord. Now he was coming home on a ship, too old to continue. On the same boat was a celebrity. When the ship docked, there were hundreds of people waiting to meet the celebrity and they carried him off on their shoulders while the old preacher stood there alone. Looking up, he said, "Lord, did you forget?" Slowly but clearly came the Lord's reply, "No, son I didn't forget. But you must remember that you're not home yet! Over here there are myriads of angels waiting to carry you on their shoulders, but son, you're just not home yet!"

Listen, no matter what you're suffering from, frustration, fear, pain, or loss, remember this, you're not home yet! But think about it; one day you will be! And that thought can turn your sorrow into joy.

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

1:6-7 - Our Purpose In Suffering

The hardest question I know of to answer is a simple three letter word, "WHY?" When suffering, this is the big one that everybody wants to know, "Why did God let this happen to me?" When our neighbor across the street died after prolonged illness and suffering, her daughter said it outright several times, "I'm mad at God. I want to know why mother had to suffer like this." A human being can stand most anything that happens to them as long as they know why it's happening. The most painful thing to any of us who are suffering is to think, "There is no reason for this; it is pure chance." And that is again what gives the suffering Christian a great advantage over an unsaved person who is suffering. We know there is a reason, a purpose for this. Somehow God is in it. We may not know what the purpose is or how He's involved, but we know it's not just chance; it has meaning and purpose in our lives. Look at verses 6-7. Now in verse 6 you have:

I. The Parameters of Suffering (6) These are the facts we know about it. First, we know that:

1. suffering is temporary It is for a little while. To us eternity is real; heaven is real. We are going to live forever. No matter how long we suffer on earth, even if it is our whole life, it is only a little while compared to the eternal life we possess. When you are hurting, you can rest in the fact that God will not let you hurt forever. There will come a day when all the hurt will be over and He will wipe all the tears from your eyes and when He does, they will stay dry. It will be over for good, forever. Then we know that:

2. suffering is regulated (7a) Verse 7 says, *These have come so that...* The language makes it clear that suffering is regulated; it is controlled. God superintends it. God sends it and God regulates the flow of it and God limits it. You are not suffering under the rule of a mean tyrant who likes to make you squirm, but under the gentle hand of a loving Heavenly Father who loves you and redeemed you. Compare 4:16. I like the KJV, *Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a FAITHFUL CREATOR.* Suffering is a part of the work of the CREATOR in your life, making you His perfect creation. In fact, the text indicates that:

3. suffering is necessary Verse 6 says, *you may have had to suffer...* or literally, *it may have been necessary for you to suffer....* There are some things God can do in your life in no other way than through suffering. You'll find that true as a parent. There are things your children can never learn without suffering. They will never grow up as well-adjusted adults if you shield them from all pain and hurt. You can tell them a million times not to ride their bike barefooted, but it is only through the pain of skinning a toe that they really learn why it is not good for them and change their behavior. Suffering is a vital part, a necessary part, of God's work in our lives and that brings us to verse 7 and:

II. The Purposes for Suffering (7) I would never pretend to know specifically why the particular suffering that you are experiencing has come into your life. Many times we never know until long afterward or not at all. However, I CAN tell you that apart from pure discipline which you bring on yourself by sin, suffering is designed to do something to the most precious thing you have, your faith. You'll find that God uses it in three ways. First, for:

1. the refining of your faith Gold is a precious metal, but in order to have its most valuable form, it must be refined. It must be heated and melted down. And when it is, the dross, the impurities that have crept into the ore, separates itself and you skim it off and remove it. Then, when the ingot cools, you have pure gold. Our faith is like that gold ore. Our

trust in God and walk with Him has impurities and imperfections and things that are mixed in and won't come out by washing or admonishing. They only come out under the pressure of suffering. Let's just look at two examples:

a. Moses - Acts 7:22-29 You see, Moses had a faith in God from his youth. Maybe it was planted there by his mother who cared for him as a young child. But by the time he was 40 it had matured to a point, to the point where he knew he had to do something to help God's people. Verse 25 explains his thinking. He had it in his mind just how God was going to use him, the mighty prince of Egypt, with all his wisdom and royal power. But God couldn't use his faith in that condition. So God threw a monkey wrench into his plans and brought suffering. He had to flee and leave all the comforts of Egypt and every position of rank, going through the desert to Midian, where he was reduced to humble dependence on God and the job of a shepherd (the most loathsome occupation to Egyptians, remember?). And for 40 years God let him learn how to take care of sheep on the backside of the desert, until his faith was refined and he saw how little he was and how much he needed God if he was to do everything. Then God sent him back to Egypt with a refined and purified faith, a complete trust in Him and he led the people out. God did the same thing with David; He left him suffer for 10 years in the wilderness learning to depend on God before making him king. But the greatest example of all is:

b. Jesus - Heb. 2:10, 5:7-9 These are awesome verses and I confess I don't fully comprehend what they mean. But the word *perfect* means *complete*. There was something He gained from suffering. He learned obedience, something totally out of His realm of experience as God. He learned what it is to obey the Father's will in going to the cross and so was made complete. And if it was necessary for Jesus, who had no impurities, to suffer to be made complete, how much more is it necessary for us who not only are incomplete, but are sinful! Sometimes God has no other way to refine and perfect and to teach you what you need to learn than to bring suffering into your life. But there's a second reason:

2. the proof-testing of your faith The second thing that melting the ore does is to prove the nature of the metal, whether it's really genuine gold or just fool's gold. I can have a rifle cartridge in my hand that looks like it will fire and all the pieces are there and you can hear the powder in it and you can have all confidence that when you put it in the gun and stand in front of an enemy soldier, it will go off. But you don't KNOW that until you pull the trigger. Sometimes they don't go off (that's why ammunition companies proof-test some rounds all the time as they're manufactured). Your faith is like that. You trust in God and depend on Him. But that is not really proved or put to the test without suffering. That's why Peter uses the word *TRIALS* in verse 6. Our suffering is a trial or a proof-test of our faith. For example:

a. Abraham - Gen. 22:1-2, 12 Abraham already had a strong faith. He had trusted God for a son. But God put him through a very severe test to prove the quality of his faith and look how great it was. Compare **Heb. 11:17-19**. His faith was the real thing. It was unshaken. He trusted God so much that he was convinced that God would just have to raise Isaac from the dead to keep His promise! That test proved both to God and to Abraham and to all who knew about it just how real and deep Abraham's faith was. Then there was:

b. Job - Job 1:8-11 Job was the most righteous man on earth, but Satan accused him of having a shallow faith, one that was motivated, not out of true love for God, but out of getting things from God. Lots of people have that kind of shallow faith that Jesus spoke of in the parable which withers when the first trial or difficulty comes. So God proof-tested Job with suffering, to display to Satan, to Job Himself, and to Job's friends, that his faith was real and genuine (as well as to refine a few things in Job himself). You see, if all Christians were rich and trouble free, people would flock to Christianity in droves. But they would not have real faith, real trust in God and love for Him. Suffering separates the true from the false, the wheat from the tares. Those who hold up, come through strengthened and assured that their faith is worth devoting a lifetime to. But there is another purpose:

3. the glorifying of God Sometimes the purpose of our suffering really has nothing to do with us. It is a way of God using us to bring glory to Himself, to accomplish His will. It may be:

a. in the present - John 9:1-3 That man was born blind and suffered years of blind life so that Jesus could heal Him and people would believe in Him and glorify Him. How many people have been helped and comforted and even saved through the ministry of a young lady who broke her neck as a teen and became a quadriplegic, Joni Eareckson Tada? They see that her faith is real and sustains her in great difficulty and they want it. That can be true of you. Sometimes you have to suffer so that God can use you to minister to others, so they can look at you and see Him. That's now, but verse 7 says it will be also true:

b. in the future On that great day when we stand before Christ at His coming, all creation is going to rise and shout His praises for what He has done in you and how He has sustained and finally glorified you in that day when He is revealed. So, we know suffering has a purpose, more than likely a number of purposes all at once, in our lives. The question is what will be:

III. Our Reaction to Suffering (6) You see, we can be:

1. grieving in the present trial Nowhere does the Bible say that you have to stand up and say, "Hallelujah, I'm suffering!" That's not what Jesus did in the garden. He grieved and cried and sweat blood. You don't have to like suffering. It's OK to cry, to hurt, to seek comfort. But the key is, while you are grieving, to be:

2. exulting in the future hope You can still greatly rejoice in the guaranteed glorious eternity that lies ahead. Listen to Paul. Compare **2 Cor. 4:16-18**.

The question is whether you will say "yes" to suffering by saying, "OK, Lord, I'm willing to learn and grow and be refined through this, to be used of you through this. Lord, I trust this will work together for good in your plan." Or will you say "no" and spend all your effort and energy to simply escape from suffering, saying, "Lord I reject this; it is not from You; You must get me out of it NOW!" I'll let you decide which answer reflects the deeper kind of faith.

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

1:8-12 - Our Privileges In Suffering

I've been telling you ever since we started this series that we as Christians have distinct advantages over other people who suffer. Everybody suffers. Some more and some less, Christian and non-Christian alike, but everybody suffers; it is the common lot of humanity. However, because of our identity as believers in Jesus Christ we have privileges and advantages that other people cannot enjoy. And these are the Lord's means of making our suffering bearable. The first one Peter mentions is:

I. The Privilege Of An Invisible Savior (8) Now, at first glance that doesn't appear to be much of a privilege but rather a difficulty:

1. the apparent difficulty of it We love with total selfless love a Savior that we've never had one glimpse of (in the Greek). And we've been serving Him for years and we still have never seen Him. We've committed our lives to a man we've never seen! We live by faith, not by sight. This has been the prime objection of those who are resistant to the Gospel when we try to share. "When I can see Him, then I'll believe..." After all, it's hard to convince people to give their lives to a man who died and rose again 2,000 years ago and whom we claim now lives in heaven, but whom they can never see for themselves. And sometimes it is a difficulty for us as well. When we go through the waters of suffering and we get discouraged and our faith wears thin, there are times when we wish we could just see Him once and be reassured, that somehow, we could be like Stephen and have the windows of heaven opened for a moment so we could see the Savior or be like Thomas and touch our hand to His side. There are times when we really envy those early disciples who walked with Him and talked with Him on earth and think, "My, how great it would have been to be one of them and how hard it is to believe like I do without seeing!" But this is only an apparent difficulty. Think for a moment about:

2. the actual privilege of it Compare **John 20:29**. Jesus said we are blessed or happy because we have believed, though we have not seen. How is that so? Well, think about the experience of those first disciples. They saw Him, yes, but their faith so often hinged on seeing Him. If He was not with them, they had trouble casting out demons; they were full of fear while they were tossed about in the boat on the stormy sea until He arrived and even when He was asleep in the boat, they thought they would perish until He woke up. They depended on sight. As soon as they couldn't see, their faith faltered and wavered. But look at **Jn. 16:7**. Jesus said it is good that He went away and we don't have sight. Why? Because now He can come to individually indwell us in the person of the Holy Spirit! There is never a time, never a moment, when we're apart from Him, never a second when we're where He is not, never a spot on earth where we can be that He isn't, never a pilgrimage that we have to make to reach Him! And that's why Peter talks about:

3. the amazing joy of it Seeing Him filled those disciples with fear that He might go away and sadness when He did. But believing on Him without seeing brought the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts and with Him a great joy that is two things. First, it is inexpressible. It can't be told or explained logically to others. It goes beyond words. But it is also literally, *glorified*. We don't see the man on earth, limited and easily pictured. With the eyes of faith, we see the Man in the glory, seated on heaven's throne, ruling the universe, controlling our lives, putting all His enemies under His feet, yet living in us, empowering and strengthening us, going right with us through our troubles and one day coming back to claim us! Hallelujah! We have a privilege, an understanding and a view of Christ that those who saw with eyes never had until He was taken away from them and they like us had to see with eyes of faith! And along with that privilege comes:

II. The Privilege Of A Present Salvation (9) Now, you can't appreciate this until you stop and think about the rest of the world. Here's what they're doing:

1. others are struggling to attain an unsure salvation If they have any care or regard for what happens after death at all or any kind of belief in God or a heaven, it is like a goal that stands way out there, and in between, there is this long span called life and its full of unknown things. And you don't know whether you're going to get there. You're never

sure. You never know until you die. You can only hope and wish. And in every situation, you struggle and try to do the right thing because you want to somehow make it to heaven. Let me tell you, that's a miserable way to live! But the people who live all up and down your block are doing it! And they never know if it's going to be worth it; they live with the fear that after a lifetime of trying, they might get out there and find out that they didn't make it! But here's what we're doing:

2. we are suffering while possessing a sure salvation We've already obtained the goal; the salvation of our souls is settled. We know we have eternal life in Jesus Christ. We know that heaven is our home and one second after death we'll be there with Jesus! Oh, what a privilege that is! We may be suffering, but there is no fear that we may fail and be cut off from heaven! This struggle that we are in is for our good and will mature and refine us, but it can never separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Remember **Rom 8:35-39**. We are conquerors because we already have our salvation. No amount of suffering or struggle can take it away from us. Salvation is ours, right now. Hallelujah! But there's a third privilege we have:

III. The Privilege Of A Clear Understanding (10-12) Did you notice that to understand our privileges we compared our case first in verse 8 to the case of the early disciples who saw Jesus, then in verse 9 to the case of the unbelieving world around us? In verse 10 we compare our case to:

1. the case of the Old Testament prophets These are tremendous verses to give us insight into the Old Testament and God's servants whom we all admire. Don't you get jealous when you think about Abraham and Moses and David who heard God and the great prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah who heard God's voice and recorded it for us? Wouldn't it have been great to be them? Well, Peter points out something we forget:

a. their confusion Their own writings were confusing to them. Did you know that? And here's why. The normal process of writing is that you collect and organize your thoughts until you understand something well and then you write it down. These men spoke and wrote under inspiration. The Holy Spirit impressed on them what to say and what to write down. And we believe in verbal inspiration, that the very words on the page are, in the end, God's words. But then, once God had inspired them to write, they had to turn around and try to figure out what God meant. It was a real problem and one key issue was:

b. their concern to understand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow Imagine how difficult it must have been for Isaiah, who lived 750 years before Christ was ever born, before there was any thought of the Gospel as we know it. Here's what God made Isaiah write, **Is. 53:4-8**. But now compare **11:1-4**! Look at those two very different pictures, yet there is only one Messiah. There is suffering and glory. Isaiah couldn't have known how those two things fit together. How could Christ suffer and die and yet rule the earth with a rod of iron? Peter says the prophets searched their own writings intently and with the greatest care to figure out the time when these things were going to happen or if not that, then literally, what kind of time it would be. They sorely wanted to know how God's plan was going to work. It would have made the difficulties they were going through so much easier. But they couldn't know. It was not revealed to them. Yet this was:

c. their consolation The things they were given might not benefit them directly, but they would benefit those who would come later, that is, us! And they had to be content with that, with suffering while not understanding, knowing only that their message was going to help somebody later! And you thought they had it good! Then look at this thought. At the end of the verse, he mentions:

2. the case of the angels We might think, "Wouldn't it be great to be an angel, because then we'd get to be in heaven with God and know all that's going on!" No, you wouldn't. Even the angels don't have full understanding. They are just servants that God sends to go and do things. They know only whatever He tells them. They long to know and to understand the things that have been revealed to us. They're like little kids standing outside a window and rubbing it clean, peering in to see what's going on inside! But consider our case:

3. the case of the New Testament believer We have two things that are unique privileges:

a. we have the comfort of revealed mystery Compare **Eph. 3:2-6**. We know what the Old Testament saints never knew, what was hidden from them. We know that the suffering occurred first and the glory will occur later. We know that there was a first coming, and in between Christ is building His church and then He's coming again! What glorious blessing we get from Isaiah 53, because we know it paints for us what was happening in the crucifixion of our Lord, yet also from Is. 11, because we know that's in the millennium at the return of Christ which is still to come. And when it comes to thinking about suffering, the comfort is that we know the plan. We know how it all turns out and who wins in the end! And further:

b. we have the assurance of fulfilled prophecy Isaiah never got to see either of those beautiful prophecies come true, but we have. We know Is. 53 came true. He died on the cross for our sins and rose again. We've seen it fulfilled according to plan and we know the whole plan. We know the glory to follow. And the fact that all the prophecies of Christ's first coming and His suffering were fulfilled gives us full assurance that Is. 11 and all the rest that are

yet future will be too! They had to take it by faith and never saw it. We have the full assurance of it because the Gospel has been preached to us!

Listen, we always think we have it bad. But we are the most privileged group of people that ever has lived, the church of Jesus Christ! We have an *Invisible Savior* who indwells every one of us, a *Present Salvation* that we know is ours right now, and a *Clear Understanding* of what God is doing in this world. Who could be better equipped for suffering than we are?

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

1:13-16 - Our Command To Be Holy

Verse 13 begins with a key word, *therefore*, and it indicates a turning point in the chapter. Paul's been talking about *our salvation as sufferers*, explaining the difference that our salvation makes to us when we suffer. Now he's going to move on to talk about **our sanctification as sufferers** in **1:13-2:10**. The word *sanctification* is a big word from a very simple root, the word *holy*. God wants us to be holy when we suffer. Now, if you watch what happens to people when they suffer, you find that suffering can easily lead people to sin! I've seen people stop praying, stop reading their Bible, stop attending church, stop loving, become angry at God, and even drop their moral standards because of the pain of suffering they were going through. It's a natural temptation. Satan even used it against Jesus. He was hungry and Satan tried to get Him to do what He knew He shouldn't do because of the suffering of hunger. Yet Jesus refused. He remained holy in His suffering all the way to the cross! And that's what God wants of us. Because of who we are, His children and heirs of eternal life, He wants us to be holy in spite of suffering. Now, I've broken this section down into four parts:

- a. *our command to be holy 13-16*
- b. *our reason to be holy 17-21*
- c. *our desire to be holy 1:22-2:3*
- d. *our design to be holy 4-10*

This morning we'll concentrate on verses 13-16 and talk about our command to be holy. As we do that, the first thing we have to deal with is:

I. The Meaning of Being Holy (15-16) How many of you think the word *holy* describes you? When I talk about a holy person, many of us think of somebody like the Pope wearing a habit and living in a monastery or something, a unique person, different from the rest of us. I want to erase that notion today. Holiness in the Scripture is a moral term, not a religious one. It is not about how you dress, but how you act. It is not about where you live, but how you live. It is not about being unlike other men, but being like God. In fact, verse 15 spells out for us:

1. the standard of holiness, which is God Himself ...*just as He who called you is holy*. If you want to know what holy is, look at God, for God is holy. In fact, He is the only One who is truly holy. Now here's:

a. what it means for God: to be set apart from sin The root word means to be set apart. God is totally and completely set apart. From what? From sin. He is of purer eyes than to look on sin with approval. Everything touched and stained by sin is barred from His presence. That's what our salvation is all about. Sinful men cannot ever be with a holy God unless they are made holy! And that's exactly what happened to us. **2 Cor. 5:21**. Christ the Holy One was joined to us so that He became what we were as sinners to die in our place and we became what He was, Holy Ones or Saints, who now in His righteousness can come to God. So, here's:

b. what it means for us: to be set apart unto God We are set apart from sin, which has claimed a hold on the whole creation, unto God! Simply put, to be holy means to be like God is and thereby to belong to Him and be separated from belonging to the sinful world system all about us. Now let's think about:

2. the expectation of holiness God says that I am to be holy like He is, literally, to be a Holy One like He is a Holy One. And it's obvious that He's not simply talking about my position in Christ. There's nothing I have to do further about that. As far as my salvation goes, I am already holy in Jesus Christ. I am a saint; I can't BE any holier than I already am, as far as salvation goes. But he's not talking about salvation, rather, he's talking about my behavior! He's saying, "Alright, you belong to Me, so be like Me in your life right now!" That's a tall order! How can God expect me to be perfect, when it is abundantly clear that I can never be sinless as long as I'm on this earth? Well, note this:

a. it is an expectation of becoming The verb *be* in both of these verses is not the plain verb *to be* but the verb *to become*. "As He who called you is holy, so you become holy in all you do". God does not expect us to be what we're not. He expects us to be in the process of becoming what we are! We are holy and set apart to Him in Jesus Christ, so He expects that in our lives right now on earth we are moving toward that standard, living more and more up to our calling, until the day it is completed in His presence. Now notice:

b. it is a universal expectation ...*in all you do*. That's a plural *you*. God expects this of every Christian, preacher and new convert alike, Sunday School teacher and student alike. It is not for some and not others. And further it is

not a now and then thing. It is literally, *in all conduct*. It is not at church but not at home; it is not when you are well but not when you're suffering. It has no limits. That process of becoming like God has to be going on, no matter where we are in life and no matter how tempted we may be or how strongly our suffering is pressuring us to sin. You say, "Fine. So God expects it. But how am I supposed to DO it?" Well, God never commands you to do something that He does not give you the means to fulfill. And back in the last two verses He already gave us:

II. The Method of Being Holy (13-14) It has four steps. If you really want to be holy, really want to obey this command of God, here's what you have to do:

1. eradicate all mental HINDRANCES The NIV loses a beautiful image that God put in the text when it translates, *prepare your minds for action*. The KJV translates more literally, *gird up the loins of your mind*. In the Middle East and much of the ancient world, the usual dress for men and women alike was long, flowing robes. How many of you women have ever tried to run in a long dress? It trips you! So, if they were going to work hard or run for some reason, they would take the lower part of their robes and tuck it into the sash around their waist and that would give them unhindered leg movement. And that's what God says you have to do in your mind; get rid of those things in your mind and thought life which would hinder and hold you back from the process of becoming holy. Like what? How about worry? Fear? Jealousy? Hatred? Unwillingness to forgive? Unwillingness to confess a particular sin? Every one of those things holds you back from growing in holiness. They have to go. You say, "But how?" You make up your mind you're going to get rid of them and God will show you the how! Just ask Him! You can't be like God and hang onto those things. Then:

2. eliminate all wrong INFLUENCES *Self-controlled* is literally, *sober* and the Greek word means free of intoxicants. Compare **1 Thes. 5:6-8**. Notice here two pairs of opposites. Unsaved people are asleep; we are to be alert or awake, aware of what is going on. Unsaved people may be drunk, under the influence of wine, but we are to be sober or self-controlled, free from the control or influence of any outside element. The problem with alcohol and drugs is that they take over control of your faculties and behavior. They influence how you act. And there are a lot of other things that control and influence you wrongly. The thing that controls you may be peer pressure, the drive to be like those around you. It may be the drive to succeed in business. It may be your golf game. Anything in your life that you can sense influencing and taking over control in your life has to go. That position belongs to God alone. You can't be growing to be like Him if somebody or something is taking His place in your life. Then:

3. cultivate a focused VISION Hope has to do with the future. Lots of folks cultivate a focus on what their future holds. They think of some position they'll have or of having some amount of money or some particular lifestyle they'll be able to afford. But here's:

a. the object of our focus: Christ's return Jesus Christ is coming back. That's not a wish, a fond ambition, a dream. It's a fact, a sure hope, a certain event. And when you hold any other object up beside it, it pales in comparison. The most important fact we know is that we're going to spend eternity with Jesus Christ and that fact, if we can manage to focus our minds on it regularly, ought to color our lives with holiness. Now what is:

b. the degree of our focus: completely I don't think this means that the return of Christ is all you ever think about. Otherwise, you'd go sit on a hill somewhere and wait for it and that is not at all the kind of life the Scriptures describe. Rather it means that being with Christ ought to be the single most important factor in our thinking and our living all the time. If I have a decision to make, the bottom line is not which alternative will make me the most money, but rather which will please Jesus Christ, because He's coming and I'm going to spend eternity with Him. The bottom line is not what feels best or what is the easiest or least painful thing to do, but what will please Jesus Christ, my coming King! That, my friend, will lead to holiness in your life. And finally:

4. obliterate all evil DESIRES Part of the problem with becoming holy is that you have a sin problem built right into you, a set of desires, wrong desires, a bent toward sin that drives and entices you to wrong. And here's how it works in a person without Christ:

a. ignorance leads to fulfilling your desires which leads to a life of sin The person not having the Holy Spirit is ignorant of his situation and of the dangers of sin. He just knows he has a desire for this or that and his goal is to fulfill his needs, to meet his desires, to get what he needs. And it leads to a life dominated by sin. That doesn't mean all unsaved people are as bad as they can possibly be. Some of them end up in an outwardly immoral life. Others try to meet those needs through more legitimate needs, but still end up with a life lived independently of God, seeking its own good, and that's sin. But here's how it works in us:

b. knowledge leads to denying our desires which leads to a life of holiness We have the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We know that in our flesh dwells no good thing, that we have desires that want to lead us away from Christ. And when they surface in our minds, we deny them; we say no to them by God's power and instead do what God wants us to do. So, in essence we end up fashioning our lives, not according to our own evil desires, but after the holy will of our holy Heavenly Father. And we end up with a life that is growing in holiness. You can't stop the

thoughts, the desires, from popping up. But you can say no; you can deny them and thus obliterate their effect in your life.

God doesn't want you to give up and quit and throw away your faith when you suffer! He doesn't want you fall into sin and deny all you've stood for. He wants you to keep on moving toward holiness. There is another beautiful passage that sums up just about everything we've looked at, **Heb. 12:1-2**. We must throw off everything that hinders, everything that would tangle us up and keep us from going God's way. We must let no influence lure us or push us off the course that God has marked out for us. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who is sitting on the Throne waiting to receive us, scorning the shame, that is, denying the desire to be vindicated and every other desire that would keep us from following God's will. That's what will lead to a holy life, a life fashioned after God. And the great part is that when the path marked out for us leads through suffering, the joy that we know is set before us will help us to endure whatever cross we may have to bear for now.

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

1:17-21 - Our Reason To Be Holy

We saw back in verses 15-16 last time that God has commanded us to be holy, even in the midst of suffering, that suffering is no excuse to halt the process of growing in holiness and becoming like Jesus Christ. But do you remember how you feel sometimes when things have been tough and you're worn out by your circumstances and you're struggling to do your best to maintain a positive Christian testimony, yet you really feel like giving in and becoming angry and hateful and vindictive and all the rest? Job suffered the loss of all his wealth and all his children and finally his health, and yet he did not sin with his lips. He said, *The Lord gives and the Lord takes away...* But his wife told him to curse God and die. Don't you think that's what he probably really felt like doing down inside? Like giving up, like going ahead and sinning and cursing and accusing God and throwing in the towel on his faith? Sure, God has commanded us to keep on living in a holy fashion when we suffer, but sometimes a command is not enough. Sometimes we need a reason! We need more than an external "Thou shalt"; we need an internal, "I must", a driving motivation from within that gives us a reason to do what we're told to do. And Peter says there are two huge reasons why we should continue to strive to live holy lives when we suffer. The first is:

I. A Healthy Fear Of Displeasing The Father (17) The Bible speaks in many places about this concept of "fearing God". That's something we in this generation of Christians have almost lost along the way somewhere. There has been a lot of emphasis in recent years on the love of God and, as a result, a lot of younger people see God, not as the Heavenly Father, but as the "Heavenly Big Buddy" who is there to bless and help us, but when we do wrong, He just kind of says "Tisk, tisk, that's too bad". Peter says that the truth lies somewhere between those two extremes. We are supposed to have a reverent fear of God all the days of our lives. Now perhaps we can understand it if we analyze:

1. the source of this fear Here's what we often forget:

a. we must give account to our Heavenly Father A good father loves his kids and because of that he makes them be responsible for obeying when he tells them to do something. And if they don't, he lovingly disciplines them. For example, when I was 14, I backed our truck into my sister's shiny Thunderbird and I knew I had to tell Dad and explain my negligence. I knew I had to account for my actions. And if he told me to have the truck unloaded or to have a pile of wood split, I knew that if I didn't do it, I would have to give account. **2 Cor. 5:10** says that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what is due us for the things that have been done in this body while on earth. Notice that it is not to be judged concerning our salvation and whether we get into heaven or not. We're already in heaven. It is to be rewarded or not rewarded for how we have served, how we have obeyed, how we have represented Him! And further we know that:

b. our Heavenly Father must be impartial with us Our Father is a just Father. He can't treat his children with partiality and say, "Oh, I like you, so I'll just forget you disobeyed me and blew your testimony and give you everything I was going to reward you with anyway". I know earthly fathers like that. No matter what their kid does, he still gets everything he wants. Not our heavenly Father. We'll have to stand before Him and give account and He'll have to judge and reward us absolutely impartially and fairly. And that ought to instill a fear in us! Now let's look at:

2. the nature of this fear Am I supposed to be afraid of God? Am I supposed to live in terror of Him? No:

a. it is a healthy reverence Let me put it this way. Are you supposed to be afraid of your Dad, to live in terror of him? Certainly not. That's abuse! I was not actually afraid of my Dad, but I tell you what, I had a healthy reverence for him! I had a fear of displeasing him and disobeying him. I don't want my kids to be afraid of me, but I certainly want them to have a healthy reverence for me and understand that when they disregard and disobey me that they'll bring discipline on themselves. That's a healthy thing! I cringe when I see a child outwardly defy a parent. But we might easily do the same to our Heavenly Father without a healthy fear of Him. You see:

b. it affects our whole life The kid who knows that Dad is going to find out and there'll be consequences to pay lives much more carefully. He is less tempted to follow his friends into wrong or let his responsibilities slide. Isn't

that how it was with some of you? You thought twice about misbehaving because of the trouble you knew you'd be in? Now just imagine if your dad was omniscient and knew everything! All things are open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! Our Father sees and knows everything we do and, whether we like it or not, we're going to have to give account to Him as His children! So, let's live our lives here in reverent fear. That's one reason that should move us to be holy, even when we don't feel like it. The second is:

II. A Heartfelt Debt of Gratitude To The Son (18-21) Let's suppose that you were swimming with a friend and you were drowning and your friend saw it and swam out and dragged you out of the water, pumped your chest and revived you. One day later on, the weather's hot and you don't feel very well and just want to hibernate, but your friend comes by and asks you to help him move some furniture. What do you do? You do what he asks, whether you feel like it or not, because in your heart you know how much he did for you. There is a heartfelt gratitude in you that takes precedence over circumstances and feelings. Now magnify that about a million times and that's how it is between us and the Lord. First of all, there ought to be:

1. gratitude for the great price He paid for us Paul wrote, *you were bought with a price*. It is not just that Christ happened along and rescued us and went His merry way unscathed. He paid a great price, His own blood. Now notice that:

a. it was precious (18a, 19) Not precious the way we so often use it to mean cute or dear, but precious as in precious metals or precious gems. The word means *of great*, and in this case infinite, *value* or *cost*. Jesus once asked, *What can a man give in exchange for his soul?* That's a thought-provoking question. Would a million dollars buy salvation? Would the whole world? Micah wrote, *Should I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* - 6:7. Could another human being pay the price to redeem me? No, the price tag for my redemption was too great. It was too big; it was infinite, but Jesus paid it all. Now notice:

(1) it was the giving of life, not possessions It was not silver or gold or some other perishable thing that Jesus gave to save me. It was not something that was here today and gone tomorrow. It was His own blood, His very life. *Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us!* - Rom. 5:7-8. Would you die for me? For Him, it was not simply a contribution to help poor lost sinners, but the giving up of all, of everything, of life itself, that we might be saved! And:

(2) it was given totally for us, not Himself This Lamb, like the Passover lamb of old, was without blemish and spot. He knew no sin. He had no reason to die in Himself. He was innocent. There was no fault found in Him. The reason He went to the cross and gave His life is totally for us. He paid the great price because He loved us and wanted to rescue us! And yet, perhaps the most awesome thing about it is that:

b. it was planned (20) The cross didn't take Christ by surprise! It was not some great cosmic accident; it was planned. It was known and determined before the creation of the world. Before there was ever any world to live in, any race to redeem, Christ planned and chose to come into this world as a human being and go to the cross and suffer and give His very life for us! That ought to be enough to make you sing, "I'll live for Him who died for me!" But there's more. Not only are our hearts overflowing with gratitude for the great price He paid, but with:

2. gratitude for the great change it made in us Look what Christ did for me!

a. I am redeemed from an empty life (18) If it wouldn't be for Jesus Christ, I would be just like the millions of other people around me who are living an empty life. Some of them are eating and drinking and being merry for tomorrow they die. That's because they're fortunate. Lots of them are suffering and struggling and being miserable and tomorrow they still die. And after all they've done and sought and accomplished, they come up to death's door and the grand sum total of their life is left behind and they die empty with nothing to take on into eternity. But I don't live like that. Because of what Jesus did for me, I'm here for a purpose, to serve Him. And it counts for eternity. I take the fruit of it, the reward of it, with me forever and ever! And further:

b. I have a guaranteed future (21) I have an absolute faith and a sure hope. I know there's a heaven and I'm going there because Jesus died for me. My eternity is guaranteed by His blood! Listen, if a healthy fear of displeasing God doesn't move you to live a holy life, then this sure ought to! You owe God, not just some money, not just a nod or the time of day. You owe Him your very life, your soul, your eternity.

The songwriter put it like this, *How can I say thanks for the things you have done for me, things so undeserved yet you give to prove your love for me. The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude. All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to Thee.* I'll tell you how you can say thanks. Live a holy life! When you're suffering and you feel like quitting and throwing in the towel and sinning, let that weight of gratitude move you to keep on being holy, to keep on obeying!

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

2:4-10 - Our Design To Be Holy

We've been talking through this whole section about being holy while we are suffering. We saw that we are commanded to be holy. We looked at a couple of powerful reasons to be holy. Last time, we discovered that we have an inner desire or drive to be holy. Now, our text today tells us that we are **DESIGNED** to be holy. So often we've been trained to think of ourselves as individuals. It's a cultural thing, I suppose. And it has even carried over into our spiritual lives. We pray for our needs. We strive to discover God's will for our own life. We work in our own particular ministry. And that's OK. But so often we forget that we are not in this thing alone. We are only a minute part of a much greater design and plan that God is working out in this world. We're down here among the trees. We know and see the handful of people that are part of our daily lives. But God above has a different view. He sees the whole forest and how each tree fits into it. And He wants us to understand things from His point of view. So, in order to help us understand, He gives to us here three spiritual analogies, three verbal pictures of who we are:

I. We Are Stones In A Holy Temple (4-5a) Here's what God is doing in the world. He's building something. He's building a building, but it's obviously not a physical building. Jesus told plainly what He was going to build. He said, *I will build My CHURCH*. The word *church* is *ecclesia* and means a called-out assembly of people. Christ is building Himself a group of people called out from among all the rest of mankind through their faith in Him as Savior. We call it the Church Universal, which includes every single believer from Pentecost to the Rapture, an assembly of which every one of us is a part. And Peter says that the Church is like a building, a building made up of stones, but living stones, us. A more complete picture of that is given to us by Paul, Compare **Eph. 2:19-22**. God is constructing a building for Himself out of people. He started with Peter and John and the apostles and all through the centuries that building has been going up, person by person, stone by stone, until one day the last stone will be placed and the building finished and then the Rapture will occur and the building will be moved to heaven! Now let's think about:

1. the parts of the building Three are mentioned. First:

a. the Cornerstone: Jesus Christ (6-8) Peter quotes three Old Testament texts which refer to Christ as a cornerstone. Most of us have never built anything out of stone or brick, so we have almost no idea what this means. That Ephesians passage gives us a hint, *the chief cornerstone in whom the whole building fitly joined together...* The cornerstone is the first stone laid. And it must be strait and it must be level and it must be set at the exactly right angle. Why? Because all the lines of the walls rest upon it, vertical, front face, and sidewall. If any of these dimensions is off, the whole building will be crooked. Being off 1 degree in that stone may translate into feet at the other end of the building. So it's important that the builders pick the right stone and set it in place properly. Now maybe that'll help you understand who Jesus is:

(1) to unbelievers He is a stumbling stone You see, God's original building contractors, the Jews, looked at Jesus and examined His life and said, "He's not fit to be the Cornerstone, to be the Christ." So they rejected Him and threw Him out. Now He lies there in their path as a stone sunk into the ground over which you trip and cut your leg and fall. As a nation they tripped over Him and fell. And that's what unbelievers do still. They reject Him as Savior, will not acknowledge Him as God's cornerstone, and so they trip over Him and fall. And that fall is a long one; it goes straight into hell. But:

(2) to us He is a precious living stone God took that rejected Stone and made Him the head of the corner, the chief Cornerstone of His building, the Church. And so, to us He is precious, literally, held in honor. We recognize His perfection and His position as the head, designer, and builder of the Church. Now first He laid:

b. the foundation, which Ephesians says is the apostles and prophets, Peter and James and John and Paul and the rest. They were the foundation layer. They passed the message of Christ's death and resurrection on to the rest of us. Our faith is built on them and in turn, as each layer of stones rises, the next layer rests on it! The next generation of believers rests on our faith, our performance, our witness, and the one after that on theirs. Our place in this building is critical; it affects all who come above us. Now think about:

c. the stones: us Imagine building a brick wall and one brick in the middle is made of improper material and is crumbly or off-colored. The whole wall is affected. And you'll see the importance of that when you realize:

2. the purpose of the building: a dwelling for God This building is a Holy Temple. God doesn't dwell in a house made with hands. He dwells in the hearts of His Church. If there's anywhere on earth that you can pin God down to and say, "Where is He?", the answer is, "There, in the hearts of His people." And God's temple must be holy! God is building a perfect, pure building. And when suffering comes and you quit and give in and stop growing in holiness and begin to backslide and sin, you're marring the Temple; you're defacing the whole building. You're smearing the image and reputation of the church of Jesus Christ and ultimately the image of God Himself! God's plan is to present the Church to Himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle, without impurity, so when you fall into sin, you're going against God's design, fighting God's plan, opposing what He's doing in the world!

II. We Are Priests In A Holy Priesthood (5b, 9b) This is a unique Temple, because the stones are also the priests! In the Old Testament only a few select persons, the family of Aaron, were priests and could approach God to minister in His Temple. But the New Testament declares that every single person who receives Christ is a priest of God and has personal access to His presence without having to have anyone go between for us. However, we are more than simply priests:

1. who we are: priests of the King Royal priests, priests that minister to the King. King David had his royal advisors, counsellors, his royal secretary to record things, and then the Bible says that Zadok and Ahimelech were priests. There were hundreds of priests. But when the King wanted to offer a sacrifice to God, he didn't go to them; he went to Zadok and Ahimelech, who were privileged above all the rest to serve in his behalf. And we are not just priests, we are priests of the King. The God whom we serve is also our King. We are in the service of the most important Being in all the universe, offering Him sacrifices and here's:

2. what we offer We are not earthly priests. We do not offer animal sacrifices. We are spiritual priests and offer spiritual sacrifices. The Bible mentions three of them which we offer continually:

a. our persons for His service - Rom. 12:1 You offer Him day by day your body as a living sacrifice, a body dedicated to Him to do His will, to serve His purpose! A body that goes where He wants and says what He wants and does what He wants. That's a spiritual sacrifice.

b. our possessions for His use - Phil. 4:18 The Philippian church took money and sent it to meet Paul's need. Paul says that was a sacrifice because they really gave it to God to be used for His purpose, which in this case was to help Paul. Every time you take out your wallet or write a check and give, if you are doing it in the right spirit, presenting it to God, you are offering a spiritual sacrifice. You tell Him He can do what He wants, when He wants, with whatever you have and when He shows you, you use it according to His direction. That is a spiritual sacrifice.

c. our praise for His glory - Heb. 13:15-16 Here you have all three sacrifices named, doing good (that's offering your body), sharing (that's offering your possessions) and the third is offering praise and worship to God with our lips. We confess His Name before others in witnessing. That kind of praise and testimony is a spiritual sacrifice. But any priest, especially a royal priest, must be holy! When you backslide and sin, you don't just personally fail God, you mar the holy priesthood! God wants the world to look at us as those who approach God, those who get into His Presence, those who serve Him. And when suffering comes and you quit and give up on being holy, you blemish the whole thing, both before God and in the eyes of people.

III. We Are Members Of A Holy People (9-10) Every Jew had a strong understanding that he belonged to a particular people and all the rest of the world were Gentiles, non-Jews. There was only one small race of people on earth that God had chosen and he belonged to that people. But now God has temporarily set aside Israel as His people and is doing a new thing, calling out from among the Gentiles, those who were not a people to be a people for His Name. We are a people not identified by the color of our skin or the ancestry of our father, but by our common faith in Jesus Christ. God took all of us who believe, black and white and brown, Jew and Gentile alike, and made us who were not a people, the people of God. Now that indicates:

1. our position: we belong to God We are a people belonging to God, a people whom God has set apart, has marked off, from all other people on earth, a spiritual race of people whom He set apart to be His own and belong to Him. Now here's:

2. our privilege: we are chosen by God This phrase *a chosen people* is not looking at our individual chosenness and how special it is individually to belong to God. Just as Israel was a people that God selected and set apart from all the other nations on earth for a purpose, so now the Church of Jesus Christ is a chosen people, a people that God has selected, not only to belong to Him, but to serve His purpose. And what is it:

3. our purpose: to declare the praise of God The Church of Jesus Christ is to declare the praise of God to all the world, both by the testimony of what it says and by the way it acts! It is a holy nation, a holy people, a people that is to display the image and glory of a holy God to a sinful world. But when members of that holy people backslide and sin and throw in the towel on holiness, the whole people is affected and can't fully do its job of declaring the praise of God. A holy people with unholy members is no longer a holy people but a half-holy people!

What am I saying? There's more at stake here than your own Christian life and personal reward. You are part of God's grand design, His great universal plan to build a holy temple to dwell in, a holy priesthood to serve Him, and a holy people to declare His praises to the world. And when you quit and give up living holy, whether because you're suffering or not, it affects the whole. Perhaps I can sum it up with an illustration. *In a certain mountain village in Europe several centuries ago, a nobleman wondered what legacy he should leave to his townspeople. Finally, he decided to build a church for a legacy. The complete plans for the church were kept secret. When the people gathered, they marveled at the church's beauty and completeness. Following many comments of praise, an astute observer inquired, "But where are the lamps?" Without answer, the nobleman pointed to some brackets in the wall; he then gave to each family a lamp to be carried to the worship service and hung on the wall. "Each time you are here, the area where you are seated will be lighted," the*

nobleman explained. "Each time you are not here, that area will be dark. Whenever you fail to come to church, some part of God's house will be dark." Listen, whenever you fail, some part of God's spiritual house, His Holy Temple, is dark, some part of His holy priesthood is blemished, some part of His holy people is silent in declaring His praises! You do make a difference. So make it!

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

2:11-17 - Our Submission As Citizens

At 2:11 we come to the second major division of 1 Peter. The first section had to do with our **IDENTITY** in suffering. We aren't just anybody who's suffering. We're believers in Jesus Christ. We have real advantages when we suffer, but we also have a real responsibility to continue growing in holiness while we suffer. That's what we've learned so far, but now Peter's going to talk about our **ACTIONS** in suffering. And those actions really boil down to one common action, **SUBMISSION**. That's what distinguishes us from the rest of the world. They say, "When the government gives you a hard time, fight!" "When your boss picks on you, fight!" "When your spouse treats you wrong, fight!" God says, "SUBMIT!" And the areas of our submission show in the outline of this section:

<i>II. Our Actions In Suffering</i>	<i>2:11-3:22</i>
1. <i>our submission as citizens</i>	<i>11-17</i>
2. <i>our submission as servants</i>	<i>18-25</i>
3. <i>our submission as spouses</i>	<i>3:1-7</i>
4. <i>our submission to brothers</i>	<i>8-12</i>
5. <i>our submission to others</i>	<i>13-22</i>

In every relationship that we have, we are to show submission. And Peter begins at the level of our relationship as citizens to the government which is over us. Now rest assured this was not nearly the academic type discussion for them that it may seem to be to us. We live in a country characterized by freedom. They lived under a very oppressive government. In fact, if you recall, these Christians lived in the path of a wave of persecution that had begun at the hand of the mad Roman Emperor, Nero, who blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome. For them, their relationship to the government was no light matter! They had already begun to suffer, to be accused, to be blamed, to be persecuted. How should they act? Well, before we can understand God's answer to that question, we have to understand:

I. God's Plan To Use Us In This World (11-12) Here's what God wants to do with us in this world. This is why we're here. There is a clear four step process, but it leads to a goal. You are here so that God can use you to save people! Here's how it works:

1. distinction: we are different from unbelievers God through our salvation has given us a new position or status. We don't belong to this world anymore. We're aliens and strangers, people that live in the same locality alongside of unsaved people, non-believers, but are distinct and separate from them! We are the people of God! So logically the next step is:

2. demonstration: we live differently They indulge the desires of their sinful nature. We abstain, literally, hold ourselves constantly back from those things. These Christians lived next door to people who regularly went to pagan temples and participated in religious prostitution, who sacrificed to pagan gods or abandoned children if unwanted, who cheated and lied and stole, who threw their sick into the streets to avoid catching the plague. So do you. But these folks abstained from those things; they demonstrated a difference. They were faithful to their wives and loved their children and were honest and cared for the sick. They demonstrated holy and pure lives. And that's what God wants us to do. In fact, He pleads with us to do it. The word *urge* literally means to beseech, to beg. This is what God really wants of His children. He says, "PLEASE live differently; demonstrate Me before the world!" And obviously there is:

3. observation: they see us They may be angry with us and accuse us, like Nero did the Christians or like the silver-smiths did over in Ephesus, because we're different. But they see our good deeds and our good lives, nevertheless. You can't argue with a life. Someone can be angry at you and call you every name in the book, but when he sees you nurse a sick neighbor or return the wallet you found with all the money still in it, he has to see it and it has to affect him. How can he argue with it? People are always watching us. And if we live right, we come to step four:

4. salvation: they are saved They come to glorify God and to trust in Christ, just like we do. Now, that's the plan. That's what God wants to do with us in this world. He wants to use us as demonstrator models for the salvation He's trying to give away. But SUBMISSION is:

II. Our Practice That Enables Us To Be Used (13-17) The average pagan being persecuted by his government would fight and resist and rebel, at least to the extent that he could get away with it, and certainly on the inside. But the Christian has the responsibility of submitting and here's:

1. the meaning of submission (13-14) The Greek word is a military term. It means to arrange yourself under the command of a leader. The sergeant comes out and says, "FALL IN!" and you recognize his authority over you, his right to command you, and you act accordingly and run to take your place in line. It is an attitude of the heart that says "Yes sir!" and so you see in the life:

a. its effect: willing obedience A Christian is to have a "Yes, Sir" attitude toward the government and therefore willingly obey the laws that are placed upon him. *Every authority* is, in the KJV, *every ordinance of man*. It's talking about the laws which the government dictates to us. We should not have to be forced into obeying by the fear of getting caught disobeying. We should willingly comply and obey. If the government says you should fill out a tax form and pay taxes, then you willingly do it in an honest fashion, not like those around who try to cheat and hide and cover up. You might be almost ready to say an "Amen" to that, but what if the government said, "Any Christian must pay an extra 10%!" Worse things have been done by governments to Christians. What if you have to suffer because of some law the government passes? Do you still submit? The answer is yes. Did you notice what Peter says in verse 13 about:

b. its extent: every human regulation Now that's a pretty sweeping statement and one we tend not to like! We'd like to ignore the ones we can get by with and save money on or the ones that seem stupid to us. But the Word says we are to submit:

(1) regardless of its maker Whether it's a law that comes down from the king himself as the supreme authority or one passed by the local governor. It doesn't matter whether it's a federal law made by congress and signed into law by the President or a local ordinance about the height of the grass in your yard. We are to submit to it regardless of which authority made it and:

(2) regardless of its wisdom Authorities have a purpose. They are supposed to encourage good and punish and prohibit evil. Sometimes it doesn't seem to work that way! Sometimes you wonder about the wisdom of a certain law. This gets to me, "Why do I have to go 25 mph. on this street. when all the other streets like it are 35? And why do I have to wear a seatbelt?" You say, "You mean it applies even to those kinds of laws?" Yes! Every means every. That's why we spend money and buy copyrighted licenses for our music instead of just using it. Every means every. And it gets pretty sticky sometimes and maybe we don't understand exactly what's required of us. But the point is that we willingly submit to the laws of our land, big or small! Why?

2. the reason for submission (15) Here it is point blank. It is not because we are afraid of the penalty. That's coercion. There's no merit in doing what you are forced to do. We do it because:

a. it is God's will Did you catch that? Almighty God, the Supreme Sergeant of the Universe says, "Fall in and obey the civil authorities." When I obey them, I am obeying God! That's exactly what Paul said in Rom. 13:2; when you resist the earthly authority, you resist God! And when you submit to it, you submit to Him! But why does God want me running around obeying a bunch of perhaps unfair or senseless rules, even laws that may cause me grief or difficulty? Because:

b. it serves God's purpose Remember what His purpose is? To demonstrate by our lives that He is real and bring people to salvation! Remember all those people who think Christians are a bunch of fakes and phonies and that God is a crutch. Where do you think they got that? Mostly from watching Christians somewhere! Imagine the cop who pulls me over doing 45 in that 25 zone and sees the business card in my wallet that says Reverend. I remember how embarrassed I was years ago when I got stopped on my motorcycle. But on the other hand, imagine what it does when the IRS audits a Christian and finds my books in order! Or when the township inspector comes by and finds everything done according to code. Remember they sought something to accuse Jesus of to the governor and couldn't find anything, except that He claimed to be the Christ! They sought something to accuse Daniel of to the king and couldn't find anything, except that he prayed! That has to make a difference. God has to be able to use that! So, let's sum it up. How do we practice submission?

3. the practice of submission Verse 16 tells us:

a. what it means (16) It means that we:

(1) live as people who have a choice We live, not as slaves do, forced to do what they don't want to do. We live as people who have spiritual light and understand right and wrong from God's perspective because Christ is in us. We live as people who have been set free from the need of the Old Testament law of ordinances. But we don't use that as an excuse to do wrong. We are to live as people who make a willing, conscious choice and that is to:

(2) live as people who choose to serve God We have chosen to become God's bondslaves and that willing service means living a life of submission for the Lord's sake. Verse 17 tells us:

b. how it applies (17) A submissive heart means I am submissive in every relationship that I have. It means that I give:

(1) to others: respect I value them and treat them that way.

(2) to brethren: love I see them as my spiritual family and give them that special family love Jesus commanded.

(3) to God: reverent fear I give Him my first and most complete obedience. I let nothing stop me from doing the things He tells me I must do, like Daniel did. And:

(4) to government: honor by obeying its laws willingly, so that God can use me to win others.

There is only one limit as you well know. **Acts 5:29** tells me that when the government tells me to disobey God, then I must disobey the government and obey God. Someday I may have that problem. Right now, God tells me to obey the government. And how will I have the courage to obey God and disobey the government someday when the cost is very great, if I haven't submitted myself to God now by submitting myself to it? *Genesius lived during the reign of the cruel Roman Emperor Diocletian who persecuted Christians severely. He was raised in a Christian family but had rejected Christ. He was an actor and one day was in the arena pantomiming a Christian baptism to entertain the Emperor. Suddenly he stopped and shouted, "I want to receive the grace of Christ that I may be born again. I want to be set free from the sins which have been my ruin." Then he turned to Diocletian, "Illustrious Emperor, believe me, Christ is the true King!" Diocletian became furious and ordered him ripped with claws, burned with torches, and beheaded. Just before his death he cried out, "There is no king except Christ whom I have seen and whom I worship. For Him I would die a thousand times. I am sorry for my sin and becoming so late a soldier of the true King."* Genesius still honored the king and showed him no disrespect, but he put his true King in first place. If he and thousands like him could do it at the cost of their lives, can't we do it at the cost of our willing submission?

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

2:18-25 - Our Submission As Servants

We're talking in this portion of the book about our ACTIONS in suffering and we saw last time that the key word that sums up how God wants us to act in suffering is SUBMISSION. And that submission extends to every relationship we have and every area of our lives. Verses 13-17 we recognize as applying to us because we know we have to submit to the government over us. But when you come to verse 18 and see the word *slaves* or *servants*, your natural inclination is to say, "That's irrelevant; it's not talking about me; slavery doesn't exist anymore". So, we mentally skip over to 3:1 and say, "Wives, submit to your husbands...now there's something worth reading!" Well, hold it a moment and let's look closer. Many, many of the early Christians were slaves or servants. The whole ancient world was saturated with the practice of slavery, but our image of slavery is that of American black slavery and the civil war. There was that kind of chattel slavery or bondslavery. Slaves were taken in war and bought and sold at auction and killed at will in the Roman Empire. But there were also other varieties of servitude. A person could be a servant voluntarily as Elisha was Elijah's servant for many years. A person could become a servant because he owed money and couldn't pay and so became the lender's servant for a period of time to work off the debt. Among the Jews, servants were to be released every seven years and treated like hired hands. I assume a person could actually be a servant as a job and be compensated for it by having his room and board provided. Some servitude is not even actual, but only in point of fact, as in Prov. 22:7, *The borrower is servant to the lender*. A debt of allegiance and submission is owed because of the monetary debt. So you see, there are all kinds of ways to be a slave or a servant. And I believe that most of us fit into one of them! So verse 18 is really:

I. Our Command of Submission to Masters (18) The language here is very interesting. First, let's look at:

1. the persons involved The one person is a:

a. slave: the servant in the house The Greek has half a dozen words for servants. The common one is *doulos*, which means a *bondslave*, one who is owned by the master, who is bound to him. The word here is *oiketes*, which comes from *oikos* (house) and means a domestic or household servant. Compare **Lk. 16:13**. Now you can understand this verse better. Can you imagine a household servant who is responsible for cooking and cleaning trying to please two different lady masters in the same house? Now of course, a household servant could be a bondservant, but he could also fit one of the other categories I mentioned. The key thought is that he cares for somebody else's house. Then there is the:

b. master: the owner of the house The Greek also has several words for master, but the one here is *despotes* (from which we get *despot*) and it means the one with absolute control and ownership. So the contrast here is not so much between a bound person and a free person, as it is between one who is the owner and controller of something and the one who owes him a debt of service for whatever reason. Now can you see that in that sense, though you are not a slave, there are people to whom you are a servant! At work you are a servant, you owe a debt of service by reason of your employment and pay to the owner of the business or those who represent him who are over you. They own; you serve them. At school, young people, you are a servant. The law says you are bound to be in school and the teachers are the representatives placed in charge over you. And though it is for your benefit, you

owe them the service of being obedient and doing what they expect of you. You see, the principles in this verse apply to your relationship with anyone who is put in charge of you. For the prisoner, it's the prison guard. For the child, it's the teacher or the parent. For the employee, it's the boss. For the citizen, it's the judge and the policeman. We've all got masters and we're all servants. So, how are we to act in these relationships? Here's:

2. the process involved

a. the action: you obey your master The word *submit*, I told you last time, means to arrange yourself under the command of a superior, that is, to obey. Compare **Eph. 6:5-8**. Notice what Paul commands servants and even children in verse 1, "OBEY." When somebody in charge over us tells us to do something, we are to obey. Kids, when the teacher says, "Do this assignment", God wants you to do it! When your parents say, "Do this task", God wants you to do it. When your boss says, "Do this", God wants you to do it. It's not a matter of whether you feel like it or want to do it or whether you'll enjoy doing it or not. In this sense you are a servant and the action God wants you to take is obedience! But that's not all. Notice:

b. the attitude: you do it with genuine respect You do it with all respect or fear. That doesn't mean you do it because you're afraid of your teacher or your boss and you're going to get disciplined if you don't. That's not to be our motive. It means we obey with reverential respect for their authority and position. You don't walk away to do what you're told muttering under your breath, "Why that ignorant so and so!" You do it with sincerity of heart, Ephesians says. You do it thinking, "They're the boss and I may not like it, but it's my job to do it." You don't do it only when they're watching, but even when you're out of their sight! Just think how wonderful it would be if your teens had this attitude about cleaning up their rooms when they're told! Now, that's fine if the master is kind and considerate and reasonable. But what about when the demands are unreasonable or foolish. Look at:

c. the extent: regardless of your treatment *Harsh* is literally *bent* or *curved*. Some masters are bent! They're crooked. Some bosses treat you unfairly. They demand things you can't produce. Some of the masters in those early days beat their slaves when they got drunk or were mean to them and treated them like dirt. Some employers are like that too. Some teachers and parents are that way too. But God says we are to submit regardless, to obey in the same attitude, regardless of the character of the master! Now, of course, as an employee here, you have the perfect right to quit the job and get another one. That's not true for our brethren in Russia or China where jobs are assigned! But as long as you're in the job, you are to submit with a sincere heart no matter what you are treated like. How in the world can you do that? **Eph. 2:6-7** has:

d. the key: you are serving the Lord! You're not doing this for the person; you're doing it for the Lord. Your allegiance goes one level higher up. You're obeying this harsh master who's making you suffer because this is what God says to do. This is the will of God! And in obeying them, you're obeying Him. If you get hold of that, it will transform your everyday life. "I work for God; I go to school for God; I serve for God; I'm doing this for God!" Now obviously, this kind of submission runs contrary to our human instincts and our flesh. We don't like the idea of having to submit, especially when the person we submit to is harsh to us and treats us wrongly. So, Peter goes on to give:

II. Our Reasons for Submission to Masters There are two very powerful reasons that we do it. First:

1. the commendation of God (19-20) We'll be rewarded for it someday. Now let me be clear that there are two factors involved in that reward:

a. God commends us for suffering unjustly If you lie to a teacher and get suspended for it or get disciplined and have to suffer, there's no reward for that. If you're a sloppy employee and you mess something up and it's your fault, and you catch difficult consequences for it, there's no reward for that. The slave who steals from his master and gets beaten deserves no reward or pity. I'm afraid that all too often, some of us think we're doing a great job for our company or in school and we don't see ourselves clearly and we're really not and we think we're suffering unfairly when the consequences catch up, however, we're really only getting what we deserve. There must be injustice. The master must be returning evil for good. You must be suffering genuine injustice in order to be commended.

b. God commends us for endurance You must bear up under the injustice and not throw away your testimony and your sincere heart and start to hate that person and to lose that respect we spoke of earlier. But when you are suffering unjustly at the hand of a despot and you maintain your sincere genuine obedience, then there are two results:

c. suffering unjustly displays the power of God Verse 19 literally says, *For it is a grace!* when you suffer this way. It's not natural. It is an act of the grace of God. It displays the power of God. Actually, God uses your behavior to display Himself to that master and to others! Remember, that's what God is doing with you in this world. He uses the submission of a citizen to impact the ungodly, He uses the submission of a wife to win her ungodly husband, and He uses the submission of a servant to win, not only his ungodly master, but to win those who are watching, who say, "Man, that guy has something I need!" And so:

d. suffering unjustly deserves the praise of God He'll say "Well done!" We'll be commended for obeying Him and being used of Him in His plan. And if we want to hear that, we'll submit. However, there's a second big reason to submit, which is:

2. the example of Christ (21-25) You know, you might be tempted to think, "It isn't fair that God should expect me to endure this unjust suffering; how can He require that of me?" Well, remember:

a. He endured suffering with submission (21-23) Is. 53:9 says that Christ was perfectly innocent, absolutely without sin and guilt. He never deserved one iota of the mocking and the scourging and the crucifixion He endured yet:

(1) He did not retaliate against His judges Not only did He not call those ten legions of angels to slay them, but He didn't retaliate by throwing insults back. He didn't threaten them with judgment to come. He suffered submissively, in silence. Why?

(2) He entrusted Himself to the true Judge He knew that it was the Father who had put those men in authority and this was His will. So, He simply submitted and trusted the Father to work it all out in the end and He did! And we're to follow His example. But there's one more thing to remember:

b. He endured that suffering to save us (24-25) He submitted to the unjust treatment and bore our sins in His own body on the tree so that God could use Him to save us from our sins. We were like sheep going astray. We were lost, headed in the other direction from God. But because He humbled Himself and became obedient unto the death of the cross, we are now turned to God and made righteous. We were sick with the deadly disease of sin, but because He gave His back to the smiters for us, by His stripes we are healed and made every whit whole!

My friend, if the Lord Jesus was willing to submit and endure unjust suffering at the hands of those over Him for you, aren't you willing to do the same for Him?

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

3:1-7 - Our Submission As Spouses

We once had a little plaque in our kitchen which somebody gave us when we got married that said, "Marriage has a ring to it: an engagement ring, a wedding ring, and suffer-ring". Now that's meant to be a tongue-in-cheek saying. Where a husband and wife are both walking with the Lord there should be what we call "marital bliss". Yet in so many marriages that statement is much truer than it was intended to be. There is suffering. Sometimes one of the partners is not saved or is not walking with the Lord and the other one suffers. Sometimes even though both are believers there are flaws in their lives which they cannot see which cause the other suffering or great pressures come into the marriage through ill health or finances and they cause real tensions between husband and wife and there is suffering. Now, how will we react to suffering in this part of our lives? The world has some answers. It says, "Insist on your rights, insist on getting your needs met; after all, you are important and your #1 responsibility is to care for yourself, so if the situation becomes intolerable or if the spouse refuses to change, then get a divorce! There are better fish in the sea!" But that's not God's way. God says there is one key thing that we must practice when suffering comes into any relationship we have, whether it's with the government over us or with our boss at work or with our spouse at home, **SUBMISSION**. It's against human nature; it doesn't seem logical and it's painful, but God says it works. When you submit, you triumph over suffering. Let's begin with:

I. Our Submission As Wives (1-6) Men, your turn is coming so I'd hold back on yelling "Amen" at what we're going to study here. But the first thing we need to understand is:

1. the meaning of submission (1a) There's a little phrase that we often overlook here, *in the same way*. In what same way? The phrase looks back to chapter 2. In the same way that a we submit to the government over us, in the same way that we submit to the master or boss who is over us, that's how a wife is to submit to the authority and leadership of her husband. And how is that?

a. the action of submission: obedience The word *submit* is the same word as in those cases and means to arrange yourself under the command or authority of a person in authority. And that is a long way of saying, to obey! Verse 6 leaves little doubt of the meaning. Wives are to be like Sarah who OBEYED her husband. The Greek word means "to hear under", to hear what is being said and regard yourself as being under it and do it. It is the same word used in Eph. 6:1, *Children obey your parents*. That used to be in the marriage vow; we'd promise to "love, honor, and obey," but it didn't sound so good so we took it out. Yet that is the bottom line. Submission for the wife means, in the final analysis, to do what her husband says, as long as he is not directly commanding her to disobey God. Now before you start throwing hymnbooks, let me explain that if the husband is submitting the way he's supposed to down in verse 7, that won't be any burden at all. There will be communication and understanding and caring and sensitivity. But that will not always be the case. Yet even when it is not, I should say, especially when it is not and life is difficult, God's design, plan, and desire is still for you to willingly submit to your husband! Now notice:

b. the direction of submission: your own husband There is no chauvinism here, no implication that women are somehow inferior, no command that all women are supposed to submit to all men. He's talking about family structure and within that family structure, God has designated the husband as the leader and given him the position of authority in the home. The wife is to recognize that authority as coming from God and to submit herself to it in the same way that we all do unto the Lord, Ephesians 5 says! Now why? What is:

2. the purpose of submission (1b) The words *do not believe* are literally, *are not persuaded*. In many of these early church families, just as today, when the Gospel first came to town, the wife was the first to respond and receive Christ. And there were many husbands then, as now, who just refused to be persuaded by words. They needed more. And what will persuade them is not arguing or trying to chide them into believing. It is watching the profound change and difference in the person they live with every day, who doesn't resist and rebel against them, but who submits to their leadership even when they know she doesn't agree! If you're willing to pay the price of submitting, God stands ready to use your life as a tool to win your husband to Christ. Of course, this is not a moneyback guarantee nor is there a time limit on when it will happen, but unless you are willing to submit, God can't even use you and you become a hindrance to what He is trying to do in your husband's life. Now Peter goes on to further explain:

3. the process of submission (2-4) In verse 2 you'll find:

a. what God wants you to display Two things:

(1) purity for your husband The Greek word here means free from contamination. Sometimes it is used as a general word for a pure life or one that is free from sin. But in several places, it seems to have a more specific meaning. For example, 1 Tim. 5:2 says, *Treat younger women as sisters with absolute purity*, but compare 2 Cor. 11:2, *...that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*. Here the KJV word *chaste* spells out the meaning, pure from the contamination of another man, given only to one husband. Sure, God wants you to live a holy life before your husband, but more particularly He wants you to be chaste, to display a particular loyalty to your husband alone, with no desire for anyone else. Now let me tell you, in the world they lived in, that would stick out! Sexual promiscuity was rampant. Pagan idolatrous worship at the idol's temple involved sex for both men and women! For a woman to be chaste and devoted to one husband was to stick out of the crowd. That sounds like today! God wants you to display to your husband that your faith has made you different! That it has made you committed to him. And secondly, He wants you to display:

(2) reverence toward your husband, respect for his position as the leader in your home, not trying to run and control him and manipulate his life, but being ready to follow him and support him and be the complement that God created you to be. Women's liberation is no new thing either. It was around in Peter and Paul's day. But God wants you to display to your husband that your faith has made you different, that it has given you respect and reverence for him, whether he deserves it or not! Consequently, here's:

b. what God wants you to be characterized by

(1) NOT by mere external beauty (3) You know, some have read this verse to mean Christian women are supposed to look ugly. But it doesn't say that. These things should not be your *adornment*, literally your *kosmos*, your world. You know women as well as I do who live for their physical beauty. They spend hours in doing their hair and putting on their face and have an outfit for every hour of the day. Why? Because they want their husbands to think they're beautiful? Probably to some degree, but more likely because they want everybody to think that; they want any man (or woman) who looks at them to say, "Now there's a beautiful woman". But that's not what God wants you to be known for. He wants you to be characterized:

(2) by an internal submissive attitude (4) That other beauty will fade, believe me. But true beauty is a woman who is loyal and submits to her husband with:

- **gentleness, that is, without resistance**, without belligerence and:

- **quietness, that is, without disturbance**, without complaint. That beauty will never fade away and it will tend to draw your husband to the Lord. We don't have time to look at it, but next you have:

4. the example of submission (5-6) If Sarah and a host of others had adopted modern US principles instead of God's, they wouldn't be in the Bible and probably neither would their husbands. Sarah followed her husband away from home and family across the desert to an unknown land to live in a tent all her life wandering about and never having children. Maybe that's why God made her the mother of the nation of Israel. Anyway, on to the men:

II. Our Submission As Husbands (7) Some lady must be thinking, "How come the women get six verses and all that time and the men only get one?" Well, I know a whole lot more women who are suffering at the hands of their unsaved or ungodly or hard to live with husbands and need encouragement, than I do men who are suffering because of their wives. So did Peter. That explains it! Well, first notice, men, that you too get the words *in the same way*. In the same way that

your wife has to submit and order her life in her proper role toward you, you too have to submit by doing the same. If you want to see it in black and white, look at:

1. the command of submission - Eph. 5:21 Submission is mutual. Men you are to submit just as much as your wife is. For her, verse 22 says her submission means to submit herself to obey your leadership as she does the Lord. For you, verse 24 says submission is to love her and sacrifice for her as the Lord did for you! Peter explains for us what that means:

2. the qualities of submission If you are submitting to your wife in the way God intends, then three qualities will be evident:

a. personal understanding of your wife Literally, this verse says, *live with your wives according to knowledge*. Not book knowledge about marriage but personal knowledge about your individual wife. Do you know the pressures and stresses your wife lives under? Are you aware of how she feels about you and your life together or do you just plod blindly on expecting her to tag along? Have you tried to understand what it's like to be in her shoes, to maybe work all day and then have to come home and do the housework at night or to be caring for small children all day long every day with no time away from them? Listen, I know there are men (and more than 1 or 2) sitting here right now listening to me that have no idea of the struggles you are putting your wife through, yet it's painfully obvious to other people. It's your responsibility to learn to understand her. And even if she's being rebellious and causing you grief and pain and suffering in your life, it's still your responsibility. You'll never win her to the Lord or to godly behavior as a Christian, until you start to live with her in understanding. Then you must have:

b. sacrificial caring for your wife They are the weaker partner. Now please be assured that he's not talking about inferiority or inability to achieve great things. He's saying that women have been created with a different physical ability and emotional makeup than men. And while in some particular case the wife may actually be physically stronger than her particular husband or emotionally stronger, by and large, husbands, we have to be conscious of our wife's physical and emotional limitations. They are not the same as ours. We cannot expect her to endure what we may be able to endure in the same stoic way. And so, we have to respect that and care enough to sacrifice, to limit ourselves, to lay down things that we enjoy or feel we have a right to sometimes, to go the extra mile for them. And that affects the whole of our life, whether it be in helping with the dishes or the housework or caring for children and giving them free time. Christ gave Himself up for the Church because He loved us and that's the way we are to submit to our wives, by loving them enough to make personal sacrifices for them.

c. spiritual recognition of your wife You are heirs together of the grace of life. Men, even though you have been given positional authority in the home, in every sense your wife is your equal, your partner, your colleague in the adventure of life. You may make more money, know more technical information, or whatever, but you are still both equally necessary to that one joint life that God has welded you into. And that is especially true in the spiritual realm. You're not going anywhere spiritually without your wife. You may be the one who holds an office in the church or carries a big responsibility or preaches or plays the lead and maybe all she does in your mind is take a turn in the nursery, but before God, you are spiritual equals. And if your hearts (not your heads) are not in a spiritually equal place in your Christian growth, then you need to nourish and cherish her spiritually and bring her along with you. Because without it, look what happens in the end of the verse:

3. the effect of submission Your prayers are hindered without it. If you're not submitting to your wife by understanding her and sacrificing to meet her needs and treating her as a vital part of your spiritual life, then some of your prayers aren't making it through. They're cut off, hindered. Your spiritual growth is stunted. You can't move forward until you deal with that. But when you do, when you truly submit to your wife by loving her as Christ loved the church, then you're free to move ahead, to grow together and it's a wonderful thing.

God's command for you, whether husband or wife is to submit. Sure that may mean some suffering on your part, some giving up, some difficulty, but I'll tell you what, if you go the other way, if you try to force her into submission and thrust your authority upon her and make her life miserable in her eyes, or if you try to rebel against him and show him what a jerk he is, not only are you disobeying God, but in the long run you yourself will be far more miserable and will be missing out on the joy of the greatest human relationship God ever invented.

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

3:8-12 - Our Submission To Brothers

We've been seeing in 1 Peter that God wants every relationship in our lives to be characterized by SUBMISSION, even when it brings suffering. As citizens, we are to submit to the government and the laws over us, fair or not. As servants, we are to submit to those in authority over us, our "bosses", whether treated justly or unjustly. As husbands and wives, we are to submit to each other, whether our partner is godly or not. But Eph. 5:21 is not limited only to husbands and wives. It says, *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* That includes husbands and wives, to be sure, but it's talking about the whole church! It is one of the many "one-another commands" Jesus gave to His church. As believers, brothers

and sisters in Christ, we are all to submit ourselves to each other, to arrange our lives to undertake the proper responsibilities we have toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. And sometimes that's not easy. There's a lot of suffering that goes on within the church, suffering that comes to us at the hands of other believers, harsh words, hurt feelings, uncaring attitudes and actions, anger, bitterness, resentment, even shouting and accusations and division. Some of you know what I'm talking about because you've lived through it! All of that kind of suffering could be avoided if we would learn to submit to one another. But even if another believer is causing us suffering, we are still to submit ourselves, regardless. Now Peter spells out for us what submission to one another means. Here is:

I. The Behavior You Should Display (8-9a) There are six things that should characterize all your relationships with other believers and I've tried to give each one a clear definition:

1. unity: sharing each other's purpose He says literally, *be same-minded or like-minded*. Now some Christians have an idea of like-mindedness that goes like this, "A good Christian believes everything that I believe down to the minutest details or he is in some stage of apostasy". The object of this thinking is uniformity. We dress the same, hold the same number of worship services each week, organize the same way, use the same version of the Bible, condemn the exact same things, and do everything the same way. So, we are all clones of each other and have unity and anybody who claims to be a Christian and deviates a bit is out to lunch! Believe me, that is not the kind of unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17! Neither is the kind of unity that the liberals talk about where we just forget everything that's important and join up in one big organization. There are Christian fundamentals that are key to our faith which we can never put aside and we can never have unity with anyone who does not hold them. But the unity we're to have is something else again. It is a unity of purpose, a unity of spirit and heart. If two believers both love the Lord Jesus and have as their purpose to truly serve Him in the best way they know how, then here's:

- **the point: set aside minor differences** Living in harmony or unity means being willing to put aside the small things that you differ on for the sake of getting on with serving the Lord together and not criticizing or looking down on the other person for differing with you! For example, my Presbyterian brothers and I have a differing view of predestination and election. But we both love the Lord and love each other and want to see people come to Christ. So I don't beat on 5 point Calvinists from the pulpit and they shouldn't agitate other people trying to win them away from my position. That's our submission to each other. And it doesn't have to be over doctrine. It could be over money or property or policy. We must adopt an attitude that will not allow small things, minor things to come between and divide us. For example, *George Whitefield and John Wesley were two giants of the faith from the 1700's. Both were great preachers and won thousands to Christ. They began their ministries together, but later Wesley developed and grew into "Methodistic doctrine," while Whitefield was a staunch Calvinist. At length they could not work together any more. But when Wesley attended George Whitefield's memorial service, a woman asked him, "Do you expect to see dear Dr. Whitefield in heaven?" He replied, "No". She said "I was afraid you would say that," but Wesley quickly responded, "Do not misunderstand me. George Whitefield will be so near the throne of God, that men like me will never even get a glimpse of him!"* There was unity!

2. sympathy: feeling each other's feelings The word *sympathy* means "to suffer with". If you want to know what it means look at **Heb. 4:15**. Jesus stood where we stand. He was tempted like we are. He felt our feelings. And that hasn't changed now that He is in glory. When He sees us going through something, He knows how we feel and feels it with us! And that's how it is to be for us. When the little toe suffers, the hand is supposed to suffer with it, to feel what it feels!

- **the point: don't become callous** It's so easy to do. We're so bombarded by bad news that 200 people can die in an airplane crash and we turn off the set and ask, "What's for supper?" And we can get like that toward each other. Imagine the person who's just had a great thing happen, an answer to prayer, or leading someone to Christ, and they come to you and all they get is a fleeting, "That's nice". Or they have some serious problem and are upset and hurting and you give them a quick, "That's too bad, I'll pray for you." Paul said, *Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep!* One of the greatest dangers in my life is that I so easily get callous, stop feeling, wrap myself up in my own little world and forget how the other person is feeling and therefore don't give them the support they need. So, submitting, in this sense, is putting the feelings of the other ahead of my own.

3. love: affection and fondness for each other The word here is not *agape* but *philadelphia*. Literally, it says, *Be brethren who are loving*, who display the same kind of affection and fondness toward each other that physical brothers would. Don't you need that from other Christians once in a while? There are some days I just need a word of encouragement, a kind word, a hug, or someone to listen to me a bit. I need to know that a brother or sister loves me and cares about me. But those are the very things I don't feel like giving to others when I'm hurting! My feeling is often, "Let me alone; don't bother me." When we're hurting, we're often not very loving, hence:

- **the point: don't withdraw from the brethren** Don't pull back and stay home and hide out. People need your love. Somebody needs your caring for them as much as you need somebody to care for you. Submission means putting the need of the other to experience your caring ahead of whatever needs you may have.

4. compassion: caring about each other's problems The word is literally *tenderhearted* and it goes one step beyond sympathy. Sympathy means you understand and feel what that person is going through. Compassion takes it a

step further and means you care that they are going through it and want to do whatever you can to help. There is a great danger that when someone is suffering you can feel bad and do nothing. But there's an even greater danger that when YOU are suffering, you can feel bad for someone else and do nothing, because you're wrapped up in your problem, thus:

- **the point: minister to others as they or you suffer** Suffering does not excuse you from ministering to others. Having your own problems does not somehow remove the responsibility of helping others with theirs. Submitting means putting the problems of the other ahead of my own.

5. humility: valuing each other above self Here's the real key to submitting to one another, you regard the other as of greater value, of more importance:

- **the point: prioritize your life, putting others first** Suffering is a self-centering thing. It pressures you to think constantly and only about yourself. But submitting means you meet the other's needs before your own. You help them before you worry about getting your own needs met. Submission means putting the well-being of the other ahead of my own. Now all these five things are fine under normal conditions. Submitting is easy then, as long as they are in turn submitting and doing the same to you, but what about when a brother or sister wrongs you? Verse 9 adds a sixth characteristic of submission:

6. non-retaliation: forgiving each other's wrongs Everything that has been built into you has taught you to retaliate. When somebody insults or criticizes or castigates you, you want to respond in kind, even if that person is a brother in Christ! When they take advantage of you or slight you or break their promise to you, you want to retaliate. But God's plan is just the opposite:

- **the point: return good for evil** Their wrongdoing does not constitute license for you to do wrong toward them. Whether or not they have done you wrong, you are to be a blessing to them, to speak well to them, to love them, sympathize with them, help them, and value them! That means forgiving them! It means putting the anger and hurt aside and forgiving them as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you! Now when you do these things, when you submit your life to your brothers and sisters in Christ like this, God makes you a promise:

II. The Blessing You Shall Inherit (9b-12) The first thing we must do is to identify:

1. what the blessing is Peter is quoting here from Psalm 34. First look at the inscription. Remember that time in David's life when he was first fleeing from Saul and he got the brilliant idea to go Abimelech, one of the Philistine kings, to seek refuge, but he forgot that the Philistines still remembered that David had slain his ten thousands? And as he was standing there, all of a sudden realizing that his life was in danger, he must have silently cried out to God and God's answer came back, "Pretend you're insane!" and Abimelech believed the act and drove him away safely! Now read **Ps. 34:6-7, 11-19** The blessing David is talking about is not general; it is very specific. When we are in trouble or suffering, we have:

a. God's attention to our cry God's ears stand wide open, ready to hear us. He is close to those with a broken heart who sorrow and those with a crushed spirit. We know we have His attention and His heart. HE feels our feelings; HE cares about us; HE has compassion on us in our problem and so we have:

b. God's assistance in our condition A righteous man MAY have many troubles. God never guarantees to spare us from that. But out of them all, the Lord will deliver him! One way or the other! God will assist you and help you and somehow get you through the trouble and the suffering. But there are some prerequisites:

2. the qualifications summarized (10-11) They are simple:

a. a controlled tongue That means you must be submitting to others in what you say to them and about them, no matter what they say to or about you.

b. a consecrated life That means you must be submitting to others in how you live, doing them always good and never evil, no matter what they do to you.

c. a commitment to peace with others That means you must be submitting to others by putting them first, by setting aside differences, doing whatever is necessary to bring about a peaceful and harmonious relationship.

If we submit to one another, God will hear us. If we don't, if we turn a deaf ear toward them and toward how God says we should act toward them, then He will turn a deaf ear toward us! The thing that keeps us from submitting to others is that gnawing fear we have that if we put others first and take care of them, then who will take care of us? *Queen Elizabeth once sent an ambassador far away on important and difficult business. He objected, saying to the queen, "But what will become of my business and my family?" The queen replied, "You take care of my business and I will take care of yours."* If you take care of God's business and put Him first, He has promised to take care of yours!

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

3:13-22 - Our Submission To Others

Most of the suffering that comes to us in a deliberate fashion comes at the hands of others, of those outside the Christian faith. Sure, family members can put us through torture by their behavior, but most times they are not doing it deliberately to cause us suffering. Sure, other believers can really hurt us, but if you're involved in a spiritually growing church fellowship that should be pretty well minimized. So, the question Peter is considering here is how we relate to those others, those outsiders, especially when they are causing us suffering by their actions and attitudes toward us. Peter's answer is the same one that he has given us concerning all the other relationships in our lives. Submit to the government, submit to your boss, submit to your spouse, submit to your brothers and sisters in Christ, and now he says **SUBMIT** to others. Now in verses 13-17 you have:

I. Our Instruction to Submit to Others (13-17) While the word *submit* is not used directly, it is clear that we are to order our lives in a particular way toward those outside the faith. First, let's consider:

1. the meaning of our submission Submitting to others means that there are two specific things that God wants you to give to other people. The first is:

a. a ready testimony of Christ on your lips (15) God doesn't say that every Christian has to become a public evangelist, to stand up on a street corner and gather an audience, though He does call some to do that. He doesn't say that everyone has to go out knocking on doors and witnessing to strangers, though He does call some to do that. But He does say that every believer, no matter who you are, needs to be always ready, constantly prepared, to give an answer when somebody asks you! You see, God expects that if you're living for Him, your lifestyle will be significantly different from the non-Christians about you. There will be things they do all the time that you never do. There will be ways they talk all the time that you never do. There will be ways they react to people and problems that you never do. 4:4 says they will think it strange that you're not willing to hurry after them into sin. And some of them will ask you about it. Some of them will gather that you're a Christian and they will ask you how you can live like that, how you can act like you do, why you won't join them. And God says you need to be perched like a hawk watching for a mouse, ready and prepared to jump on that opportunity and give an answer. Now that word *answer* is significant. It is the Greek word from which we get our word *apology* and literally means a verbal defense. That doesn't mean an argument! It means that you tell them the reason why you believe in Jesus Christ, why you've given your life to Him as Lord and Master and why you're willing to do anything He says. You're ready to tell them what Jesus did for you, what a difference He's made in your life and how He sacrificed Himself for you. And did you notice how Peter said you're to do it? With gentleness and respect. Not with condemnation and criticism and telling them they'll die and rot in hell, not with a sense of arrogance and being better than they are, but humbly and with genuine respect for them as a person that Jesus loves and died for as well as you! There is no place for obnoxiousness in witnessing! But that's not usually our problem. Ours is exactly the opposite. So many times, we let that opportunity go by with our lips zipped. We let that person go without hearing. We're not willing to submit ourselves to that person enough to bare our soul and share the most important thing in our lives for some reason! Some people say, "But I'm a silent witness; I do things that show my faith". That's good and should be so, but they won't know why you do them unless you have a ready testimony to share. God says you must be ready, so if you're not, then do what it takes to get that way! But that does bring us to the second thing God wants you to give to others:

b. a real display of Christ in your life (16) Your words must be consistently matched by your deeds in the way you live. If they aren't, people will notice it. If they don't see any difference in you in the first place, they'll never ask. If you tell them and they see any hypocrisy in you, you can be sure they'll let you know. You must live so that you have a clear conscience before God. Then, if outsiders want to accuse you of something or pin something on you or paint you in an unfair light because your lifestyle makes them uncomfortable, so be it. Just don't give them an opportunity to have a real accusation! You see, these two things are a powerful combination, a ready testimony and a godly life. God can use those things to bring others to Himself. You can be a tool of God by submitting to others in these two things. But what about when it does the opposite. Well, consider:

2. the manner of our submission (13-14, 17) There are two things that God expects. Our submission must be:

a. continuing in spite of suffering A godly life should lead to praise and being liked, but it may not. Some people may mock you for it, may try to embarrass you for it, may consider it a challenge to tempt you to fall, or even hate you for it. Jesus told us to expect that. However, we are not to return evil for evil and retaliate. We are to continue to display a godly life toward that person. We are not to fear the things they fear and would try to use on us, even if it is the threat of death! We are to fear displeasing our Heavenly Father and continue on, even if it brings us suffering. But further, we must do it:

b. conscious of our blessing Did you see that in there? If you suffer for what is right, you are blessed! Why? The answer is in verse 15. You have a future hope that they know nothing of and cannot share in. You'll be in heaven with the Lord. They can't do one thing that can hurt your soul or take you away from the Lord. And the fact that you are suffering for doing good simply confirms again to you that you really are saved! That hope really IS in you. It is

so strong and real that suffering cannot shake it. You are truly blessed, no matter if life is the pits! Now to encourage us along the way, Peter moves on to give us:

II. Our Examples of Submission to Others (18-22) And the first one, as you might expect, is:

1. the example of Christ (18, 22) Verse 18 is one of the shortest but fullest explanations in the New Testament of the meaning of what Christ did on the cross. I could preach a whole sermon on it. Every word is packed with meaning. It has the purpose, the permanence, the substitution, and the effect of the cross in one sentence. But we don't want to lose sight of why it's here. His point about Jesus is that:

a. He suffered persecution to save sinners He was perfectly righteous; He lived the most godly life ever lived. He lived out what He expects of us. And when they opposed and persecuted Him, He did not retaliate, but submitted. In fact, in the body, they did the worst thing they could to Him; they did what every man fears. They put Him to death. Why did He do it? So God could save us by Him! And that's what He wants of us. He wants us to give out a ready testimony and a godly life, even under persecution, so He can use us to save people. But look:

b. He was rewarded with glorification The Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead and verse 22 continues the story. He is now gone into glory and seated at the Father's right hand forever and ever with the whole universe in submission to Him. And guess who's going to sit beside Him and reign with Him!! So what if they kill the body! After that, they have no more they can do, but we'll live in glory. So what if they mock and make trouble. We'll be glorified!

2. the example of Noah (19-20) Before we dive in, let me say that this is one of the more difficult passages in the word of God to understand and that good men have spent ages of time and volumes of paper arguing over these next three verses. So, if you don't like my explanation of them, somebody else will give you a better one, but this is the only one I know of that gives any reason for it being in the midst of a passage on witnessing. If you think you've got it bad sometimes, think about Noah:

a. he preached while the ark was being built In 2 Pet. 2:5 Peter specifically says Noah was a preacher of righteousness. God gave him 120 years advance notice of the flood and the judgment to come on the ungodly. That gave him time to build the ark and to tell all his neighbors about God and His holiness and the judgment to come. Imagine the guff he must have taken for building a boat on dry land! Imagine how people mocked and scoffed at the thought of a flood that would cover the mountains; how they must have picked on him! You see the:

b. people were not persuaded, perished, and are now in prison The word *disobedient* literally means "refused to be persuaded". They wouldn't listen during those years the ark was in building, not until it had rained 5 or 10 days! Then it was too late. What they feared most, death, came upon them and they perished, every one, and are now in the prison of hades or hell awaiting the final torment of the Lake of Fire. But what about Noah?

c. he and his family were delivered The same water that destroyed them buoyed Noah and his family up in the ark and saved their lives. You see, Noah had a sure future hope that the ungodly didn't have and so he was willing to be used of God in ministry to others even if it meant suffering at their hands! And now comes:

3. the application of baptism (21) Of course, you should be asking, "What in the world does baptism have to do with all this?" That flood water saved Noah and that water is a symbol of the water of baptism that "saves" you. Before you shout "heresy," let me think with you a moment. The water didn't actually save Noah's life, did it? No, God did. And the water of baptism doesn't save your soul. Peter says that plainly. *Dirt from the body* is literally, *the filth of the flesh*. I think he's talking about our sins here. Baptism doesn't wash away those filthy sins that result from our flesh, our old nature. It's only a symbol, something God uses for a purpose in our lives.

a. we have a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Christ Baptism is an appeal made by an already good conscience. How do we get that? The words *it saves you* in the NIV are NOT in the Greek, so cross them out. The word *by* here means "on the basis of" or "on the ground of". Of what? Of the Resurrection of Christ. Rom. 4:24-25 tells us that Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification. His resurrection is the PROOF that we are forgiven and justified. When we believe in our hearts that Christ died for us and that He rose the third day, we are saved; we have a clear conscience and can approach God and so:

b. we confessed that openly by baptism Things have changed a bit for us. In those days baptism was done openly and in public down at the riverbank or the lake. And most of those coming to Christ were adults. So, to be baptized meant that you were consciously declaring before the whole town that you were no longer a worshipper of idols who practiced the lifestyle that went with them; you were a Christian and you would practice the lifestyle laid down by Jesus Christ your Lord and Master. Now we do it inside and nobody else seems to care too much, but it should still mean the same thing to us. "I've given my life to Jesus Christ from here on. I'm renouncing the sinful lifestyle of the world. I belong to Jesus Christ because He saved me and I want everyone to know it!" And that's what got them in trouble, what got them persecuted and hated. But to us, baptism means:

c. we are assured of our deliverance Your baptism is a sign that you are delivered. The fact that you were baptized says that you are confident that you belong to Jesus Christ. No matter what they may do to you, you can submit to others; you can bear a testimony to them and live an uncompromised godly life before them because you have eternal salvation. And your baptism is your sign and reminder of that.

The question is, will you do it? Will you submit to others? Will you tell them about your Lord Jesus Christ as He gives you opportunity? Will you live a godly, uncompromised lifestyle and not hide it from your friends so they can see the difference? Will you be used as an instrument of God to save others? And will you do it even if they turn against you? *A story is told of Peter Miller, a plain Baptist preacher of Ephrata, PA, in the days of the Revolutionary War. Near his church lived a man who abused the pastor to the last degree. The man became involved in treason and was arrested and sentenced to be hanged. This old preacher started out on foot and walked the whole seventy miles to Philadelphia that he might plead for the man's life. Washington heard his plea. But he said, "No, your plea for your friend cannot be granted." "My friend!" said the preacher. "He is the worst enemy I have." "What!" said Washington, "you have walked nearly seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts the matter in a different light. I will grant the pardon."* Could you dare to think that you might be God's means of granting eternal pardon to your worst enemy? If so, why not to your best friend? The question is, will you?

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

4:1-6 - Our Attitude About Sin

At chapter 4 we reach the third major division of the book of 1 Peter. First, we saw our IDENTITY in Suffering, who we are! Then we examined our ACTIONS in Suffering, which all boil down to the command of SUBMISSION in every relationship of life. Now Peter proceeds to talk about:

III. Our Attitude In Suffering	Ch. 4
1. our attitude about sin	1-6
2. our attitude about service	7-11
3. our attitude about suffering	12-19

Everyone knows that attitude is important in facing almost any difficult thing in life, whether it's an operation or a job or a marriage! And when we as Christians face suffering, we need to face it with the proper attitude. Verse 1 says are to *arm ourselves*, literally, to put on the heavy armor like a soldier does, with the same attitude or way of thinking that Jesus Christ had when He suffered in His body! Paul said almost the same thing in Phil. 2, *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...* Jesus Christ endured suffering, insult, pain and death in full submission. How did He do it? He had an attitude, a mindset, a way of thinking. He had an attitude about sin, an attitude about serving the Lord, and an attitude about suffering itself. And if we adopt the same attitude, it will prepare and protect us when we have to face suffering and allow us to triumph over it spiritually. This morning we want to concern ourselves with our attitude toward sin. I have often noted already in this series that suffering can very easily lead to sin. In fact, that's one of Satan's chief uses for it. God uses it for positive good in our lives, but Satan tries to take advantage of it while it's there and try to use it to get us to sin. There are four principles, four basic axioms of thinking, which, if I adopt them and live by them, will deliver me from this trap of the devil. The first one is this:

I. I am done with sin (1) Now that does not mean that I am perfect and without sin. Sin still dwells in me; it still affects me and tempts me. It is not done with me until I get to glory. But I am done with it! I am consciously choosing to have nothing to do with it! That's the attitude the Savior had. He was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin; He chose to have nothing to do with it. The KJV and NAS say that the one who has suffered in the flesh has "ceased from sin". If you look at the next three verses, you'll see what Peter's talking about. It doesn't mean the Christian is sinless; it means that he has stopped his former lifestyle and habits of sin. Debauchery and drunkenness and immorality and idolatry, those things are no longer part of his life. He has gotten release from the power of sin over his life through his new birth and now, through the power of Christ in him, he's choosing to be done with those things! That should be my attitude. But why? Because:

1. my Savior died to free me from it Because Christ suffered in His body for me; because He died on the cross, not only to procure forgiveness for all my sins, but to break the power of sin in my life! When I as a Christian choose to sin, I am deliberately going against the dearest thing in all the world to me! Sin is not some light thing, some mistake, some lark or tangent I get sidetracked on. Sin is trampling underfoot the blood of Jesus Christ. Sin is saying, "I don't care that Jesus died on the cross for me; it doesn't matter that He gave His life to take this thing out of my life forever!" That's why I have to be done with it. That's why in my mind I have to be committed to this principle. Now, the positive news is that:

2. my suffering shows me I am done with it The kind of suffering he's talking about is persecution by unbelievers. That's why he wrote the letter, because these folks in Asia Minor were suffering persecution. And he confirms that's what he means in verse 4. And what he's saying in verse 1 is that if I am suffering persecution here in the body, it is proof that my life has changed, that I have quit my habits of sin, that I am living as though I am done with sin. Other-

wise, nobody would persecute me for it! There's a note of rejoicing when you're getting guff at work because you won't do something or when you're getting laughed at and mocked at school because you won't party with your coworkers or do drugs or drink like they do. Your commitment to Christ must be solid and firm, otherwise you'd throw in the towel and follow the crowd and sin! But you don't! So, keep that principle in your mind at all times, I am done with sin. Now here's the second one:

II. I live for the will of God (2-3) That was always Jesus' mindset. It was prophesied about Him in the Psalms, *I have come to do your will, O God!* In John 6:38 He said, *I have come down from heaven not to do my will but the will of Him who sent me!* He lived that way and when he faced the prospect of the cross in the garden, He prayed, *Not my will, but thine be done!* Most people live to get what they want and to do what they want. That is their goal. They work hard at it. But the Christian is not on this earth for that reason; he is here to do, to live for, the will of God. Now, Peter reminds me that:

1. I spent enough time in sin before conversion I spent enough time living like other pagans live. Maybe you were saved as an adult. You might have been involved in serious sin like the ones mentioned here. Or you might not have been, but just think of all those wasted years where you lived for yourself and not for God. That was enough of that, wasn't it? I was saved at 15. You might say, "What kind of sin can a 15 year old be delivered from?" How about lust and stealing and lying and swearing, to name a few. I was only 15, but by then I had spent enough time living for me and not for God. You might have been saved at a tender young age. But listen, ANY time spent living in sin and for self is ENOUGH! Time is too precious. I don't need that in my life now. That's why:

2. I no longer live to please myself I am a Christian. I called Christ my Lord. After what He did for me, what I want doesn't matter anymore. Life is not about getting what I want. Life is not about having everything I would enjoy having or doing everything that would feel good. Life is about doing what He wants, in fact, it is about making sure that everything I do is what He wants me to do! And if that is difficult or if it brings suffering or persecution, so be it! I live for God's will! But that brings us to the third principle.

III. I will suffer persecution for it (4-6) Jesus had this in mind; He warned us of it. Compare **Jn. 15:18-21**. He told us to keep it in mind, to remember it. Paul said the same thing, *All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution!* And that's me. I WILL suffer for being done with sin and living for the will of God. Verse 4 says:

1. other people will think me strange I'll be the oddball who doesn't drink, who doesn't do drugs, who doesn't have sex before marriage or outside of my marriage, who doesn't lie or cheat on my taxes. I'll be viewed as different by others and:

2. they will persecute me for it Some folks will like it. But some of them will have their consciences pricked by my behavior. They will feel guilty and they won't like it. So they'll heap abuse on me. Literally, they'll blaspheme me. They'll say bad things about me and insult me and accuse me. Verse 6 indicates that some of these Christians had already died for their faith in the Roman persecution. The suffering of persecution will come in some way or other, at some level or other. But here's something to remember:

3. they will have to give an account to God Nobody gets away with anything! Unbelievers will have to stand before God for punishment and they can't escape it, even by death. What they do to you does not go unnoticed and it does not go unpunished. God sees and, unless they come to Christ, they will be judged for it! But if I have it in my mind ahead of time that I will be persecuted, it helps me to be armed and mentally ready when it comes, and here's the principle that will really sustain me:

IV. I have eternal life (6) Jesus, *for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame*, and is now sitting at the right hand of God. He had that forward look in His mind. His mind was not on the present suffering, but on the glory to come. So should mine be. You see, in the long run:

1. the persecution of this body does not matter Some of these Christians had become martyrs for their faith. Men judged them and did to them their worst. Somebody might have been tempted to think, "What good did the Gospel do them; they died!" Peter is reminding us that the Gospel wasn't preached to us to spare us from suffering in the body, but so that our spirits might live with God! You see:

2. my spirit will live with God forever They can kill me, but after that there is no more that they can do. I am a Christian; I have eternal life. Nobody can take that from me. If I die, I am still alive! Now, that thought will prepare your mind to face anything. That thought makes it worthwhile to be done with sin and to live for the will of God and to suffer for it, if need be. After my cross, I too will sit down at the right hand of God forever! Why should I allow suffering to wear me down so that I throw in the towel and sin? That's the easy way out. Be like everybody else, do what they do, conform! But I'm not like everybody else. I have a higher destiny. That's why my attitude is to be, "I'm done with sin!"

Once a tug boat was towing a heavy barge on the Great Lakes and was caught in a terrible storm. It was swept again and again from stern to bow by heavy breakers. It began taking water and for hours it seemed there was little hope for its

crew. All through the night they were beaten by fierce waves but managed to keep afloat and in the morning the captain and crew were rescued by a passing ship. Afterward the captain, in telling of the night of fear, said there was one thing that strengthened them to carry on and keep hope alive in their hearts. Shining through the gloom they could occasionally see the lights of home. Without that they might have given up and been lost. The pressure to give in and quit and fall into sin may be great, but if you'll just keep the eyes of your mind looking upward instead of downward at the watery circumstances, you'll see the lights of home. The writer of Hebrews put it like this, *Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin which so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God!*" - 12:1-2.

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

4:7-11 - Our Attitude About Service

In chapter 4, Peter gives us instructions about our ATTITUDE in suffering. In verse 1 he plainly says that since Christ suffered in His body, we are to arm ourselves with the same attitude that He had. In our study of verses 1-6 we talked about our attitude toward sin and how when we suffer, we are to have the attitude, "I am done with sin, no matter what; I'm not going to sin; I refuse". Now if Satan can't use his number one tactic and get you to sin because of the suffering that comes into your life, then he'll try to use his very powerful number two tactic, which is to get you to stop serving God. Pain demands attention. Have you noticed that? It's amazing how quickly you forget where you were going when you get your hand smashed in the car door! And when life becomes painful through suffering, there is a natural tendency to focus all your time and attention on alleviating or at least enduring the suffering. And Satan likes to capitalize on that to get you to focus on yourself and your problem so completely that you forget all about why you're really here, to serve God. And thus you become totally ineffective! But Jesus remembered that He was here to serve. It was on His way up to Jerusalem, having just explained the details of his coming suffering and death clearly to His disciples, that He said in Mt. 20:28, *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* In all of His suffering, Jesus always had a clear attitude about serving, so He triumphed over suffering and accomplished God's purpose in saving us. And you can do the same. Here are the things Peter says to build into your attitude about serving:

I. Serve With Urgency (7a) The verb *to draw near* or *approach* in this phrase in the Greek is in what is called the perfect tense, which has the idea of something that has happened in the past and bears a continuing relationship to the present. English has no real equivalent of it, but you could see it, for example, in the phrase, "It is written". That is not really present tense; it is not being written right now. It was written in the past and it still stands written today. So literally, the end of all things which will occur at the return of Christ *has drawn near*. It is a fixed thing. The time of it was settled and appointed in eternity past. And now it has drawn near. People look at phrases like that in the New Testament and say, "Peter must have been wrong; 2000 years have gone by so it was not near." That's not what he's saying. He's not saying that it is near as we would measure nearness, like in 5 or 10 years or even 50 years. It's as though he's been looking down at his feet while walking toward a mountain and then suddenly looked up to find that the mountain has drawn much nearer than before. And when we stop looking at our problems and look up and think about it, we realize the return of Christ has drawn even nearer, 2000 years nearer. For me it is 68 years nearer than when I was born. The sense is that it is rapidly approaching; time is slipping by and life is evaporating at an enormously fast pace. It seems but yesterday I was a child and yet so much of my expected life is already gone. There is so much to do and so little time yet to do it in! I don't have time to get sidetracked and focus on myself and my problems. If I do, time will slip away and the Lord will come or I'll die and I'll not have accomplished my purpose for being on this earth. My mind has to have a sense of urgency that cuts right through problems and keeps me serving even in the midst of them, even if the way I serve has to change. And right along with that goes this principle:

II. Serve With Clarity (7b) Now, by clarity, I mean this. You serve, first of all:

1. knowing what your purpose here is We identified it back in verse 2. You live for the will of God. You are here to serve God, to accomplish the tasks that He has laid out for you, to finish the course that He has set for you. To be clear-minded or of sound mind means that through everything that happens to you, you keep your mind focused on what you're here for, to serve God. If you end up in the hospital, your mind should be thinking, "How can I serve God here?" When tragedy strikes, your mind should be so programmed to serve that it asks, "How can God use this in my life to minister to others?" And Peter uses a second word to describe this, *self-controlled* which means:

2. unaffected by outside influences It means you remain true to your purpose regardless of the pull of your feelings and emotions and desires which may be aroused by suffering in your life. You see, if you have it fixed in your mind, "I am here to serve God no matter what!" then when suffering or trouble comes, you'll triumph over it and turn it into an opportunity to serve God. Then be sure that you:

III. Serve With Prayer (7c) There is nothing more important, whether you are suffering or not suffering, than prayer. You'll never have victory over suffering without constant communication with the Master. If you let your prayer and devotional life go, when trouble comes, you're sunk. Satan has won. Your purpose in life ends up defeated and you end up useless.

So the best thing to do is to ingrain it as such a habit now that when trouble comes, you keep it up regardless! Here are three quick suggestions:

- **have a set time to pray** Otherwise you won't do it seriously.
- **have a regular place to pray** Pick a quiet, private spot and make it your regular place to pray, so that when you come to it you mind says, "Now I'm going to pray".
- **have a plan of praying** Use a prayer guide or write a planned out prayer list, but make sure you have some time to thank God for answers, to pray for others, and to pray for your own needs and put that last!

And you'll find a habit of prayer like that will carry you right on through trouble, serving God. Then:

IV. Serve With Love (8-9) Now, you may not see it at first glance, but there are two groups in view here. Verse 8 has in view:

1. those you know (8) It's hard to "each other" people you never see. It's talking about the Christian brothers and sisters that are part of your life, that you fellowship with regularly. Love them not just generally, but DEEPLY; REALLY love them and chiefly that means overlooking their faults. Sure, they've got faults and fallacies and sometimes hurt you a bit or are insensitive and even sometimes sin, but let your love be deep enough to cover those things over, to forgive them and keep on loving! Don't let a little suffering and difficulty break off your love for one another! Then, verse 9 has in view:

2. those you don't know (9) The word *hospitality* is *philoxenia*, the love of strangers. It's not talking about inviting each other over for cozy dinners (which is OK too); this is talking about other brothers and sisters who are strangers to you and you're to love them by meeting their needs. These folks lived in an era of outright persecution. Christians would be forced to flee sometimes to other towns and find shelter with brethren there. Those brethren were to love them and meet their needs without grumbling! Don't let your own problems cause you to grumble about having to help or minister to the needs of others. If you fill your mind ahead of time with the attitude of true love toward others, you'll triumph over suffering and keep on serving God. Next:

V. Serve With Faithfulness (10) Here Peter points out that:

1. each one is entrusted with a gift to serve others And you thought you were just naturally talented! Everybody, every believer, has at least one gift and usually more, an ability that has been entrusted to you by God to use for His service. It may be an ability like singing or teaching or it may be organization or helping others or any one of a thousand other things. But whatever it is, you didn't earn it. God has entrusted it to you to equip you to serve Him while you are on this earth. So on our part:

2. we must faithfully exercise that gift And faithfully means that we don't quit because we're suffering or trouble has come into our lives. Faithful is what God is. Did you ever get up one morning and there was no sunrise or did it ever fail to get dark one night? Did you ever miss summer once and have winter two years running? God doesn't quit loving and caring for you for a single moment and you can't let trouble and suffering make you quit using your gifts for Him, even if the use of them has to be redirected or changed. And along with that comes our last principle:

VI. Serve With Dependence (11) Here's something you must never forget about serving:

1. you serve conscious of your need for Him If you speak, then you do it realizing that you need His help. I can stand up and speak words to you on my own. But without God, it will never cause you to grow or change your life. Every morning before I get up to preach, we always pray in the study that God will do the speaking, that He will do the work. If you serve in another way, you must realize that you are dependent on His strength. Sure, you can go do something on your own, but unless He's working through you, it won't end up having any eternal value or effect. You're dependent on God and you'd better know it! That's got to be in your mind all the time, constantly. And when you're suffering, you'll find that need is even more real, but when you draw on that strength and let Him live through you, then:

2. He receives all the credit And that's the goal of our serving anyway, not to get His praise for ourselves, but to get Him praise because of ourselves!

Jesus had an attitude of serving, no matter what. Jesus served us despite His personal suffering by going to the cross. The night before His death, he took a towel and got down on His knees and washed the disciples' feet. He, the Lord and Master, served them as a common servant would. Then He said, "I have done this as an example to you; you should do as I have done unto you." Serve God by serving one another in spite of your personal difficulties and problems. Then He got up and went to the cross and did just what He commanded; He served to the very end. Will you?

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

4:12-19 - Our Attitude About Suffering

There is a third area in our attitude in suffering that Peter gives consideration to in this fourth chapter. The first area was our attitude toward sin; I am done with sin, no matter what. The second area was our attitude about service; I will serve

God, no matter what. This third area is our attitude about suffering itself. We are to arm ourselves with the same attitude that our Lord Jesus Himself had toward suffering when He was here on earth. And so, we have to begin by talking about:

I. The Nature of Suffering (12) People have all kinds of varying views about what suffering really is. There are those who shout loud and clear that all suffering is of the devil and if you're suffering, it's Satan out to get you! Now there's no question that Satan will try to use the suffering in your life to affect your spiritual life. He'll try to get you to sin because of it or to stop serving God or to doubt God or whatever He can. But I'm just enough of a Calvinist to believe that our Sovereign Almighty God is in full control of everything that happens to me and that everything that happens to me is filtered through His hand, whether Satan initiates it or not. You see, the bottom line with these folks, and maybe with some of us, is that we feel that suffering is an alien thing, that somehow it doesn't belong in my life because I'm a Christian. Jesus saved me and everything ought to be just hunky-dory, but Peter says:

1. suffering is not an alien thing It is not some strange, foreign thing. It is a normal part of human existence in this world the way it is. Everybody suffers. And Jesus warned His disciples repeatedly to expect suffering, especially as a normal part of the path of following Him. He said, *In this world, you SHALL have tribulation!* That's why there's a heaven! We are in one sense no different from other people. Suffering is a normal and natural part of existence in this world. But the difference is that for us:

2. suffering is a purposeful, refining thing See the words *painful trial*? The KJV translates more literally, *fiery trial*. For these folks that was pretty literal. In Rome Christians were being covered with pitch and lit as torches to light the Emperor's gardens at night! But it literally means a refining by fire as in 1:7. Gold is melted in fire and in the process the fire refines it, removing the impurities. Suffering is a normal part of existence, certainly, but it is not meaningless! It is God at work in our lives with a purpose, teaching, purifying, refining, changing us, always working it together somehow for His good purpose. We've got to stop seeing suffering as the enemy when it comes into our lives and start looking for the hand of God in it! For example, when I was 15, my father died and that was difficult emotionally, financially, and even in terms of transportation, because my mother didn't drive. But it meant that I had to be the man of the house, to fix things, care for the property, and so on. Yet now when I look back on it, without that, I doubt I'd be in the ministry today. Four years later I became the pastor of a church! That could never have been without the maturity I was forced into by that difficult time. You see, suffering is God at work, molding, shaping, preparing me for His glory and for GLORY! And hang onto your hat because I'm going to plunge in one step deeper and talk about:

II. The Blessing of Suffering Suffering is actually a blessing in your life, not only because God uses it to refine and mold you, but for two other reasons. First:

1. it includes you in the sufferings of Christ (13) That's deep! When you suffer in the will of God and particularly when you suffer for being a Christian, you are participating in the sufferings of Christ. He's not talking about the suffering which Christ did on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Our suffering does not help Him atone for our sins in any way. That is complete and finished. Compare **Col. 1:24** where Paul says the same thing and uses the Greek word translated *afflictions*, literally *distress, pressure, or trouble*. It's not talking about His death, but about His life. In leaving heaven and coming to earth, Christ took on Himself suffering. He suffered as a human being all the same things that you suffer. Now, after returning to heaven, He is STILL SUFFERING. But He is doing in the person of His body which He left on earth, the Church! You see, I am identified with Him. I am part of His body in this world and when I suffer, He is still suffering in His body, still feeling the pain. I am participating in the continuing suffering of Christ. So many times we think how we would gladly have suffered with Him through the rejection of the crowds and the agony of the garden and the sadness at Lazarus' tomb. We would have shared that suffering. Well, that's what you're doing right now! You are sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings, suffering His sufferings for Him and with Him. Peter says we should rejoice. We are privileged to be a co-sufferer with Him. But hallelujah, one day His suffering will finally be over; His glory will be revealed! And then His body will suffer no more. All suffering will be ended and we'll overflow with joy! And when you realize that you are participating together in His sufferings, do you know what that does? It binds you together in a brand new way; it gives you a deeper, fuller closeness than ever. When two people suffer through some terrible ordeal together they are often bound together for life because of the mutual support they received from each other, like two war veterans who fought in the same unit or a couple who live through some accident or illness; they are bound deeply. Let me tell you, there is nothing that will bind you closer to the Lord than suffering, if you will let it drive you to Him! The times that I have felt myself closest to the Lord in my life have been the times of greatest difficulty! But there's a second blessing in suffering:

2. it assures you of the Spirit's presence (14) When the suffering takes the specific form of persecution, when you get insulted because you let it be known that you're a Christian or you get picked on or discriminated against or fired because of your Christian principles, there is something special you can rejoice in. Evidently the Holy Spirit really does live in you and work through you, or you wouldn't be suffering that way. If you were like all the rest of people, they wouldn't persecute you for being different. But since Jesus Christ has changed you, you suffer for it and that ought to assure your heart that your faith is really genuine; otherwise, you'd quit and give in and be like the rest. So, suffering is a normal part of the Christian life and it is actually a great blessing in several ways. Well then, if that is your attitude, if those things are in your mind, how should you react when suffering comes your way? Here is:

III. The Reaction to Suffering

There are five steps. First:

1. cut out things that bring deserved suffering (15) The words *it should not be* are literally, *do not let it be*. In other words, make sure if you're suffering, that it's not because you deserve it. These were the things they were suffering in this wave of persecution. Some were murdered; others had property confiscated or were mistreated some other way. Peter is saying, "Don't you do it back! Don't you retaliate and kill somebody or steal from those who have hurt you or do anything else that would deserve being branded as a criminal, and then suffer for that and think you're suffering for God! Don't even meddle in other people's business where you don't belong and then suffer for it and think you're suffering for God!" In other words, cut out the wrong things that you may be doing or you'll suffer for them. That's first, then:

2. count yourself a Christian joyfully (16) Don't be ashamed of it. You see, the term *Christian* was not such a nice term in the beginning. It seems to have been a term of derision. There was everybody else and then there were those "Christians". Everybody else was a *kaisarianos*, a worshipper of Caesar. You were a *christianos*, a worshipper of Christ. That made you an enemy of the state, a traitor. It carried a similar connotation to the word *communist* in our time. But Peter said, "So what! Don't be ashamed of that. It means 'little Christ'. Praise God that you have the privilege to bear that seemingly cursed name." No matter what your love for Jesus brings you, be proud of it; be glad that you carry His Name, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which you can be saved! And while you're doing it remember to:

3. consider the end of others (17-18) Let me paraphrase what Peter is saying, "If we're Christians and we love God and belong to Him and He has to deal with us as His own people so severely by bringing suffering and persecution into our lives to mold and shape and discipline us and make us what He wants, if God has to deal with us in so severe a fashion, what do you think will happen to unsaved people who don't love Him?" Sure, unbelievers may persecute you and give you a hard time, but they're going to fall into the hands of Almighty God whose wrath is a consuming fire. There's hell to pay, literally! Do you want to change places with them? Would you rather be in their shoes? NO! So, here's what you do:

4. commit yourself to your Faithful Creator (19a) That word *commit* in the Greek is a very familiar word to you. You do it every week at the bank. You take your money and deposit it there for safekeeping. So Peter's talking about:

a. the deposit of your soul *Yourself* is literally *your soul*. You commit your soul into the hand of the One who is big enough to keep it and so faithful that He will never lose it. This is what Jesus did on the cross when He prayed, *Father, into thy hand I commend my Spirit*. Listen, do you worry about your money that's in the bank? Do you lie awake worrying that the bank will lose it? No? Then have that kind of committed confidence in God. Know that your soul is in His hand and you're secure, so then commit to Him:

b. the disposition of your life The implication goes further than just salvation. If God is faithful enough to keep your soul, then He's also faithful enough to keep your life, to control every moment of it according to His will. Trust Him! Leave your life in His hands and say, "Thy will be done". And then:

5. continue doing good (19b) Continue living right. Continue serving God. Continue in spite of suffering, in spite of persecution, in spite of obstacles, in spite of handicaps, in spite of tragedies, in spite of losses, in spite of anything that may come your way!

Blaise Pascal was one of the greatest scientific minds of the western world, but on Nov. 23, 1654 He found Jesus Christ as His Savior. For about two hours he had an intense experience of something he'd never known in all his philosophy and science, the presence of God. And that conversion was real and lasted to his dying day. But here is a prayer that He wrote down on an occasion in his life when he was sick and suffering: "Lord, whose spirit is so good and so gentle in all things, and who art so compassionate that not only all prosperity but even all afflictions that come to Thine elect are the results of Thy compassion: grant me grace that I may not do as the pagans do in the condition to which thy justice has reduced me; grant that as a true Christian I may recognize Thee as my father and as my God, in whatever estate I find myself, since the change in my condition brings no change in thy own. For Thou art the same, though I be subject to change, and Thou art God no less when Thou dost afflict and when Thou dost punish, than when Thou dost console and when Thou dost manifest indulgence." If you have a right attitude toward suffering, then you'll say "Amen!" to that!

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

5:1-4 - The Responsibilities Of Leaders

At chapter 5 we come to the fourth and final division of the book. Peter closes his letter by reminding us that in suffering we still have responsibilities that we must fulfill. They don't quit just because we have a problem or a difficulty. The fifth chapter can be simply divided like this:

IV. Our Responsibilities In Suffering	Ch. 5
1. the responsibilities of leaders	1-4
2. the responsibilities of all	5-14

Today we'll focus on the first four verses and talk about the responsibilities of leaders. Now the first person that ought to listen to this sermon is your pastor. He really needs this, whoever he is. Then notice it is addressed to the elders, those leaders of the local church who serve as overseers, watching over all the people and the whole ministry. So, there are a number of us who have to really listen up this morning. But that doesn't mean the rest of you can go to sleep! The responsibilities Peter reminds us of apply to anybody in leadership in any capacity, Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, Nursery School staff, VBS workers, even nursery helpers, even PARENTS and bosses. Then, just in case you don't fit any of those categories, there are still some principles here about serving God that apply to any Christian, so maybe you'd better stay awake. First, in verse 1 we meet:

I. The Mentor of Our Ministry: Peter (1) Here is the first leader, the first shepherd of the church, the only one to whom Jesus said three times, *Feed my sheep*... He is sort of the pioneer leader of the church, but look how this man whom we call a great leader looks at himself and in what capacity he speaks to us. He sees himself first as:

1. a fellow elder He doesn't say, "I'm the leader of all you leaders and I'm here to tell you how you should lead." No, he says, "I'm one of you! I find myself in the same position. I lead people just like you do, have the same kind of responsibility. I understand what you're going through and what this responsibility entails." So, you can't look at Peter and say, "Well, that's fine but did you ever do it?" Sure he did, and he also sees himself as:

2. a fellow believer He is a witness of Christ's sufferings, literally, one who is called to give testimony to what he has experienced. He was given the position of telling the world of Christ's suffering and death and resurrection. Isn't that what we all are? He's one of us, a fellow believer, one who's clinging to the fact that Jesus died for him, and one whose task is to be a witness of that fact to others. And then he sees himself as:

3. a fellow sufferer, one who will share in the glory to be revealed. But who is it that will share in the glory to be revealed? Look back to 4:13. Those who participate in the sufferings of Christ. Those who suffer now for His sake. Peter is a fellow-sufferer, just like us. In Acts we read how he was jailed, his life threatened. And Jesus even warned him that suffering would come into his life and that when he was old, he would stretch out his hands and someone would carry him where he did not want to go. History tells us that at last Peter was crucified at Rome, but in the upside down position at his own request, not feeling worthy of dying in the exact same manner as the Savior.

You see, Peter never saw himself as above and beyond. Always as simply one of the group, a leader in a team of leaders, a believer among a group of believers, a sufferer among a flock of sufferers. When a leader starts to see himself as different, as above and beyond, as better than or smarter than or holier than the people he leads, he's left the biblical model of leadership. Peter once said "Though everyone else forsakes you, I will never forsake you!" But he did and a great change has come over him now. What has left? Pride! We may have different levels of maturity and we may have different callings and responsibilities but before God we are all equal. Somebody has defined witnessing as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Well leadership is one student helping another student with his lessons! Leader, don't you ever forget who you are: nobody! You are a sheep among the sheep with the job of helping the other sheep. And that brings us to:

II. The Mandate of Our Ministry: The Shepherd (2-3) Ministry is described here with the key verb *to shepherd*. If we can understand what a shepherd is and does, then we can understand ministry. Incidentally, the word *pastor* means *shepherd* and in that sense, every leader is a pastor. Now let's look at:

1. the meaning of ministry There are two key concepts here:

a. you are entrusted with a part of God's flock Did you hear that? Whose flock? God's! The people you minister to as a leader are not your sheep; they are God's. They belong to Jesus Christ. He is the Chief Shepherd in verse 4. But He has singled out a particular portion of His flock and allotted them or entrusted them to you to take care of as an under-shepherd to Him. Every person of that congregation, every member of that class, every member of that family, is God's and he has entrusted their care to you. And He knew just who to give you! Sure, sometimes you wonder why he didn't give that sheep that keeps breaking through the fence to your neighbor instead, but He didn't. What a responsibility! Suppose I had to go somewhere and I gave you my child to take care of, just imagine the responsibility you'd feel. Well, God has given to you some of His children and:

b. you are to meet their needs as a shepherd What does a shepherd do for the sheep? He finds it food and water. He protects it from harm and the elements. He cares for it in illness and retrieves it when it wanders off. In short, he does his best to meet every need that the sheep has. If you don't relate well to taking care of sheep, just think of taking care of children. You have to meet their every need, feed them, dress them, bathe them, discipline them, comfort them, protect them, educate them. That's what ministry is! It is not a job. It is not a profession. It is loving a bunch of sheep and doing everything you can to meet their needs! Now what in the world would you want to do that for? Look at:

2. the motive of ministry Peter lists two pairs of negatives and positives in verse 2, reasons why people minister to others. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people in ministry with:

a. the wrong motives He mentions two:

(1) compulsion: because you have to "I'm doing this because God called me to do it. I don't like doing it, I don't want to do it. But if I don't do it, I'll be in trouble with God, so I just do it because I have to." Do you want that person taking care of your pet? Or teaching your child? Or for your pastor? For example, we had a retired neighbor, a widower, and when he went away, he would ask me to go over and care for his cat. I do it because I genuinely want to help my neighbor, but as far as the cat goes, I do it because I have to! And you know what? That cat has all its needs met, but we have no relationship at all! And that's what happens when you lead people out of compulsion. There is no love and Paul said if you sacrificed all your goods for them but didn't have love, it gains you nothing. There is no reward for that, because it isn't ministry! Love your sheep! And that brings up a second wrong motive:

(2) selfishness: to get something in return Plenty of people minister for what they can get out of it, whether that is money or recognition or status or praise or a boosted ego or even to lay up a huge reward in heaven. "I'm going to minister now, even though I don't like it, because I know that God will really reward me for it in heaven and I want the biggest reward I can get!" They're the folks that are always praying like the Pharisee, "See Lord, look what I've done, don't forget!" Jesus said if that's why you minister, to get something, then you've already got your reward right here and now; don't expect one in heaven! Again, love your sheep! Now here are:

b. the right motives See them?

(1) willingness: because you want to Shepherd your flock, not because you have to, but because you really want to, because your heart genuinely wants to please God and really cares about the sheep. And take that one step further to:

(2) eagerness: to meet the needs of others It is not to be just, "OK, I'm willing," but "I'm ready and eager, I really want to care for these folks because I love them and care about them and I count it a great privilege to be able to help them." That's the person I want caring for me! And my friend, if you're a leader in whatever way, even as a parent, ask God to fill your heart with that willingness, that eagerness, so that your ministry is not just an assignment, but an act of love and a joy to carry out! And one more thing:

3. the manner of ministry With leadership always comes authority of one degree or another. And though you may genuinely love and care for that flock, it matters how you go about it. Peter says in verse 3 that we are to be:

a. not lordly masters of the flock Sure, sometimes a leader has to tell people what to do and how to do it. The Bible recognizes that. But a leader is not to be autocratic and high-handed, emphasizing his right to demand and to exert his own will. There are a lot of people who operate in that mode. They are chiefly known as people who command, who demand, and you know what? The flock usually doesn't like them! The flock is usually miserable and rebels whenever possible. We are not to be lording it over our sheep:

b. but living models to the flock Whatever we teach, we live. Whatever we expect, we perform. Whatever we want to see built in them, we demonstrate before them, so that we can humbly say with Paul, *Be followers of me as I follow Christ!* That's the kind of leadership God wants, in the church and in the home.

Now what's all this leadership stuff doing in the middle of a book about suffering? It is because suffering is when this kind of leadership is needed most of all! Folks, when your flock is suffering and hurting, that's when they need you to be there in love, willingly caring for them in their need, living the love of Christ out before them. And the time of suffering is also when you'd most like to quit, to start worrying about yourself and forget about your sheep and let them wander off on their own way while you see that your own needs are met. What did Jesus say about the good shepherd? He lays down his life for his sheep if necessary! But it's worth it:

III. The Reward of Our Ministry: The Crown (4) One of these days the Chief Shepherd will appear and our shepherding days will be over, but we'll receive an eternal crown of glory, a bright and shining reward that will last forever and never fade away like the flowers do! Or even like "thank-yous" do. But just remember, it is future. There may be very little reward in caring for the flock now. Just wait, you're not home yet!

1 PETER: TRIUMPHING OVER SUFFERING

5:5-14 - Your Responsibilities In Suffering

Leaders are not the only ones who have responsibilities in times of suffering. We all do. And Peter uses his closing words to remind us of them. In fact, these closing verses of the book form a sort of summary of many of the things that Peter has enjoined on us elsewhere. When suffering comes into your life, there are some things you absolutely must do in order for

you to triumph over it and God expects you to triumph over it, so these are not "take it or leave it" kinds of things; these are things God expects you to do. These are:

I. Your Responsibilities (5-9) Peter has boiled it down to three of them. The first one is:

1. humbling yourself (5-6) Peter says that all of us, particularly those who are younger, are to *clothe ourselves* with humility; we're to wrap it around us like a garment and cover ourselves with it. It ought to pervade our lives in every aspect. It is precisely when we hurt that we can so easily become proud, angry, and resistant. Let me give you an example. Suppose somebody has done something to you that hurts you. Maybe they lied to you or fired you from a job unfairly, and you come to me and I encourage you that you have to forgive them and pray for them. Now that's a godly course of action and I know it and you know it, but what's your likely reaction? Anger! You may get upset at me; in fact, if you hurt bad enough, you may get upset at God for allowing this thing into your life or for how He expects you to act in the midst of it because you don't feel like doing it. It's natural; it happens all the time. But Peter says you must be careful to humble yourself, first of all:

a. toward others, toward those who are older, toward those who are spiritual leaders, toward one another in general. Don't allow suffering to cause you to become proud and resistant toward others and self-seeking. But more importantly, you must be careful to humble yourself:

b. toward God, to realize that everything that happens to you, even the suffering and difficulty and pain, is coming to you from God's mighty hand, controlling and working all things together. Now you can fight that and be angry and accuse Him of unfairness, or you can accept that and say, "OK Lord, this is from you, I accept it as part of your will; give me strength to make it through." They say that people with terminal illness go through stages, denial, anger, and eventually, if they adjust well, acceptance. It's the same in other kinds of suffering. That's just the natural, the reaction of the unsaved person who comes to accept his "fate." The Christian needs to humble himself to see that this is God's hand at work in his life, the same mighty hand that will one day lift him up to glory! And here's why; *God resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble!* If you want to fight with God and try to tell Him what He ought to do, fine! Go ahead, but you're on your own. And God will resist you at every point along the way. Jonah thought he could run to Tarshish, too, but you can't fight God. He'll break down the pride, one way or another, sooner or later. But just look at the promise, if you humble yourself, God will give you the grace you need to bear it and make it through. If you submit to Him, you won't have to go through it alone; He'll be with you! So, your first responsibility is humbling yourself. The second is:

2. trusting God (7) The second natural reaction to suffering in your life is anxiety or worry! If you lose your job, you worry about how you're going to pay the bills! If an emergency happens, you wonder how you're going to make it through or handle the problems it creates. Well, here's what God says to do:

a. the action: deposit all your anxiety with Him Here's what it means. You take your anxiety. How much of it? ALL of it, the whole of it. And you go to God and say, "Here, I want to deposit this with You and leave it there." The word literally means to make a once-for-all deposit! "Lord, these are my problems, my difficulties, my worries, the things I know I can't handle. Now they're yours and I don't want them back!" You simply trust God with your future, all of it, and here's:

b. the reason: you are His concern It's not just that He cares about what's happening to you. It's that your life, your future, your circumstances, are not your concern. You can't arrange them. You can't change the color of one hair on your head without using chemicals! They're His concern, His realm. He's responsible to perfect that which concerns you; all you're responsible to do is to trust Him! Does your child worry about whether he's going to have food to eat tomorrow? No, that's not his concern. He has totally left that in your hands because he knows that somehow, you'll make sure it'll be there. Tomorrow is your Heavenly Father's concern, not yours. When you worry, you're actually taking on yourself what you were never meant to carry; it belongs to Him! Take it all to Him, deposit it, and leave it there! And instead, concentrate on your third responsibility:

3. resisting Satan (8-9) Now here's the scenario. You're in Africa and you're camped out in the bush in some remote area. And there is a lion who lives in this area and there's been a drought. Game is scarce. The lion is hungry and he prowls the length and breadth of his range trying to find an antelope or a warthog or a zebra or SOMETHING to eat. You can hear him at night roaring with anger at the gnawing in his stomach. And suppose you can't leave? How are you going to act? That's the situation we're in, stuck on this planet with an adversary, Satan, who, like that hungry lion, is constantly looking for how he can kill us, destroy our faith, or ruin our testimony and usefulness! How are you going to resist him, to stand him off? Peter says four things:

a. keep control of your mind Be self-controlled, literally, don't be drunk. Keep clear possession of your mind. Don't let anything cloud it and keep you from thinking clearly about what's going on. The lion is out there. If you let fear grip your mind or panic seize it, you'll do something crazy and the lion will have you! That's what you must do when suffering comes. Force yourself to think clearly. Ask God to help you do it, to see the situation clearly and to analyze all the available resources and solutions. Then:

b. watch carefully for his tactics You're going to be alert for that lion. You'll post a watch and try to figure out which direction he'd most likely sneak up from and the time of day he'll try it. And that's what you have to do when suffering comes. You think, "Now how can Satan use this in my life; what is he going to try to accomplish through this? To get me to doubt God? To get me to be self-centered and stop serving? To get me to disobey God and sin? What?" Be alert, then:

c. stand firm in your faith You're not camped out there in a tent. You've been placed there in a tank, yes, a military, iron-plated tank that is more than capable of handling that hungry lion. So finally, you spy him. Here he comes. What do you do? If you let panic seize you and leave the tank and run, you're breakfast! You get in the tank and lock the door and let the tank handle him! God didn't plant you here with Satan defenseless! *Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.* Jesus Christ is more than a match for anything Satan can throw at you. All you have to do is stand firmly in faith; hold to it, trust what God says, keep on believing what you believe to the very end. If you run from that, Satan wins and you lose. Stand firm but:

d. understand that you are not alone You are not the only one stationed in lion country. We all are. You are not the only one that undergoes the kind of suffering you have. Your brothers and sisters all over the world are doing the same. And Satan is trying to attack and overtake them too. But they're standing firm and you can too. You can find God's grace and strength to defeat Satan and to triumph over the suffering that comes into your life. Those are your responsibilities. Humble yourself; accept what God sends your way. Trust God and stop worrying. And resist Satan, staying clear-minded and alert, always watching for his sneak attack and standing firm against him. It sounds difficult, but Peter closes by reminding you of:

II. Your Rewards (10-14) First there is:

1. the lasting glory to come (10a) Listen, I am called to eternal glory. I'm not staying like this, in this world of pain and suffering and misery, forever. One day for me there's going to be no more tears, death, crying, mourning, or pain. All those things belong to the old order and one day they'll all pass away in the glorious presence of Jesus Christ forever and ever, to the ages of the ages! I'll gladly endure suffering for Him and triumph over it; look what He's provided for me forever and ever by His suffering! Then there is:

2. the long-term growth through suffering (10-11) Here's what God does through suffering. The Greek word translated *restore* is *perfect* in the KJV and NAS and means to order and arrange something to accomplish its intended purpose. God, who is full of grace to help you, allows suffering to come into your life for a little while to perfect you, to order and arrange your character and personality, to make you strong and firm and steadfast and unshakeable. Suffering makes you the person God wants you to be; you are a better person in the long run for having suffered! Then Peter mentions:

3. the loving encouragement of brethren (12-14a) Just as Peter encouraged these brethren in Asia Minor who were suffering persecution and assured them of the love of those who were with him (probably in Rome; Babylon is probably a veiled reference to Rome as it is in Revelation), the same thing happens when we suffer. God uses brethren to love and encourage us. Oh, the beautiful thing it is to experience the love of brethren who bear you up and help you and stick by you and love you when you suffer. There's nothing like it. Some of the most wonderful relationships in the world are forged in the fires of suffering! And, in closing, Peter mentions:

4. the living peace of God (14b) When you have cast all your cares on Him and stood firm, there is a mysterious thing, a wonderful peace, the peace of God, the very sense of confidence and calm and security that God has which passes human understanding, that floods our hearts and minds and it is precious. It is wonderful. It is there always, but always makes its presence felt most closely against the backdrop of suffering.

One time, I was visiting one of our people who was just in the hospital after suffering a stroke. At 88 and with a partially clogged main artery to the brain, that's nothing to sneeze at. But he said to me, "I had such peace, John, more peace than I ever had. It was wonderful. I was so close to the Lord. I was not afraid to die, not in the least. The Lord is so good!" Without suffering, you would never know just how good God really is nor how deep His peace really can be. I'd like to close this study about suffering with Peter's own words in verses 10-11 and make them my prayer for you, *May the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen!*

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life The Word Of Life - 1:1-4

In the back of your Bible, just before Revelation, are three short books, letters actually, called First, Second and Third John. The first of these is the longest and the most commonly known and read; it is often one of the first sections of the Bible that is used with people who are new to the faith. My plan is to dig into it verse by verse together with you. By way of preparation, let me share with you a little bit of background about 1 John:

1. it was written by John the Apostle some 35-50 years after Christ's ascension to heaven. That's actually a very long time. John was around in Jesus' time, of course, but most of the believers in the churches in the day when he wrote were not. He was rapidly becoming among the last living persons who had actually lived through the events of Christ's life. The believers he's writing to had the same problem that we do. They were "second generation" believers who had to accept by faith a message about things that happened before their time that they did not experience. And they needed to be reassured about their basis for doing that. So do we. Second:

2. it is a general letter written to the churches of Asia (Minor) John doesn't mention his own name nor any other. It is not a letter written to a specific person, but a letter meant to be circulated and read in all the churches. John, at this point in his life, was the bishop, that is, the overseer, of the churches in the province of Asia, which is the southwestern region of the peninsula of Asia Minor, today the nation of Turkey. And it was, no doubt, to those believers under his faithful care that he wrote, believers who were Greeks by background, not Jews like himself, who had grown up under the influence of Greek and Roman culture and idolatrous worship rather than Jewish law. Of course, what He wrote was also meant for the church at large and was read everywhere and we may regard it as being equally as much for ourselves as it was for them. Third:

3. it is written to combat false teachings that believers confronted in the culture of their day. By this time Christianity had been around long enough that counterfeit versions of it had come to exist. Just as we have sects like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons in our culture today who deny that Jesus was actually God, in that day there were groups that denied Jesus was actually a real man, a true human being. Just as we have liberal teachers in churches today who want to laud Jesus as an example and a great teacher and leader, but not as God to be worshipped and the only means of salvation, so they had false teachers who taught Jesus was less than what He really is. And these teachings had appeal to those in the church from Greek background, just as they might to those from a secular enlightenment background today. John wrote this letter to protect his sheep from being led astray from the true faith that was once for all given to the saints and it can do the same for us.

I've decided to give each small section that we will study a title, as the ESV and other Bibles do, using a key phrase from that section. Verses 1-4 are the prologue, the introduction to the letter. The key phrase is found at the end of verse 1, *...concerning "the Word of life*. You'll notice the W is capitalized in many translations, indicating the translators may think it is a title referring to Jesus like it is at the beginning of John's Gospel where it says, *in the beginning was the Word... and the word was God*. But if you look closely at **(1b-2)**, John's not saying that Jesus is the WORD; he's saying that Jesus is the LIFE! He's saying that:

I. We Have A Message (a word) Concerning Eternal Life In the only other place in the Bible where this phrase is used, Paul said almost the same thing that John wrote in this prologue, *Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain*. - *Phil 2:14-16*. He said, "Hold on to that word, to that message that you have embraced, that is LIFE. You live in a crooked generation that tries to take you away from it, but hold on to it! Hold fast to it! It is your life!" We have embraced that same message, the message of Rom. 6:23 which says, *the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life...* The message we hold fast to:

1. it is about life that is eternal. The root of that word in Greek means "an endless age, a perpetual thing". We like to say in English that eternal means **without beginning or end**, thinking of it in terms of length. But I think the sense of it is more like the synonymous phrase in Heb. 7:16 where it says that Jesus has become our High Priest *on the basis of an indestructible life*. It's a life that has no end because it cannot be destroyed, it cannot be dissolved. The message we have has brought us life that will always BE, life that cannot be destroyed or dissolved or decayed or even taken from us by physical death, because it is the very life of God, a truly perpetual life that no force in the universe can snuff out! What a precious gift for God to give us! But notice that:

2. this life is not a thing It is not a state of being. John describes it in personal terms. He saw this life; he heard this life; he touched this life. This life is not a thing, **but a Person**, that is, **Jesus Christ** Look with me at **5:11**. God gave us life all right, but it is in a Person! It is in the Person of His Son, Jesus! The age-enduring, indestructible life of God Him-

self came down to us in the person of Jesus Christ. **Jn. 1:4** says, *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* He himself declared in Jn. 14, *I am...the Life!* In verse 2 John says:

a. He was with the Father from all eternity past Jesus did not begin to exist when He was conceived in Mary's womb. He was always with the Father. Long before creation, in fact eternally before the creation of the world, Father God and His Son Jesus enjoyed the sweet fellowship that exists within the Trinity. Jesus was there at the fall of the angels; He said, *I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.* He was there at creation, for *without Him was not anything made that was made.* He was there all through the Old Testament and often visited earth and showed Himself. He met Abraham at the door of his tent; He wrestled with Jacob and gave Joshua instructions for attacking Jericho. Centuries later He was in the fire with the 3 Hebrew youths in Babylon and appeared to Daniel in a vision. *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman...*

b. He was revealed to us through incarnation as a man As John put it in his Gospel, *...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* - **Jn. 1:14.** Now the Son, who Himself was the indestructible life of God added to His very being the body of a human and literally became one of us, God in flesh. He did not just appear to be a man nor become some kind of half-human/half-god hybrid like the Greek myths without ceasing to be fully God, He became fully man *in every respect ...like we are, yet without sin!* The life of God which was in the Person of God the Son walked about among us for 33 years, endured the phenomenon of the most awful physical death and demonstrated the power of His endless life by raising His body from the dead before returning to heaven to await our arrival! In Him was LIFE and:

3. this eternal life becomes ours when we receive Him Look at **5:12.** It's that simple! When we recognize our sins and repent of them and ask for that gift of life, the Son of God Himself in the Person of His Holy Spirit comes to literally dwell in our bodies and joins His Spirit permanently with our Spirit so that His eternal, indestructible life literally becomes our life. We are grafted into the very life of God!

That's the message we have believed! That's the message we preach. And when we preach it, it has power to give people LIFE! Our message is literally the word of life! *Dr. W. B. Hinson, respected pastor of East Side Baptist Church in Portland, spoke from his own experience just before he died in 1926. He said, "I remember a year ago when a doctor told me, 'You have an illness from which you won't recover.' I walked out to where I live, five miles from Portland, Oregon, and I looked across at that mountain that I love. I looked at the river in which I rejoice, and I looked at the stately trees that are always God's own poetry to my soul. Then in the evening I looked up into the great sky where God was lighting His lamps, and I said, 'I may not see you many more times, but Mountain, I shall be alive when you are gone; and River, I shall be alive when you cease running toward the sea; and Stars, I shall be alive when you have fallen from your sockets in the great downpulling of the material universe!'" Hallelujah! Glory to the Lamb of God! We have been given the word of LIFE! But how do we know that's true, that this eternal, indestructible life is really ours? Well, in verse 1, John tells us that:*

II. Our Faith And Message Are Based On Absolute Certainty In that very first clause John is assuring us that:

1. he had followed Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry John had been there at the beginning of it all. He was a follower of John the Baptist. He had been there that day by the Jordan River with Andrew when John pointed to Jesus and cried out, *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* If he did not see it personally, he had at least heard John tell how the Holy Spirit descended from heaven upon Jesus in the form of a dove and the Father's voice spoke from heaven saying, *This is My Beloved Son...* That very day he and Andrew went home with Jesus and spent the day with Him and became convinced that He was the Christ. From that day on he was with Jesus as much as any other man and eventually became a full-time disciple who traveled about with Jesus for three years. He mentions here that:

2. he personally heard the words that Jesus spoke They were not passed down to him by someone else as they were to Mark or Luke. He was standing there and heard the message of life proclaimed by Jesus Himself. He could vouch for its authenticity. And he reminds us that:

3. he personally saw Jesus both during His ministry and after His resurrection He saw all those miracles we only read about. He saw Jesus calm the storm and multiply the loaves and open blind eyes and cast out demons and heal the sick and raise the dead! He was a witness to Christ's resurrection. He saw Him in all His risen glory. And it was not a glimpse but prolonged gazing that led to true perception. He says, *we've seen* and *we've looked upon* Him. It was a long 3 ½ year look in every sort of circumstance. Further:

4. he personally touched Jesus and knew He was a real human being He touched Him many times. He leaned against Him as he reclined at the table at the Last Supper! He touched Him and ate with Him in Galilee after His resurrection. Jesus was not some figment of his imagination, not some surreal figure. He was a real man of flesh and bones and John could testify to it, no matter what all the heretics said a generation later! At the end of his Gospel, John wrote, *This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.* - *John 21:24.* That's exactly what John is saying to us, "I was there from the beginning; I

heard Him, I saw Him, I touched Him, I lived with Him. He is the Christ, the Son of God and you have LIFE through His Name!" That's why:

5. he proclaimed this message to us with the authority of God He said it in verse 2 and a second time in verse 3. "I experienced Jesus and I am proclaiming to you what I experienced as a Divinely appointed witness. You can rest with absolute assurance and certainty in the message that I have proclaimed to you. It is true!"

Peter said the very same thing, *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* - 2 Pet 1:16. Our faith and our confidence of having life in Christ and all that we believe is not based on some theory or some ancient story. The word of life was proclaimed to us and written down for us by eyewitnesses like John and Peter whose lives were transformed by power of the living Christ! That's how we know for sure that we have life! Hallelujah again! Now, the third thing John tells us here is that:

III. Our Common Faith Binds Us Into A Fellowship (3) Fellowship, as we usually define it, is the half hour we spend talking together after church or the hour we spend eating snacks and chatting after small group or maybe at a church dinner. But in the Bible its meaning is far deeper. In the Greek, the word *fellowship* is *koinonia*, from the root which means *in common* and:

1. fellowship means sharing together in a common life and purpose. In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* story, seven characters bound themselves together with an oath to form the *Fellowship Of The Ring*. They pledged their lives to the common purpose of returning the ring of power to be destroyed in Mordor. Our forefathers gathered in Philadelphia in 1776 and signed a Declaration of Independence from Great Britain and in the last line of it they wrote, *for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor*. They formed a fellowship of United States committed to the cause of standing together against the British with everything they had. And in our case as followers of Christ, true fellowship means sharing together a common life devoted to the common cause of advancing Christ's Kingdom in this world! From the moment we believe the message and receive that common life of Christ:

2. we are immediately united in a fellowship with one another as verse (7) says. We become more than a group, an organization, a society, more even than a family. We become part of a fellowship with each other. We share common lives with one another as we pursue Jesus and together, we pledge everything we have and are to His service. We are the fellowship of believers, the fellowship of the faithful and that fellowship into which we are bound goes far beyond those believers that we see and know.

3. we are also united in fellowship with believers in all other times and places We are part of the fellowship that began with John and Peter and Paul and the Apostles. We share in the common life and purpose of all those who have followed them and believed their Word down through the ages. We are part of a fellowship that binds together believers in every country on earth who speak every language on earth and will one day soon extend to every distinct people group on earth. And:

4. we are ultimately united in fellowship with God the Father and Christ The life of our Heavenly Father and Jesus His Son is shared by every one of us down through the ages and everywhere. His Spirit lives in our bodies; His life has joined itself to our life so that we share a common life together with Him. And we share a common purpose, that the whole world may join this grand fellowship that elsewhere the Scripture calls the Church Jesus Christ! The union, the bond, that we have is so tight that He describes it as His body of which He Himself is the Head. This message we believe was proclaimed to us to bind us all into this one living organism together with Him, sharing His common life and accomplishing His purpose together for eternity! Now finally, John says that:

IV. This Letter Was Written To Fulfill Joy (4) This is one of those places in the text where we're not exactly sure what the original said. Some manuscripts say *MY joy*, while others say, *YOUR joy*. Does that erode our confidence in the Bible? Not at all! Actually, both things are true:

1. John's joy was made complete by believers walking in the truth Look over at **3 Jn. 4**. John wrote this first letter to help believers hold fast to the truth of the word of life. So, he wrote it to increase his own joy as he saw this letter help all his spiritual children remain faithful to the message he had taught them. Then, looking from the other direction:

2. our joy is made complete by walking in the truth he wrote to us If we cling to the word that he proclaimed to us, OUR joy will be increased. WE will experience the fullness of joy that Jesus promised us.

So, this letter was written to bring joy all around, to both the writer and the readers as it moves us to stand firm in the united fellowship of the word of life and not be moved from it by the falsehoods that rage about us. You know, the "tongue in cheek" saying among pastors is that in the world of independent churches like this one, every man is his own "bishop". John was overseer of at least the 7 churches in Asia he mentions in Revelation. I've only been the overseer of one for many years now, probably longer than John had cared for these churches when he wrote this letter. He had come to see

the believers of Asia as his spiritual children and he affectionately called them that. I understand that feeling; in that sense you are my spiritual children. And I can testify that what John says is true. The thing that gives me the greatest joy is when I see YOU standing firm in your faith in Jesus in a world that's trying to deceive you, serving Him with a deep passion that involves your whole heart and living lives dedicated to His purpose of seeing the whole world and every people group in it reached with the word of life that He's entrusted to us. That makes my joy complete; it thrills my heart; YOU are the fruit of my labors, my joy and my crown. So, my challenge is that of Paul to the Philippians he loved, *Make my joy complete* and make your own joy complete by living this common life that we share to the full for Jesus' glory.

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

Walking In The Light - 1:5-10

There are only two options for knowing what God is like and we have a choice between them. We either choose to believe what God tells us about Himself through His Word or we choose to believe that God is actually the way we think He ought to be. In other words, WE decide what God is like and then believe it. We live in a day when people have largely rejected being told what to believe and would rather believe in a god who is made in their own image. They believe in a god who would never send anyone to hell, a god who would never condemn the practice of homosexuality or view abortion as the taking of a human life or call sex between two consenting adults morally wrong and actually evil because they are not married. They choose to believe in a god they have invented who is here to serve them and help them and make them feel good when they need him. Well, our culture today is not so very different from the Greek culture that surrounded John's beloved churches with its proliferation of gods, rampant immorality of all forms and universal practice of infanticide, including child sacrifice. John is writing to reaffirm to his sheep exactly what God is actually like and he has three themes in this short letter that he wrote. In chapters 1-2 he teaches us that God is LIGHT. In chapters 3-5:5 he teaches us that God is LOVE and in the rest of chapter 5, he teaches us that God is LIFE. It is that first theme we'll focus on today. In 1:5 John declares to us:

I. The Message We Have Received Concerning The Nature Of God (5) John says, "I'm writing to tell you, to proclaim to you, to pronounce with authority for you, what God is truly like!" And don't gloss over his first words; he says:

1. Jesus Himself sent this message to us Remember our last study? He says, "I saw Jesus, I touched Jesus, I HEARD Jesus! What I'm telling you now is not my own opinion, not some theological construct; I heard this from Jesus Himself and I'm declaring it to you!" Listen to what He said, *...Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.* - **Jn. 12:44-46** "I am what My Father is; I am what GOD is! And I am LIGHT so."

2. God is LIGHT Now what does that mean? Paul put it like this: *...he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.* - **1 Tim. 6:15-16**. Light means absolute good, perfect purity and complete holiness. God is the sum of all moral perfection, so pure that no human could approach Him ever, were it not for what His Son did at the cross. Light, moral purity, is not simply one of His characteristics; it is the core of His very nature. In fact, it is His nature that defines for us what good, pure and holy is! Now the converse of that is to say that:

3. God has absolutely NO darkness in Him Light has this amazing quality. Walk into a completely dark room and turn on the light and instantly there is no darkness. Turn on a flashlight and wherever you point it, the darkness disappears. Light and darkness cannot coexist; as soon as one is present the other is not, not only by definition, but in reality. Describing God's nature as light means there is absolutely **no evil or impurity** in Him. None! God never thinks an evil thought, never has a bad day, never slips up and does the wrong thing, never tells a little white lie, never delights in anything evil or impure, even for a split second! Habakkuk said God is *...of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong....* - **1:13**. He can't stand it, can't tolerate it, not the tiniest smidgeon of it; it utterly repulses Him and cannot be allowed to exist in His presence. You see, God ISN'T like us! He cannot be tempted by evil! He has no evil desires in Him that yearn for even a little bit of it. His eyes wouldn't linger on that risqué commercial even for a second nor would His mind even entertain the thought of returning evil for evil. That's why no human can approach Him except through Jesus!

But John's real point is that:

II. God's Nature Transforms Our Lives (6-7) We saw back in verse 3 that since Christ is in us:

1. we share His very life and nature We share a common life with Him. **2 Pet. 1:4** puts it like this, we become *partakers of the Divine Nature*. His nature is planted inside of us and joined to us. The very core of our being is literally made holy. Paul tells us to *put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* - **Eph. 4:24**. When we share His life, we share His nature. And:

2. sharing His nature transforms our walk, that is, **the way we habitually live**. When we are made new on the inside, we begin to live a new way. When we are made holy in our very nature, we begin to live a life that displays that

holiness, whereas before, when our very nature was to sin, we could not help but live a life that displayed that nature, no matter how hard we tried. To put it another way, you expect a sinner to sin; it's his nature. You expect a saint to live a life of holy deeds; it's his nature. Look down to **2:6**. If your life is bound to the life of Jesus Christ, you will live like He lived. Therefore, verse 6 says:

a. if we walk in darkness, our deeds prove that we are lying about knowing Him If the habitual pattern of our behavior is evil and the desire of our hearts is after evil things, we can say we know Jesus all we want; we can say we love Jesus and believe in Him and follow Him and even believe that, but we're lying and our deeds are the evidence that proves it! Look ahead to **3:9**. God's seed, God's very nature as light, remains in us if we are truly born of Him and we cannot continue to practice sin, to live a life of it. It is absolutely impossible for us. If we do, He's not in us. You can't have it both ways. But conversely, verse 7 says that:

b. if we walk in light as He does, if we live a life characterized by holiness and righteous deeds like His life, two things happen. First:

(1) we express the common life we have with one another and Him We display the very life of Christ that is in us, which all of us share in together. And:

(2) Christ's blood continually cleanses us from all sin The blood of Christ washed us from the guilt of all our sins the moment we trusted in Him. But it also changed the very nature of who we are so that now, to use Adam Clarke's phrase, *it keeps clean what it has made clean*. Our new nature is repulsed by sin and continually weeds it out of our lives over and over again. By changing us, it cleanses our present lives.

OK, so if all of that is true, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to ask the obvious question, "Then why aren't we perfect?"

III. What About The Fact That We Still Sin? That's what John goes on to deal with in verses **(8-10)**. Now:

1. we could claim that the force of sin is not in us (8) There were some people who wanted the label of Christian, mainly the Gnostics of John's day, who claimed to have superior knowledge, who did not believe that sin was a reality in their lives. Somehow, it's strange that the most educated and even religiously educated people in our own day believe nearly the same thing. Man is basically good, not sinful by nature. What we call sin is just bad judgment and mistakes, unhelpful choices that will go away if we get more enlightened! There is nothing wrong inside of me! Well, John says:

a. that would be to deceive ourselves When he looked deep within himself, even the godly Apostle Paul found sin still there. Look with me **Rom. 7:18-20, 23**. Yes, I have a new nature; that's what makes me WANT to do good. But this force, this power called sin, still dwells in me, not in my spirit which is joined to the Holy Spirit and made holy, but in my flesh, in my physical body and in my mind, my thought patterns. It didn't go away when I got saved. And there's a war on. This evil force or power called sin that lives in my flesh is always attacking my mind which wants to obey my true nature and do good, and I must choose which force I'm going to yield to in order to walk in the Spirit which is to walk in the light. If we were to claim that we were already perfect and that sin was totally removed:

b. it would prove that the truth is not in us, that God's truth is not the inner principle that animates our lives. Listen, Muslims do not believe in the indwelling presence of sin. Jews do not believe in it. Mormons do not believe in it. Unitarians and millions of liberal protestants who don't cling to the truth of the Bible don't believe in it either. The average man on the street certainly doesn't. But if we genuinely belong to Christ, our very nature causes us to recognize the presence and power of sin dwelling in us, even though our spirit is transformed and made holy. We recognize the battle and stand ready to fight it! Or as some others do:

2. we could claim that we no longer commit sins, that is individual acts of sin **(10)** The claim that I can reach perfection in this life, that I can literally live totally without sinning has been put forth more than once in the history of the church. But John says:

a. that would be to make God a liar Solomon said to God, *...there is no one who does not sin...* in **1 Kin. 8:46** and in the New Testament, James wrote to believers, *...we all stumble in many ways.* - **Jas. 3:2**. God says that we sin! And if we say we don't:

b. it would prove that His Word is not in us, that His Word is not the abiding principle that animates our lives. The idea that I can attain a place where in thought, word and deed I am pure and without sin is a proud notion. I love what one blogger on the internet wrote about this, *"What saint can be named in God's Word, of whose life many details are recorded, who was literally and absolutely perfect? Which of them all, when writing about himself, ever talks of feeling free from imperfection? On the contrary, men like David, and St. Paul, and St. John, declare in the strongest language that they feel in their own hearts weakness and sin. The holiest men of modern times have always been remarkable for deep humility. Have we ever seen holier men than the martyred John Bradford, or Hooker, or Usher, or Baxter, or Rutherford, or McCheyne? Yet no one can read the writings and letters of these men without seeing that they felt themselves 'debtors to mercy and grace' every day, and the very last thing they would ever claim was perfect-*

tion!" A young minister told the Scottish church leader Alexander Whyte about an acquaintance who claimed he could go several days without consciously sinning. The youthful pastor then asked the older preacher if that man's evaluation of himself was correct. Whyte, his eyes shining with an intensity that revealed deep conviction, replied, "No, sir! No man who has seen the exquisite holiness of God would say a thing like that!" Yes, the truth is that the force called sin still lives in us and we still commit sins, but:

3. if we truly know God, we continually confess our sins to Him (9) The hallmark of the genuine believer is not perfection but confession! We abhor sin and when we find it in ourselves, we admit it to God; we cry out to Him and tell Him about it. Why?

a. not to obtain forgiveness for the guilt of those sins - Heb. 10:10 says that *...we have been sanctified [made holy] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*. Christ's sacrifice removed the guilt of all my sins, past, present and future, once and for all the moment I believed. We do not have to "keep up with" clearing away the guilt of the things we do one at a time. We don't confess them to make sure we are forgiven and that we'll go to heaven...

b. but to rid our lives of them that we might walk in light with Him We want them out of our lives. We want to be honest with God; we want nothing to hinder or stand in the way of the daily communion we have and we want His power in enabling us to remove them and stand against them so that we keep on walking in purity and holiness with Him!

And on the other hand, the second half of verse 9 tells us that:

4. God is perpetually faithful to us He never changes. He doesn't love us one day and stand against us the next. He knows we are children who still sin and He is ALWAYS willing to hear us as we confess and to move powerfully in our lives. And, John reminds us, He is **also just**; it is RIGHT for Him to love and draw near to us even though we sin **because of the sacrifice of Christ**. His justice was satisfied at the cross so that He can faithfully show us mercy now and forever. And in that mercy:

a. He forgives ALL of our sins Even the worst ones. Even the ones we commit today and the ones we'll likely commit tomorrow. The Psalmist said, *If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? - Ps. 130:3*. If God held on to them and kept record of them against us, none of us could stand before His holy presence. But now in His mercy He has removed them from us as far as the east is from the west! He will not let them come between us. Every last one! He is faithful to do that! But He does something even more:

b. He purifies us by removing unrighteousness from our lives As we confess to Him and admit what we've done to Him and ask His help, He empowers us and enables us to defeat the power of that force of sin in our flesh and to choose to walk with Him in the light.

That's what He wants, for us to walk with Him in the light, to admit it when we fail and allow His grace to change us so that we keep on walking in the light, in that common life we share with Him. *In 1818, Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis was born into a world where young women routinely died. The finest hospitals lost one out of six young mothers to the scourge of what they called "childbed fever." The reason was that a doctor's daily routine normally began in the dissecting room where he performed autopsies. From there he made his way to the hospital to examine expectant mothers without ever pausing to wash his hands. Dr. Semmelweis was the first man in history to associate such examinations with the resultant infection and death. His own practice was to wash with a chlorine solution, and after eleven years and the delivery of 8,537 babies, he lost only 184 mothers--about one in fifty. He spent the vigor of his life lecturing and debating with his colleagues. Once he argued, "Puerperal fever is caused by decomposed material, conveyed to a wound... I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proved all that I have said. But while we talk, talk, talk, Gentlemen, women are dying! I am not asking anything world shaking. I am asking you only to wash... For God's sake, wash your hands." But virtually no one believed him. Doctors and midwives had been delivering babies for thousands of years without washing, and no outspoken Hungarian was going to change them now! Semmelweis died insane at the age of 47, his wash basins discarded, his colleagues laughing in his face, and the death rattle of a thousand women ringing in his ears. [Boyce Mouton]. "Wash me!" was the anguished prayer of King David after his great sin, multiple times. James admonished us: Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. - Jas. 4:6-8. As Dr. Semmelweis put it, "For God's sake, wash!" Walk in the light as He is in the light and His blood will cleanse you from all sin.*

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

Christ Our Advocate - 2:1-6

As followers of Jesus, we continually live on two horns of a dilemma, as John pointed out to us in chapter 1. On the one hand, God is light, perfect purity and holiness, and if we truly belong to Him, we have His nature, so we walk in the light. That is, the normal pattern of our actions is righteous, pure and holy. But on the other hand, we all have the power of sin

living in our flesh and every one of us still sins, without exception. And when we sin, the natural thing for us to do is to question ourselves. "How can I really know God and DO that? How can I really know Jesus and TALK like that? How can I be saved and FEEL like that?" And Satan the accuser is always quick to have one of his demonic henchmen right there to plant those thoughts in our mind. The issue is how can we be SURE of our salvation. How can we KNOW that we truly belong to God when there are lots of times in our lives when we don't act like it? Well, assurance is one of John's themes throughout this letter; he wants his dear children whom he loves to live in complete assurance and not wander around questioning their salvation every time they do something wrong. I have known people who struggle with that issue, especially people who have been taught that you can lose your salvation, that you can sin in such a way as to separate yourself from God. The result of this thinking is that you have people inviting Christ into their lives over and over again, never quite knowing whether it "worked", but what is really sad is that they spend their lives focused on themselves and their own salvation, rather than having a deep concern for the salvation of others, let alone the world. They don't take an active part in carrying out the commission that Jesus gave us; Satan effectively disables them from serving God's purpose. Maybe the kind of person I'm talking about this morning is YOU; maybe you struggle with this kind of doubt about your salvation. Or maybe it's someone you know today or someone you'll meet tomorrow. So, listen carefully as John explains to us:

I. Our Assurance As Believers Who Do Sometimes Sin (1-2) In the previous couple of verses John strongly declared to us that sin still dwells in us and that we still sin. He even told us that our normal pattern of life is to confess our sins. But he didn't write all of that to excuse our sinning. Both His writing and:

1. our purposeful intention is always NOT to sin Our aim, our goal, is always perfect purity, perfect sinlessness, to be holy as God is holy. Just because the standard is unattainable in this life doesn't mean that we abandon trying. A perfect score may be unattainable in many endeavors in life, in athletics or dance or academics. Yet rather than discouraging us and causing us to quit trying, it is the existence of the perfect score that moves us and drives us to strive for it; it becomes the goal toward which we push ourselves! *For example, the name Stradivarius is synonymous with fine violins. This is because Antonius Stradivarius insisted that no instrument constructed in his shop be sold until it was as near perfection as human care and skill could make it. Stradivarius observed, "God needs violins to send His music into the world, and if any violins are defective, God's music will be spoiled." His work philosophy was summed up in one sentence, "Other men will make other violins, but no man shall make a better one."* Dear friends, God needs PEOPLE to send His MESSAGE into the world and if those people are defective, the delivery of His message to all peoples will be spoiled! So our goal, our intent, our aim, is to strive with all our being to reflect the nature of our Master, to NOT sin:

2. yet, John says, if we DO sin, we have perpetual assurance of acceptance by the Father in spite of it! We can be flawed and imperfect and fail and still know that we are fully and completely accepted by our Heavenly Father. How? What gives us that kind of assurance? John says, in most translations:

a. we have an advocate, we have **One who is before the Father on our behalf** in the NIV. We have Somebody there in heaven in the presence of the Father who is literally in the Greek, our *paraclete*, one who is called to help us, our helper, our aid, one whose presence brings us comfort. You'll recognize that term. Jesus said, "I'm leaving and going to the Father, but I'll send you *another* Comforter, another *paraclete*, another Person like Me to stand alongside you and act on your behalf, the Holy Spirit." So just as the Holy Spirit is our advocate on earth:

b. our advocate in heaven is Jesus who is perfectly righteous. WE may not be perfectly righteous; we may still sin. But we have One whose life is joined to ours who is seated there in Heaven perpetually at the Father's right hand and He is perfectly righteous, absolutely without sin. He meets the standard of holiness which is the very nature of God. He IS holy as the Father is Holy! He IS perfect as the Father is perfect. But not only that:

c. He Himself is the sacrifice which completely atoned for our sins He is the propitiation, to use the theological word; He Himself is that which fully satisfied the wrath of God upon our sins and freed us from their eternal penalty. The One who stands in the Father's presence is Himself the One whose perfect sacrifice released us from the penalty of all our sins, once for all, forever. So, the point really is that:

d. His living Presence with the Father is our guarantee - Heb. 7:25 says, *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.* One commentary says *The Father, by raising Him from the dead, and setting Him at His own right, has once for all accepted Christ's claim for us. Therefore, the accuser's charges against God's children are vain. As Martin Luther said: "The righteousness of Christ stands on our side; for God's righteousness is, in Jesus Christ, ours."* Hallelujah! Our righteous, perfect Advocate is always there interceding for us. Now, how does He do that. Often, we picture His interceding as a conversation as the NIV does; we think of Him as speaking to the Father every time we sin, as though He has to remind the Father, "I died for that sin..." To me that's faulty theology. It says that the Father is mad at us for sinning and wants to punish us, but Jesus has to continually keep Him from it. That would make us fear God the Father, but love Jesus and it's just not true! In the Upper Room Jesus told us, *No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.* - John 16:27. Jesus doesn't have to talk to the Father to

remind Him of anything; it is Jesus' very PRESENCE there which perpetually assures our salvation because we are already there and seated with Him! Or visualize it like this. In the Old Testament, the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God once a year to sprinkle the blood of the lamb that made atonement for the people on the mercy seat. And then he would leave and come back next year to cover that year's sins. The fact that he had to go again and again was a perpetual reminder of sins. But our High Priest went into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of the Father in heaven, with His own blood as the perfect offering and He sat down there! He stayed there! He had no need to come back later to do more! His very presence with the Father is the interceding, it is our guarantee that our salvation is permanent. It is not conditional upon anything we do or don't do. It is as secure as Christ Himself seated on the Throne! That's why we freely confess when we sin. We know we're already forgiven but we don't want anything to mar the communion of the beautiful relationship that we have with Him.

Steve Lawson writes, "A wealthy English merchant lived on the European continent. He was very eccentric and satisfied with only the best of everything. So naturally, he had to drive a Rolls-Royce. It was his pride and joy, but one day after years of perfect service, he hit a deep pothole and his rear axle broke. The Englishman shipped the car back to the Rolls-Royce plant and was surprised when the car was repaired overnight and returned to him without a bill. Although his warranty had run out, there was no charge. The car was fixed perfectly, all for free. The owner called the company and inquired about the repair. The reply was, 'We have absolutely no record of your Rolls-Royce axle ever breaking. There can be no charge.' The company's commitment to excellence would not permit a flaw to be made known. Therefore, they had repaired the damage immediately and without charge...as if nothing had ever gone wrong." [When All Hell Breaks Loose by Steven J. Lawson.1993. Page 251.] I realize that illustrations are always flawed, but that's how it is with God's grace when we sin. To Him the damage was so thoroughly repaired through the sacrifice of Christ that we can approach him still after we sin in the absolute assurance that our relationship is as complete and intact as though nothing had ever gone wrong! Hallelujah! But notice in verse 2 that John adds another phrase to remind us that this blessed assurance is not intended to be something that we sit and celebrate in a self-centered fashion. He says that:

3. His sacrifice is sufficient for the sins of the whole world; it isn't just for us to sit in our meetings and revel in with one another. It is for us to declare to the world. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. And I realize that I'm probably stepping on someone's theology in saying this, but I truly believe that when John wrote that:

a. this means the entire human race, not just believers who live all over the world geographically. Look ahead to **4:14**. Then notice how John uses the same phrase in **5:19**. *The whole world* there definitely includes nonbelievers; it means the whole race. Jesus died to provide forgiveness for the sins of ALL men. In fact, look at what Peter said in **2 Pet. 2:1**. He said that even false prophets and:

b. rejecters deny the very Lord who bought them The price for their salvation was paid at the cross, even though they have refused to receive it! To say it in standard terms, Christ's death is *sufficient* for all men but *efficient* only for believers. They are the only ones it actually saves.

However, I think John mentions it so that we never forget that this message of absolute forgiveness we have through Jesus needs to be delivered to the whole world so that they have the opportunity to receive it! That is our purpose, our goal, our assignment, not to simply celebrate our own forgiveness continually.

OK, so we know that forgiveness is absolutely intact forever once a person comes to actually know Jesus and be joined to His perfect life. But how do we know that WE are such a person, that we are not merely fooling ourselves, that the sins we commit are not evidence that we are still lost and merely saying the right things? Well John goes on to explain:

II. Our Assurance That We Truly Know Christ (3-5) John says:

1. the proof that we know Him (and he means the internal proof that we have for ourselves, our own inner assurance) **is that we keep His commands**. We look at our own life and examine it and what we find as the general pattern of our life is that we obey Him, we do what He commanded us to do. John adds:

a. to say "I know Him" without keeping His commands is a lie John has in mind here a group of people in his day who were known as "Gnostics". The term comes from the Greek word *gnosis* which means *knowledge*. They claimed to know God. They claimed to know Jesus as an emanation of God, but their beliefs made no change in their moral behavior. They lived however they pleased. To them sin was a non-existent thing; what you did didn't matter. It was only what you thought that was important. We have some "Gnostics" around today, don't we? They say, "I know God; I believe in Jesus." but they live like the devil. John says they're lying; there's no truth in them. You can't KNOW Jesus and not keep His commands. Paul says about such people, *They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.* - **Titus 1:16**. To really know Jesus results in regularly keeping the commands He gave us. Or to put it another way:

b. keeping His Word is the full manifestation of loving Him Jesus told His disciples, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* - **John 14:15**. That love will not just be emotional; it will not just be a warm fuzzy feeling. Genuine love results in actions that prove it. If we genuinely love Jesus, that love drives us to keep His Word, to do what He told us to do, to live like He told us to live. Jesus said you can tell what a tree really is by its fruit. You may

not be able to tell an apple tree from a peach tree by their leaves or their shape. But when the tree begins to produce apples, you know that it's an apple tree, because apple trees produce apples. And "Jesus trees" produce the fruit of "Jesus", the fruit of His Spirit in holy character, purity, love and all the rest. The fruit is the full manifestation of the nature of the tree that proves what the tree really is. So, as we look at our own lives:

c. seeing ourselves continually keep His Word assures us It is by this, by the fact that we continually want to and are working to and are succeeding in obeying Jesus, even though we sometimes fail and fall, that we know that we are truly IN HIM, that our lives have been joined with His, that as He is seated there before the Throne in complete communion with the Father, so are we! Our behavior assures our own hearts that we know Him. On the other hand, if our life is a continual pattern of doing what WE want, and breaking His commands to suit ourselves, that's a huge red flag and maybe we need to examine ourselves to see whether we are truly in the faith! Verse (6) states the point quite clearly:

2. whoever claims continuing relationship with Him MUST continually live as He lived, walk as He walked. Of course, that doesn't mean that we must all be itinerant preachers and be celibate and not have a home; it refers to the nature, the character, of the way He lived. To live as He lived is another synonym for the others we've seen. It means to keep His Word, to obey His commands, to walk in the light as He is in the light, to live morally the kind of life that He lived. We owe it to Him. It is our nature and it is our duty. He died for our sins; how can we possibly go on sinning nonchalantly after that and not strive with everything we have to live His way? We can't! If we truly know Him, we'll live like Him.

What is the character of your life like? Do you sin regularly and not care about it? Do you lie to get your own way? Do you say awful things about others and gossip about them? Do you steal things from work and cheat on your taxes? Do you sleep with people you're not married to or look at pornography on the internet? I'm not asking, "Did you ever..."; I'm asking what characterizes your life. How do you LIVE? If the pattern of your life is, "I always try to tell the truth; I try to only say things which are wholesome and useful; I am trustworthy with money and material things and I am careful to be faithful to my spouse and to keep my mind pure of lust", that is the evidence that you really DO know Christ. Remember, John is writing to give us assurance, but genuine assurance, not false assurance. And that assurance is so basic to our Christian lives. *In an interview for Discipleship Journal, J. I. Packer, the eminent British theologian who wrote the well-known book Knowing God, was asked what gives him joy. "The first and basic thing," he responded, "[is] knowing that I am a child of God--knowing that I am secure in His hands, that He is my Heavenly Father, that this is His world and everything that happens to me is programmed by Him for my good, so that in the deepest sense I have nothing to worry about. I would testify in any company," Packer went on, "to the fact that this is the complete opposite of where I was and what I was before I became a Christian...Because then I was running, if not scared, at least nervous. I was insecure. I didn't know where I was. I was frightened of many things. And God has changed all that. There is joy in the knowledge of that relationship."* That joy of security is what John is trying to give us all. I trust that joy is yours.

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

The New Commandment - 2:7-11

Today in our study we arrive at something of a transition. The most important theme in John's letter so far has been that of 1:5, *God is LIGHT* and John has focused on how our lives must mirror God's purity and holiness. But now we transition to his second and most important theme which is summarized in 4:8, which says that *God is LOVE* and John begins to show us how our lives must mirror God's immense love. Not only does the word *love* itself occur 24 times in these five short chapters, but John begins talking about it in verse 7 without actually using the word (7). Everybody he was writing to understood:

I. The Commandment John Was Referring To It was the command to **Love One Another** that Jesus gave. How do we know that? Well:

1. it is mentioned directly in what follows As he breaks down his subject in detail, he immediately spells it out in verse (10a). And by the time we get to 3:11 he says it straight out. John wants now to talk about this most important and central of all the commandments. Why? You'll notice that:

2. it flows naturally from what precedes Look at verse (3). What commandments of Christ is he talking about that we will keep if we have truly come to know Him? The chief is, of course, the command to love. And then look at verse (6). How *did* Jesus walk? How did He live? What characterized His life more than anything else? Love! That's what should pervade our lives! But before we can look further at what John has to tell us about it, the command:

3. it must be understood clearly First of all, in Greek the word:

a. love is agape You realize that John was careful not to use *eros*, the word for romantic love or the word *phileo*, which means family or friendship love, deep affection. **Agape means selfless commitment** of the kind that God displays. In fact, the best way to define it is as John does in 3:16. *Agape* is a complete combination of emotion and

action. It is not merely a warm compassionate feeling toward someone without actions; neither is it acting to help someone without emotional caring. *Agape* is caring so deeply for another that we are willing to act, to sacrifice ourselves, to give up what is precious to us and even lay down our very lives for the benefit of others. By definition, love is to care about others in the same way that God cared about us in sending His only Son to die for us, in the same way that Jesus cared about us by dying for us while we were yet sinners. It is to put the well-being of the other above our own, regardless of the cost. Now notice the second part of the command. Who does:

b. one another refer to? When you come to verses 9-11 you have another term to describe who we're to love, *brother*. In its most literal sense, the command **specifically means to love other believers** in Jesus. It was given first and foremost to us who are part of the family of God to define the way that we must relate to one another in everything. However, our love cannot be limited to only to fellow believers, just as God's love is not limited to us. Love does not have boundaries. When love is present, it cannot be contained; it spills out, it overflows onto the whole world, even to enemies. Love ultimately **expands to include all**, but it starts with each other.

Now, what does John want to tell us about love? Well, it may be stating the obvious, but first of all:

II. Love Is A Commandment We Must Obey (7-8) A commandment is something to be *done*, something we choose to carry out and obey. It does not happen automatically, rather it involves our will, our choice. If you're 5' 2" tall, to command you to grow is useless, isn't it? You either will or won't, depending on how old you are and there's nothing you can do about it. To issue a command implies that love is something we must cultivate, that we must work at, that we must struggle to accomplish! It involves our will; we must choose to love! And the first thing John tells us is that:

1. it is an old commandment, one that we've had from the beginning. Beginning of what? Well, in one sense, it is so old that:

a. it was given in the Old Testament to God's People Way back in **Lev. 19:17-18** God gave this command through Moses, *Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.* From the very beginning there at Mt. Sinai, God commanded His people to love one another! Of course, through the years that command kind of got slipped down to the bottom of the pile. God's people knew it was there but with hundreds of commands to remember and follow, it did not seem to stand out. Remember one day an expert in the Law came to Jesus to test Him and asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life. And Jesus turned it around and put the question to him, *What is written? How do you read it?* And this lawyer summed up the whole law in just two commandments, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.* And Jesus commended him for seeing that love was God's whole point concerning relationships with other people. But, realizing that he couldn't possibly keep it, the lawyer turned around and asked, *And who is my neighbor?* Jesus answered by telling the story of the Good Samaritan, as if to say, "Love any person you find lying in a ditch, whoever they may be!" [**Luke 10:27-37**] It's a command God's people have always known, but they really don't want to keep! In another sense it's old because:

b. it was given by Jesus from the very beginning, from the time He began to build His church. In the Sermon on the Mount, He challenged His followers, *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you - Mat. 5:43-44.* Throughout His ministry Jesus challenged His followers to love, but what John is most likely referring to is that special night in the Upper Room. Look with me at **John 13:34-35**. And He repeated Himself in **15:12**. He engraved it upon their minds. He set it up as the hallmark that would identify His followers, the one thing that would set them apart from all the other people on earth. They wouldn't just show niceness and kindness; they would sacrificially love one another in a way the world was not used to seeing. And that's exactly what happened. Love became their trademark. About 200 AD, a believer named Tertullian who lived in Carthage in North Africa wrote a defense of Christian faith called *The Apology*. Contrasting the practices of Christians with that of the Roman public he wrote: *Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death. [Tertullian's Apology Ch. 39].* Some 170 years after Jesus commanded it, His followers were still obeying it, even as they are today 2,000 years later. It's an old command we've had from the very beginning. And certainly:

c. it is taught to Christians from the time they believe From little on up or from the time we believe, we are taught, *Love one another!* It's something we have always known, something we've heard over and over again, something we sing about. But:

2. yet, John says, **it is a new commandment**, not new in the sense of age. John is careful to use the Greek word *kainos* which means new in the sense of fresh. We always buy used cars, but when we buy one, I still say, "We got a **NEW** car". It has been around a few years but it is "new to us"; it is fresh. That's how it was both for Jesus and for us. Do you see:

a. Jesus took the old command to love your neighbor that was in the Law **and made it fresh for His disciples** when He said *Love one another!* It wasn't that they didn't know it; but it needed to have a brand new focus in their lives, to be shuffled from the bottom of the deck to the top and lived out. It had to be made new all over again. And that's what John is saying to us:

b. we need to take the old and make it fresh in our own lives We've known it forever, but we need to restore it to its rightful place and priority in our lives. We need to actually LOVE one another, to fill our lives afresh with it, just the way those early believers did with sacrificial acts of caring that make no sense to the rest of the self-centered world! How do we do that? We CHOOSE to do it! It's a command! I found this illustration fitting: *When snow skiers want to make a turn, they do it by shifting most of their weight to the left or the right foot. As that ski begins to bank in the intended direction, the other follows naturally. One foot can never get too far from the other. Now apply this to love, which must combine emotional caring with action. Think of a self-giving act as the weight we put on the turning leg. At first it may be a feelingless deed; but before long, emotion comes into line with it. The key to loving is the will. We can obey a command, but we cannot command a feeling into existence. So, when we don't feel like loving, we can still act in a loving way. In Leviticus 19 God was specific in His command to love. He told His people to leave gleanings in the field for the poor; not to be partial; not to put a stumbling block before the blind and a host of other things which culminated in the summary, Love your neighbor as yourself! Loving their neighbor started with choosing to act! In his book Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis wrote, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."* Choose to make that old commandment fresh in each situation you find yourself in. Act lovingly and genuine love will be the result. Now why should that work for us?

c. we do this, John says, **because His light is already shining in us** and as it shines brighter, it causes the darkness to pass more and more out of our lives. **2 Cor. 4:6** says, *"...God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* His light is already inside us; it's shining there and as we choose to obey and cooperate, it shines brighter and brighter and we live lives characterized by love.

Now we're beginning to consider the second thing John tells us in the next three verses. Love is more than a commandment:

III. Love Is The Manifestation Of Our New Nature You see, love is a character quality that has been planted inside of us in the new Christ-like nature that we were given when we received Him. It is the fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. That's why John now says that:

1. hatred of a brother reveals the presence of an old, darkened nature (9, 11) Now he talks about the opposite emotion, about hate. What's hate? The dictionary says to hate is *to dislike intensely or passionately; to feel extreme aversion for or extreme hostility toward; to detest - usually deriving from fear, anger, or a sense of injury.* The world of John's day was filled with it. Jews hated the Gentiles. Jews hated Romans. Romans hated Jews. Romans hated barbarians. Slaves often hated masters and important public figures often hated one another. Hate was enmeshed in every stratum of the Roman world. And everybody hated Christians; by law they were criminals, enemies of the state and rebels against the Empire. We don't like to admit it but we've all seen and experienced hatred in our world too; we've all felt it at one point or another. *When he was in the eighth grade, Spencer Perkins had the "privilege" of being the first black student in his town's public schools. Even before the first bell rang, he had already been called "nigger" several times. Spencer observed that there were two issues that generated a lot of anger in his classmates that year. One was, as one white student put it, "Why do we have to go to school with a nigger?" The white teacher struggled to come up with a satisfactory answer, but what hit Spencer the hardest was that it was obviously OK for the other boy to refer to him as a "nigger." The irony of the situation was that the other major issue that year was school prayer. The other students in the class were outraged that the Supreme Court had outlawed prayer in public schools. In fact, it made them almost as angry as Spencer's presence in the classroom. These young "Christians" applauded enthusiastically when the teacher announced that he would continue to open every class with prayer in spite of the ruling. Says Perkins, "Neither my young classmates nor my teachers saw any contradiction between their professed love for God and their disgust for me..." [Reconciliation Wednesday for Leaders, Apr 9, 1997. Page 1.]* That's the contradiction that John is pointing out. Whether it is ethnic hatred, religious hatred like that we've seen toward Muslims since 9/11, or ha-

tred of someone who's hurt you, or, God forbid, hatred of a brother or sister in the body of Christ, hatred cannot exist in the same heart with the genuine love placed there by God! That's why he says in these verses:

a. the one hating IS STILL in darkness That is, he has an unregenerate heart. If he can hate his brother, he's never been truly reborn of the Spirit of God. He's manifesting the evil of his true nature within him. Not only that, John says in verse 11:

b. the one hating WALKS in darkness That is, he lives an ungodly way of life. His actions continually reflect the darkness that fills his heart. He makes choices in life that are self-centered, rather than God-centered, because he doesn't really love God. As he acts and speaks in hate, he is living out of the darkness that's inside. And what's worse, John says, is that:

c. the one hating is BLINDED by darkness That is, he is unaware of his condition. He can't see it; the evil one has blinded his mind to it. He practices hate and thinks he's doing good! That's what frustrates us. We think, "How can you NOT see the nature of what you're doing? How can you not see how awful it is, how wrong it is?" Blind people can't see, no matter how much you want them to or tell them to, because the blindness is inside. Only God can change it!

Hate is a big red flag! To say, "I love God" and still hate is a contradiction. If you see traces of it in yourself, cry out to God to see what's really true about you! But on the other hand:

2. loving a brother reveals the presence of a new nature (10) Displaying the very love of God toward brothers and sisters, even toward those who curse or persecute us:

a. it demonstrates a continuing connection to the light It shows the light of God's presence is truly in us and we're staying connected to it. And:

b. it shows there is no stumbling block in the one doing the loving There's no snare, no trap, no false, deceptive thing inside, only the genuine thing, the very nature of God Himself, the love of God that has been placed there by His Spirit. The new nature inside is showing itself outwardly in actions.

So, choose to cultivate the new nature. Choose to act out of the love that's inside you and allow it to blossom into all that God intends it to be. *In the first little country church I pastored there was an older widow who had one daughter. The daughter had been raised in the church and was an active believer. But her mother sent her off to college and college did a real number on her faith, as it has for so many young people. She was no longer sure about the reality of what she believed. Sadly, one of her male professors got involved with her sexually and she got pregnant and came home to have her baby as a single mom. Of course, in those days, there was much more of a tremendous stigma and shame attached to that than there is today. And I remember visiting the elderly mother and her telling me this story and it coming down to this sentence, "I hate that man. He ruined my daughter." I was shocked! I was certainly sympathetic and sorry for the tremendous pain she suffered as she endured all of this, but no amount of words seemed to change her heart. Raised in church all her life, she hated that man and wished him dead. As I recall the daughter was ill with some protracted disease they couldn't really diagnose and died at some point, maybe after I was gone. I was only there two years, so I don't know whether that hatred persisted or not; I hope the Lord rooted it out of her life eventually.* But I know this: there are many people in this room right now that have plenty of reason enough to hate somebody. Maybe you've been deserted, abandoned, betrayed, abused, bankrupted, threatened or fired by somebody who really ruined your life. Maybe it was something far less than that. Maybe it was even a brother or sister in Christ. But I will tell you this, if you can truly hate them and continue in it without remorse, John says, "How can the love of Christ dwell in you?" If that love truly lives in you, cultivate it, choose to act out of it, whether you feel like it or not. Cry out to God for the grace to obey His commandment to love and you'll find the strength to do what's humanly impossible, to love with the very love of God.

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

Do Not Love The World - 2:12-17

Last time as we looked at verses 7-11, we saw how John emphasized that special command given to us as believers to *love one another*. Now as he moves forward, in verse 15 he is going to give us an opposite command and tell us what NOT to love! In living the Christian life, we have two enemy forces that oppose us and seek to destroy us. First, we have an internal enemy, the force of sin dwelling inside our minds and bodies and striving to control us through our flesh, the learned patterns of thinking, feeling and acting that have been ingrained in us. But we also have an external enemy, the world in which we live with all of its evil influences and enticements, complete with Satan its ruler. In the upper room on His last night with His disciples, Jesus Himself made the same contrast that John makes here in his letter, *This is my command: Love each other. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.* - Jn. 15:17-19. As believers, we have been chosen out of the world and set apart from it. We don't belong to it anymore; our citizenship is in heaven! So, the whole of our Christian lives, the world is set against us and is constantly trying to do one of two things. Its first strategy is to woo us into loving it, to lure us to fall back into its ways of think-

ing and acting so as to absorb us into itself and reclaim us. Or in times and places where that fails, it will attempt to destroy us outright through persecution. Now as we think about facing this lifelong battle, let's read:

I. The Assurance John Gives Us (12-14) This portion is written in sort of a poetic format, but let me summarize for you what John is trying to get across. That first *little children* in verse 12 means ALL of us; John uses it seven times in this letter as his tender term of address to us; we saw it back in verse 1 and we'll see it throughout. So, what John writes here is meant for all of us who believe, even though, as he goes on to indicate:

1. we may be at different stages in life physically and spiritually Some of us are "fathers". We are older physically and more spiritually mature. Just as Israel in their villages had "elders", respected men of the community who were looked to for example, advice and judgment, so in the body of Christ we have spiritual "fathers" (and "mothers" too) whom we look to as our moral and spiritual examples. Then some of us are "young men", vital and strong and in the prime of life both physically and spiritually. In the army they're the warriors, not the planners; they go out and fight the battles. In the church the "young men" and "young women" are the movers and the shakers who are busy "doing the ministry", reaching out into the community, teaching, planning, organizing, fighting the battle to rescue others out of the world. Then some of us really are "children", at the end of verse 13, where John uses a different Greek word to show he's referring to those who've only recently come to Jesus and are still untaught and immature in Christ and really vulnerable to the world's attack. In the body of Christ, we're all at different ages and spiritual stages and our needs at each one may vary, but all of us together:

2. we have a three-fold assurance There are three things that John wants us to know and be absolutely sure of as we face this battle together. Number one:

a. our sins have been FORGIVEN for the sake of Jesus' Name (12) We are different from the world of people around us. They commit sin because it's their nature; it comes naturally. They commit sin because they choose to follow their own desires. As a result, they stand under the condemnation of God for their sins and face the prospect of eternal death. But we are different from them. Our sins have all been forgiven, once for all, forever. And we have been forgiven not because we have done anything or deserve it in any way. We are forgiven because Jesus died to take away the penalty we deserved. We are forgiven solely and only for the sake of HIS Name, so that He might receive all the credit and the glory for saving us and so that our lives might be used to declare glory of His Name among the peoples of the earth. As Paul put it, *...You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.* - 1 Cor. 6:19-20. The first factor that keeps us separate in this evil world is that we know we are forgiven and we know the price that bought us! Number two:

b. we KNOW both the Father and the Son John says it three times in these verses. You KNOW Him! And that word *know* means to know by experience, to know by connection, to know by relationship; it does not mean academic knowledge. You KNOW the Father; you know Him the way you know your wife or your husband or your mom or dad. Jesus said, *...you do know him and have seen him.* - Jn. 14:7. We have a personal relationship with both the Father and the Son. We talk to them; they speak to us in the thoughts of our hearts. The world doesn't know the Father, nor the Son, nor the Spirit! But we do! We have entered into a personal walk with God where we commune with Him. That's the second factor that keeps us separate from the world. Number three, John says:

c. we have CONQUERED the evil one That word *overcome* means *conquered* and the tense indicates that it is a permanent victory after the conflict. Satan is a defeated foe; the victory over him was won once and for all at the cross! The battles we find ourselves in with him now are merely mop-up operations! We fight a foe who has already lost, one who cannot win. And even in that, John reminds us that:

(1) we are strong, but not in ourselves. We are strong **with God's divine power**. 2 Cor. 10:4 says, *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.* Our weapons have divine power, the very power of God Himself. We don't fight with our own resources by our own strength; we stand before our enemy in the power of Almighty God Himself. We are strong! And, John says:

(2) the Word of God abides in us It dwells in us; it lives in us. We know what GOD has said and we know that it stands as truth, no matter what the world tries to tell us, no matter what Satan screams at us. The Word is our sword, our weapon against the enemy.

In his book Forever Triumphant, F. J. Huegel wrote that after General Jonathan Wainwright was captured by the Japanese in World War II, he was held prisoner in a Manchurian concentration camp. Cruelly treated, he became "a broken, crushed, hopeless, starving man." Finally, the Japanese surrendered and the war ended. A United States army colonel was sent to the camp to announce personally to the general that Japan had been defeated and that he was free and now in command. After Wainwright heard the news, he returned to his quarters and was confronted by some guards who began to mistreat him as they had done in the past. Wainwright, however, with the news of the allied victory still fresh in his mind, declared with authority, "No, I am in command here! These are my orders." And from that moment on, General Wainwright was in control. Friends, our side won! We must

stand and act on the truth of that news! The group *Harvest* recorded a song years ago called *The Army Of The Lord* and the chorus of it says:

*Are we walking into the enemy's camp, laying our weapons down
Shedding our armor as we go, leaving it on the ground?
We've gotta be strong in the power of his might and prove to the enemy
We are the army of the Lord and we've won the victory.*

Listen, as we go into the battles of life that we face, we go with the assurance that our sins are FORGIVEN, that we KNOW God Himself, and that our enemy is already CONQUERED by Jesus Christ! So now, having heard this great assurance, we are ready for:

II. The Command John Gives Us: Do NOT Love The World (15-16) As I mentioned earlier, the world's first tactic, before persecution, is usually to woo us into loving it, to try to absorb us back into itself. So, let's dig deeper and let John show us how this works. First off, I've been using a word without really defining it. The word:

1. *world* here means the place/time environment in which we live In some places, such as John 3:16, it simply means the whole human race. But in verses like this one, *the world* refers directly to the spiritually hostile environment which surrounds us. Look with me at **Eph. 2:2**. *This world*:

a. it is an environment designed and ruled by Satan to oppose God The Greek here is a very peculiar expression, literally "the age (era) of this world". You were born at a particular time in history in a particular place in a particular country in a particular culture, to a particular family with a particular background in a particular neighborhood. When you come into this world there is an ordered environmental system all about you which exerts its force upon you from the earliest part of life until the day you die. Before you are saved this *world* system actually dominates and controls you because it colors and affects every aspect of your life. Now, who invented what surrounds you? Satan did. He is the prince with the authority over the air, that is, the surface of the earth, the world of men. He is called elsewhere *the prince of this world* and *the god of this world*. He is the one controlling that world in which you live. The entire world has always been dominated by Satan and has followed paths that he has laid out. Of course, his tactics are different at different places and times. Multiplied millions in Asia have been enslaved for centuries following false paths of religion that he has laid down in Hinduism and Buddhism. Over a billion live under obedience to a false representation of God in Islam. The Greek and Roman culture of John's day was led down a path of pleasure-seeking polytheistic idolatry which the USA seems to be bent on repeating. The devil has been allowed control over the systems of this world and he has ordered all of them in opposition to God. So, the world in which we live:

b. it is an environment that pressures us into its way of life Ever since birth you walked on the paths that system had laid out for you. You dressed in the manner it laid out. You cut your hair according to its patterns. You listened to its music. You were inoculated with its general beliefs and patterns of thought; you had its values and customs drilled into you. And those things were ingrained in you deeply, even if you grew up in a Christian home which sheltered you from some of its effects. Now, because Satan organized the system, from little on up the greater majority of the paths that have been laid out for you to walk in by the forces of your environment have been self-centered, self-serving, and self-gratifying; that is, they have been sinful and opposed to God. Now let me ask you this; when you walk through thick brush, where do you walk? Do you make your own path or go down the trails that are already there? You follow the paths, don't you, because there are too many obstacles to making your own, because being different is too hard. So, the environment all around you pressures you to live the way everybody else does and makes it hard for you to strike out on your own.

Now on top of that, inside you there are forces which make you WANT to go down those worldly paths. In fact, in verse 16 John explains to us that:

2. the world appeals to three passions within us to pressure us (16a) John says that you can sum up every tool that this world system has to use against you into three categories. The first one is:

a. the desires of our flesh In modern terminology he might call it *the longing to get our needs met*. In many places the Bible calls it *lust*. It is that passion I have to get what I need. At the most basic level, it is:

(1) the urge to satisfy bodily drives like hunger and thirst. Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and she was hungry. You can push an honest man to steal if you make him hungry enough. You can drive a kind man to keep all the water for himself if you can get him thirsty enough. You can get him to break into a house if he's cold enough. And you can lure a man or a woman into sexual immorality if you fan the flame of that urge strongly enough. But it is not only basic bodily drives that we are desperate to satisfy; the term *flesh* also includes:

(2) the urge to satisfy emotional needs like the need to have significance (to know that we matter), the need to have security (to feel safe) and the need for love and companionship. It's nearly impossible to live without those things and if the system around you denies them to you, there is great pressure to give in and bend the rules to get them. But remember, **Rom. 8:6-7** says, *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to*

God's law; indeed, it cannot. If the most important thing in your mind becomes getting your own needs met, you'll end up rebelling against God and hostile to Him. The second appeal the world uses against us is:

b. the desires of our eyes, that is, **the longing to possess what we see**. Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was a delight to the eyes; it was beautiful to look at and she wanted it, so she took it, even against God's instructions. The Bible calls it **greed**, the desire to possess what I see simply because I want it. It might be a beautiful woman or a handsome man who belongs to someone else. It might be a car or a house or a boat or a sum of money. If the world can get you to see it and to want it bad enough, whatever it is, it can pressure you into going about getting it in the wrong way. The third appeal the world uses against us is:

c. the pride of life It is **our empty boasting that we are god-like**. Eve saw that the fruit would make her wise, that it would make her just like God, so she could make the rules instead of Him! People will do all kinds of things if you appeal to their **pride**. There is this urge within us that is always:

(1) striving to gain power and control in every situation, to be in charge, to make things turn out the way we want them to, regardless of whether it's right or not. And there is this urge we have of:

(2) striving to be recognized and served by others We want to be noticed. We want to be thanked. We want others to regard us highly. We want to BE somebody! All the world has to do is offer someone the chance to be that and he will hurt all kinds of people as he climbs over them to get there!

We need to recognize that these desires are still in us. They are not gone. And the world around us is always appealing to one or more of these three passions that we have to get us to conform to it. That's why:

3. we are commanded NOT to love the world nor the passions it foments in us. You see:

a. the satisfying of these passions on our own is not from God (16b) When we seek and strive to get all these things, to satisfy all these desires on our own in our own way, that's not from God. That's the way of the world around us. If we fall in love with that, if we make that our highest priority and give our lives to the pursuit of it, we love the world and John says clearly:

b. we CANNOT love God and love the world (15b) If we love truly love HIM, we cannot love what is hostile toward Him. **James** put it like this, *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* - 4:4. You can't have both! You can't sit on the fence! You can't love God and sleep with your girlfriend or boyfriend to satisfy your sex drive or steal from your employer to get new golf clubs or lie about your coworker to get the promotion you want. That's loving the things of this world and you can't love what God hates if you truly love Him! What the world will never tell you is this **(17)**:

c. the world and its passions is perishing, along with those who pursue it The world system is destined to perish. In the end Jesus will reign. The satisfying of everything we want ends at death and if that's what we lived for, we'll have nothing we ever wanted for all eternity. But if what we really wanted is Jesus, if the true satisfaction of every desire of our hearts is really found in Him, then:

d. we who pursue the will of God remain forever and enjoy Him forever! We have what we really want eternally!

Ray Stedman puts it like this: *One of these days the world and all that we see in it and all that history records of it, will have been forgotten, will have passed into the silent dust of the centuries. But according to the Scripture, one day the Lord shall stand with his own and view a universe where all things have been brought together and reconciled in Christ... What a thrilling thing it will be to stand there and see that come to pass and say, "Thank God, I had a part in that, in the reconciling of all things in Christ." Our Lord divided the issues of life into two words. He says there are two things, and only two things, you can do with your life. "He that is with me gathers, but he that is against me scatters," (Matthew 12:30). Now which are you doing? Are you gathering, or scattering? Are you uniting and reconciling, or are you dividing and breaking up and severing? All the issues of life funnel down into those two things. This is also where John puts it. If you are living for the world, loving its glory, seeking its fame, counting important the things it can give, clinging to these desperately, letting your emotions get wrapped up in them, you are scattering, you are breaking up, you are dividing. But if you are walking with Christ, if the things that he loves are most important to you, if a cup of cold water given in his name is of far more value than another dollar in the bank, if time is spent in comforting or encouraging some lonely person is to you a far greater treasure than a killing in the stock market, then you are building, you are gathering, you are building that which will endure, which will last forever, you are laying up treasures in heaven. [<http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/1-john/the-enemy-around/>]* Following his graduation from Wheaton College, as he was preparing for missionary service, Jim Elliot wrote these words in his journal entry for October 28, 1949, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." He obviously meant them. On Jan. 8, 1956 the bodies of Jim and his three companions were found below a sandbar in the Curaray river in Ecuador, murdered by Waodani tribesmen. Today much of the tribe has adopted their faith and many have already joined them in heaven. These men gave up their love for every-

thing this world holds dear, even life itself because of their genuine love for Christ and they gained what they can never lose. They were no fools and neither are you if you choose to put to death that natural love we have for the things of this world and choose to love Jesus Christ and the things that matter to Him above all. As Ray Stedman concludes: *That is where John rests his case.*

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

Antichrists - 2:18-27

At verse 15 John began to warn us about the evil world system that surrounds us all and is constantly trying to lure us back into itself by appealing to the passions that are inside of us. Now he moves on to give us a grave warning about one specific element of that world system that is particularly dangerous. It is filled with false teachers who continually try to lead us away from the truth. And to emphasize the seriousness of this danger, John gives them a shocking label. He warns us that:

I. We Must Be Alert To The Presence Of Antichrists (18-19) Beloved, John tells us that:

1. we live in the *last hour* of human history before God destroys it all and sets up His Kingdom on earth. He's obviously not talking about a literal hour; this phrase is similar to Paul's telling us that we live in the last days. It does not mean that John and Paul thought Jesus would return in their lifetimes, but they were mistaken. They probably did live in that expectation and so have the many generations of believers that have followed. How often have you heard it said of our day and age that surely, we live in the end times; the world can't get much worse than this! We are ALWAYS to expect the Lord's soon return and live that way. But looking back from our perspective, they were right. We live in **the final age before the end**; the whole time from the apostles to us and until Jesus actually returns is *the last hour*, the final stage of human history and the world system dominated by Satan and John says that:

2. this age is to be characterized by antichrists We know this from the teaching of Jesus Himself. He said ...*See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.... And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. - Mt. 24:5, 11.* John calls them *antichrists*. What does that mean?

a. an antichrist is one who is either *against Christ* or *instead of Christ*, either one who opposes Christ or one who falsely claims to actually be Christ. False Christs and false prophets are both, in reality, antichrists. Now as soon as we hear that term, we can't help but think of exactly what John tells us. In the end time tribulation period:

b. there will be a specific world leader, the antichrist, before Christ's coming In Revelation John calls him *the Beast*. Paul calls him *the man of lawlessness* or *the man of sin*. A Satanically energized world leader will arise during that end time and make his bid to dominate the entire world. Paul says, *Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God....then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. - 1 Thes. 2:3-4, 8.* When we use the term *antichrist*, this man is who we are usually referring to and much speculation has occurred through the ages as to who this antichrist is. I'm sure early believers considered the Roman Emperor a candidate. Martin Luther, along with many of the Protestant reformers, declared that the Pope was the antichrist in their day. Hitler was also seen as the antichrist by many and there have been others, but the truth is that we will not be able to truly identify this person until that day when he sets up his statue and takes his seat in the Temple at Jerusalem and proclaims himself to be God. However, that *antichrist* is not who John wants to talk about here; he says that:

c. there are many antichrists already present in the world during this last age. Who are they? Look at **2 Jn. 7**. The *antichrists* John is talking about are **false teachers**, teachers who oppose and deny the truth about the central Person of our faith, Jesus Christ! Throughout this age they have been and they continue to be literally everywhere. Where did they come from? John says:

3. these false teachers separated themselves from the true church He is not talking about proponents of other religions who deny the truth about Christ. He is concerned about people who began in the context of the church, but refused to continue to believe the truth and then separated themselves to gather their own following. Groups like this were already common in John's day. Hegesippus, who lived from 110-180 AD shortly after John died wrote this, ...*Thebuthis, because he was not made bishop, began to corrupt it [the church]. He also was sprung from the seven sects among the people, like Simon, from whom came the Simonians, and Cleobius, from whom came the Cleobians, and Dositheus, from whom came the Dositheans, and Gorthaeus, from whom came the Goratheni, and Masbotheus, from whom came the Masbothaeans. From them sprang the Menandrianists, and Marcionists, and Carpocratians, and Valentinians, and Basilidians, and Saturnilians. Each introduced privately and separately his own peculiar opinion. From them came false Christs, false prophets, false apostles, who divided the unity of the Church by corrupt doctrines uttered against God and against his Christ.*" [Quote from Hegesippus in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History IV. 22.]

Thebuthis was a leader who got offended and left and started his own following, trying to lead others with him and tear the church apart. You remember Simon! He believed Philip when he preached in Samaria in Acts 8 and was baptized, but after he was rebuked by Peter for his thirst for power, he left the believers and started his own cult that lasted into the third century and his followers ended up worshipping him. Marcion was a bishop in the church, but he declared the God of the Old Testament was not the true God, the loving Father that Jesus talked about, and was excommunicated around 144 AD. The group that followed him lasted some 300 years. All these heretical teachers:

a. they were once part of the church and seemed much like the rest of us There was a time when, from every appearance, they were regarded as genuine believers, but they did not continue in the faith. They did not persevere in believing the truth but left it. That has been the case with almost every false teacher down through history. Joseph Smith's family was deeply impacted by the religious revivals sweeping New York in his day, until he claimed to have a vision where he was told to join none of the churches but that he would re-start the true church and thus the Mormon Church was birthed. Charles Taze Russell was a Presbyterian and then a member of a Congregational Church, but became disenchanted and started promoting his own doctrines to those who listened and thus the Jehovah's Witnesses were born. False teachers have always been so; they come out of the church itself and that bothers us. How can it be that one who professes the truth can apostatize? How can they give it up and profess something else? Well, John explains, *they were not OF us*. That is:

b. they were never *truly* one with us through genuine faith in Christ Oh, they tasted the truth. They saw the work of the Spirit. They joined in the worship and gave assent to what they were taught. But they were never truly born again, never truly regenerated and transformed on the inside by the power of Christ's Spirit; they never genuinely believed with their whole heart. If they had, they would have remained part of the true church and stayed true to the teaching of Jesus and His apostles! The very fact that they now repudiate it says that they were not real!

And now it is evident that they are antichrists! The world around us is filled with them and we must be alert to discern what they truly are, so that they are not able to lead US astray. Now John goes on to tell us clearly:

II. How We Are To Recognize Antichrists (20-21) First of all, John urges us to remember that:

1. God has anointed us, and he means anointed us **with His Holy Spirit**. Listen to the words of Paul in **2 Cor. 1:21-22**, *...it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee*. God has claimed us as His own and imbued us with everything we need of Him by placing His own Spirit in our hearts! The presence of the Holy Spirit in us is our guarantee that we genuinely belong to Him. And:

a. the Spirit who lives in us **has convinced us that we *know* the truth**. We don't believe that Jesus is God and that He is the only Savior based on some academic evidence! We believe because we were convicted of it by the Spirit. He convinced us that what we now believe is the absolute unchanging truth. The world today says, "That's bigotry; that's pompous and presumptive. How can you claim you're the only ones who are right?" But the Bible says we **KNOW** the truth because God Himself has convinced us of it and shown it to us! And, John says:

b. truth is exclusive; if what we believe is truth, then **any teaching opposed to our core beliefs concerning Jesus Christ is a *lie*!** It is not just misinformation, not merely an unclear understanding. False teaching is deliberate deception. It is against Christ. It is anti-Christ! So, it is not something to be tolerated kindly, not simply something about which we can shrug our shoulders and say, "Oh well, everyone has the right to believe what they choose!" False teachings are lies from the enemy and false teachers are antichrists! They represent a grave danger, not only to us, but to the souls of human beings everywhere whom they seek to capture and lead straight to hell. Now look at:

2. the lies that antichrists propagate (22-23) Some of them:

a. they deny the Incarnation, the fact that God actually became man in Christ. They deny **that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Divine Christ**. John puts it another way in **4:2**. M. R. Vincent says that these...*words are aimed at the heresy of Cerinthus...[a false teacher of John's day]. He denied the miraculous conception of Jesus, and taught that, after His baptism, the Christ descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and that He then announced the unknown Father and wrought miracles; but that, towards the end of His ministry, the Christ departed again from Jesus, and Jesus [the man] suffered and rose from the dead, while the Christ remained incapable of suffering as a spiritual being*. You might say that's an old dead heresy, but you can go into liberal theological circles today and you'll hear the same teaching that we all have Christhood, that Jesus was just the fullest example of it! He was merely a man supremely anointed by God! In essence:

b. they deny the Deity of Christ; they deny that both Father and Son are fully God Every sect you can name, every cult that has come out of orthodox Christianity, holds some variation of this deception. They say Jesus was only the SON of God, not fully and completely God Himself, not GOD THE SON, coequal and coeternal with the Father. And so:

c. they acknowledge the Father but deny the Son There are plenty of people all around us who want to believe in God but reject Jesus Christ! The Unitarians shout, "There is one God behind all religions! They are all the just different pathways to the same God." But John says you can't have God without Jesus. You can't have the Father without the Son! If you don't have Jesus Christ in your life, you don't know the Father. You don't know God at all! And if you have Jesus, you have the Father also, because they are One! That is the very essence of Christianity and these teachers are trying to get you to deny it! Look with me at **2 Cor. 11:3-4**. They present you with *another Jesus*, not the Jesus of the Bible, and *another Gospel*, not the Truth once for all delivered to the saints. They preach a whole other way of salvation than believing in Jesus Christ alone. Now, exactly who are we talking about? Well, here are:

3. some groups that fall into the category of antichrist today Many of them are:

a. sects like Jehovah's Witnesses who walk up and down your street and knock on your door, wanting to convince you that Jesus is NOT Jehovah, the great I AM, and that salvation comes through joining their group alone and by being baptized by them and by obeying all the commandments they deem important. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, commonly known as **the Mormon Church**, teaches much the same thing, but adds to the Bible *The Book of Mormon* as a source of truth. They are not just another Christian denomination, as you might hear it put in the ad campaigns these days. In my seminary days LuAnn and I lived in a little town in south-west Ohio called West Elkton. It had 200 people but it had four churches. One of them was a **Church of Christ** and one of the older couples in our church had a daughter and family who left the church and became committed members of the Church of Christ. They caused the parents much heartache because they no longer regarded their parents as true Christians. I remember when I spoke to them about their beliefs, how confusing it was. They believed the Bible and turned to it at every opportunity. But, they said, it was not enough to believe in Jesus; you must OBEY Him and be baptized. You must OBEY Him and take the Lord's Supper every day. You must OBEY Him and only associate with people who do exactly the same as you do. Doesn't the Bible say all that? Finally, the Lord showed me clearly what was going on; they believed in salvation by faith PLUS good works! At the bottom line, Christ was not enough. Your salvation was based on what YOU DO, not solely on what HE DID! Go to their website and you'll find there are 1.5 million members in 1200+ churches all over this country, but read their doctrinal statement and you'll find that their roots are in Mormonism and they hold the Book of Mormon along with the Bible, yet they'll never tell you that up front! The *Disciples of Christ* church comes out of the same movement but has become ultra-liberal today instead. **Christian Science** or *The Church of Christ, Scientist*, is in the process of dying out with perhaps as few as 30,000 members left, but there is nothing truly Christian about it. Antichrist groups are all around us but at least you can identify them. An even greater danger are the:

b. theological liberals found in many mainline denominations I went to a denominational college and then on to a seminary where virtually NONE of the professors believed that the Bible was the inerrant Word of God and Jesus was the ONLY way of salvation. Many of our mainline denominations, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal and a host of others, literally have antichrists teaching their people from numerous pulpits every week and don't see it! Of course, there are still lots of conservative true believers and pastors in these denominations too but the false teachers have been invited right in among the sheep! To their credit, this same process was happening in the Southern Baptist convention, but the conservatives staged a takeover and threw the false brethren out of their leadership positions before error became too deeply rooted! Antichrists are outside the church and even INSIDE it! So finally, John tells us:

III. How We Must Guard Ourselves Against Antichrists (24-25) First of all, he says:

1. continually choose to trust in what you've been taught Stay in the Word. Cling to its teachings. Hold fast to what you have been taught by those who have instructed you in the faith! Hold on to the sound teaching that has been passed to you through a chain of faithful people brothers and sisters over 2,000 years. Why? Because **this is life!** Clinging to the Truth is abiding in His wonderful promise that we have eternal life. Second:

2. be aware that false teachers are trying to lead you away from Christ (26) Yes, so many of them are actually nice people! They are thoughtful and kind and do many good deeds. In many ways they may act more Christian than some Christians I know! They are moral and pray and say they believe in God and want to help people. And they are sincere; they want you to believe what they believe because they sincerely think it is a good thing for you. Jehovah's Witnesses knock on your door because they think YOU're lost and they don't want to see you be lost! But despite all the good intentions, Satan's design is to use them to lead you away from pure faith in Christ! Be aware of the underlying reality; their teaching is antichrist and Satan is trying to deceive you! I remember sitting in a Philosophy class in college, thinking, "What on earth am I doing here?" And I glanced over and on the cover of someone's notebook he had written **Col. 2:8**, *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ*. That became my theme verse and it went on my notebook! It is your responsibility to see to it, to beware, to be AWARE of the false teaching that comes your way and to reject it, to shun it for what it truly is. But, you say, "What if I don't know enough to do that?". Look at **(27)**. John says:

3. trust the assuring work of the Holy Spirit within you You don't need to know all there is to know. You don't need to have somebody else to tell you. You have God's own Spirit. He will guide you into all truth. Just ask Him to show you the truth and He will. Trust the Spirit. Abide in Him and you will abide in the Truth.

During the Revolutionary War, a loyalist spy appeared at the headquarters of Hessian commander Colonel Johann Rall, carrying an urgent message. General George Washington and his Continental army had secretly crossed the Delaware River that morning and were advancing on Trenton, New Jersey where the Hessians were encamped. The spy was denied an audience with the commander and instead wrote his message on a piece of paper. A porter took the note to the Hessian colonel, but because Rall was involved in a poker game, he stuffed the unread note into his pocket. When the guards at the Hessian camp began firing their muskets in a futile attempt to stop Washington's army, Rall was still playing cards. Without time to organize, the Hessian army was captured. The battle occurred the day after Christmas, 1776, giving the colonists a late present--their first major victory of the war. [Today in the Word, MBI, October, 1991, p. 21.] Beloved, John has sent you an important note that reads, "The enemy is on the move. Antichrists surround you with their false teachings and in reality, they hunt for your soul! If you fail to recognize them and cling to the truth, they will lead you astray from the true faith." And, like Rall, you have a choice. You can either dismiss the urgency of the note, stick it in your pocket and go on playing the daily game of life or you can heed the warning and be ready for the danger when it comes, by staying in the Word and feeding yourself daily. If I hadn't heeded that warning many years ago, the false teaching that surrounded me would probably have captured me like it did so many others and I literally wouldn't be standing here saying this today. I pray we ALL heed the warning; it truly is a matter of life and death!

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

Children Of God - 2:28-3:10

As we pick up our study today at the beginning of chapter 3, there is a concept I would like you to consider with me first. You may never have thought about it in quite this way, but look with me at **Heb. 2:10**. We usually focus on the beginning or the end of this verse and miss the middle. It tells us that:

I. God Has An Immense Desire To Have Children Yes, God made everything that exists for Himself, but that was not enough! God was not satisfied to have a universe full of created things to obey his will. He wanted CHILDREN! He wanted beings made in His own image who would be with Him and share His glory forever, sons and daughters who shared His very Spirit with whom He could commune and fellowship from the heart forever. That's why He created the human race, but they turned around and rejected Him! Still, His desire to have those children and bring them to glory was so great that it was necessary to send His own Son to earth and make Him complete through the suffering of the cross to bring those sons and daughters to Him! Listen, where do you think that innate instinct comes from that is inside us. Those of you who don't have kids, please forgive me for bringing this up, but recognizing that circumstances may affect this, the hearts of husbands and wives normally long to have children! Why? They're a lot of work! They're expensive! They get you up in the middle of the night and make your life centered on them for decades! Yet you want them! Why? Because you long to have sons and daughters that are sprung from you and share your very nature who can share your life at the deepest level and make it fulfilled. Why do you long for that? Because your nature mirrors that of God Himself, only His desire to bring MANY sons to glory is so deep and vast that it will never be satisfied until there is an innumerable multitude of sons and daughters from every tribe, tongue, people and nation standing in glory with Him! Now all of that being said, maybe you're ready to feel the depth of emotion that John is trying to convey when he tells us that:

II. God Has Made US His Very Own Children (3:1-2) Hallelujah! We are not just beings that God created. We are not just servants made to carry out the will of a heavenly Master. WE are the very sons and daughters of Almighty God! And when we say that, John assures us that:

1. this is not just a title by which we are called; it's not just some fond way of referring to us, the way an older man might say to a younger man, "Son, let me help you..." **It is what we actually are!** We are the very children, the offspring of God Almighty Himself, the Creator of all things, destined to share His life forever in glory! Moreover, according to verse 2, we are that RIGHT NOW! It is not some position that is accorded to us after death upon our arrival in heaven. Today, this moment, we who follow Jesus actually ARE the children of God. Yet here we sit and nobody around us really knows it! John says, "Don't worry..."

2. the world doesn't recognize us as such because it didn't recognize Him They didn't know He was the Lord of glory or they wouldn't have crucified Him! Though He was God Himself, He looked like just another ordinary man to them; even so the world around us is absolutely blind to the fact that we truly are God's children who will reign with Him forever! But their blindness to it doesn't change the truth of it. You see:

3. we became His children by an actual birth experience (2:29) We are not children just by accepting a doctrine; we are not children because we believe a truth. We are children because we were literally born of God. We experienced a spiritual rebirth. Look with me at **Jn. 1:12-13**. The moment we believed in Jesus' Name, His Spirit did a mighty

work in us. It put to death our old, dead nature and literally created or birthed a brand-new spirit, a new nature inside of us, one that is created exactly like our Father in true righteousness and holiness. That's what makes us His children! But there's more! John says in verse 2 that:

4. we shall be made completely and perfectly like Him at His coming Right now we're stuck in these old bodies that still have sin dwelling in them. But one day Jesus will come! And when He does, the process will be made complete; we'll be given brand new resurrected bodies made exactly like His glorious body. And friends, we have no idea what that will be like! We can't even imagine it. Our minds can't comprehend all the things that God has prepared for us, His children, but what we do know is that we shall see Jesus as He really is, face to face, and it will transform our lowly bodies so that we shall be made fully like Him, sons and daughters of God made perfect! No wonder John begins by saying *Behold! See! Look!* He is encouraging us that:

5. we must ponder the indescribable love He lavished on us in doing this! How great must God's love for us be that He would do all that for us! There is nothing in us that would merit or deserve it; He has bestowed it on us by His free choice. Steven Curtis Chapman wrote a song that captures some of that joy:

Who are the treasured and the prized? Who is the apple of God's eyes?

Who is? We are, We are, We are!

Who are the ones who bear His name Who are the children he has claimed

As His? We are, We are, We are!

We are the ones God has sent His Son to rescue and now He calls us His own.

We are the children of God! We are the children of God!

We are the sons and the daughters. Almighty God is our Father!

Hallelujah! What an amazing thing! We will stand in awe of it for all eternity! But now we come to the reason John wants us to revel in this. You see:

III. As Children Born Of A Holy Father, We Replicate His Holiness (3:3) Children by nature display the core characteristics of the parents that begot them. Your offspring are always made like you are. You don't have to worry that your pregnancy could result in the birth of a goat or a monkey. It will always be a human being like you. It will have a brain like yours and human capabilities like yours. It will be of your same race and even likely have a number of your more subtle physical characteristics. Well, God is not physical; the Bible says He is Spirit. And as His children who now have His nature dwelling within us, we also bear His core qualities in the spiritual realm. One of those we read back in 1:5, *God is light and in Him is no darkness at all!* That means our Father is righteous, absolutely pure and holy. And what John's trying to say is that:

1. our Father's righteous nature resides in us perpetually (3:9) Now, the ancients didn't know much about genetics, but they did know that if you plant the seed of a corn stalk that it would reproduce a corn plant exactly like itself. If you plant a kernel from a head of wheat, you get a stalk of wheat exactly like the parent. Well, God planted HIS seed in you! He planted His very own nature of righteousness and true holiness inside of you and it remains in you! It never goes away! It CAN NEVER go away any more than you could be un-born! So what John is saying is that because our nature is permanently changed:

a. it is impossible for us to continually practice sin contrary to our nature With the exception of God Himself, any created being can act against its nature temporarily, but ultimately it will act like what it is. You can get a lion to sit up and do tricks for a while and under certain conditions, but sooner or later he's going to act like a lion, he's going to kill and eat other animals (or people)! A cow is an herbivore. Maybe you could get a cow to take a bite of roasted chicken somehow, maybe by hiding it in a salad or something. But ultimately the cow is going to eat grass because it's a cow. You are a child of God. You have the nature of your Father inside you that loves and only wants to practice righteousness. Satan can find ways to tempt you and lure you to do otherwise, to do things that are against your nature, but ultimately you cannot keep it up. If His nature is really in you, you CANNOT continually practice sin over and over, without any guilt or remorse. It is impossible. It is acting against your own nature and you just can't sustain that for very long. You see, John says that:

b. the practice of sin is lawlessness (3:4) In the Greek, sin is *anomia*, living as though there is no law, living as though there is no order of right and wrong established by God. In essence, he's saying that the practice of sin is **rebellion against God** Himself. And ultimately, we who are like God cannot persist in that which is anti-God; it is actually anti-ourselves. Why? Because:

c. Jesus, the sinless One, came to take away our sins (3:5) - 1 Pet. 3:18 says, *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...* We were unrighteous, dead in trespasses and sins. But on the cross, Christ the righteous One made a great exchange. He took away our sins by taking them upon Himself and gave us His righteousness. Not just as a position, but in very reality. We are not simply DECLARED righteous, that is, forgiven. We are MADE righteous. The same thing that happened to Him happened to us. WE were put to death in the flesh and made alive in our spirit by Him through new birth. That's how He can bring us to God as His children! If we could continue to practice

sin, then His work would be faulty; it would be incomplete and ineffectual. We can no more continue to practice sin as an ongoing habit, than a fish can breathe air and perpetually live out of water. But on the other hand, John says:

2. Satan's unrighteous nature still resides in those who belong to him (3:8) Now think this through. Satan made the choice to rebel against God in the very beginning of all things and when he did, his nature was changed. He was a good angel like the rest but he BECAME evil. The reason he came into the garden after Adam and Eve seems obvious: he wanted to take away from God the very thing that God wanted most, the deepest desire of His heart. He wanted to keep God from having children, from filling up the glories of heaven with many sons and daughters! And when Adam and Eve chose to follow him instead of God, THEIR natures were changed; they became LIKE HIM. Sin entered the very core of their beings; they BECAME evil in nature. And they produced offspring that were like them, who had their nature. So, all human beings (including us) as they come into the world are "OF" the devil and because they have his sinful nature:

a. they continually practice the deeds of their father The Jewish religious leaders were arguing with Jesus one day and He said straight out to them, *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* - **Jn. 8:44**. They were the devil's children by nature and they were acting just like him. That was ALL of us, not just them. It is still ALL of those who are outside of Christ. They sin because it is their nature to sin. They can do some good things, but they cannot continually practice righteousness any more than a lion can eat grass for very long. That is the work of Satan, to deny God his children and drag them all to hell after himself. But John says:

b. Jesus came to destroy Satan's work How? **Specifically, in us!** Through the cross Jesus destroyed what the devil had done; He paid the price of sin and bought God's children back and transformed them through new birth so that they are once again fit to share the glories of heaven! God WILL have His dream of many sons to share His glory after all! But here's John's bottom line point:

4. the behavior we practice is the evidence of our true parentage Now go back and look at **3:6-7, 10**. Here is the test. Here is how you can tell people apart. You look at their behavior. Those who truly are God's children ACT like Him continually! Those who continually DON'T act like Him are not His children, no matter what they may say! Jesus put it like this in **Mat. 7:15-20**. A person's fruit is how they act, how they live. Good trees produce good fruit; bad trees produce bad fruit. That's the rule; that's how you tell a good tree from a bad tree and that's how you tell a true child of God from an impostor. Both Jesus and John are actually giving us a warning here. They are warning us that:

5. we must beware the deception of those who teach differently *Let no one deceive you!* There are those who would claim to follow Jesus, who would claim to be children of God, but who practice and who advocate the practice of evil. Who are they? Well, in John's day, for example, there was a group known as **the Nicolaitans** whom John wrote about to the churches he oversaw in Revelation. Look what Jesus says to Ephesus in **Rev. 2:6**. However, in Pergamum they're in the church in **14-15**. Thyatira has a deceitful woman there in **20-23a**. There were people in John's beloved churches teaching that it is OK to participate in idolatry with your neighbors and you can freely have sex with multiple partners outside marriage like they do and STILL follow Jesus! In other words, you can continue to live like a pagan and still be a Christian because your sins are forgiven. Idolatry and immorality have gone hand in hand from the time of Balaam and you don't have to look very far in the modern church today to find the same kind of teaching. There are hundreds of "gay churches" across our country where those who practice that brand of immorality are openly lauded as believers. And there are literally thousands of churches who have departed from the authority of the Word of God, who don't care what you really believe as long as you believe in a God and where sexual promiscuity is no big deal because God loves everybody and forgives everything. There is no judgment to fear or hell to avoid. John is saying, "Watch out! That's a deception that kills people! Beware and avoid it; in fact, purge it out from among you! True children of God ALWAYS live like their Father! They practice righteousness and holiness and those who don't are imposters!"

As Children of God, we replicate His holiness! We can't help ourselves; it's our nature! But John also says here that:

IV. As Children Of A Perfect Father, We Intentionally Strive To Emulate Him It's not merely automatic; it's something we want, something we work hard at, something we strive for. We have the greatest Father in the universe and we want ourselves to be like Him! Why? Well, on the negative side:

1. we do not want to be ashamed when we face Him (2:28) Do you remember the shame you felt as a child when you did something wrong and your parents found out? But you can't hide what you do from your Heavenly Father; He knows everything you do! On that day when you see Jesus face to face, when you walk into the throne room of heaven and see the Father, can you imagine the shame of knowing you've disappointed Him by going after sinful and worldly things as His child? And it's not just about then:

2. we want to have boldness and freedom in our relationship, even now How do you feel when you know you've got sin in your life and you come to read the Word and try to pray? There's this wall because you know what you've

done and you know HE knows what you've done and you can hardly approach him. Many years ago, I confronted a friend whom I knew was a believer but was sleeping with his girlfriend at the time and his reply was, "Don't you think I know it's wrong? I can tell the Lord isn't anywhere around when she's here..." He knew the Lord was asking him to give up that idol of sexual pleasure in his life and, thank God, not long after, he did. But oh, how sin hinders us. We can't approach the throne of grace boldly to find help in our time of need if we're living a lie. We can't enjoy the pleasures of closeness with God if we're regularly eating at His enemy's table. The practice of sin denies us the very thing we were created for, to love our Father and enjoy Him forever. But we want to be like Him for a positive reason also:

3. we are deeply moved with gratitude by His lavish love Go back and read again **3:1-3**. Oh, what love has God poured out freely upon us to make us His children, to plan our glorious future together! *Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!* What humble gratitude that should fill us with! We want to please our Father because He loves us so!

The story is told of a ragged boy with a violin under his arm who roamed the streets of a great European city. Because he had no home or family, he wandered around for food and shelter. He had a strange gift for music and had somehow gotten hold of a violin, and so would stand on the corners and play for the crowd. When he finished, they would toss some coins and this is how he lived. In the same city lived a famous musician. One day he happened to hear the boy playing and was impressed by the quality of music. He asked the boy, "Son, to whom do you belong?" "I don't belong to anybody," the boy answered. "Well, where do you live?" was the next question. "I don't have any place to live. I just sleep on the streets or wherever I can." The man thought for a moment and then asked, "How would you like to come to live with me and be my boy? I'll teach you all I know about how to play the violin." The boy's eyes sparkled, and he said, "Mister, I'd love it." So, the great musician took the boy to his own home, had him cleaned and dressed up, and the man became a father to him. For several years he poured into the eager young mind and heart all he knew about the violin. Finally, the boy was ready to appear on the concert stage for his first public recital. The house was filled to capacity. At last, the boy came out, put the violin beneath his chin and began his concert. He played beautifully and there was much applause, but the boy paid no attention. He merely kept his eyes turned upward and continued to play. The audience was mystified by his behavior and finally someone said, "I don't understand why he is so insensible to all this thunderous applause. He keeps looking up all the time. I'm going to find out what is attracting his attention!" So, by moving about in the concert hall, the observer found the answer. There in the topmost balcony was the old music master, peering over the banister toward his young pupil. He was nodding his head and smiling, as if to say, "You are doing well, my boy; play on!" And the boy did play on, not seeming to care whether the audience laughed or applauded. He kept his gaze upward. You see, he was playing to please the master only. Dear ones, God has done for us so much more than this! He has taken us who were lost enemies and rebels, dead in our sins, and made us His very children who will live in His house and share His glory forever! If we really ponder and grasp that, we will live for one thing to the ignoring of all others; we will live to please our Master only.

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

Love One Another - 3:11-24

This letter John wrote is composed at its core around three fundamental contrasts. In chapter 1 John focused on the contrast between light and darkness. Here in these middle chapters, John has been focusing on the contrast between love and hate which he first expressed in 2:9-10. Now in chapter 3, beginning at the end of verse 10, John re-expresses that same theme of contrast and develops it further. Taking together verses 11-15, what John is really saying is that:

I. Hatred Is The Way Of Satan And His Followers (11-15) Let's drop back and read **(10-11)**. In other words:

1. one who does not love his brother is a child of the devil, because *WE* have had and have been obeying the command to love one another from the very beginning. Not loving your brother is a sign of your spiritual parentage, a mark of whose child you are in the spiritual realm. You act out of whatever nature is inside you, either the nature you've received from God through new birth or the nature you were born with which is the nature that originated with Satan. If your behavior shows no love or open hatred, it reveals that you belong to Satan rather than God. John says:

2. this can be seen in the example of Cain (12) Have you ever stopped to think what an indictment it is concerning the nature of the human race, that the third person ever to exist hated the fourth and murdered him! And he was literally his own brother! You know the story, but you might want to look at it with me back in **Gen. 4:5-8**. Amazingly, God did not withdraw His personal presence when He cast Adam and Eve out of the garden. Cain offered a sacrifice to God which was unacceptable and the Lord actually came and spoke to him personally about the reason why and warned him. We always think the problem was with *WHAT* Cain offered but it wasn't; the problem was with what was inside Cain himself. God called on him to look in the mirror and literally said, *Why are you angry, and why is your countenance fallen? Is there not, if you are good, a lifting up? But if you are not good, sin lies before the door, and its desire is toward you; but you should rule over it.* God told him, "The problem is not with ME not accepting your offering; the problem is in YOU, in your heart! You are NOT good and the evidence is that you haven't been practicing good or I

would have accepted you. Sin is ready to control and own you if you yield to it!" John spells out the story of Cain this way in verse 12. First, we see:

a. his nature: he was of the evil one Cain didn't love God and strive to please Him; He was not a person who loved and practiced good. He lived the way he wanted to and sought to please himself. He sold himself to and belonged to Satan. What's:

b. the evidence: he murdered his brother Think about this. Two boys raised in the same home, growing up together in the same family. And there were NO other families, no other people in the world, just them! They ate together and played together and slept together and worked together, just the four of them. There was no "world system" to lure them astray, no evil people to lead them into sin. No human being had ever died and, obviously, there had never been a murder; they didn't even kill and eat animals at this point in history! Yet despite all of this, Cain attacked his own brother Abel in a field and, the Hebrew says, *slaughtered him, butchered him*, the way Abel had the slaughtered the lambs from his flock for sacrifice. Where did that come from? It came from inside Cain, from the powerful force of sin trying to control him and he yielded to it, despite God's personal warning. Why? John tells us:

c. his motive: he hated his brother's good works It was not simply that he was jealous of Abel because God accepted him. He hated Abel because Abel was good, because he was constantly living a life of good works, living God's way. Cain didn't live that way and didn't want to live that way. He lived a self-centered, self-serving life. But every time he looked at Abel, Abel's life pointed out his sin and made him feel guilty. So instead of repenting, he blamed Abel and grew to resent him and the resentment turned to hatred and ultimately led to enough fury to murder him!

Now in **Jude verse 11**, Jude says about certain false prophets, *For they walked in the way of Cain...* Cain chose the path to hatred of his brother. It is a way, a road, a highway that, not only Cain, but many people in this world travel. John reminds us that:

3. hatred of the righteous is a common pattern in this world (13) It should not surprise us! Those who belong to Satan have been hating God's children ever since Cain's time. Jesus warned us the world would hate us and throughout history and even today Christians have often been the on the receiving end of the hatred. Our friend David Dayasagar in Nellore, India sent me a Hindu newspaper article that read, *After lying low for some time, the problem of proselytization has reared up its ugly head once again at Tirumala, the abode of Lord Venkateswara [Hindu god]. ...in a raid conducted by the TTD's Vigilance and Security personnel on three houses in the TTD staff quarters at Tirumala late on Monday night following a tip-off, bundles of religious publications, wall-posters and such other propaganda material belonging to Christian missionaries were reportedly recovered. ...all [three men were] working as 'sweepers' in the TTD's Health Department... The trio was immediately taken into custody for interrogation in view of a blanket ban imposed by the government... The BJP [radical Hindu party] leaders...urged its top-brass to go all out to end the 'menace' once and for all. They hate Christians! Even here in America there are people that hate you just because you believe in Jesus and want to practice righteousness according to God's standards. You may have read in the paper that our local Abington Hospital planned to acquire and merge with Holy Redeemer and that the Board agreed that abortions would not be done. Well, the backlash to that was so mean and so aggressive that the merger was canceled! And Abington only does about 65 abortions a year, so it's not about money. People have a hatred toward anyone and anything that shows their deeds for the evil that they are! And you don't have to physically kill someone; John says that:*

4. anyone who hates his brother is a murderer (14-15) You remember what Jesus taught about this. Look with me at **Mt. 5:21-22**. Murder is just the outward manifestation of the hatred that's inside. That same hatred can manifest itself in angry behavior and talk, in insults and name-calling and cursing, or simply in that angry sullen countenance that Cain displayed. John says, *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer!* What's more:

a. no murderer has the eternal life of God inside him - Rev. 21:8 says that *murderers have their place in the fiery lake of burning sulfur*. They'll be separated from God for all eternity, so they don't have His life inside them. Quite the opposite:

b. not loving a brother is evidence that the heart remains in death If God's nature and His Spirit is present in us, His boundless love overflows into our hearts. Therefore:

c. loving a brother is the evidence of God's life dwelling inside us, the evidence that we are children of our Heavenly Father.

And that's the second major point that John wants to make. Hatred is the way of Satan and the way of his followers, but:

II. Love Is The Way Of Christ And His Followers (16-18) And what is love? It is far more than simple kindness, much greater than the affection we feel for members of our own family. John says that:

1. the cross is the defining act of love (16a) This is how we know what love is; we look at Jesus and what He did there on the cross; **He laid down His life for us**. And then we hold up our own behavior to it and say, "Is this like

that?" Not in degree, of course, but in nature! Am I acting like Jesus acted, with the same attitude and heart that He displayed? Now, notice the three things about that act of love that are in this simple statement. First of all:

a. it was voluntary: He chose to lay it down He was not forced. Nobody took His life from Him. He could have called 12 legions of angels and put a stop to it rather quickly. But He chose to do it for us; He did it because He genuinely wanted to. Secondly, notice that:

b. it was costly: He laid down his life Most people are willing to do something kind if it doesn't really cost them anything they truly care about. But if it really invades their money or their time and becomes a sacrifice of any sort, willingness immediately begins to diminish. Jesus did not just give away all of His money to help someone; He gave His life in our place. He died for us. He gave that which to lay down is the last full measure of devotion, his very life itself. And thirdly:

c. it was selfless: He laid it down for us He didn't do it for His own benefit to obtain some reward for himself. He did it solely for OUR benefit; it was a selfless act! I like the way Francine Rivers imagined the thoughts of the rich young ruler after he left Jesus in sadness: *I walked away. I went back to all I knew, back to the life that left me empty. When I went up the steps of the Temple, I put coins in the hands of beggars, and cringed inwardly. I knew the truth. I gave not for their sake, but my own. A blessing—that's what I was after! Another mark in my favor, a deed to bring me closer to the assurance of hope and better things to come. For me.* [Rivers, Francine (2011-04-22). *Sons of Encouragement* (p. 586-7). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.] So many of the good things people do, if you could actually see the motives of their hearts as God can, are at the root selfish, ultimately done in some measure for their own benefit. But love is totally selfless; it thinks not of itself, but only of the need of the other. Jesus showed us what love is; it means doing costly, self-sacrificing things that meet the needs of others because we truly want to. And John adds that if we truly belong to Him:

2. His love will be replicated in our behavior (16b-17) If we are His, then **WE lay down our lives for our brothers**. What does that look like? Well, John gives one simple example:

a. we see a brother in need They lost their job and can't pay their bills. They became ill or were in an accident and can't support themselves. Their husband left them and they struggle to make it on their own. Or maybe they were simply born into a situation where there is no way available to them to make it. They are in need and:

b. we may have the means to meet that need We may have money in the bank or income we can spare or something we can sell or a house to share. Of course, we may NOT have the means. We may be in need ourselves, but even then, we will share our hearts with that brother and pray. In either case:

c. the love of God in us creates compassion and causes us to share Because His love is in us, we WANT to meet the need of the other, we are willing to SACRIFICE and do without in order to meet it and we do it for no other reason than that we care deeply about the other. That's love! I see it constantly. But John warns that:

3. our love must be genuine (18) Rom. 12:9 puts it like this, *Let love be genuine*. Literally, the Greek says, *without hypocrisy*. It can't be an act.

a. it cannot be mere words without deeds Saying that we love one another is not enough. Love is not merely a feeling of pity; it is being moved enough to act on the other's behalf. And likewise:

b. it cannot be mere talk without truth It cannot be actions that we only say are acts of love without genuine caring on the inside. Paul said, *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing*. That's why Peter urged us, *...love one another deeply, from the heart...* - 1 Pet. 1:22.

Our love must be real and to be real it must come out of a heart like God's and result in actions that are like God's. Praise the Lord, it happens right here among us all the time. I see it constantly in a thousand small ways. Envelopes full of money mysteriously appear on my desk or in the offering plate with nothing but the name of a brother or sister in need, for us to deliver. One is sick in bed and brothers and sisters begin to show up with meals for the family. Another is moving and needs help and a team of people will sacrifice their time and energy to see that the job is done. Another experiences a loss and a flood of cards and calls and visits begins to come their way. Our people have opened their homes to one another when they have no place to go and even to strangers they don't know when there is a need. Real love, Christ's love, displays itself here among us today because love is and has always been the way of Christ and His followers! But the point John is trying to get to is this:

III. The Practice Of Genuine Love Becomes Our Assurance (19-24) Now please understand, loving our brothers does not save us; it is not the source of our salvation. We can't earn heaven by loving people like so many think. But this love IS the EVIDENCE of our salvation and its presence in us is the very thing that assures us that we truly belong to Christ. We experience this assurance in three ways. First of all:

1. we are assured by observation of our own lives (19-20) John is implying that:

a. our own heart [and by that John means what we usually call our **conscience**, our inner God-implanted sense of right and wrong] **may raise doubt** about whether we truly know Him. Why? **It knows things against us.** We know the evil thoughts that sometimes cross our minds. We know the anger that sometimes flares up inside us. We know our impatience and see how quick we are to hurt a brother or sister when things don't go our way. Inside, we know all our many flaws and failings and sometimes they are enough to cause our own heart to question whether our experience of Christ is genuine and real. But, John says:

b. seeing ourselves practice love sets our hearts at rest in His presence When we spontaneously respond to the needs of our brothers in love, we know that doesn't come from us! We know that's a God thing! And as we see ourselves love and ponder why we just responded like that, it occurs to us that we did it because GOD is IN us! We HAVE been born again and made new! We don't need to be afraid to approach Him! He knows our faults and failings too, but He knows more than that; He knows we are His children. So, seeing love flow out of us assures us and in fact:

c. it gives us great confidence to ask God for what we need (21-22) It gives us confidence to walk right into His Presence and boldly ask for what we need as His child and to see Him answer the way a true child would expect Him to! Seeing ourselves love makes us sure we are His! Secondly:

2. we are assured by God's declaration about us (23-24a) Look at the beginning of verse 24. God says it very clearly:

a. those who obey His commandment belong to Him And what is His commandment? **To believe** in the name of His Son Jesus **and to love** one another. Well:

b. WE keep His command We believe in the name of His Son Jesus and we love one another. Therefore, He Himself declares that **we live in Him and He lives in us.** If that weren't true, we couldn't believe and we couldn't love! He declares it. He says that because these things are true of us that we are His. You can't argue with Him! And finally:

3. we are assured by the Spirit's confirmation (24b) You remember **Rom. 8:15-16**, don't you? *...you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.* There's a Spirit that now lives in you, the Holy Spirit, a Spirit that knows you are a son or daughter of God, a Spirit who bears witness together with your own new spirit inside you that God is your Father and you can come to Him and cry out, "Daddy!" because He loves you and you belong to Him! And that same Spirit is the very One who causes you to love God and love others.

In her book *Love In A Lunchbox*, Elaine Ward tells this parable: *A king who had no sons sent out his messengers to announce that every young man in the kingdom might apply for an interview with the king to apply to become the next king, but only if they met two specific criteria: They must love God, and they must love others. One young man did indeed love God and others, but he was so poor that he had no clothes that he could wear in which to be interviewed. At last, he begged and borrowed until he had enough money for his clothes and food, and he set out for the castle. He had almost arrived at the castle when he came upon a poor beggar by the side of the road. The beggar was trembling and dressed only in rags. "Would you help me?" he cried weakly. The young man was moved to compassion at the sight of the beggar so much that he took off his new clothes to dress him and gave him his food. Then, uncertain of what he should do, he slowly walked on toward the castle. When he arrived, he was brought before the king and, to the young man's amazement, the king bowed before him. When the king looked up, the young man recognized his face and said, "You...you...were the beggar beside the road?" "I was that beggar," said the king. "But aren't you the king?" "Yes, I am the king." "I do not understand," stammered the young man. And the king replied, "I had to find out if the one who followed me as king truly loved God and others. I had to see what was in your heart. Now I know you will rule my kingdom well." [Love in a Lunchbox by Elaine Ward. Abingdon, 1996. Page 124.] Dear friends, God has the same two criteria sandwiched into one command: Love God; believe in the Name of His Son who died for you. And love one another. The second is the evidence that the first is really true. If you love others, you truly love God. And one day the True King will say to you, "Come, Inherit My Kingdom!"*

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

Test The Spirits - 4:1-6

As we enter chapter 4 in our continuing study, John uses his last phrase in chapter 3, *by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us*, and springboards from there to re-visit the warning that he had given back in chapter 2 about false teachers whom he called there, *antichrists*. I don't think we have nearly enough appreciation for the tremendous difficulty that believers in the earliest days of the church faced in knowing what they should believe as truth and what they should reject. They had no written New Testament to compare as a reference as we do. Copies of letters from the Apostles were made and circulated by being passed around to various house groups so that they could be read

in meetings, but certainly, no one had a personal copy to refer to. Everything they were taught was oral, by mouth, and they had to rely completely on their memory for retaining it. Further, with the many who were coming to faith, the one who was teaching them was likely not an apostle or someone like Titus or Timothy who had been taught thoroughly for years, but probably someone who was relatively young in the faith themselves. Under these conditions it was EASY for wrong teaching to develop and propagate, even from sincere sources. One of the earliest problems in the church arose from Jews who had believed in Christ trying to teach churches out in the Greek world that they had to become circumcised as they were in order to be saved. That heresy is the subject of Paul's letter to the Galatians who were being troubled by these teachers. The explosive growth of the church in China in the last 50 years created similar conditions and might help us understand the problem. For example, *a man who had fallen away from the Lord fell into an old well while walking through a field and landed on his head. It was not big enough to turn around in so he started praying, "Lord, if You will get me out of here, I will follow You forever." He called out for help, but knew it was useless; no one ever came by that deserted place. Suddenly he heard voices and soon felt a rope around his legs and was pulled out. So, he began a group, which at one point came to number 10,000 people, who believe that the only way to pray is standing on their heads! [The Coming Influence of China, Lawrence, p. 87].* We laugh, but you get the point. Untaught people start all kinds of false teachings based on experiences they have or on limited or wrong understanding of what they've heard from others. And that is as much a problem today and right here as ever. There are several churches in Philadelphia, for instance, that teach faith in Christ, but as a corollary teach strongly that medical care and blood transfusions are morally wrong and their members, not infrequently, die needlessly from things like childbirth or pneumonia. It is of vital importance that we have a way to know that the things we are being taught are true and are actually from God. That's why John writes this in **(1-3)**. Now let's try to understand:

I. The Concept Of Inspiration that John is explaining to us here. We don't use the word *prophet* in the church any more, probably because we think the word means somebody who predicts the future. But that's not what it means.

1. prophets are people who claim to speak a message from God I'm acting as a prophet, or exercising the gift of prophecy if you will, right now. I am proclaiming a message to you, teaching you things which I contend are true because they ultimately come from God. I'm certainly NOT claiming that God told me word by word exactly what to preach this morning, but simply by standing here and doing this, I am claiming that the basic principles and content of what I'm teaching you is from God. And you probably believe me or else you wouldn't be sitting here week after week. Now in the early church there were also people whom God endued with a particular gift of prophecy where He actually did give them specific words to speak, just as He did the prophets of Israel. Agabus, for instance, came to Paul in Acts 21:10-11 and told him that the Spirit said he would be bound (arrested) at Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles, which he was. I'm sure God gave this sort of direct prophecy much more commonly then because there were still no written New Testament records, but He is not limited. He still gives specific messages that way to His church, even today, especially out among the unreached peoples where the church is very young and vulnerable. Well, you can see the obvious danger that goes with prophecy; there is a real need to discern who is really speaking from God and who isn't! John explains that:

2. prophets speak by whichever spirit is compelling them They don't just stand up and speak on their own. Preaching and teaching on spiritual things is more than a lecture or a class session. Prophets are inspired. They are compelled to share what they share by a spirit who is at work in and through them. To get a picture of how this works, look with me at **2 Pet. 1:20-21**. That last phrase is how prophecy works; men speak from God as they are *carried along* by the Holy Spirit, the same way a sailing ship is pushed across the ocean by the wind or a kayak is propelled downstream by the current. The Spirit, working in and through the person, compels them to say what they say. Well, John points out that, unfortunately:

3. there are two different spirits which may be moving a prophet Of course:

a. true prophets are moved by the Spirit of God (2) The Holy Spirit lives in them and as He impresses the message He wants to deliver upon their minds, **they speak the truth from the Spirit of truth**, as He is called in **(6b)**. The Holy Spirit can only speak truth and Jesus said He would be given to us to guide us into all the truth. A true prophet speaks from God's spirit, but there are also false prophets, counterfeits, who claim to be speaking from God but really are not. In fact, John says that:

b. false prophets are moved by the spirit of the antichrist (3) The antichrist who is to come in the end time will also be moved by a spirit and that same spirit is already at work today. Of course, **this refers to evil spirits or demons who are controlled by Satan. 1 Tim. 4:1** says, *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.* Demons are teachers! They invent lies, false information, and feed it to the minds of people whom they control. Let me give you one obvious example. *In the Middle East there are about a million Arabic speaking Druze people who departed from Islam centuries ago and have their own religion. The Druze emphasize belief in the reincarnation of souls and this belief in reincarnation is also linked to the practice of "speaking out," which is essentially an effort to encourage small children to practice a kind of divination. Some children and adults do apparently have revelations, and speak about details of other peo-*

ple's lives that are impossible for them to know otherwise. When young children "speak out," it is considered a sign and even a proof of their reincarnation. [www.30-days.net/muslims/muslims-in/mid-near-east/druze-middle-east/] Where do children get such information? They're actually inviting demons to feed it to them! Evil spirits are compelling people to say what they say and that is true for all false prophets. **They teach error or falsehood from the spirits who induce error** according to (6b). And that brings us to John's main point:

II. We Must Test The Inspiration Of The Teachers We Hear (1) Or to put it another way, John is warning us that:

1. we must continually exercise the gift of discerning which spirit is really doing the speaking whenever we hear someone claim to speak for God. If you look at **1 Cor. 12:10** you'll see there a listing of spiritual gifts that some people are given and one of them is *the ability to distinguish between spirits*. That doesn't mean to sort them out into different varieties; it means the ability to tell whether the spirit who is speaking through a person is the Holy Spirit or an evil spirit! When Simon the magician of Samaria, after he had believed and been baptized, saw people receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles' hands and offered Peter money to gain this ability for himself, Peter immediately said, *...your heart is not right before God...I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.* - Acts 8:21-23. Instantly he perceived that the spirit who was speaking through Simon was NOT the Holy Spirit! And that's what John says we have to be able to do on a continual basis. Some people may be particularly gifted at distinguishing like this in difficult cases, but ALL of us have a responsibility to develop and exercise this gift of discernment, which John shows us has two phases. First:

a. we must not indiscriminately believe everyone who claims to speak God's message The first step is to realize that not everyone who claims to be speaking for God is really doing it. Just because a person says, "God said..." doesn't mean God actually said it! In other words, we need to develop a healthy skepticism instead of blind acceptance. Just because a person is pastor of a church or a professor in a seminary or is on the radio or TV or has gotten a book published is no guarantee that what they are teaching is truth from God. As I told you earlier, I had lots of professors in college and seminary who were very nice, religious and learned people. They spoke from years of experience and training, yet they taught me things I knew were not true, things that did not come from God. And many were deceived into believing those things. That's why John says that, rather than simply believing everyone:

b. we must "assay" test everyone who claims to speak God's message You know what an assayer does, don't you? You take him the gold-colored rocks you found in the stream and he tests them chemically to determine whether they are really gold or not, how pure the gold is and how much of other metals is mixed with it. That's the root meaning of the word *test* here and that's what we must do with everyone who claims to speak for God. We must test them; we must make a deeper examination and analyze whether it is really God speaking through them or not. Now John gives us:

2. the marks of a person inspired by the Spirit of God (2) If a person is speaking by the Spirit of God, first:

a. they demonstrate a personal confession of Christ That word *confess* means more than simply saying something or stating a fact; it means to agree with it, to admit and adhere to the truth of it for yourself. A person speaking by the Spirit will personally confess that Christ is their Savior, that they love Him and are His follower, that He is their only Savior and their Lord or Master. *...No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit*, Paul said in 1 Cor. 12:3, and truly mean it. Second, if a person speaks by the Spirit:

b. they teach a true understanding of Christ's person and work They confess that *Jesus is the Christ*, the Son of the living God, that He is the one and only Savior of the world. And that He is come in the flesh, that He, God the Son took to Himself a truly human body in Mary's womb and actually became a man in order to go to the cross and save us from our sins. The Spirit of God KNOWS who Jesus is and, obviously, anyone who is speaking from Him will hold to what we know as the biblical doctrine of who Christ was and what He did. Then third, if a person speaks by the Spirit:

c. the right audience listens to them (6) People who truly know God, genuine believers, listen to people who speak from God. In other words, don't trust only in your own judgment. Look at who else believes and trusts this person and their message. In the multitude of counselors there is wisdom; if a number of people whom you know to be mature and discerning in the faith, sense that the Spirit is really speaking through the person, that's pretty good evidence that they are the genuine article.

Now on the other hand John gives us:

3. the marks of person inspired by the spirit of Satan (3) If a person is really being inspired by an evil spirit:

a. they demonstrate no clear personal confession of Christ They are *not* quick to say that Jesus is Lord and that He is their Savior and that they love Him with all their heart. At the same time:

b. they teach a false understanding of Christ's person and work They will teach that Christ was the son of God, but not completely and fully God. They will teach that He was a good man, a great teacher, a man through whom

God worked, and they will not see His death on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of men and the only means of salvation. They will add works to it in some fashion or another. They will tell you that there is something else, something more, that you must DO to be saved, in addition to believing in Jesus. And if you look around, you'll notice that:

c. the wrong audience listens to them (5) The unbelieving world is willing to listen to what they say and doesn't have a problem with it. When you teach biblical truth concerning creation or miracles or moral purity or a myriad of other subjects, people all around object to it and even become angered by it. But they have no trouble with someone claiming faith who endorses evolution and abortion and salvation by doing good things. Look at who listens.

The world tends to hate people who genuinely proclaim God's truth!

The habit of testing the teachers you hear is crucially important! You need to have it going on all the time, to be constantly evaluating what you hear, doing like the Bereans did when they heard Paul, *...they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.* - Acts 17:11. Listen for a personal confession of Jesus, compare what is being taught to the Scriptures and look at who else is listening to it. Test the spirits that are behind what you hear being taught, but don't be discouraged that false teachers abound. They always have and always will. Look at:

III. Our Assurance Concerning False Teachers First, Paul tells us that:

1. it is no surprise that Satan disguises his messengers Listen to **2 Cor. 11:13-15**. Deceit, wrapping up lies to declare them as truth, dressing up his servants to make them appear as servants of God, that is all standard operating procedure for Satan. He is the "Deceiver"; that is what he does! Expect it. Yet we need not fear that his false prophets will win the day by overwhelming and leading us astray. Look at the assurance that John gives in **(4)**! Hallelujah!

2. we are indwelt by God Himself He is IN us! In the Greek it says we are *out of* God, that is, He is our very source. His Spirit is the One who lives inside us, so that when we speak, **we speak by God Himself!** Our message is HIS message and it is HIS Word that will prevail, not the deceitful teaching of the false prophets. In fact, John says literally that:

3. we have conquered them and have continuing victory over them The verb is *to conquer*, in the Greek, is in the perfect tense which means that *the progress of an action has been completed and the results of the action are continuing on in full effect. In other words, the progress of the action has reached its culmination and the finished results are now in existence.* The conquering has already been done at the cross; Satan is a vanquished foe. He has already lost. And the effect of that loss is permanent and continuing. We are not striving against false prophets and their message to overcome them; they're already defeated and can't win! Why? Because:

4. our God is greater in both power and authority than theirs The one who is in them is no match for the God who spoke the worlds into existence and who upholds the universe by the power of His Word! For all his striving and trying, he cannot contend with the One at whose Name one day every knee shall bow of things in heaven and on earth and under the earth! Jesus is Lord of ALL! And He lives in ME by His Spirit; so, whom shall I fear? The Psalmist said, *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."* - Ps. 2:1-6. Beloved, Jesus is already seated on His throne; nobody is going to move Him from it! And because we are joined to Him and He is in us, nothing can separate us from Him, not now and not ever!

In The Case for Christianity, Colin Chapman quotes Ugandan bishop Festo Kivengere's account of the 1973 execution by firing squad of three men from his diocese: "February 10 began as a sad day for us in Kabale. People were commanded to come to the stadium and witness the execution. Death permeated the atmosphere. A silent crowd of about three thousand was there to watch. I had permission from the authorities to speak to the men before they died, and two of my fellow ministers were with me. They brought the men in a truck and unloaded them. They were handcuffed and their feet were chained. The firing squad stood at attention. As we walked into the center of the stadium, I was wondering what to say. How do you give the gospel to doomed men who are probably seething with rage? We approached them from behind, and as they turned to look at us, what a sight! Their faces were all alight with an unmistakable glow and radiance. Before we could say anything, one of them burst out: "Bishop, thank you for coming! I wanted to tell you. The day I was arrested, in my prison cell, I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart. He came in and forgave me all my sins! Heaven is now open, and there is nothing between me and my God! Please tell my wife and children that I am going to be with Jesus. Ask them to accept him into their lives as I did." The other two men told similar stories, excitedly raising their hands, which rattled their handcuffs. I felt that what I needed to do was to talk to the soldiers, not to the condemned. So, I translated what the men had said into a language the soldiers understood. The military men were standing there with guns cocked and bewilderment on their faces. They were so dumbfounded that they forgot to put the hoods over the men's faces! The three faced the firing squad standing close together. They looked toward the people and began to wave, handcuffs and all. The people waved back. Then shots were fired, and the three were with Jesus. We stood in front of them, our own

hearts throbbing with joy, mingled with tears. It was a day never to be forgotten. Though dead, the men spoke loudly to all of Kigezi District and beyond, so that there was an upsurge of life in Christ, which challenges death and defeats it. The next Sunday, I was preaching to a huge crowd in the home town of one of the executed men. Again, the feel of death was over the congregation. But when I gave them the testimony of their man, and how he died, there erupted a great song of praise to Jesus! Many turned to the Lord there.

Jesus can't lose! He's already won! And so have we! We need not fear anything the enemy does to us; they can even kill our bodies, but after that there is no more they can do! But we DO need to expose Satan when we see him at work. We do need to constantly discern who his followers are and how they are trying to lead people astray and denounce their false teaching for what it is. We DO need to continually test the spirits of the teachers we hear, lest we be led away from the Word, the very source of our assurance.

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

God Is Love - 4:7-21

For the remainder of the fourth chapter, John returns to the theme of this section of his letter, which is love. To me it feels a little like he's saying the same thing over and over and as I preach it, I'm doing likewise, saying the same thing over and over. But maybe there is a point to that. Around 380 AD, a priest by the name of Jerome gave the Roman world its first complete Latin Bible translated from the original languages, known as the Vulgate. But Jerome also wrote other things, including a commentary on Galatians, and in that commentary he recorded this tradition that had been passed down to him about the last days of the Apostle John: *When the blessed evangelist John, the apostle, had lived in Ephesus into his extreme old age and could hardly be carried to the meetings of the church by the disciples, and when in speaking he could no longer put together many words, he would not say anything else in the meetings but this: "Little children, love one another!" When at last the disciples and brothers present got tired of hearing the same thing again and again, they said, "Master, why do you keep saying the same thing?" John replied with a saying worthy of him: "Because it is the Lord's command, and it is enough if it is really done" [Jerome, Commentary on Galatians 6:10 AD 387-388].* In other words, "I keep on saying it so you will actually DO it!" Repetition is not a bad thing if you see that the point of it is for you to really GET the message! So don't crinkle your nose in boredom when John writes yet again in verse 7, *Beloved, let us love one another!* He just wants us to REALLY DO IT! Actually, John goes much deeper than that; this portion of his letter can be divided into three sections, each of which spells out for us an important fact about love. In the first section, verses (7-12), he explains to us that:

I. Our Love Comes From God It is not something that originates from or is generated by us. It is not a human thing, not a natural thing, but rather a supernatural thing, a God thing. Look at (7-8):

1. God's very nature is love You see it in verse 8 and John repeats it later in verse 16, *God IS love*. Love is not just some secondary quality that describes God like majesty or beauty. It is the very core of His person; love is what He IS. All that He does, even judgment, He does in love. All that He says, even rebuke, He says in love. Even consigning the wicked to hell, He does in love because He IS love. Now evidently His love is not exactly love in the way we commonly think of it; it is much bigger, much grander, much deeper and wider, and much more multi-faceted than we're prepared to fully understand with our limited human minds. However, we can POSSESS it. *Love is from God*; it comes from God. He is the one and only source of that kind of love; it comes from nowhere else. Therefore, John says, **its presence in us indicates His Presence in us!** If we love with that God-kind of love, we must know God and have been born of Him so that He dwells in us with His love. Where else would it come from? If we don't love with that love, we couldn't really know Him or have Him living in us, else we would love! His Presence in us would compel us to love! Now what does that love look like? John says:

2. God's love was fully revealed in the sending of His Son (9) The cross is God's full, final, and complete revealing of His love. God loved us human beings, whom He lovingly created for intimate fellowship with Him, so much, that even though we rebelled against Him and followed His enemy and became absolutely lost and dead in our trespasses and sins, deserving eternal suffering in hell, He sent His one and only, absolutely beloved Son into the world to become one of us and ultimately to die the cruelest of all deaths upon a cross as the sacrifice for our sins so that we might live with Him after all! THAT is love! Nobody generates that on their own! Sure, some people might give up their lives for a worthy cause to help others or to rescue someone they care about, but NOBODY sacrifices their own infinitely loved son to save their very enemies! That kind of love that cares about, sacrifices and redeems people who don't deserve it, that's a God thing! And that's why:

3. God's love for us precedes and produces our love (10) It wasn't that we loved God and because of our love for Him, He saved us. It's the other way around! Because He loved us first in such a tremendous sacrificial act, we love Him! His love came before ours and the experience of His love produced in us a genuine love for Him. How can you not love Someone who loved you that much? In the early 1500's Francis Xavier expressed it well:

My God, I love Thee; not because I hope for heaven thereby,
 Nor yet because who love Thee not Are lost eternally.
 Thou, O my Jesus, Thou didst me Upon the cross embrace;
 For me didst bear the nails, and spear, And manifold disgrace,
 And griefs and torments numberless, And sweat of agony;
 Yea, death itself; and all for me Who was thine enemy.
 Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ, Should I not love Thee well?
 Not for the sake of winning heaven, Nor of escaping hell;
 Not from the hope of gaining aught, Not seeking a reward;
 But as Thyself hast loved me, O ever-loving Lord.
 So would I love Thee, dearest Lord, And in Thy praise will sing;
 Solely because Thou art my God, And my most loving King.

[Francis Xavier, 1506-1552 Translated by Edward Caswall, 1814-1878.]

His love makes us love Him, but at the same time:

4. God's love for us generates the duty for us to love one another (11) Since God loved us this much when we didn't deserve it, since we have received so great a love, does not that make it binding upon us to love others the way we've been loved? You remember the parable where the King forgave his servant a tremendous debt he could not pay, but that servant turned around and refused to forgive another who owed him only a small amount. The King rebuked him by saying, *Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?* Should not the one who has been forgiven so much forgive others? Forgiveness creates the duty to forgive and it is the same with love. To be the recipient of such great love, if we truly grasp it, compels us to love others with the love that we have received from God. And as we do that, as we live out His love:

5. our love fulfills the complete revelation of His love (12) The world can't see God. They can't go to some temple or some sacred mountain and catch a glimpse of Him. But they can see us! And as they see us loving others, they see Him as He lives in us. In fact, as we love, His love is brought to its most full and perfect completion. In his Gospel John says that *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.* When people saw Jesus, they saw God in all His fulness. He was the complete revelation of God to us. Likewise, when people see us loving with the very love of God, they see God's love in all its fullness. It is made perfect, brought to completion, in us so the world can see His true nature shining through us. *During the conflict between Armenia and Turkey an Armenian nurse had been held captive along with her brother by the Turks. Her brother was slain by a Turkish soldier before her eyes. Somehow, she escaped and later became a nurse in a military hospital. One day she was stunned to find that the same man who had killed her brother had been captured and brought wounded to the hospital where she worked. Something within her cried out "Vengeance". But a stronger voice called for her to love. She nursed the man back to health. Finally, the recuperating soldier asked her, "Why didn't you let me die?" Her answer was, "I am a follower of Him who said, 'Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you.'" (Luke 6:27). Impressed with her answer, the young soldier replied, "I never heard such words before. Tell me more. I want this kind of religion."* As we love with His love, God reveals Himself to others.

So, our love comes from God. Now the second fact John tells us in **(13-16)** is that:

II. We Love Because God Lives In Us Five times in these four verses you find the words *live in* if you're reading the NIV. If you have the ESV you find *abide in* and the good old King James has *dwell in*. All three are right. God *lives* inside us. He *dwells* in us; we are His permanent home. He *abides* there; He remains in us. And that's the reason we love, because He is IN us and He is love. But the reverse is also true. We live in Him, we dwell in Him and we remain in Him! Our very life is joined to His. And John tells us how we know that. First, John says:

1. we know He lives in us because we possess the Spirit (13) That was Peter's first promise in the invitation he gave at the end of his first sermon, *...Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.* - Acts 2:38-39. When we give our hearts and lives to Christ, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God Himself comes to literally live inside us, to dwell in our spirit and be united with us. And we know He is there. The Holy Spirit changes us and He gifts us and empowers us. He gives us a new posture of intimacy with God. We can tell He is present because we are different and that difference means that God Himself lives in us. We have the evidence of our own experience. Second:

2. we know He lives in us because we confess His Son (14-15) If God lives and dwells in all those who confess with their hearts that Jesus is the Son of God as He promised, then since we openly confess and testify that He is indeed the Savior of the world, He MUST live in us! He said so! We have the evidence of His very Word on it! But where John is going is the third evidence:

3. we know He lives in us because we live in love (16) In believing the Gospel we have both understood and experienced the great love that God has for us. We have believed and trusted in that love; we have relied upon that love to

save us. So, when we live a life of love, when we abide in loving others with that *agape* kind of love, we demonstrate that God Himself, who IS love, is dwelling in us and that we are joined to Him. Our love to others is the evidence that He lives in us. We couldn't do that without His Presence!

Our love comes from God; we love because He lives in us, and finally John tells us in **(17-21)** that:

III. Our Love Gives Us Great Assurance First of all:

1. our love gives us confidence to face the day of judgment (17) Paul told us that *...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* - 2 Cor. 5:10. This is not a judgment of our sins (that occurred at the cross), but an evaluation of our service, of how we lived as believers, of what God was able to do through our body, whether it was valuable or worthless. If we are living a life of love now, the life we are living right now in this world is His life, the character we are displaying is His character. And because of that we are not ashamed to face Him on that day; we are not hesitant and questioning as to how we will be received. Rather we are confident, looking forward to that day, because we know love is what He really wants of us. In fact:

2. our love drives out all fear of punishment (18) People are always afraid that when they stand before God they will be punished. People know their own hearts. But we are never afraid of someone who loves us. No matter how big they are or how strong they are or how capable they are of hurting us, if we are fully convinced they love us, we have no fear. If we are fully experiencing God's love and we see that love flowing through ourselves, all fear of punishment is gone. We are not afraid of God anymore; we call Him *Abba*, Father, Dad. We know that there is no condemnation for us because we are in Christ Jesus; His love takes all fear away. Now the thing that makes this all work is that:

3. our love could not be self-generated (19) We only love because He first loved us and placed His love in us. We can't generate love for Him and we can't generate love for others on our own. So, the fact that we see ourselves loving means it HAS to be from Him. It has to be real! It demonstrates to us the reality of our own faith.

4. our love demonstrates the reality of our claim to love God (20) Lots of people claim to love God; it's pretty easy to say. But the proof of it is in whether or not they demonstrate His love to other people. If you can't bring yourself to love people whom you can see and interact with on a direct personal basis, how can you love Someone you've never seen? It's like Jesus' question to the Pharisees in Mat. 9:5 about the paralyzed man, *For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?* I'm sure they thought it was easier to say *your sins are forgiven* because that's an intangible thing that you can't see or prove. But Jesus' point was that the intangible thing of being able to forgive a person's sins was MUCH harder than the physical miracle of healing him which you could see. So, Jesus went ahead and did the miracle of healing the man and told them that was to prove that He could do the even harder thing, that He had authority to forgive sins. John says, "Which is harder, to love a God you can't see or to love people you can see?" The spiritual reality of loving God is actually a harder thing, even though it is easily claimed. The proof that you do it is not in the words, but it is in the easier thing of loving the people around you right here and now! Our practice of loving other people proves that our claim to love God is real and genuine. It gives us great assurance. But finally, John reminds us that:

5. our love is always an intentional response to God's command (21) It is never fully and completely automatic. Even though God Himself dwells in us by His Spirit and has placed His love in us, we never love others against our own will. We are never puppets that are just forced to go around loving because we can't help it; we always have to choose to do it, to choose to let that Divine love in us be poured out on the other person. That's why it's a command. It still requires obedience.

I know I've read this story to you before, but it is really a classic. Those of you who are older will remember the name of Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch lady who was interned in a Nazi concentration camp for sheltering Jews. It was a place of untold horrors and in it she lost both her beloved elderly father and her sister Betsy who shared her ordeal. But God touched Corrie in that awful place and the rest of her years she traveled the world telling the story of God's incredible love and the healing it can bring. In her book, *The Hiding Place*, she writes of this experience she had after the war: *It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there-- the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsy's pain-blanced face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!" His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? "Lord Jesus," I prayed, "forgive me and help me to forgive him." I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. "Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness." As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so, I*

discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself. [The Hiding Place - Corrie Ten Boom - p. 238]. Oh beloved, God's love is in us, the very love which drove Him to send His Son to earth to a cross to save us from our sins! It dwells in us by His Spirit. But we must choose to let it out, to release it in each situation upon each other, upon those we live near and work and go to school with, even upon those who hate us, and we let it out by simply calling upon Him and asking Him to love through us. And when you do that and sense that love that is not your own flowing out to others through you, what tremendous assurance it will give your heart that you are living out His very life in this world. You really do belong to Him.

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life Conquering The World - 5:1-5

Before we start today, I have an admission to make to you. 1 John is hard! I know it has a number of simple lessons and concepts in it and we often recommend it to young believers, but the actual study of it is tough! Looking at it verse by verse and phrase by phrase in a serious fashion, it is MUCH deeper than a cursory reading reveals. There are only five verses in the section of chapter 5 we'll study today, but I spent hours looking at those verses, reading commentaries, and looking up Greek grammar while praying, "Lord, exactly what are you saying and what do you mean?" And then when you do figure it out, it's not always what you would expect it to say or want it to say! Anyway, after all of that agonizing, here's my best shot. If you remember, in the last verse of chapter 4, John had reminded us that loving each other is a command that God has given us; it is a choice that we must make to obey Him and do it. But do you realize how HARD that seems sometimes? And I'm not even talking about loving your enemies! I mean just how hard it can be to love people that you know are believers just like you; they can be just so "unlovable" sometimes! I read one pastor's personal lament about this. He said, *As a pastor in my younger days, I had my share of [difficult people]! There was Helen, who lived across the street in our small New England town and kept her eye on the parsonage. When the furnace acted up in the dead of winter, I had to monkey with it to keep it going, and she complained to the church board about "Mr. Leonard playing with his tinker toys." (I guess we were supposed to freeze to death instead?) Then there was Marion, the treasurer in another church, who became so hostile to me that she tried to withhold my salary — or the nominal stipend that was euphemistically referred to as my salary — until the Bishop intervened. And there was Joe in my western Illinois parish. I tried to make a few changes when I came to that church, such as asking the Board to meet in the well-lighted basement instead of the dim parlor at the back of the church. For this and other things, Joe became so angry at me that after church services he would leave by the side door rather than shake my hand at the main entrance. It really galled him when I beat him to the door and made him shake my hand anyway. The list could go on and on. [Dr. Richard C. Leonard, "Difficult People: Gotta Love 'Em!", www.laudemont.org/sermons/s-difficult.htm]* As it could for each one of us, couldn't it? Well, my take on what John is continuing on to tell us as we begin chapter 5 is that it is NOT hard to love our brothers and sisters in Christ! The command that Christ gave us to love our brothers, as difficult as it may seem at times, is not some impossible goal we can never reach; it is not some awful task that we must grit our teeth and bear up under. It is not hard for us to do and John gives us three reasons. First of all:

I. It Is Not Hard To Love Our Fellow Believers By Nature (1) In other words, it is our very nature to love one another and when it's your nature to do something, it's not hard for you to choose to do that thing, even if the task itself is difficult. For example, is it hard for you to love your children? Of course, your first response is probably, "No! Of course not! It just comes naturally!" But others of you, if you are honest, are thinking, "Yes, it is!". Maybe your child has rebelled against you and done all kinds of things that break your heart. Maybe your child has a chronic illness or a handicap and it takes all you've got to handle an endless round of doctor visits plus their physical care. But you do it anyway; you don't even think about *not* doing it. Why? He's your child or she's your child and making the choice to love them comes easy no matter how difficult the doing of it is! Well, John begins by saying that:

1. everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, (or as he puts it in verse 5 in) the Son of God, is a genuine believer He is still wanting to exclude those false prophets, those false teachers whom Paul referred to as *false brothers*. He excludes those who claim to be brothers, who claim to be believers, yet do not confess that Jesus is God the Son, that He is the only Savior who came to pay for our sins on the cross and that trusting in Him is the only way to heaven. They are NOT who he's talking about. But everyone who DOES believe and confess those things is a real, genuine believer in Christ and:

2. all genuine believers have been "fathered by" God and so contain His nature I learned something really interesting this week that I had never realized before. The verb in that phrase *born of God* has a different meaning depending on who is doing the bearing. In the case of a woman, it obviously means "to give birth" and refers to the act of delivering a child. But when the actor is a male (as is true in the genealogies of the Bible where Abraham "begat" Isaac and so on), it refers not to the act of birth itself, but to conception. It means "to cause a child to come into being" or in shorter form in English, to "father" a child. Now the ancients didn't know all the biology involved in procreation, about DNA and chromosomes and all that; rather they saw it in a much simpler agricultural image. A husband planted a seed of himself in his wife, much like planting a seed of corn or wheat in rich soil prepared for it, and from that seed a child would grow like a young plant. And just like the wheat seed would bear a stalk of wheat which had the nature of its

parent, so the child that was born was the “seed” or the “offspring” that sprang or rose up from the father and shared his nature. The nature of the father is transferred to the child whom he “fathers”. That’s what John meant in **3:9**. The NET Bible translates it, *Everyone who has been fathered by God does not practice sin, because God’s seed resides in him, and thus he is not able to sin, because he has been fathered by God*. God “fathered” us! His “seed” is in us. His very nature has been planted in us because we believed! Now, John says:

3. everyone who has been “fathered by” God innately loves the other children He has “fathered” You see this in your own family, if you have more than one child. When the second one is comes along, the first one naturally loves the second. And the first two love the third. You don’t have to teach them, “Now, this is your baby brother or sister. You have to love them!” It is innate; it is inside them; it happens for them just like it does for you. Why? Because they share the same nature. And the same thing works in the spiritual realm. All of us who believe, share the nature imparted by our Father, so it is our very nature to love one another! It comes as part of the salvation package imparted to us in our new birth. It is not hard to love our brothers and sisters because it is part of our new nature to do it! We’re not forcing ourselves to do something alien, rather we’re doing something that is as natural as breathing or eating or sleeping or loving our own children!

Yet it is still a choice. A brother or sister can choose to act selfishly in their own interest or become alienated from the family. So, we still have to choose to do even what comes naturally. And that brings us to John’s second point:

II. It Is Not Hard To Love Our Fellow Believers By Command (2-3) Now this section is a little tougher to understand, so let’s dissect and examine it. First, John is saying:

1. when we love God, we naturally keep His commandments Because I grew up on the King James, I always thought that when Jesus said in **Jn. 14:15**, *If you love Me, keep my commandments*, that He was giving a command, an ultimatum. “If you really love Me, then DO what I say!” But the best Greek manuscripts, which the more recent translations, follow have a future tense, *If you love Me, YOU WILL keep my commandments!* It’s a statement of fact, of what will happen. Love for God, love for Jesus, naturally results in obedience. And John confirms that thought, even going so far as to say that:

a. loving God IS keeping His commandments They are one and the same thing! Loving God is not just a bunch of gushy emotional feelings toward Him, as nice as it may be to have those. Love for God is an absolute dedication to Him, a giving of your life completely over to Him, so that doing what He says, keeping his commands, is just something that comes naturally. You do it without a second thought. The love and the doing are all one and the same thing! And that’s why John says that:

b. His commandments are not a burden They’re not a heavy load that weighs us down; they’re not some grievous awful duty that we’re saddled with. Look with me at what Jesus said in **Mt. 11:28-30**. Now what’s a yoke? A yoke is a wooden bar or frame that joins two animals like oxen or horses so that they can pull a wagon or a plow together for their owner, and of course, figuratively, taking a yoke upon yourself means entering into the service of another. When you come to Christ, you enter His service and take upon yourself the yoke of obeying His commands and doing his will. But He says that He is not a harsh Master! He doesn’t whip the oxen pulling His plow nor scream and curse at them like many drivers do. In fact, He says that in His yoke you’ll actually experience rest, not hard toil and exhaustion! That’s strange; why? Well, I’m not sure whether Jesus meant it like this or not, but I like to take the image of the yoke literally. It requires two to pull the plow! So, when you get into His yoke, He is the one on the other side! He is the one pulling the plow, doing the work with you and He’s pulling all the weight! It’s like riding a two-person bicycle with the guy in the front so big and strong that he’s doing all the work and the guy in the back is just barely keeping his feet turning on the pedals! To say it another way:

c. He provides the power to keep His commands That’s why they’re not a burden. His power resides in us in the person of the Holy Spirit and when we choose to let Him pedal, He does life through us! His energy accomplishes the work through our bodies. That’s why His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Love for Him makes us naturally WANT to do what He says to do and His power ENABLES us to do it. So, keeping His commands is not hard, if we yield ourselves to Him. But here’s the tricky part. In verse 2, John says that:

2. whenever we see ourselves loving God by keeping His commandments, we know that we love His children You see, the reason we sometimes wonder whether we really love some brother or sister is because we don’t always have warm, fuzzy, feelings about them. We don’t want to rush over and give them a hug; it would be like hugging a cactus! So let me give you an example. Look at **Eph. 4:25-29**. When you see yourself obeying God’s commands, when you see yourself telling the truth to that person you struggle with instead of lying to them and deliberately keeping your anger towards them under control and sharing materially with them when they have need and choosing only to say true and useful things to them and about them, and forgiving them and not holding bitterness (which comes in the next verses), you ARE LOVING THEM! You are loving your neighbor, your brother, as yourself! God doesn’t expect you to generate warm affectionate emotions toward somebody; He provides you with both the desire and the ability to keep His commands toward them. So, when you see yourself keeping His commands, you know you are loving them. And, trust me, if you DO that, the emotions will follow later!

So, it is not hard to love our brothers because of our nature and it is not hard to love our brothers as a command of God. And thirdly, John says:

III. It Is Not Hard To Love Our Fellow Believers Because We Have Conquered The World (4-5) As we explained back in chapter 2:

1. the world is our Satanically-arranged environment which pressures us to join its evil way of life When we come into this world there is an ordered environmental system all about us which exerts its force upon us from the earliest part of life until the day we die. And, as *the prince of this world* and *the god of this world*, Satan arranges and controls it through the lives of the billions who unknowingly follow him. And the world around us is always pressuring us to join it, to think like it thinks and to live its way. Just look at TV commercials; how many of them seek to either arouse you sexually or lead you into materialism and pleasure seeking. You don't see, "Love God with all your heart and be chaste!" commercials during the Superbowl! That same pressure to disobey God and essentially live in idolatry is all around and comes at us from everywhere. But here's the good news:

2. God conquered the world through Jesus' death at the cross The Greek word *nikao*, translated *overcome*, literally means to conquer the enemy, to win the battle. In English, *overcome* to us carries the sense of struggling and wrestling against a difficult situation and making it through. Do you see the difference? In **Jn. 16:33** Jesus said, *...In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage – I have conquered the world.* He is not engaged in some long struggle against Satan and his system down through the ages in which He will eventually succeed at last. He already won the battle! The battle occurred on the cross and there the victory was accomplished once and for all! We're just engaged in the long mop-up operation of rescuing as many of Satan's hostages as possible before Christ imposes His Kingdom upon the world at His coming! He can do that any time He wants; He won the battle and He can take over the world at will. Now the implication that John seems to be drawing from that is this:

3. everyone who has been "fathered by" God conquers the world's attack against his own life To be fathered by God is not only to share His nature, it is to share all that is His. His position is our position. His rulership is our rulership; that's why the Book says, *if we live with Him, we will REIGN with Him.* And His victory is OUR victory. The battle that He won at the cross was our battle; that's why we are *more than conquerors*, we are *superconquerors*, through Jesus Christ our Lord. When the world throws its most powerful pressures against us, it is not hard for us to conquer them, IF we realize the truth of who we really are. Now John adds that:

4. the conquering force that does this in our lives is our faith That word *victory* means the actually winning of the battle, the conquering of the enemy. The conquering force that wins this battle, when we face it every day, is faith. You see:

a. this conquering is not by our own effort God does not simply say, "Go out and live in this pressure filled world, where Satan is always skulking around behind your back in the grass like a hungry lion waiting for the opportune moment to devour you, and take your little spear and fend him off when he charges!" He does not say, "Go out and fight the enemy the best you can. Be strong, be a man, be tough!" He says, "Go and when the lion charges, call upon Me and trust Me; I will take care of him. I already did!" In other words:

b. this conquering occurs because we trust Him to supply the power It occurs because, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* - Gal. 2:20. When I realize that I live, that I love, that I obey only by His power, then I call upon Him in every situation and I win, I conquer, I live out His will! It is my faith, my trust, my counting on and depending on Jesus in every moment, in every situation, that makes it easy to not act like the world pressures me to act toward my brothers and sisters. When I trust Him to act through me, I love them! And John finishes by bringing the circle round to where he started it:

5. all genuine believers have conquered the world simply by believing that Jesus is the Son of God! This victory is not just for some select few. It is not just for monks secluded in some monastery away from temptation. It is not just for super-spiritual people who read their Bibles five hours a day and have calluses on their knees from praying half the night. Everyone who has believed that Jesus is the Son of God, who has confessed Him as their Lord and Savior, has conquered, has won, and has this victory available to them, if they will choose to simply trust Jesus and call upon the power that is already in them. That's why it's not hard to love, as difficult as it may seem.

I love the story that Beth Moore tells about waiting in the Knoxville Airport to board a plane: *I had the Bible on my lap and was very intent upon what I was doing. I'd had a marvelous morning with the Lord... I tried to keep from staring but he was such a strange sight. Humped over in a wheelchair, he was skin and bones, dressed in clothes that obviously fit when he was at least twenty pounds heavier. His knees protruded from his trousers, and his shoulders looked like the coat hanger was still in his shirt. His hands looked like tangled masses of veins and bones. The strangest part of him was his hair and nails. Stringy gray hair hung well over his shoulders and down part of his back. His fingernails were long. Clean, but strangely out of place on an old man. I looked down at my Bible as fast as I could, discomfort burning my face.... There I*

sat trying to concentrate on the Word to keep from being concerned about a thin slice of humanity served on a wheelchair only a few seats from me. All the while my heart was growing more and more overwhelmed with a feeling for him. Let's admit it. Curiosity is a heap more comfortable than true concern, and suddenly I was awash with aching emotion for this bizarre-looking old man. I had walked with God long enough to see the handwriting on the wall. I've learned that when I begin to feel what God feels, something so contrary to my natural feelings, something dramatic is bound to happen. ...I immediately began to resist because I could feel God working on my spirit and I started arguing with God in my mind. "Oh no, God please no." I looked up at the ceiling as if I could stare straight through it into heaven and said, "Don't make me witness to this man. Not right here and now. Please. I'll do anything. Put me on the same plane, but don't make me get up here and witness to this man in front of this gawking audience. Please, Lord!"... There I sat in the blue vinyl chair begging His Highness, "Please don't make me witness to this man. Not now. I'll do it on the plane." Then I heard it..."I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to brush his hair." The words were so clear, my heart leapt into my throat, and my thoughts spun like a top. Do I witness to the man or brush his hair? No brainer. I looked straight back up at the ceiling and said, "God, as I live and breathe, I want you to know I am ready to witness to this man. I'm on this Lord. I'm you're girl! You've never seen a woman witness to a man faster in your life. What difference does it make if his hair is a mess if he is not redeemed? I am on him. I am going to witness to this man." Again, as clearly as I've ever heard an audible word, God seemed to write this statement across the wall of my mind. "That is not what I said, Beth. I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to go brush his hair." I looked up at God and quipped, "I don't have a hairbrush. It's in my suitcase on the plane, How am I supposed to brush his hair without a hairbrush?"... God was so insistent that I almost involuntarily began to walk toward him as these thoughts came to me from God's word: "I will thoroughly furnish you unto all good works." (2 Tim 3:17) Even as I retell this story my pulse quickens and I feel those same butterflies. I knelt down in front of the man, and asked as demurely as possible, "Sir, may I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?" He looked back at me and said, "What did you say?" "May I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?" To which he responded in volume ten, "Little lady, if you expect me to hear you, you're going to have to talk louder than that. At this point, I took a deep breath and blurted out, "SIR, MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF BRUSHING YOUR HAIR?" At which point every eye in the place darted right at me. I was the only thing in the room looking more peculiar than old Mr. Longlocks. Face crimson and forehead breaking out in a sweat, I watched him look up at me with absolute shock on his face, and say, "If you really want to." Are you kidding? OF course I didn't want to. But God didn't seem interested in my personal preference right about then. He pressed on my heart until I could utter the words, "Yes, sir, I would be pleased. But I have one little problem. I don't have a hairbrush." "I have one in my bag," he responded. I went around to the back of that wheelchair, and I got on my hands and knees and unzipped the stranger's old carry-on hardly believing what I was doing. I stood up and started brushing the old man's hair. It was perfectly clean, but it was tangled and matted. I don't do many things well, but I must admit I've had notable experience untangling knotted hair mothering two little girls. I began brushing at the very bottom of the strands, remembering to take my time not to pull. A miraculous thing happened to me as I started brushing that old man's hair. Everybody else in the room disappeared. There was no one alive for those moments except that old man and me. I brushed and I brushed and I brushed until every tangle was out of that hair. I know this sounds so strange but I've never felt that kind of love for another soul in my entire life. I believe with all my heart, I - for that few minutes - felt a portion of the very love of God. That He had overtaken my heart for a little while like someone renting a room and making Himself at home for a short while. The emotions were so strong and so pure that I knew they had to be God's. His hair was finally as soft and smooth as an infant's. I slipped the brush back in the bag, went around the chair to face him. I got back down on my knees, put my hands on his knees, and said, "Sir, do you know my Jesus?" He said, "Yes, I do." Well, that figures, I thought. He explained, "I've known Him since I married my bride." "She wouldn't marry me until I got to know the Savior." He said, "You see, the problem is, I haven't seen my bride in months. I've had open-heart surgery, and she's been too ill to come see me. I was sitting here thinking to myself. What a mess I must be for my bride." This was one of those rare encounters when I knew God had intervened in details only He could have known. It was a God moment, and I'll never forget it... Loving a brother or sister is not hard; it's a choice. But He will both make you want to and make you able to; He will give you grace to ignore all the embarrassment or the fear the enemy can throw at you and even let you feel what He feels -- if you let Him.

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life

God Gave Us Eternal Life - 5:6-12

At verse 6 of chapter 5 we come to the third and final division of John's letter. In the first section in chapter 1, his message was *God is light!* And his application for us was to live holy lives like His. In the second section, the middle chapters, his message was *God is love!* And his application for us was to love one another. In the final section from here on, his message is *God is life!* And his application for us is to be sure of it! Now if you read the seven verses in our text, there is one word that you will see over and over (in fact it is repeated 8 times), the word *testimony* or in verb form, *testify*. The Greek word means to *bear witness* to something, to give evidence or proof that a thing is true. In court, a witness swears to tell the truth and then testifies to what he saw; he gives proof that a certain thing is or isn't true by verifying that he saw or experienced it. Well in these verses we have:

I. The Testimony God Has Given About His Son And we're going to study this in reverse order from the way John writes it; we'll look first at the actual testimony, at what God SAYS about His Son, in verses 11-12 and then go back and

look at how John proves that the testimony is valid in verses 6-10. So, look with me at **(11-12)**. This is the testimony; this is the declaration; this is the sworn statement of truth of Almighty God Himself. Notice that it has two parts. The first is that:

1. God gave us eternal life Now what is *eternal life*? Most of the time we think of it as simply life that doesn't end. But even Satan has that; he will exist forever and so will every human being ever created. The English word *eternal* actually reflects better the meaning of the Greek term. If something is eternal, not only does it have no end; it also has no beginning! It always exists; it just IS! Well, the only being who has that kind of life is God Himself. So, the life that God gave us is not simply an endless quantity of time to exist:

a. it is His very own life He gave us the very life that He has. Look at what Jesus prayed as He was talking to the Father in **Jn. 17:2-3**. Did you see that? Eternal life is not a quantity of existence; eternal life is to *know* God Himself, not to know about Him, but to know Him by experience, to be joined to Him in relationship so deeply that His life becomes your life! The living illustration that God Himself uses to exemplify this is the union of a man and a woman. Paul said in that kind of union ... *"The two will become one flesh."* [that is, they become one in body.] But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. - 1 Cor. 6:17. We become one in spirit with God; His Spirit is joined to our spirit permanently, so His true undying life becomes ours! As the hymnwriter George Robinson put it, ... *But while God and I shall be, I am His, and He is mine.* THAT's the life God gave us, and notice the past tense, gave. It's not something you wait until you die to get! And it certainly isn't something you wait until you die to see whether you're going to get! For us, that is, for believers, it is already given; we got it already! To be technical, the gift of life was given 2,000 years ago at the cross, but it was delivered to me and I received it when I was fifteen years old. Some of you received it much longer ago than that and some of you received it only recently, but whenever you get it, you get it here and now while you're still alive on planet earth, not after you die. Then also notice that this eternal life:

b. it is a gift freely given It is not something we buy or earn by merit. The rich young ruler really missed the boat when he asked, *What must I DO to inherit eternal life?* You don't DO something to receive an inheritance; it's a gift from someone! A gift always originates with the giver; the recipient's only role is to accept it and say, "Thank you!" Eternal life, His own life, is a gift, an inheritance that God bestows on those who choose to receive it! That's the first part of God's declaration in verse 11, *He gave us eternal life!* The second part is:

2. this life is in His Son Eternal life is not a thing; it is not a force like electricity or magnetism. Eternal life is a Person. You know **Jn. 14:6**; Jesus said, *I am the Way, the Truth and THE life!* God Himself IS life. Jesus IS life. He told Martha, ... *I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.* - **Jn. 11:25**. Why? Because Jesus IS life. Look back to how John began this letter in **1 Jn. 1:1-2**. JESUS is life. That's why God declares in verse 11:

a. whoever has the Son has the life There is God's assurance for you! If you have Jesus, you have life! Satan uses all kinds of things to cause us to doubt whether we have life. We look at our behavior and see that we often sin. We look at our past and realize how unworthy we are. We look at God's standard of righteousness and see how hard it is to be like Him. So we doubt and we wonder, but God says, "Forget all that stuff! There is only ONE issue as far as I'm concerned. If you have My Son, you have My life! Period!" Trust in that! Rest in that! BASK in that! But that declaration necessitates the awful opposite truth:

b. whoever does not have the Son does not have the life And that, dear friends, is most of the world. It is most of the people around you. There is no other way to get life. It doesn't matter how religious they are, how devout they are, or how good they are. Without Jesus they cannot have life! In fact, Jesus said, ... *whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.* - **Jn. 3:18**. You don't have to do anything to NOT have life; you come into the world not having life! Everyone without Jesus stands condemned and cannot have the life of God unless they receive Jesus.

In the year 1829 a man named George Wilson of Philadelphia robbed the U.S. mails, killing another person. He was later arrested and brought to trial. He was found guilty and the judge sentenced him to be hanged. Some friends intervened on his behalf and were finally able to obtain a pardon for him from President Andrew Jackson. But when he was informed of this, George Wilson refused to accept the pardon! The sheriff was unwilling to act; for, he reasoned, how could he hang a pardoned man? An appeal was sent to President Jackson. The perplexed President turned to the United States Supreme Court to decide the case. Chief Justice Marshall gave this ruling: "A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly to be supposed that a person under the sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon; but, if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged." George Wilson was executed, although his pardon lay on the Sheriff's desk. [Grace Discipleship Course, p. 15] The gift of eternal life is no gift unless it is received! It must be accepted, otherwise the person stands condemned and will die with the gift that would save them unwrapped. Some folks divide the world materially into two classes, the "haves" and the "have nots". God divides the whole human race spiritually the same way, into the "haves," who have Jesus and life in Him, and the "have nots," who don't. And, by the way, some 3 billion "have nots" are, in reality, "can't haves," because they have no opportunity to hear about Jesus and the gift! That's why Jesus sent us to tell them! At any rate that is the testimony God has declared about His Son. Now let's go back to the earlier portion of this section in verses 6-10 and look at:

II. How We Know This Testimony Is True Well, according to John:

1. we have three witnesses that testify that God gave us life in Jesus (6-8) Wow, this was simple up until now; anybody could understand that other part, but water and blood, what's this about? Well, let's take it apart. First John says that Jesus, the Son of God, came to us, literally:

a. through the water Most Bible students believe that in that phrase John is referring to **Jesus' baptism** by John in the Jordan river. If you remember, it was there that **God testified that He is the Son**. Let me read you **Mt. 3:16-17**, *...when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* Now this is a big deal. The Jews wanted to kill Jesus because in their understanding when He called God "Father", He made Himself equal with God [*Jn. 5:18*]. When the Father called Jesus "My Son", He made Jesus equal with Himself! He declared Jesus to be God in a human body! At the water is where God first publicly revealed Jesus as the Son of God and called the world to believe, as John shouted the next day, *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* Of course, **we mirror this testimony in our own baptism**. By passing through the waters of baptism, we declare publicly that we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died and was buried and rose again for us and we identify ourselves as being united with Him, as being raised with Him to new life, as sharing His life. But Jesus did not come to us by the water only; John says He came:

b. through the blood And it's obvious that now John is referring to **Jesus' crucifixion**. John himself was actually standing there that day. Look with me at **Jn. 19:33-35**. This is John's testimony. "I saw it! I was there! I saw the Son of God die! I saw His blood be shed that day for us! I saw the Lamb of God take away our sins and I tell you so that you might believe in Him!" The writer of Hebrews explains what was really happening when Christ shed His blood for us, saying, *He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ...when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.* - **Heb. 9:12, 10:12**. Through the blood, John says, **God testified that He made atonement for us**. The shed blood at the cross is the witness of the atonement that was made. And, of course, **we mirror this testimony in celebrating the Lord's Supper**. As we take the cup, we testify that we believe that the shed blood of Jesus has cleansed us from all our sins, that we are counting on His blood and His blood alone as the means of our salvation and giving us life. That's two, the water and the blood, but there is still a third witness that John mentions in verse 6:

c. through the Holy Spirit God testifies that Jesus is the Son Now how does the Holy Spirit testify about Jesus. Well, the most obvious meaning would be that He testified about Jesus:

(1) through descending on Him at His baptism Look at what John the Baptist declared in **Jn. 1:29-34**. After Jesus was baptized, the Spirit came down from heaven in the appearance of a dove and alighted upon Him, and as I like to picture it, merged into Him, at the very time the Father's voice was speaking from heaven. The Father was marking His Son as having His Spirit. John said God had told him that the One he would see with the Spirit descending on Him and remaining on Him WAS His Son and the result was verse 34, *I have seen and borne witness...* That's what the Spirit was doing that day, testifying that Jesus is the Son. It's what He ALWAYS does! In fact, He does it even today:

(2) through bearing witness in our own hearts Look what Jesus promised in **Jn. 15:26**. Ever since Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came, He has been bearing witness about Christ, not only in signs and wonders and gifts, but in the very hearts of each one who believes. Paul said, *...because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* - **Gal. 4:6**. Inside you, you know that you are a child of God because of your faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit did that! He convinces you that Jesus is the Christ and that you have life through His Name.

So, there are three witnesses that testify that Jesus is the Son of God, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, John says. And by the way, just in case you're reading the King James and are confused, thinking we missed a large part of verses 7-8 that says *and there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit and these three are one*, you'll notice that the NIV puts it down in a footnote and other translations ignore it altogether. That's because we now have better resources than they did in 1611 and realize that it does not appear in any Greek manuscript before 1300 AD and was definitely not part of John's original text, but rather was inserted by later copyists who wanted to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. However, don't fret; the content of what it says is true and accurate. The persons of the Godhead DO bear witness to one another; it's just not part of the actual text. John only mentioned the Spirit, the water and the blood, and now he explains:

2. the validity of this testimony (9) First of all, there is a principle that God repeats in Scripture in a number of places, but it is stated most clearly in **Deut. 19:15 [NET]**, *A single witness may not testify against another person for any trespass or sin that he commits. A matter may be legally established only on the testimony of two or three witnesses.*

a. three witnesses make a testimony valid One witness is not enough because he may have a biased motive or an incomplete understanding of the situation. Two witnesses whose testimonies agree are much better as the second confirms the first, but the third witness seals the matter and establishes it. There are many more witnesses to Jesus; for instance, He Himself said that the miraculous works He did bore witness of Him. But three is enough to settle a matter. If three concurring witnesses are enough to settle a human matter, if you would believe three witnesses who gave testimony in a human court, how much more should we believe the three witnesses God has given us because:

b. all three are actually the testimony of God Himself about His Son HE said of Jesus at the water, "This is My Son!". By sending His Spirit upon Him in that moment and also into our hearts today, HE is saying, "This is My Son!". At the cross HE said it so loudly that the very centurion whose soldiers pierced Jesus and shed His blood said, *Truly this man was the son of God!* The Son of God came to give us life; He died to give us life. Through Him God has given us the gift of life! So here's:

3. the choice we face (10) We either believe the testimony that God has given about His Son or we choose not to believe it. Near the end of his Gospel, John tells us why he wrote it, *...these [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* - **Jn. 20:31**. If you believe with your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, God gives you the gift of life, eternal life, his very own life in His Name! And, John says:

a. if we believe God's testimony, He validates it in our hearts We have His own testimony inside ourselves. His Spirit bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God, that we have His eternal life! BUT:

b. if we refuse to believe God, we call Him a liar It is not just that we miss out on life, as awful as that is, but we actually add to the weight of our sins this terrible indictment, we regard the God of the universe as a liar. When I call what God has said about His Son untrue, when I say Jesus is NOT the only way, that He is NOT God the only Savior, that I can be saved some other way, my own way that I have invented, then I am saying that the Living God who is Truth is a liar! And I would not want to stand before Him with that on my record!

It's a choice that every human being must make. Believe Him or don't. A military chaplain shares this testimony: *While I was working in the V Corps Chaplain's office in Frankfurt, Germany; I came in contact with many wonderful Christian individuals. One of the most inspiring was a German by the name of Carl Scholz. In speaking to him one day, he related to me how that during the Second World War he served as a Nazi soldier, but, not believing fully in what they were doing, he tried to desert. Failing in his attempt, was captured and thrown into prison. He was accused as a deserter, and thus was sentenced to die before a firing squad along with another of his comrades. When the day came, they were both marched to the outskirts of the town and the spot where they were supposed to be executed. Not hearing the orders given to the squad, Carl didn't realize that all rifles were to be turned to his comrade instead, letting him live. When the rifles fired, in shock, he also fell to the ground. They picked him up and again he was placed in prison. The months passed and finally when the war ended, Carl was set free. Not having any place to go to, he went from one war-torn village to the next. His one last hope was his only living relative, his mother...and by the time that he found her, he realized that she was trapped in the communist side of Berlin. Again losing all hope, he made his dwelling in the bomb-stricken buildings, drinking more and more with each passing day. Finally, receiving word that his mother had been killed while trying to escape the communists, he felt his last hope fly out of his body. He said to himself, "Now, what's the use of living!" So, he went down to a near-by river hoping to drown his sorrows by throwing himself in. But as he was about to jump, he heard soft singing coming from a near-by wooden building. He heard the words...*

*"When Jesus comes the tempter's pow'r is broken, When Jesus comes, the tears are wiped away;
He takes the gloom and fills the life with glory, For all is changed when Jesus comes to stay."*

Hearing such sweet words, he came closer to the building wanting to hear more about this Jesus. As he approached the door, he read those gentle words which have meant so much to millions of individuals throughout the ages...

"Gott Ist Liebe - God is Love; Gott Ist Leben - God is Life!"

He went inside, and there for the first time he heard about the wondrous love that God had for him. He heard how God sent his only Begotten Son to die on the cross so that he could have life - and have it more abundantly! Eternal Life! The young missionary who was speaking said, "Christ says, 'Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'" Carl said to himself, "If there is anyone here burdened down it's me! I am tired of this life I am living." And that night, Carl went to the altar and said, "Lord, if it's true that you can change the worst sinner like this missionary says, change me! If it's true that you can give rest...give it to me! If it's true that you can straighten out the most twisted life...straighten out mine!" And that night the Christ that had saved Carl from the firing squad also broke the chains of bondage of sin that had his life captive, and he got up from that altar a new person. Christ had saved him...he had life, eternal life! From that time on Carl continued preaching and helping as part of the Berean Missionary Fellowship in Erzhausen, Germany, and brought many others to Christ with his wonderful testimony of how he was changed by receiving the gift of life.

[\[http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/illustrations-about-eternal-life.asp\]](http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/illustrations-about-eternal-life.asp)

Have you received God's gift of eternal life? I know most of you have and if you have, rejoice today that you have the *life that is truly life*! And rejoice that God has given you His own testimony so that you can be absolutely sure of it. What a gift! Hallelujah! But if you have not received the gift, why not accept it right now by asking His Son into your life?

1 John Verse by Verse: Light, Love and Life That You May Know - 5:13-20

Today we come to the end of our study of 1 John and, if you remember, last week I told you that the theme of this final section of the letter is that *God is Life* and John tells us that to give us assurance of it. He wants us to KNOW it! If you count carefully, you'll see that seven times in the eight verses of our text, John says, *we know...* He wants us to know that we know that we know it! It's the kind of "know" you don't hear from the person who says demurely, "*Yeah, I know Jesus is my savior...*", rather it's what you hear from the person who is thrilled to belong to God and declares, "*I KNOW Jesus saved me!*" God does not want to leave you guessing about your relationship with Him. He wants you to have complete assurance about every aspect of it! So, as he closes his letter to us, there are four things that John declares that *we know!* The first one is:

I. We Know That We Have Eternal Life (13) To nonbelievers this sounds awfully presumptuous. If you say, "I know that I will go to heaven; I know that my sins are all forgiven; I know that I belong to God and have eternal life", people think, "Isn't that a bit prideful? Do you think you're better than the rest of us?" They actually feel like it's wrong to be so sure because they believe salvation has to be earned and that you think too highly of yourself. Listen, there's no pride at all. I didn't do anything to save myself. I'm not better than anybody; I deserve an eternity in hell, but verses 11-12 say *God gave us eternal life and this life is in His Son and he who has the Son has the life!* God offered me a free gift and I signed up for it by asking Jesus into my life, that's all! The Holy Spirit had John write those words so that we would KNOW! God doesn't want us walking around all our life wondering whether or not we belong to Him; all that does is make us focus on ourselves and our own status all the time, trying to please God and never being quite sure of it. God wants us to KNOW for sure that we do have His eternal life so He can use us to focus on sharing the Good News with others! He has a world to reach and we can't share what we don't know that we have for ourselves! Now here's a second thing God wants us to know:

II. We Know That God Answers Our Prayers (14-17) Let's read **(14-15)**. Many people see God as some heavenly Monarch who sits on his throne and has a line of needy subjects coming before Him all the time trying to get something from Him. They feel that, somehow, they have to convince Him to hear their case and do something to get His ear and His attention and move Him to respond. But that's not the Christian view of prayer at all! John says:

1. we are confident that God hears us when we pray He is never too busy or too preoccupied to hear us. He is not like a customer service representative who will be with us as soon as He finishes helping another customer who called first! He's never too tired, never too far away and never simply "not in the mood". As His children who share His very life, we KNOW He always hears us! And He doesn't hear the way I sometimes hear other people, "Yeah, I heard you..." He REALLY hears us.

a. He considers and understands what we have asked Of course, when we ask, He already knows all about the situation, whatever it is. He is right there. He saw the whole thing. He felt what we feel. He knows what we're thinking about it. And, Jesus said, He knows what we need before we ask Him! We're not informing Him of anything; we're crying out to our Father and sharing our hearts! We're sharing our sorrows and our pain and our joy and our concern about things. And God always has time for that! He delights in that and He hears it. He listens to you the way you listen to your child who comes to talk with you about what's on her heart - well, probably *better* than you listen! He understands, not only the situation itself, but you and all that's going on inside. And He listens from the perspective of already being committed to helping you, just the way that when your child comes to you and says, "Mom, I'm hungry!", you're already prepared and committed to feed him. If he says, "Dad, I'm hurt!", you're already prepared and committed to help him. In the same way your Heavenly Father is committed to meeting all of your needs, whether they're physical or emotional, just because you're His child and He loves you. But you know how kids often ask for stuff that you don't want them to have because you know it isn't good for them or isn't what they really need? Like, "Dad, can I have \$200; I want to buy these new sneakers like all my buddies have?" Well, we do that with our Father too. That's why:

b. we must be careful to ask according to His will Unlike an earthly parent, our Father has all wisdom. He knows what is best and will always do what is best. Plus, He has a plan in which He is working all things together for good, to accomplish His eternal purpose. So, when we ask Him to do something outside of that, He's not going to do it, no matter how much we want Him to. Oh, He'll still hear us; He won't dismiss our prayer, but if we will spend enough time with Him and listen to Him, He'll show us what HE wants to do. But when we ask for things that we are confident that are in His will, we can ask with all certainty. If you'll turn there with me, that's what Jesus meant when he said this in **Jn. 14:13-14**. *In His Name* doesn't mean just tacking the words "in His Name" on to the end of whatever you ask, like hitting the "enter" button on a computer after you type in your information. It means asking for His sake, in accord with His purpose and will and character. When we genuinely ask what we want in His Name, we're

wanting what HE wants and He promises to do it. But how do you know that what you're wanting is really according to His will. Well look ahead to **15:7**. Again, that's not like a magic ticket to get whatever you want. He's saying prayer is born out of relationship. When we abide in Him, when we spend quality time with Him in prayer and ingest His Word so that it becomes a part of us and our thinking, when our life is so joined to His that we think His thoughts after Him, then what we want will BE what He wants and when we ask for it, we'll be asking for His will and He will do it. That's why John says:

c. we are confident that we have what we asked of Him If we have checked our hearts on the matter, when we come to Him, we should come, not to beg him to do what we want, but confident that He will do what we want, because we're asking for the right thing. God doesn't want us to come to Him in prayer with a "will God or won't God" attitude; He wants us to come with the same confidence that your child has when he asks you for a glass of milk. He asks because he knows you'll do it. He already KNOWS you will, because it's your will for him to have it. That's why Jesus said *...whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.* - **Mk. 11:24**. He didn't mean, "Let Me measure how much faith you have and if you have enough, I'll do what you want." He meant "Come KNOWING in your heart I'm going to give it to you! Come with confidence that I love you and that because you're asking for what you know I want. I'll do it! Come trusting in Me!"

In 1854 Hudson Taylor, the young founder of the China Inland Mission, sailed from England to China on a voyage that lasted more than five months. As the ship neared the channel between the southern Malay Peninsula and the island of Sumatra, the missionary heard an urgent knock on his stateroom door. When he opened it, there stood the captain of the ship. "Mr. Taylor," he said, "We have no wind. We are drifting toward an island where the people are heathen, and I fear they are cannibals." "What can I do?" asked Taylor. "I understand that you believe in God. I want you to pray for wind." "All right, Captain", Taylor replied, "I will, but you must set the sail." "Why, that's ridiculous! There's not even the slightest breeze. Besides, the sailors will think I'm crazy." Nevertheless, the captain finally agreed. Forty-five minutes later he returned and found the missionary still on his knees. "You can stop praying now," said the captain. "We've got more wind than we know what to do with!" We must pray like Hudson Taylor prayed; we must set the sail! We pray with confidence that our Father hears us. We KNOW He hears us and will answer because we're asking for what HE wants! Now, while he's on the subject of assurance that God answers prayer, John goes on to admonish us that:

2. we should pray when we see a brother committing sin (16-17) Didn't I tell you that 1 John was HARD? The meaning of these two verses and particularly the phrase, *the sin unto death*, has sparked lively debate throughout the centuries. You can read it all online; I read a good bit of it and what I came away with is this, don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. The point is not for us to figure out what specific sin he's talking about or whether life and death in this text is physical or eternal. The point is that when we see a brother or sister in Christ committing sin, we should not gossip about them; we should not shake our fingers and shun them as though we're better than they are; we should PRAY for him or her! And we should pray for him with the same confidence that we've just been talking about, expecting God to give him life because we pray! The rest of the text is God giving us one caveat, telling us there is one exception to that rule. And here's what I think he means:

a. it is possible for that sinning brother to sin so grievously that God decrees his death We have an example of that in **Acts 5** where Ananias and Sapphira deliberately conspired together to lie to the Apostles about their giving to make themselves look good, to get glory for themselves. The Spirit revealed the lie to Peter and he told them, *You have not lied to men, but to God!* It was God's Name and reputation they were dishonoring and His presence they were deliberately disregarding, thinking they could fool Him as they fooled people. And God terminated their lives on the spot. Now I don't mean that they were eternally lost; I think God took them off the planet and home to heaven so they could not continue in that attitude and make Him look like a fool. I think that was a "sin that leads to death". In **1 Cor. 11:29-30** we read how the Corinthian believers were absolutely disregarding the sacredness of the Lord's Supper as though it were just some common kind of eating and drinking. And Paul told them, *For the one who eats and drinks without careful regard for the body eats and drinks judgment against himself. That is why many of you are weak and sick, and quite a few are dead.* God actually decreed the deaths of some of His own children who would not regard the death of His Son with reverence! I imagine that He would still do this today; who knows how many have died through the centuries because of this sin. But the word *dead* in the Greek is literally *sleep*, the word that Paul always uses for the death of a believer. When one of God's children sins so grievously, so continually and so boldly that God determines he is done with this world and MUST be taken out, he has committed a sin unto death. BUT:

b. if he has not reached that point, God will grant him extended life Generally speaking that point is arrived at gradually, through a course of smaller sinful choices that grow and grow in intensity and frequency until that point is reached. It's a PATH of sin that leads to death and each choice is another link in the chain. But if we pray, John says, we can partner with God to break the chain, to call him back to repentance and change the course of his life, to gain him more time on this earth to serve God. Who knows how many people you've prayed for through the years as they've headed down a path toward destruction, that you rescued from death and extended their very lives! Pray for brothers and sisters when you see them sin, expecting God to rescue them! But sadly, John says:

c. if he has reached that point, our prayer will be ineffective No praying would have saved Ananias and Sapphira. But you can't know they've reached that point unless they die. So, the mandate to pray stands; we keep on praying! The point is that if in the end God does take that person home, if He does NOT extend their life, **we should not think God failed** to keep His promise. He warns us that He has the right to deny this particular request when in His infinite wisdom and love the situation warrants it.

He simply wants us to be sure that nothing will shake our faith in the fact that He hears and answers our prayer! Now the third thing God wants us to know follows right in line with this:

III. We Know That Genuine Believers Do Not Keep Practicing Sin (18-19) There is a fine line between a seriously sinning genuine believer and a non-believer who merely claims to have faith. To our eyes they look the same; in fact, I think many of the people we know who give lip service to faith because they prayed a prayer some time earlier in life but live lifestyles that say otherwise, are actually fooling themselves. If they were real, God would long since have taken them off the earth to keep them from dishonoring His name! Genuine believers still sin, but they do not continually practice sin as a habit and a lifestyle. We saw one reason already back in **3:9**. We have God's very nature in us through the new birth. We've been made holy like Him and we CAN'T keep on sinning. It's not in our nature any more. But here John gives us a second reason why we don't:

1. God Himself carefully guards us We used to belong to the evil one. We used to be slaves under the control of Satan, because we gave ourselves to him through sin! But now we are Divinely protected from Him; Jesus, God's Only Begotten Son, protects us! We know that we are "OF God":

2. we are joined to God in our very spirit **and we belong to Him**. We are His! And because of that:

3. Satan cannot lay hold of us He cannot snatch us out of God's hand and drag us back under his dominion and power. Why not? Because, Jesus said, *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand*. There is no power, not Satan himself, who can snatch us out of the relationship we have with our Father. Our life is eternal! But more than that, John says:

4. we are free from his power The whole world lies under it! The whole rest of humanity is bound by it. That's why they offer rice to a stone statue or a picture or worship a cow as sacred. That's why they bow on their faces five times a day toward Mecca. That's why they boldly proclaim in college classrooms that there cannot possibly be a God! That's why tyrants terrorize their own people and why the poor live in slums and the rich don't care. Satan has the whole ball of wax under his power! But not US! He can't control us! He can't get his grubby talons on us and drag us back into his kingdom and make us obey him. We are free and we know it! We are free to obey God and God Himself will see to it that we stay that way! And finally, here's the fourth thing we know:

IV. We Know That Jesus Christ Is The True God (20-21) This is kind of like a final confession of faith as John closes. He says four things about Jesus. First:

1. we know that as God He came to us in a human body The false teachers then and now deny it, but we KNOW it. He was God the Son, come down from heaven, taking a human body and becoming a true human being to die on the cross for our sins and rise again. Second:

2. we know that He gave us understanding so that we could know God Many of us tried other paths to God; we tried other ways, whether other religions or simple self effort, and failed. But when we met Jesus, our eyes were opened and we were connected to God. We know that we KNOW God! In fact, thirdly:

3. we know that we are joined to the true God by being joined to Jesus We are *IN Him* and He is *IN us*! Our lives, our spirits, are joined together in one and Jesus did that! Fourthly:

4. we know that being joined to Him is our eternal life We know that there is no other name given under heaven among men that can save us, that can give us the eternal life our souls so desperately crave. JESUS did that! Jesus gave us life by joining us to Himself. And therefore, we confess that **JESUS IS THE TRUE GOD!** He's not simply the best or the most powerful. THERE IS NO OTHER! He is the REAL GOD, the ONLY GOD. All the gods of the nations are idols! All the ideologies and the theologies and the "isms" that surround us are idolatry. JESUS is the True and Living God and Him alone will we worship! And that's why John ends his letter with a short fifth and final note, *Little children, keep yourselves from idols!*

5. we know that we must guard ourselves against idols They creep so easily into our lives. Whether it comes today in our society in the form of a hobby or a pursuit of something or a person or money or material things, instead of a statue of wood or stone, whatever draws from us the allegiance, the investment of our lives, that belongs to Jesus is an idol. And we know that it is SO easy for idolatrous things to begin to creep slowly into our lives if we let them.

During the reign of the cruel Roman Emperor Diocletian who persecuted Christians severely about 300 AD there lived a man named Genesius. He was hired as an actor to entertain the crowd in the arena by pantomiming a Christian baptism before the Emperor. But in the midst of his act, he saw a vision of angels which convicted his heart and suddenly he stopped and shouted in earnest, "I want to receive the grace of Christ that I may be born again. I want to be set free from the sins which have been my ruin." Then he turned to Diocletian, "Illustrious Emperor, believe me, Christ is the true King!" Diocletian became furious and ordered him ripped with claws, burned with torches, and then beheaded. Just before his death he cried out, "There is no King but Him whom I have seen. I adore and worship Him, and for His sake, even though I be slain a thousand times, I will always be His. Torments are not able to take Christ from my mouth, nor from my heart. Bitterly do I regret that I detested His Holy Name in holy men, and came so late, like a haughty soldier, to adoring the true King." Dear friends, Christ is the True God and Eternal Life. Give your all, give your life to Him!

2 John - An Appeal For Discernment

This is one of the the four one-chapter books that we have in our New Testament. Each one is just a little letter, but each one addresses a big issue that impacts our lives. The first of these was the letter of Philemon, which was an appeal for reconciliation, for Philemon to be reconciled to Onesimus, his runaway servant, and for us to both give and to seek forgiveness with one another. The second of these is the book of 2 John, which like the following two letters, is just before Revelation. It is an appeal for Christians to be careful to discern between false and true teaching and, like any letter, it begins with a:

I. The Salutation (1) This is the To: and From: section and here we learn that:

1. the author is the apostle John, who calls himself *the Elder*, the “Old Man” of the church, the last remaining one of the apostles who had walked with Jesus on earth, a man greatly respected by everybody who believed in Jesus. But:

2. the recipients are not quite as easy to identify. Some have felt that the phrase *the elect lady and her children* refers to an actual woman that John knew and her literal children, but when John says in verse 4 that he had run into some of her children and then closes in 13 by saying, *the children of your elect sister greet you*, it seems that *the elect lady* is **probably a local church** and *her children* are individual members of the church. He also says that *all who know the truth* love her which would not likely be true of an individual person. He writes as though he’s writing to a group, as though he’s writing a letter that will be read and circulated within the churches and certainly, he intends his advice to apply to all believers, **including all of us!** His concern is that by this point, late in the first century, many false teachers had arisen and were impacting the church and he wanted to urge Christians to remain firmly grounded in the truth, so he even begins with a:

3. the truth-filled greeting (1b-2) You see, we who have believed KNOW the truth, but the truth we know is not merely accurate information about Jesus. He Himself said, *I AM the Truth!* And when we came to understand and believe who He is and what He did for us, He Himself, the Truth, came to live inside us and transformed us. We know the Truth by personal experience because we know Jesus! And John says that:

a. we love one another because of the truth which dwells in us The reason that I love you and you love me is not primarily because we’ve done something for each other, and it certainly isn’t because of our appearance or our personality; it’s because we both believe that Jesus is God and that He died to save us and now He lives in both of us and has transformed us and placed His love inside us! When we came here 40 years ago, an inexperienced young couple trying to raise a two year old, you loved us immediately, before you ever got to know us, and we loved you. Why? It just happens, because Jesus lives in us both; we share the same Spirit of Truth, His Holy Spirit! Moreover, John says:

b. that truth remains in us and is eternal and unchanging It’s not going anywhere, because He’s not going anywhere! It’ll always be in us, because He’ll always be in us. And it’ll never change because He is the same yesterday, today and forever! But then John says something unusual in verse (3); listen to the NLT, *Grace, mercy, and peace, which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ—the Son of the Father—will continue to be with us who live in truth and love.* Instead of the usual greeting where you merely wish somebody grace, mercy or peace, He declares confidently that:

c. grace, mercy and peace will be ours as we continue to live in truth and in love If we live out of who Jesus is and what He’s done and out of the intimate relationship that we have with Him and allow His love to flow out through us to one another, then we will experience His grace, we will experience His mercy and we will experience His peace. If we don’t, if we choose to live a self-oriented life and live out of our own resources, then we will miss out on all three! Living in truth and in love is the key to every spiritual blessing we receive from God. Err from the truth about Jesus or the truth of His Word or stop loving others and His grace, mercy and peace begin to evaporate. And that leads John to the main:

II. The Message Of His Letter: The Importance Of Discerning The Truth in verses (4-11) First of all, he gives this church:

1. a warm commendation for her influence on her “children” (4) John’s headquarters during his later years was the city of Ephesus and he was basically the shepherd of all the churches in the region of Asia minor, seven of which are mentioned in Revelation. So I’m sure he visited around to various locations and groups of believers and in the process, he says, “I met some of your people and I am so pleased that they genuinely know Jesus, believe the right things about Him and are living a life of love empowered by Him!” He shares how pleased he was to meet them and then gives the church:

2. a strong admonition to love one another (5-6) *Love one another* is John's theme song and it had been from the beginning. The beginning was actually in the Upper Room when Jesus said in **Jn. 13:34**, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* John took that to heart and repeated it over and over to his followers through the years. *Tradition says that the Apostle John continued preaching even when so enfeebled with age as to be obliged to be carried into the assembly; and that, not being able to deliver any long discourse, his custom was to say in every meeting, "My dear children, love one another."* [Google] And here he says it to us again and spells out a bit what that looks like. When we walk in love, we carry out the commandments of Christ toward one another. We help one another, we encourage one another, we teach one another, we correct one another, we forgive one another, we pray for one another and so on. Our every action toward one another is a loving act, one of the loving acts Christ commanded us to do! It's a challenge each of us needs to hear over and over again, which is why John kept repeating it! But now he dives into his main subject:

3. a grave warning about deceptive false teachers (7) Notice he says:

a. there are many of them False teachings and false teachers still claiming to be "Christian" had multiplied greatly in the first half century of since Jesus' resurrection. The New Testament warns about them everywhere. In the beginning these were actually **within the church**. The first were Judaizers who taught that Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul mentions some in Corinth who taught that there is no resurrection of the dead. To Timothy he names Hymenaeus and Philetus who taught that the resurrection had already happened. The church at Pergamum was chastised in Revelation for holding to the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans and the church of Thyatira had a woman named Jezebel who encouraged believers to commit sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols. All these last were in John's region and he had good reason to be concerned! And even today, within the boundaries of the "Christian Church" we have all kinds of people that teach false things. Some believe the Bible is just a human book and deny its inerrancy. Some teach that Jesus didn't really rise from the dead bodily. Some teach that there is no hell and salvation is by good works or they deny the reality of the miracles or that Jesus is the only way of salvation. I know that's true because some of them were my college professors and my seminary professors! They abound in institutions of higher learning and in large mainline denominations and are still part of "the Church". But, just as in John's day:

b. many left the true church to form their own - 1 Jn. 2:19 The NLT expands the thought, *These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us.* The largest such group in John's day were the Gnostics (with a silent G like the animal, Gnu), who blended Christianity with pagan ideas. They believed that matter is evil, so they could not accept that God actually took on a real human body. They say He only appeared to be a man. Their most well-known teacher in John's time and locality was a guy named Cerinthus, who taught that the divine Christ was different from the man Jesus, that the Christ came upon Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the cross to return to heaven. There have been many groups down through the centuries that have splintered off from the true church, most of them over the issue of who Jesus is. Today we have Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, both splinter groups from the 1800's who do the opposite; they deny that Jesus is fully God. He's only the Son of God, a lesser being and his death does not save us. We save ourselves by faithful obedience. The New Church or the Swedenborgians (over in Bryn Athyn), which originated a century earlier, believe Jesus is God (but not from eternity) and again that we save ourselves by our deeds. Then we have Christian Science, the Unification Church, Scientology, The Way International and a whole host of other cults of various sorts, all of whom deny the true nature of Christ. Now look again at what John says in verse 7. Any teacher:

c. one who denies that Christ is fully human (and we could also include fully God) is, first of all:

(1) a deceiver: one who is trying to lead you away from truth, one who is lying to you, even though *they* don't think they're lying. They think *you're* deceived and they're trying to tell you the truth, but the reality is opposite. As Paul put it, *These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ.* - 2 Cor. 11:13. They are trying to get you to believe in a different Jesus from the one you have believed in and John is even stronger, saying such a teacher is:

(2) an anti-Christ: that is, **one who is against Christ**, working against the Jesus you believe in, the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, one who is working to tear down His Kingdom. And if we are not discerning and choose to listen to them, John warns that:

d. they could cause us to lose the full reward of our labor (8) All of us have served the Lord diligently; we've sacrificed and given of our time and talents to advance His Kingdom and because of that, there is a great reward of glory laid up for us, however, if we let Satan cause us to doubt and draw us away and get us to stop, we can't lose our salvation, but we lose the wonderful full reward that would have been ours! So, we need to watch, to be careful, to discern between truth and error and John tells us:

4. the sure way to discern a false teacher is their view of Jesus (9) Jesus is the sword that divides the whole earth into two camps. You're either in His camp or you're not. John says clearly:

a. one who denies the true teaching about Jesus does not know God It is not enough to simply believe in God. It is not enough to respect Jesus and believe that He was a great teacher or a religious leader who gave us wonderful teachings. If you do not believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man and that He died for your sins and that only HE can save you, then you DO NOT KNOW GOD, no matter how religious or devout you may be, whether you're Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, JW, Mormon or Republican! But on the other hand, John says:

b. one who holds to the true teaching about Jesus has both the Father and the Son If you believe in the True Jesus, the Real Jesus, the One who was God and man and died for your sins and rose again and saved your soul, then you automatically know the Father! He is the Way to the Father; you come to the Father through Him. It is not that the Father is up there in heaven waiting to judge you, but Jesus has to go before Him to save you. In fact, Jesus said that if you believe, the Father AND the Son AND the Spirit come to live in you and make their home in you! He said, *...the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.* - Jn. 16:27.

If you have Jesus, you have it all! But if you don't, you don't have anything! Now, we need to apply this personally and John explains to us:

5. the proper way to react to false teachers who come to us (10-11) That sounds rude and harsh to our 21st century ears. Let me give some background. In these early days religious teachers routinely traveled in the same fashion that Paul did in Acts. They traveled from location to location and taught and often stayed in the homes of those they taught. John might often have come from Ephesus to visit a house church, say in Smyrna, and one of them would put him up and feed him and they would let him teach their group and the group would give him love gifts to send him on to his next stop. That's how the church was nurtured in those early days. John was saying, "Now when a person comes expecting that kind of treatment and wants to stay in your home and teach in your body, but he doesn't teach the truth about Jesus..."

a. they should not be given support in their work or opportunity to teach Don't take them into your house and give them money and let them teach your people! Further he says:

b. they should not be given approval or encouragement They should not be greeted as though they are brothers. They should not be given any sense that you approve of what they're doing or be encouraged by you in any way. It is tantamount to participating in their evil deeds! *There is a story recorded by the early church father Irenaeus who says this story was passed down to him. You know that in those days homes didn't have a bathroom and most towns in the Roman era had a public bath house where you would go periodically to bathe. Irenaeus says: John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, "Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within."* We laugh, but we have to take a clear stand against false teaching. Thirty years ago, a young man attended church here one Sunday. He carried a Bible and gave the appearance of being a believer. He said he was new in town and we welcomed him. The next Sunday he asked whether we had a youth group and when it met and whether he could see what it was like. But his car was parked on Weldon Ave. and our Assistant at the time noticed that he had a sticker on his car that said, "The Way International". I'd never heard of it, but quickly found out that it was a cult that tried to attract young people. They had deliberately rented a house on Easton Rd. and moved some of their members into it to try to attract youth from the churches of Glenside. Well, we met with him and told him in no uncertain terms about our belief in Jesus and that his teachings were NOT welcome here, though we would love to see him give his life to the REAL Jesus! We never saw him again - and you didn't even know we protected you like that many years ago! Now, in contrast to the way that we should treat false teachers:

c. ordinary wrongly-taught people should be reached in love A person who doesn't know that they're wrong, who simply believes differently because that's what they've been taught or have come up with is simply another nonbeliever who needs Jesus. I'll quote what Catholic Answers has to say: *A person who is ready to be corrected or who is unaware that what he has been saying is against Church teaching is not a heretic.* If your neighbor is a Mormon or a Muslim, you don't shout over the fence, "Your religion is false and I want nothing to do with you!" You build relationship with them. You love them. You help them. You earn the opportunity to share the truth and pray for them to be saved. If a Jehovah's witness comes knocking on your door, you don't need to say, "Go away, you heretic!" or lock the door, pull down the shades and hide. They're just run of the mill followers out doing what they're told to do. And if all they see from you is rudeness, what will they think about your faith compared to their own? You can explain simply that you believe differently, that Jesus has saved you and changed your life and since they're interested in religion, you'd be glad to tell them about it if they'd like to listen! You can say, "No? Then let me pray for you before you go!" You don't have to listen to their stuff, but don't drive them further away from Jesus. Most of them are just ordinary people mistakenly trying to earn their salvation. It's the false teachers you need to beware of!

But discernment is SO important. Recognizing and standing against false teaching is absolutely necessary. *On July 6, 1984 David Jenkins was appointed to the office of Bishop of Durham in the Church of England. Many within the church opposed his appointment because he was known to deny the truths of Christ's virgin birth and the literality of His bodily resurrection. Three days later, Yorkminster Cathedral, the seat of his bishopric, was struck by lightning and burned. A rash of articles were soon published, each titled something on the order of, "Coincidence or the Wrath of God?" At any rate as a result, his teachings, if unintentionally, got audience all over the world. Desmond Goonasekera, an Anglican rector in Africa, when later asked about the growth of the Christian church in his country, shook his head. "We're losing badly to the Muslims," he said. "It all began with the Jenkins business." Aggressive Muslims were visiting Christian communities and using Bishop Jenkins' quotes as authoritative proof that Christians need no longer believe in Christ's resurrection. Since Muslims and Christians now see Jesus as merely a prophet, they argued, why not worship together in the mosque? "They are killing us with our bishop's own words," Goonasekera concluded. One man's heresy became a stumbling-block to Christian faith halfway around the world. [The God of Stones and Spiders by Charles Colson. Crossway, 1990. Pages 128-129.] And the same can happen here if we don't stand for the truth. Well, I'll leave you this morning by paraphrasing John's words in his:*

III. The Closing in verses (12-13) which essentially says, "I have so much more to say, but I'm out of time!" Let's pray!

3 John - An Exhortation To Partnership

We are taking a quick look at the four one-chapter books we have in our New Testament. They seem like such little letters yet each one addresses a big issue for the church and 3 John is no exception. Unlike John's other letters which are written for a more general church audience, this one is written to a specific person, but it still applies wonderfully to all of us. Look with me at John's:

I. The Salutation (1) Of course:

1. the author is John the apostle, the *Elder*, the "old man" of the church, the last remaining of Jesus' apostles. But:

2. the recipient is Gaius, who appears to be both **a dear friend and** also a **local church leader** in one of the churches under John's care, somewhere in the Roman province of Asia. Now look at his:

3. the greeting (2-4) Evidently some Gospel workers, some missionaries, had passed through that area and had received hospitality from Gaius. So they came to John at Ephesus and shared a glowing report about Gaius with him. And when he heard it:

a. John was overjoyed to hear that he was spiritually healthy He was standing firm in the truth concerning Jesus and he was walking in, or living out, that truth through the loving way that he had cared for these missionary workers. John was thrilled! He was filled with joy because one of his "children", one to whom he was a spiritual father was showing evidence of being mature in the Lord. Parents are always thrilled to see their children grow up to be mature, to see them adopt the same values and the same cause that is on the heart of their parents, make it their own and live it out. *If you watch Animal Planet, you probably know that Steve Irwin, the "Crocodile Hunter" and founder of Australia Zoo passed away some years ago and now his two children are featured with his wife in their own program. And she is so proud because they have adopted his vision for wildlife conservation and are living it out with her.* That's the joy that John felt over Gaius and the same joy we have whenever we see our disciples maturing and living out the life of Christ on their own! And out of that joy over Gaius' spiritual health:

b. John wished him corresponding success and physical health He says: *Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit*, in the NLT. Wouldn't that be nice? If all the ducks in our lives were lined up in a row and everything was going well and that our body was just as healthy as our soul? Well, it's wonderful to wish that for each other, but the longer you live, you find out it's not going to happen! The ducks fly off in all directions! Something always seems to go wrong and your body grows increasingly more decrepit! Seriously, what this verse does show us is that we should care about every aspect of each other's lives, all the other person's circumstances and even their health, and not simply about their spiritual life, as important as that surely is. At any rate, now in verses **(5-12)** John gets to his:

II. The Message, and it's this: **We Must Partner With Missionary Workers!** From the very earliest days of the church, there have always been those who felt the call of God to leave their home town and the security of family and the warmth of their home fellowship and go to make disciples and plant the church in places where people have not yet heard the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. If they stay closer to home among their own people, we call them Evangelists; if they go farther and cross geographic and cultural and language barriers, we call them missionaries. And the only way they are able to answer that call and do the work that God wants done, is if believers like you and I who remain at home working and worshipping God together in our local bodies enter into deep and significant partnership together with them. If there is a description anywhere in the New Testament that describes the relationship of mission work to those on the home front, these next three verses **(5-8)** are it. I believe that the Holy Spirit preserved this little letter of John to exhort us that:

1. we must imitate the wonderful example of Gaius in carrying out partnership with missionaries. Some of you may not know this, but we as a church have partnerships with 11 active missionary couples or singles who have been sent out to serve the Lord in various countries around the world plus an additional 9 couples or singles who are technically retired, but most of whom still continue to engage in some level of active ministry. On top of that we have 9 national partnerships with individuals and organizations who are actively reaching people within their own countries where the majority haven't yet heard the Gospel and on top of *that* in 1996, we adopted the Kyrgyz people of Central Asia and promised God to do everything within our power to see them reached with the Gospel. And if we are to follow the example of Gaius:

a. we must partner with them faithfully as he did **(5-6)** Gaius made many efforts for these missionary brothers who passed through his town. He opened his home and let them stay with him. He fed them meals and helped them with all the needs they had at the moment. Maybe they needed shoes or clothing or medical attention as they neared the end of their journey. Certainly, he prayed with them and listened eagerly to their report of what God had

done through them and he probably gave them whatever money he could to help them along on the next step of their journey. And many of you have done the same for our many partners when they pass through our area. When they come, you take them into your homes to stay. You feed them meals. You help them with various needs they have and press gifts of money into their hands privately. You come to hear their reports and encourage them. You pray for them and their ministry. And for our missionary partners who live and worship here among us, yet impact the wider world, you do the same. So, I commend all of you who do such things because you are being faithful partners. Did you notice that John says that:

(1) we must do these things in a manner worthy of God? If you think about that statement, those words will take you back. We are representatives of God; we are the hands and feet of Jesus. We need to treat our partners in a manner that is fully pleasing to Him. In essence, it means that we must treat them like God would treat them! That means we give them good gifts, not our leftover, worn out, unwanted stuff. It means we send our support to them faithfully and without fail, not only when we have extra or when we happen to think of it. It means we pray for them consistently, not just when we happen to think of them. We must treat them in a manner worthy of God and, John says:

(2) we must not do it based primarily on personal relationship Gaius didn't even know these brothers he had helped; they were strangers to him. I have varying levels of personal relationship with all of our partners, some of them deeper than others, but you can't possibly know them all in a personal way. We are faithful to all of them and treat them in a manner worthy of God whether we have a personal relationship or not. Why? John explains our motive in verse (7):

b. we must be primarily motivated by the glory of God The workers went out *for the sake of the Name* and Gaius ministered to them *for the sake of the Name*, that is the Name of Jesus Christ. We do it for the sake of His Name among the nations. We reach the peoples of the world for the sake of the glory of Jesus Christ, that all peoples might call Him Lord. Our God is a great God and worthy to be praised by all peoples. And He's given us the vision of His greatness, that one day when it's all done and we stand in heaven around the throne there will be numberless multitudes from every tribe and people and nation, all in their splendor and diversity which He created, praising Him in their own languages, falling before His throne in worship singing, "Thou art worthy, thou art worthy, O Lord!" We want to make that come true for Him:

(1) it is never to get something for ourselves Those workers were like Paul; they wouldn't take anything from the peoples to whom they went because they didn't want to be perceived as coming there to "get something". And we don't either. We must never be involved in mission to get something, even if it is in the smallest measure, to get recognition, a pat on the back, the admiration of people, or a bigger reward in heaven, let alone material gain here somehow. Now certainly we're involved:

(2) it is because of Jesus' command He said in **Mt. 28:18-20** to go and make disciples of every people and our missionary partners are involved among many of those peoples and disciples need to be made of them and we want to be obedient to God, so we are involved in the process. That's OK but it's not enough. It doesn't move the heart very well when the going gets tough. Another answer would be that:

(3) it is certainly out of love for unreached people They're lost. They're perishing without Christ and most of them, not only have never heard, but they still have no opportunity to hear. And by now many of us have been overseas and met some personally. We've looked in the eyes of little children in India or orphans in Nigeria or refugees in Greece or struggling families in Kyrgyzstan and for us they are no longer an impersonal entity. They have names and faces and we don't want to see them be lost eternally. Many of you know what I'm talking about. But that in itself is not motive enough.

Last year we not only faithfully supported our missionary partners and sent out our own teams to India and Greece, but, believe it or not, we gave approximately \$110,000 to missions! Why? Not for us or for the workers or for the people, but for the sake of HIS Name among the nations! That HE might be glorified in all the earth! But here's something exciting; John told Gaius that when we partner faithfully with our missionaries:

c. we become co-laborers with them for the truth (8) In the Greek we become *sunergoi*, with-workers, co-laborers. Those on the field and we at home are co-laborers involved together as one with them in the same task, declaring the Truth of His Name. And John points out to those of us here at home that our co-laboring involves two very special functions. First of all:

(1) we walk alongside them as they go In (6b) we *send them on their way*. The Greek word means to "send someone forward" and in that time it meant literally to walk with them or escort or accompany them on the next section of their journey as they parted from you. It also meant to provide them with gifts and necessary provisions for that part of the journey. That's our function. We walk alongside these beloved laborers both as they go and as they are there. We are their companions in the process and our fingers need to be on the pulse of what's going on where they are, what their immediate needs are, what the crisis is that's in process and do whatever it takes on this end to propel them forward in the work of the Gospel. Often that means banding together in a

blanket of prayer to cover an emergency situation. A couple years ago our missionary couple in Brazil sent out an SOS that, because of a change in Brazilian air force personnel, the mission planes that are their only lifeline of supply out in the Amazon jungle, had not been given needed permission to fly. Without them, staying would be impossible so we and many others began immediately to pray. Two or three weeks went by without permission and things were looking grim, when at last God answered and permission was given. We prayed again the next month and from then on that permission has been given every month! We prayed with another partner as she was going through and recovering from surgery last year in New York. We prayed with a retired partner couple as they traveled to Paraguay to serve field workers and this month we're praying for others with needs. We walk alongside our partners in prayer! Then secondly:

(2) we undergird them by providing what they need The words, *support people like these*, in verse 8 in Greek means "to hold from underneath and lift up", that is, to undergird or underwrite, to assume responsibility for providing what they need! Our role is to make sure that they have everything they need to get the job done that God has laid out before them. We are the vital supply lines that propel the army forward. A number of years ago in China one of our partners needed a laptop; through you, we got her one and she's still using it today in another country. When she needed discipleship materials for her new converts, we sent them. Another worker needed a data projector for the new kiosk her team is establishing in Puebla, Mexico and we had a nearly new one someone had just given us, so we sent it to her. When a partner in New York called for helpers to support a conference on reaching Muslims, half a dozen or more of us hopped on a train and volunteered and a group has been doing it annually now for several years! We do things like these all the time.

You see, we are co-laborers with those on the field. Our labors and theirs blend into one whole that God's glory might be revealed among the nations! So, each one of us must imitate the example of Gaius and be faithful. On the other hand, John goes on to warn us that:

2. we must avoid the terrible example of Diotrephes (9-11) Diotrephes was evidently a leader in either the same church group as Gaius or one nearby. John had written him a letter about this same subject also and he either destroyed the letter or kept it from the church because:

a. he put himself and his own priorities first He loved to be in charge, to be noticed and to control things. He had no respect for John as one who had the special privilege of walking with Jesus personally and even made up false and wicked things about him to prevent others from listening to him. And because of his self-centeredness:

b. he refused to partner with missionary workers He didn't receive or welcome them or help them in any way and what's worse:

c. he discouraged others from partnering with them, even threatening to throw them out of the fellowship if they did! Can you imagine?

But that attitude of "Who needs missions? Who needs missionaries? We have enough people to reach right here and we need all our resources for what we're doing!" has come up more than once through the ages. *When William Carey proposed the forming of an agency to send missionaries to a meeting of Baptist leaders in the late 1700's, he was abruptly interrupted by an older minister who said, "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me."* And that attitude has never gone away. There are always those in the church who say, "Too much emphasis on missions; we're tired of hearing about it! Let's focus on our own needs." That's like saying, "The heart of God for the lost peoples of the earth doesn't matter to me; I only care about what I'm involved in!" One of our missionary partners comes from a large church with several thousand people. New leadership has brought about changes there in recent years and a building program. So, this worker was home for half a year, in desperate need of more support to return to the field, and was never given even a 3 minute opportunity to stand before the congregation and share about their work. The majority of the congregation doesn't even know who this person is or that they are one of its missionaries. We're praying that will change, and soon, for them, but we must be careful that this attitude of Diotrephes never has a chance to take root here! Then finally John tells us that:

3. we must partner with trustworthy workers like Demetrius (12) We don't know who this Demetrius is, but given the context, he's probably a worker heading out to his field of service and probably the one carrying this letter to Gaius as a recommendation from John to help him forward on his way. Gaius didn't know him, but John says, "Everyone here knows he's a trustworthy worker to send out; I myself recommend him as a trustworthy worker and you can listen to his own testimony of commitment to the Truth and you'll be convinced!" We don't partner with just anybody who takes a notion to go do something. We partner with people we trust, with people that we know sincerely love Jesus and are genuinely called by him. All of our partners are "Demetriuses", trustworthy workers, brothers and sisters worthy of our partnership with them and together with them we are changing the world.

In the 1960's Dan and Barbara Lunow went out to the Sougb tribe in the jungles of Papua, Indonesia in partnership with us and other churches. The fruit of their almost 40 years of ministry there is more than 10,500 baptized believers, almost the entire tribe. And they began to send out missionaries (now 13 couples) to other tribes, the first of whom

were Urias and Lowes Ahoren, who have also been our partners directly for many years. Some years ago, Urias sent an exciting report on his witness and work among the Irarutu people and how the Gospel was spreading among them and he ended it with this phrase, "But I'm just standing on top of the table!" When the Sougb go into the tropical forest to cut down a tree, all they have are small axes and chopping through the base of a huge tree is a formidable task. So what they do is to get together and build a shaky scaffold made of poles and vines part way up the tree and on the top of that scaffold they put a platform or in their language a "table" and attach it to the tree so they can stand way up there and cut through the tree where the diameter is smaller and their axes can get through it. So when Urias said, "I'm just standing on top of the table", he meant, "I'm not here by myself; I'm standing on top of all of you, and together we are cutting down this tree; we are reaching this people for Christ." Friends, we are the table on which our missionary partners stand; we are those who co-labor together with them, send them on their way and undergird them. We share equally in the process and we will share equal joy in seeing the reward of it one day. Let's all be faithful partners like Gaius. Well, I'll leave you again this morning by paraphrasing John's words in his:

III. The Closing in verses **(13-14)** which essentially says, "I have so much more to say, but I'm out of time!" Let's pray!

Jude - A Warning Against Apostasy (Part 1)

This morning we come to the last of the four New Testament letters that are only one chapter long, the letter of Jude. It is perhaps THE most neglected book in our New Testament, probably because of the strong statements Jude makes, which seem offensive to modern ears. It is not a long letter, but it contains enough material that it will take us two weeks to get through it, so today is Part 1. And like any letter, we begin with:

I. The Salutation (1-2) The letter is named for its:

1. the author: Jude, but who was he? Jude is a shortened form of Judas and there are a number of Judases mentioned in the New Testament. This one, however is the one mentioned in Mt. 13:55, which lists the other children of Mary and Joseph by name. So, he was a **“half” brother to Jesus**, if you will, and he was a full **brother to James** who is also mentioned in that verse. This *James the Lord’s brother* was the head of the Jerusalem church in Acts 15, a man respected by all in that day. Neither of these brothers believed in Jesus until after His resurrection, but both of them became completely devoted servants of Christ and respected leaders in the early church. As for:

2. the recipients: Jude is not writing to an individual person or to a church. He’s writing this to be circulated among **true believers everywhere** and certainly, it is meant for us along with them. Before we leave the salutation, however, Jude begins the same way he ends his letter, with a word of assurance to us. Notice these three truths. First, Jude says:

a. we were called to salvation I didn’t go seeking after God trying desperately to find Him; God invaded my life! He threw a friend into it who talked to me about Jesus, a friend who invited me to church and a family who brought me. He worked in my heart to cause me to see how lost I was and how much I needed to be saved and finally I gave in! He drew me to Himself; He called me. We were called to this salvation we have! It was a work of God, not of ourselves! He wanted us! Second, Jude says:

b. we are beloved to God the Father God didn’t just save us; He loves us! How much? So much that He was willing to give His only Son whom He loved to the awful fate of the cross in order to save us from our sins so He could have us for Himself! *Michael Card put it this way: “God loves you so much that He would rather die than live without you!”* We are dearly loved by God; He loves us more than any earthly father or mother could ever love one of their children! And third, Jude says:

c. we are being kept by and for Jesus Christ That word *kept* means *preserved or protected*. Remember how Jesus prayed for us the night before He died in **Jn. 17:11-12, 15**? *Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father... protect them by the power of your name... During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold... I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.* God the Father is keeping us saved, preserving and protecting us in our salvation for Jesus, letting NO ONE snatch us out of His hand! We are loved so much that we cannot be lost!

That assurance is important and you’ll see why in a moment. Now Jude comes to his:

II. The Theme in verse (3) His message is: **We MUST Contend Earnestly For THE Faith**. Now here he is not referring to our personal faith in Jesus:

1. THE faith is the body of revealed truths we hold, the truths that all genuine believers have held since the very beginning. Truths about who Jesus was and what He did, His Deity, His incarnation as man, His virgin birth, His death as a sacrifice for our sins, His resurrection and His coming again. Truths about the Father and the Holy Spirit, about salvation by grace through faith, not works. Truths about the Scripture, that it is the very word of God and is to be believed and obeyed. Taken all together, that core body of beliefs is THE faith, THE Christian faith, and Jude says that:

a. it is a sacred trust that God has deposited with us God has *delivered* it to us saints who believe; He has handed it over to us. He has deposited it in our hands the way that we go down to the bank and hand our money over to the teller to keep it safe and protect it. It is a sacred trust given to a holy people by a Holy God that must be preserved and protected and passed down from one generation to another until Jesus returns. And Jude says it was delivered *once for all*, that is, it was entrusted to us *once for all time*. In other words:

b. it is an unchanging body of truth It is not like scientific knowledge which is constantly being researched and revised through new evidence. It is not being added to and nothing can be subtracted from it. God put a warning right at the end of the Book in **Rev. 22:18-19** that if anyone adds to it or takes away from it His curse is upon them and they will not have eternal life. The Bible itself is complete and is to remain unchanged and so is THE faith. It is

not to be altered or added to or subtracted from. It must be passed on whole and complete through time. And therefore, Jude's admonition is that:

2. we must strive zealously to keep it unchanged and pass it on He uses a term from wrestling. The way that a wrestler strives with all his might to pin the other person, exerting every bit of his energy and strength, that's the way we must contend for or defend the integrity of THE faith that has been entrusted to us. We must do everything in our power to keep it unchanged as we pass it on to others. And obviously:

3. this is a matter of utmost importance Jude says, "I wanted to write about some other things, but I HAD to write about this; it is so important!" Think about it. THE faith that we hold is the one and only key to eternal life! Suppose God revealed to you the one sure cure for cancer. Suppose He gave you a list of 25 chemical ingredients and told you the exact proportions by which to mix them together and you did it and found that everyone you gave it to was cured completely. How would you treat that formula? Would you let anyone add something else to it? Or omit something from it? Or change the proportions in it? No, you would protect it from being altered because people's very lives depend on it! When you pass it on to others you would be absolutely certain that the formula was intact and unchanged because so much was at stake; so many lives would be lost if it was not preserved intact! That's how it is with THE faith. If we let it be altered or added to or subtracted from, the resultant belief will not save anyone. And the ball has been passed to us. People's eternal future depends on us in our generation doing what all previous generations of believers have done, contending for THE faith which was once for all delivered to the saints! Now Jude says:

III. The Reason we need to contend so mightily for it is that **There Are Ungodly People Within The Church** who want to change and corrupt it **(4)**. Within the church, within the body of people who claim to believe in Christ, there are some who do not truly believe in their hearts like we do, who are actually being used by Satan to destroy and corrupt that upon which our lives depend. How is that possible? Jude says:

1. they sneak in stealthily and go unnoticed They sit in same pew, they sing the same songs, they say many of the right words, and they serve alongside of us. In appearance they are no different from us so we don't notice them. Paul wrote about people like this in **2 Cor. 11:13-15**, if you'll turn there with me. They're in disguise. They appear like and seem like apostles and servants of Christ, but in reality, they are working for a different master and he has planted them among us to corrupt and destroy THE faith that alone can save people. And Jude gives us two:

2. key distinguishing marks that allow us to recognize them Some of them are evident through their behavior:

a. they misuse grace as a license for immoral behavior They say, "Since God loves and accepts us by His grace and not by what we do, then what we do doesn't really affect our relationship with Him!" And that line of thinking always leads to sexual immorality. "God loves me but that has nothing to do with my romantic life. I can sleep with who I want when I want. After all, He created me to enjoy it." Others of them are more evident through their doctrine:

b. they deny the nature and uniqueness of our Lord Jesus Christ They either deny that Jesus was truly and fully God or that He became truly and fully a man. Take away the first and he is just another prophet, just another good and holy man showing us the way. Take away the second and the thought of salvation through his death becomes meaningless because he was not one of us. Or else they say that He is only one of many ways to be saved, not THE Way, one of many paths that lead to heaven, not the ONLY Lord and Savior.

Now you say, "But who ARE these people? Give me:

IV. An Example." All right, let me tell you about a group that was around in Jude's day, one of the groups he would have been talking about. They are called **The Nicolaitans** and we meet them in **Rev. 2**, if you'll turn there. Jesus tells the church at Ephesus this **(6)**. Then He tells the church at Pergamum this **(14-15)**. And then He tells the church at Thyatira this **(20)**. Jezebel was probably a Nicolaitan. The Nicolaitans traced their beginning back to Nicholas of Antioch whom we meet in Acts 6. He was one of the seven men *of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom* whom the apostles chose to take care of the distribution of food to the widows in the church. Opinion is divided over whether the group simply borrowed his name to appear legitimate or whether he himself began their teachings. At any rate:

1. they were apostates: They carried the identity of being Christian but in reality, **they had fallen away from the true faith**. They no longer held the same truths that genuine believers hold nor practiced the same behavior that genuine believers do. Instead:

2. they taught people to identify with the idolatry of their culture If you remember, one of the few things the Jerusalem church had asked the Gentile believers not to do in Acts 15 was to not eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. But in the Roman world, much of the meat available to purchase came from sacrifices that had first been offered to pagan idols in the many temples of Greek and Roman gods that abounded. Everybody around them worshipped in those temples; everybody around them got their meat that way and ate it. The Nicolaitans said, "Why should we be different? Why should we alienate people around us and cause them to dislike us by rejecting what they do every day?"

Of course, once you're in the temple to buy the meat, it appears as though you worship there like everyone else and it's a much smaller step to actually begin to acknowledge the idol in some way and believe in its power. Secondly:

3. they taught people to practice the immorality of their culture Greek and Roman culture was rife with immoral sexual behavior. Ritual prostitution was part of much pagan worship. Mistresses and affairs were everywhere. Homosexual behavior was openly practiced. The Nicolaitans said, "Why not join in? Everyone else does it. Look at the great pleasure you're missing by holding that sex should only be within marriage!" Of course, the easiest way to get involved is to stop by the idol's temple and get in line and in that way you participate in the worship of the idol. It was a great temptation. So, people like Jezebel and others were teaching these things and, as we read:

4. they were tolerated within some of the churches They were being allowed to practice and to teach these things to the believers in some places and Jude is saying, "You've got to wrestle against this stuff with all your might! You MUST preserve true Christian teaching and practice!"

Now you might say, "But I don't know any Nicolaitans!" Oh yes you do! They are all around us, people who would call themselves Christian but who identify with the idolatry and advocate the immorality of our increasingly pagan culture. Let me throw a few statistics at you:

1) A Pew Research survey in 2017 found that only 4 out of 10 who identify themselves as Christians in the US believe the Bible is the Word of God and should be interpreted literally.

2) A Pew Research Survey in 2007 found that 57% of those who call themselves evangelical Christians in the US accept the idea that Jesus may not be the only path to salvation. A 2011 Baylor Research survey found that 69% of churchgoers believe everyone will go to heaven.

3) A BBC survey in Great Britain in 2017 found that only 31% of people who identify themselves as Christians believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ.

4) In a 2014 survey mentioned in the Christian Post, 61% of Christians said they would have sex before marriage. 56% said it's appropriate to move in and live together after dating for a time.

5) In the Roman world unwanted babies were commonly abandoned in a field somewhere to die of exposure; in our culture they are systematically and legally killed before birth in the womb. And the right to do that is being advocated in the church! According to Wikipedia, the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church USA and the Lutheran Women's Caucus openly support the right to abortion, while many other denominations support it in a more limited fashion.

6) Our country has now legalized gay marriage and considers homosexuality as a simple genetic difference, though it isn't. Despite the Bible's clear forbidding of the practice of homosexuality, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Quakers and the United Church of Christ all sanction and recognize gay marriage according to the Pew Research Center and the United Methodist Church has had huge internal debate about these matters for years.

And all of this is new within the last 100 years. Folks, the Nicolaitans have gotten into the church and spread their teaching everywhere! How? Certain people crept in unnoticed and multiplied, and it began largely through our educational institutions. I was a student at Lebanon Valley College (a Methodist-related institution founded to train clergy, by the way) when I surrendered to God's call to the ministry one night at the age of 19. The next morning, I went in and switched to being a religion major. In my first religion class we were studying the Exodus and the professor got up and clearly told the class that the Israelites crossed the Reed Sea, not the Red Sea, that it was basically a marsh and that the Egyptians' chariot wheels got stuck in the mud so they could not pursue the Israelites. He denied the miraculous parting of the waters. I wanted to ask, "Well then how did the Egyptian soldiers wash up dead on the seashore?" And for the first time I realized I was being lied to in the guise of religion. In another class on the Gospels the professor taught us that the resurrection of Jesus was a sacred myth treasured by Christians, not a literal fact and when I said, "You mean to tell me that Luke did not intend his readers to understand that Jesus' body literally came out of the tomb!", I was so mad because he refused to acknowledge it. This same kind of thing went on all through college and I watched student after student who had come in believing the Bible from their local churches lose their faith by the time they left. And then I went to seminary! In three years, I don't think I had a single professor who believed that the Bible is literally true, that heaven and hell are real places or that salvation comes only through a personal relationship with Christ. Dozens of seminaries around the nation are like that and they're producing church leaders who step into churches and lead people to adopt the views of culture, rather than the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. Well, it became a real struggle for me. You see, these were nice people. They were kind. They went to church and studied the Bible and prayed and claimed to follow Jesus. They did many good and helpful things for others. I liked them as people, yet they denied so many things I knew were true. It was so hard for me to see them as lost and evil and I kept praying, "God, I don't know what to think; what is really true about all these teachers?" And one night God made it crystal clear in my mind, "They do not know Me." To use Jude's word in verse 4, they are *ungodly*, destitute of true reverential awe toward God. There are multiplied thousands of them in churches and institutions across our land and community, pastors, professors, teachers leading people to deny THE faith once for all delivered to the saints. Jude issues a strong:

V. The Warning to them: They Will Be Judged By God Quickly, he says:

1. God destroyed the rescued Israelites who did not believe (5) Within the ranks of His people Israel there were many who did not truly believe and God later destroyed them. Then he says:

2. God will destroy angels who deserted His service (6) While some of the angels who rebelled against God are loose as demons, evidently some of them are being kept in chains and one day God will destroy them. Check out **2 Pet. 2:4**. Then he says:

3. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for their immorality (7) They are an example to us of what God will do with all who practice immorality. Jude's point is that:

4. apostates do these same things and will also be destroyed (8, 10) No matter how appealing or nice they seem, they do not know God and in the end will be destroyed unless they repent.

Beloved, we MUST wrestle with all our might to keep and protect THE faith that has been entrusted to us intact. We must NEVER let apostasy begin here or anywhere that we have influence. The eternal lives of people depend on it! *Methodist theologian Thomas Oden, in his book "After Modernity...What?", tells about a strange dream he once had. He was walking in the New Haven cemetery when he stumbled over something and looked down, only to discover that it was his own tombstone. Carved on the front was this epitaph: "He made no new contribution to theology." Then Oden woke up and experienced a deep feeling of relief because all his life he had, in his words, "been trying in my own way to follow the strict mandate of Irenaeus not to invent new doctrine." His goal was not to be original, but to restate and clarify "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints". [Christian Week, Mar 4, 1997. Page 5].* That's my goal too and I hope it's yours, but it MUST be ours! Next time Jude will go on to tell us that we can reach some of these very people and those that they are leading astray.

Jude - A Warning Against Apostasy (Part 2)

Today we're going to look at the second half of the Epistle of Jude which we began last week. If you remember, Jude was warning the churches, and us, against apostasy. Let's just look back at verses 3-4 to see Jude's theme, *[I urge] you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people. I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives... they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.* (3-4) Jude is warning us that we absolutely must be careful to jealously guard the core truths that are vital to our faith, because many false teachers who don't really know Christ have infiltrated the church and are leading people astray from the truth by their worldly teachings. And I shared with you specific examples of how, within the boundaries of the church today, there are thousands who teach that the Bible is not the Word of God to be interpreted literally, that Jesus was not born of a virgin, did not literally rise from the dead, is not really coming back again, that there is no literal heaven or hell, that we can practice things the Bible calls sexual immorality, like living together or gay marriage, or things that are morally wrong like the killing of a baby through abortion. I listed for you some entire denominations of churches that have officially espoused these things. But conservative believers in those churches are also standing up for truth. St John's Episcopal in Huntingdon Valley left their denomination over these very issues, had their building taken away and became St. John's Anglican Church, a conservative congregation. God gave them a new building and they're prospering. Holy Trinity Lutheran in Abington left the liberal Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to help found and join the North American Lutheran Church, an entire new conservative denomination. Oreland Presbyterian left the Presbyterian Church USA to join the Evangelical Presbyterian Church because of these things. These are just churches in our neighborhood; the church, all over America and the world, is rife with apostasy! Now in verse 11 Jude talks about:

I. The Motives Of Apostate Teachers like these that have come into our churches and educational institutions **(11)**. He uses three Old Testament characters to illustrate their motives. First, he says that:

1. they want to live their way and detest purity like Cain did What is *the way of Cain*? We remember the story in Gen. 4, but **1 Jn. 3:12** NLT explains it, *We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.* He had been living in an evil way and his goody-goody brother Abel made him angry. He didn't want to live Abel's way and be pleasing to God and Abel was a constant irritant that enraged him. Just tell some so-called "Christians" that abortion is wrong or the practice of homosexuality is wrong and see the reaction you get. They don't often say, "Well, I disagree with you." You get anger and accusations of bigotry and sometimes threats, because at the bottom line people want to live like they want to live and the purity of others is detestable to them. So in the church they teach, "It's Ok with God; there are 'other ways' to interpret the Scripture." No, there are not! You simply disregard the Scripture as being true! Second, he says that:

2. they ultimately seek their own gain like Balaam did I won't recount the story of Balaam from **Num. 22-23** but ultimately in the end of it, he advised Balak, King of Moab to entice the Israelites to join in worship of their idols and get

them to commit sexual immorality so that God would destroy them. It worked and thousands died, including him. But he gave that advice in order to get paid handsomely for it, to get something for himself, even though he KNEW God did not want Israel cursed. Ultimately, false teachers get something out of it for themselves. In some cases, it's money, but many times it gets them acceptance and recognition by their followers and students or advancement in their organization, perhaps a better appointment to a more prestigious or larger congregation in a nicer area or a higher professorship in their learning institution. For many, if they would repudiate the false truths and stand up firmly for Scripture, they would quickly be let go and lose their livelihood! They gain by it. Third, Jude says that:

3. they rebel against God's ordinances like Korah did You remember the story of Korah's rebellion in **Num. 16**, how he and his followers challenged Moses saying, "We're just as holy as you and Aaron are and we can offer incense to God as well as you can!", totally rejecting God's command as to whom He chose to be priests. So God opened a hole in the earth and buried them all alive! Let's face it; people don't like God to tell them what to do and how to live! They want to do what they want to do, no matter what HE says. So, these apostate teachers are directly rebelling against what God has said in His Word because they want to teach and do what THEY want and, sadly, the inference is that their end will be much the same! Now Jude waxes eloquent to give us:

II. A Poetic Description Of What Apostate Teachers Are Like (12-13) He says:

1. they are hidden rocks that wreck the spiritual lives of believers, the way a ship is wrecked and sunken when it hits an underwater reef. Because they look like us and are mixed into the church, you don't see them; you don't realize these teachers are different until it's too late and by then the damage has already been done in many lives of those who listen to them. It happens subtly. They may be mixed with the crowd eating at your love feast, but spiritually they are shepherds feeding themselves instead of their sheep. He says:

2. they are clouds that produce no nourishing rain We've all seen days when the sky the sky is black with cumulus clouds and you expect it to rain, yet it blows over without a drop to nourish the crops or fill up the cisterns and bless the people. You look to these folks to provide spiritual teaching that will bless and nourish souls, but there is no spiritual help from them. He says:

3. they are trees that produce no fruit through an entire season They look like good, healthy trees that ought to bear fruit, but they don't. And they come down to the end of their season, the end of their lives, and die twice, once physically and once eternally. The only thing left is to uproot them and pull them out of the ground. Jesus used the same image in Mt. 7:15-20 to tell us how to recognize false prophets who come among us. He said we'll recognize them like we recognize bad trees, by their bad fruits, by the unrighteous deeds they do and the false things they teach. And in the end, He too says that diseased trees get cut down and thrown into the fire. Jude says:

4. they are wild waves spewing worthless shameful foam on shore We've all seen the waves thunderously pounding the beach and leaving behind them only patches of empty frothy foam to evaporate on the sand. These teachers speak forcefully and boast of much, but their words and actions, of which they should be ashamed, are only so much empty froth that they leave behind. And finally, Jude says:

5. they are unreliable shining stars that will end up in darkness The ancients navigated by the stars because their locations were fixed in the heavens. "Wandering stars", such as planets or comets that move across the sky, are unreliable to follow, no matter how brightly they shine. These apostates may shine brightly, but to follow them is to be led down a false path that leads to eternal darkness.

Wow, these are strong words, aren't they?! Why is Jude so severe in his condemnation of those who teach false things in the name of Christ? Because through their "Christian" appearance, their religious language and their sincerity, they end up leading people to eternal death, to an eternity in a lake of fire, by preventing them from simply trusting in Christ for salvation! *Years ago, a physician was administering a controlled mixture of oxygen and anesthetic gas to a patient in a New York hospital. When one of the tanks was empty, the doctor attached a new one marked "Oxygen". Almost immediately the patient died. The coroner's autopsy revealed carbon dioxide poisoning. Further investigation revealed that the second tank was found to contain pure CO₂ and had somehow been mislabeled. The manufacturer denied any wrongdoing. No one knew how it could have gotten by the inspectors. The doctor had no doubt that he was using oxygen when he administered the lethal gas. All were sincere; no one wanted the tragedy to happen, yet they were all sincerely wrong.* And when you realize that there is only one way to have eternal life, being sincerely wrong kills people, forever! Now in case this whole concept that there are false teachers in the church shocks and surprises you, next Jude reminds us that:

III. God Warned Us Ahead Of Time That Apostate Teachers Would Arise Jude begins as far back as he could go:

1. Enoch said God will convict such people at His coming (14-16) Back before David's time and Abraham's time, back before Noah and the great flood, only 7 generations from Adam, we read about a man named Enoch who walked with God and God was so pleased with him that He translated him; He took him to heaven without dying. One of Enoch's sayings was passed down for generations and ultimately recorded both in a non-canonical Book of Enoch and also by the Holy Spirit here in Scripture. Way back then, Enoch knew there was going to be a great coming of the Lord

in glory to judge the whole world and on that day all those who have committed unrighteous deeds against His commands and who have spoken harsh things against His truth will be shown their great sin and condemned. Jude says the false teachers of his day as well as our own day are among those Enoch was declaring would exist on that great day. Then Jude goes on to remind us that:

2. the Apostles warned that such people would arise (17-19) Jesus warned about them often. Paul warned about them in a number of his letters. Peter warned about them in his writing. So why should we be surprised that they have shown up? They have been present in every age of church history since Jude's day, so why should we be surprised that they have multiplied so greatly now as His coming draws nearer? We've been warned and we must warn the believers of our day to beware of them or the precious faith handed down to us will be lost in the next generation! Now this next part of Jude's letter may surprise you. After all the strong condemnation, he tells us that:

IV. We Can Reach Some Of Those Going The Way Of Apostasy in verses (20-23), but before he actually says that, he warns us that before trying to do so:

1. we must be spiritually prepared (20-21) Notice the four things he mentions. First, we must **build ourselves up in our most holy faith**. He's not talking about "getting more faith". He means:

a. we must be rock solid in our commitment to what we believe He's talking about THE faith, that most holy body of Truth we are called to preserve. We must know it well and thoroughly. We must be absolutely convinced of the truth of it. We must be so thoroughly committed to it that we will NEVER waver, so that there is no possibility for us to be convinced of error. Second:

b. we must be praying in the Spirit, that is, **depending on Him**. We cannot reach people like this in our own strength and wisdom. You can't just out-argue them in some debate and think they'll change. It is an impossible task, like convincing the President of Iran to become a Jew. It's not happening unless the Spirit of God does a mighty supernatural work and for that we must pray! Third:

c. we must develop a deep loving relationship with God When you've got people telling you that immorality is OK and you've got strong hormones and opportunity arises, the temptation to follow that false notion is pretty strong. Only a real relationship with God can protect you. Joseph had a beautiful woman begging him to sleep with her and ripping off his clothes and his response was ...*How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God!* Only a deep, deep love for God will keep you from falling into sin. And fourth:

d. we must be looking for Christ's return, like Enoch, waiting for Him to come back and take us into His eternal Kingdom. We must live to be found faithful when He comes!

Now, if all of those things are true of us, then, Jude says that we have a chance of reaching some who are caught in apostasy. Verse (22):

2. we must lovingly convince those who doubt the truth Not all people who believe false teaching are hardened, committed teachers of it. Some are simply followers of it, people who've come to doubt the truths of the Bible, people who may argue with you a bit, but don't know enough to support their own arguments. Those who are simply doubters you can have an attitude of mercy toward; you can pray for and talk to them and God can use your loving concern over time to rescue them. But:

3. we must reach out to hardened apostates with utmost care (23) You treat them the way you would pull a stick out of a burning campfire, taking the utmost care not to get burned yourself. You know, when you try to save a drowning man, either you can rescue him or he can drown you with him if he latches on hard enough. With people who are deeply committed to apostate beliefs, be very careful. If you have any sense at all that talking to them is beginning to cause you doubts, back away. Rather, flee! But God can save even these.

A young man named Brewster Hastings came to serve as the rector of St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Abington 26 years ago. He was educated at Union Theological Seminary in New York city, an institution at the forefront of liberal theological thinking and teaching. He arrived here a typical liberal preacher exhorting people to do good in order to be accepted by God, not clinging to any of the tenets of the faith that we hold dear. His first marriage fell apart and things were not going well. At some point, Mike Tavella, pastor at Holy Trinity Lutheran on the opposite side of Old York Road met Brewster and began to be a friend to him, to share his faith with him and before too much time passed Brewster met Jesus! What a change! It became his passion to lead people to know Jesus. He became a devoted husband to a new wife and a father to her two children. Let me read you this: *Brewster brought joy to all whom he touched. He organized Pastors United in Prayer in 1992, whose mission was to bring together church leaders of all denominations every month to gather in prayer for the greater community and world. He organized numerous weekly Discovery Bible Study groups in many churches, some even meeting in the local mall, where he sat in the food court with a sign stating "Free Prayer"; in his inimitable fearless style, he constantly met and prayed for myriad strangers. The healing ministry was his passion and gift. He created disciples everywhere he went through his "catch-and-release" style of leadership. In every way, Brewster fully lived for God.* He became devoted to the Word of God and the salvation of people; I remember in some of the early prayer meet-

ings we had with just four of us, seeing him lying on his face on the floor begging God to save souls. Sadly, in 2016 Jesus suddenly and unexpectedly took him home. What I just read you was his obituary. He was one of those false teachers Jude warned against, but a dear brother had mercy on him, carefully snatched him out of the fire and he became a flaming apostle for Christ to the day he died. There is hope, even for terrorists like Saul and apostates! In closing, Jude gives us:

V. A Wonderful Assurance For All True Believers that has been used as a benediction down through ages **(24-25)**.

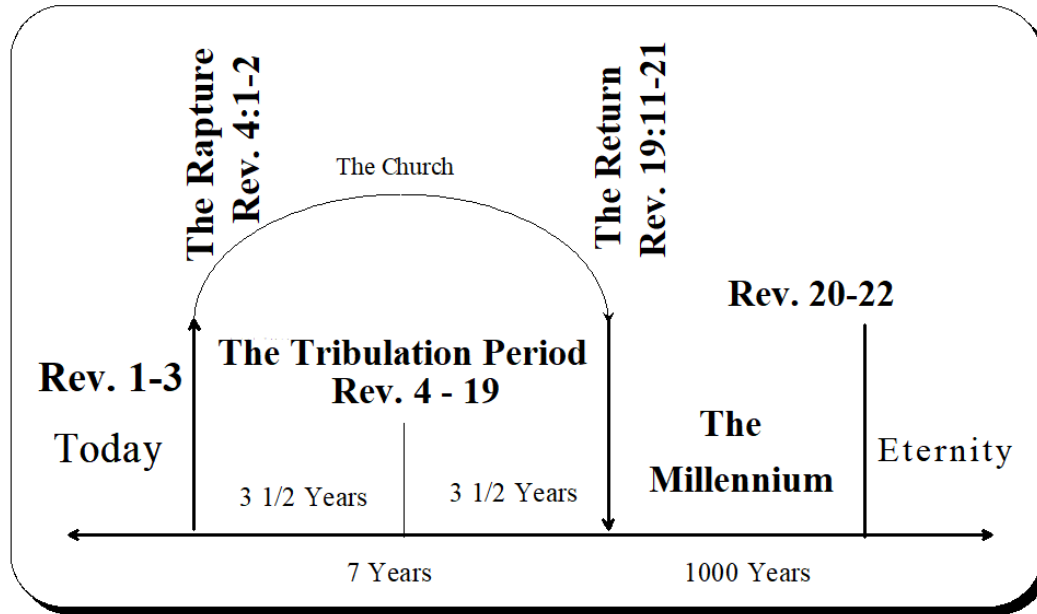
Listen, in case our study of this letter has made you anxious or worried about yourself in any way, always remember these two things: God has all the power in the universe to keep you from falling into false teaching and you can rest assured that He WILL present you blameless to Himself with great joy one day! Look forward to it.

REVELATION

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Revelation: Things To Come

Diagram: Revelation and God's End-Time Program



Christ: Exalted and Coming Again - Ch. 1

Today we begin a brand new series of messages. We're going to study together through the very last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. But even as I say that, I know that there is a very mixed reaction going on. Some of you are thinking, "Why? It's so confusing; nobody really understands it. And besides, what does it have to do with my life? It's all about stuff that's going to happen at the time of Jesus' return; why do I need it?" And at the same time, others of you are thinking, "Oh boy, now I'm going to finally make sense out of all the events that are going on in the world and see how they relate to the Bible." So let me assure you of two things you can count on. First, it will have something directly to do with your life and second, you will not be able to read the morning newspaper next to your Bible and draw clear lines from one to the other. We are going to study it because it is an important portion of God's Word and there's a good chance that a many of you may never have heard a balanced exposition of it! Right in the beginning of chapter one, the Apostle John who wrote it declares:

I. The Purpose Of This Book in verses (1-3) First of all:

1. it was given to provide us with information about the future (1a) It is a revelation, a revealing of that which was not previously known. The Greek word is *apocalypse* which means a taking away of the veil, an uncovering of what was hidden. God wanted to show us, His servants, what is going to happen in the future, things that will soon take place. And we might as well deal with that word *soon* right up front. 1900 years have passed since this was written and these events still haven't happened. The word *soon* in that sentence means literally, *speedily, quickly*. When they happen, they are going to happen fast. In verse 3 he says *the time is near*. The truth is that near doesn't mean tomorrow or next week. It means what Paul said in Rom. 13:11, *...our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed!* Every year, every month, every day brings us nearer to the day when these things happen, but no one knows exactly when that day is. It means they are imminent; they could happen any day; they could begin at any time. God has intended for every generation to live with the sense of immanence of Christ's coming, to live always looking, always watching, waiting, expecting Him. But God wanted to show us clearly exactly what it is that we are waiting and watching for. Were it not for this book, we would indeed know comparatively little about God's plans for the end of this age. What Romans does for doctrine, Revelation does for Bible prophecy; it is the book that pulls it all together in an organized fashion. The story of human history is being written chapter by chapter, but God wanted us to read the end chapter of the book so we know where it's all headed! Second:

2. it was given to provide us with unerring truth (1b-2) At the time this was written, Rome ruled the world. 30 years earlier Nero had begun the persecution of Christians and Domitian was continuing it. It was illegal to be a Christian and believers were suffering terribly because of it. It probably seemed like the world was lost in that hour, like evil would triumph and the church would be wiped out. Of course, it passed and 200 years later Christianity was the official religion of the Roman empire. But history has been filled with times like that. Jesus warned that before the end came that there would be wars and rumors of wars, nations rising up against nations, famines, earthquakes... And so, it has been: plagues, world wars, natural disasters, terrorist attacks. In every generation people try to predict and propose what the world will come to. But GOD wanted to tell us what the world will come to! He gave us truth, unerring, unfailing truth, His very own WORD as to how it all ends! And third He tells us why:

3. it was given to touch our hearts and impact our lives (3) This book was not meant to be a mystery, hidden away and pondered by theologians. It was written to be read publicly in the churches and listened to by believers like you, so that we would take it to heart and have our lives transformed by God's vision of the end and live every day in expectation and anticipation of Christ's coming! *Dr. Warren Wiersbe tells about the time when as a young preacher he preached a sermon on the second coming in which he tried to explain every detail. Another pastor who sat through that message said to him at the time, "You sound like you're on the planning committee for the return of Christ." And then he went on to say, "Personally, I've transferred from the program committee to the welcoming committee!" [Be Hopeful by Warren W. Wiersbe. Victor Books, 1982. Page 107.]* The point of the book is not that we understand and know every detail of the 7 seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls or that we can decipher the identity of the Antichrist from the numeral 666 or identify the 10 nations of the beast's empire; the point of the book is in its second last verse where John responds to all he has seen by saying, *AMEN, COME LORD JESUS!* That's the purpose of this book and that's why we're studying it, so you'll become an enthusiastic member of the welcoming committee, so you'll become one of those Paul mentioned who get a crown because they long for His appearing! Now let's look at:

II. The Message Of This Book (4-8) John summarizes it as he begins his letter, even before he tells what he saw. First, this book:

1. it declares who Christ is (4-5a) Did you hear that? ***He is the Ruler of the Kings of the earth!*** In John's day Caesar would have laid claim to that title! And through the centuries there have been many more Gengis Khans and Napoleons and Hitlers and Stalins and Maos who have aspired to it. But for all of their power and military might, none of them is King of the World! Jesus is! He returned to heaven to REIGN and He reigns as King on His Throne today. He is the KING who is over all Kings and the Lord before whom all Lords must one day bow. Nothing of all that goes on in this world phases Jesus. Nothing of all that will happen in the end of the age will stop Him. HE is absolutely in charge; He is on the throne and His will is being played out and accomplished in the history of the world, no matter what it looks like to us! Second, this book:

2. it declares what Christ has done (5b-6): *He saved us to reign with Him* He loved us so much that He died on a cross to save us, but why? He has made us to be, literally, **KINGS!** Kings who will reign with Him eternally. And **PRIESTS!** Priests who will serve Him and carry out His will forever! It doesn't matter what our lot is here in this world! It doesn't matter if we are despised and persecuted or thrown in prison and tortured. We are those of whom the world is not worthy; those who will reign with Him forever. You will see that in this book and thirdly:

3. it declares what Christ will do (7): His rule will not always be a quiet, secret, behind the scenes, unknown control. ***He will come to assert global rule.*** He will come with the clouds of heaven and every eye will see Him. He will come visibly and powerfully with all the hosts of heaven in His train. He will step into this miserable world and stage a complete takeover, when He's ready. He will set up His Kingdom on this earth and *the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever!* The message of this book is simple and straight forward: **HE IS COMING AGAIN!** And that message:

4. it is declared with all the certainty of God Himself (8) The Father puts His stamp of veracity on this. He says, "I am the A and the Z of all things, the source and the ending; I am ETERNAL and I tell you that this is how things will turn out. Jesus WILL REIGN!" This is not some ancient myth the church used to believe. This is not some fairy tale that poor misguided Christians use as a crutch to escape dealing with the real problems in this world. This is the very Word of God Himself: **JESUS WILL COME AGAIN AND RULE THIS WORLD!**

Now in the second half of this chapter John begins to share what he saw and He describes for us:

III. The Christ Of This Book in verses (9-20) And He is NOT like He was when He left! Let's look at how:

1. He revealed Himself to John (9-11) You need to be aware of:

a. John's suffering on Patmos John was for many years the leader and overseer of the churches in what we would call Asia Minor, modern Turkey. In the year 95 AD, when he would have been an old man of at least eighty, he was arrested. Tradition says that he was first thrown into a vat of boiling oil but emerged unharmed. So Domitian banished him from the Roman Empire because he wouldn't quit preaching or deny Jesus. He was sent into exile on this tiny, rocky 13 square mile island off the coast of Asia called Patmos. Victorinus, the first commentator on

John's book in the 200's, says that John was sentenced to hard labor in the mines or quarries there. William Ramsey writes: *Banishment combined with hard labor for life was one of the grave penalties. Many Christians were punished in that way. It was in its worst forms a terrible fate: like the death penalty it was preceded by scourging, and it was marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground in a dark prison, and work under the lash of military overseers. It is an unavoidable conclusion that this was St. John's punishment.* In the midst of this incredible suffering, tradition says that it was in a cave in the rock that:

b. John saw a vision It was not a dream, for he was fully awake. He was transported by the Spirit to another place, to heaven. Paul mentioned an experience like this happening to him once in 2 Cor. 12 and comments, *Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows!* The spirit of God took John in an instant out of his squalor and suffering all the way to heaven and He saw Jesus! And He tells us what Jesus looked like (12-16). The best way I know to describe Him is to say that:

2. He has been restored to His pre-incarnate glory, the very thing He prayed for in **Jn. 17:5**. All the glory that He had with the Father before the world came into being was restored to Him! Oh look at Him, dressed as our great High Priest in a long robe with a golden sash around His chest, His face shining with all the brightness that knocked Paul to the ground on the Damascus Road and blinded him! His voice is so loud and powerful that the whole earth can hear it and His words are like a sharp sword going out of His mouth to slay His enemies. He is no longer "gentle Jesus, meek and mild"; He is no longer the beaten man who was dragged onto a cross and nailed there to die! He is the Master of the Universe! He is the Lord of Glory! John's reaction to seeing Him was immediate (17a). It knocked him out! He fainted dead away, the sight was so grand. He was the disciple who was closest to Jesus, who was His cousin and confidant on earth, but when he sees Him as He is now, he cannot stand in His glorious Presence! Listen, when we're suffering down here in our exile, when we have been pressed and squeezed to the end of our endurance so that we literally believe that Patmos will be the place of our killing, as its meaning is, we need to see Jesus as He really is. Stephen saw Him! As the rocks were pelting his body, he cried out, *Look, I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!* And in that instant, it came home to him that his very death was gain and he forgave his own murderers! Listen, our Jesus is not some weak being struggling to boost His lagging forces in battle; He is the Ruler of the Universe, the One in charge, the One against whom there is no rebellion! That's who He is and:

3. He is sending a message to His Church (17b-20) Look closely at what He has to say. First of all, He says to John and to us:

a. Do not be afraid! Some of us may be thinking, "If I thought of Jesus like that, I'd be afraid of Him!" But He says, "It is ME; don't be afraid!" I am still the same Jesus; I am still the One who loves you! It is the same thing He said to John in the boat that night on the sea of Galilee in the middle of the storm when He came walking on the water, *It is I; don't be afraid!* It is what He said to John in the darkest night of his life, exhausted in a dark cave on an island forgotten by the world, *It is I; don't be afraid!* It is what He says to us when the circumstances of our lives threaten to sweep over our boat and drown us in the depths, *It is I; don't be afraid!* But why not, we ask, and Jesus answers:

b. I am alive eternally! "You know that I died. You believe that part of the story well, but now believe this, *I am alive forever more! I am the Living One! I AM LIFE!* So, you are not alone. You are not forsaken. You are not forgotten. I am alive and well and on My throne! And guess what?"

c. I govern life and death! "I hold the keys! By my death and resurrection, I bought them. Satan no longer has the power of death! He can't do anything that I don't let him. If he kills you there on that island, he's only doing my will to send you home! I am in charge! Not Caesar, not some emperor or king, not some earthly tyrant or government. The king's heart is in My hand and I turn it wherever I wish! I RULE! I have a plan in place; I plan to come again and set this world straight! But meanwhile down there in that dark empire, you are not alone because:"

d. I am in the midst of you! "Here you are like 7 lampstands, 7 menorahs, standing there all over the coast of Asia, 7 suffering churches. And now that you can see ME, where am I? I am right there in the midst of you! Right where I said I would be! I promised to be with you always, to the very end of the age and I keep my promises. I am right there with you! I am among you, in your very midst! I am not sitting up here in heaven on My throne watching you fight all my battles; I am right there with you! And because I am:"

e. You are My Light in a dark world! "The world I've put you in is a dark place. It's riddled with suffering and injustice. Terrorists blow up unsuspecting people; horrible diseases cause millions to suffer, genocidal governments wipe out innocent victims because their skin is the wrong color. For all of the good things I created, the world is a dark place, but I've put you in it as My lights. You are the city set on a hill for all to see. You are the light that isn't hidden under a bushel, but set up on a lampstand to give light to all who are in the house. You are the light of the world! You are the world's only hope! Through you they can see me! Go and shine My light! Go and build my church! And remember this:"

f. I hold you in My hand! The seven stars are the “angels” of the seven churches. We’re not sure whether that literally refers to heavenly angels or to the human messengers, the leaders of those churches, who may have come to John on that island for his direction. I rather think it applies to us, to His leaders and to His church. He said, “*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.* - John 10:27-30. I’ve got you the whole time! I’m holding you in My powerful hand! You are safe in me!”

Do you know how John’s story ended? Domitian said, “John, I sentence you to suffer and die on Patmos! You’ll never set foot in my empire again. You’ll never preach this Christ again!” But 18 months later Domitian’s body lay rotting in a tomb; all his edicts were annulled by the Roman Senate. John was back in Asia among His beloved churches and the vision Jesus gave him was spreading among the churches throughout the Roman Empire to encourage churches everywhere. Only 85 years later, on the 17th of July in the year 180 a group of 6 believers from Scillium in modern Tunisia, North Africa, stood before a Roman Proconsul. We believe the record we have may be the actual transcript of their trial. It reads like this: “*Saturninus the proconsul said: You can win the indulgence of our lord the Emperor, if you return to a sound mind. Speratus, the spokesman for the group said: We have never done ill, we have not lent ourselves to wrong, we have never spoken ill, but when ill-treated we have given thanks; because we pay heed to our Emperor. Saturninus the proconsul said: We too are religious, and our religion is simple, and we swear by the genius of our lord the Emperor, and pray for his welfare, as you also ought to do. Speratus said: If you will peaceably lend me your ears, I can tell you the mystery of simplicity. Saturninus said: I will not lend mine ears to you, when you begin to speak evil things of our sacred rites; but rather swear by the genius of our lord the Emperor. Speratus said: The empire of this world I know not; but rather I serve that God, whom no man has seen, nor with these eyes can see. I have committed no theft; but if I have bought anything I pay the tax; because I know my Lord, the King of kings and Emperor of all nations. Saturninus the proconsul said to the rest: Cease to be of this persuasion. Speratus said: It is an ill persuasion to do murder, to speak false witness. Saturninus the proconsul said: Be not partakers of this folly. Cittinus said: We have none other to fear, save only our Lord God, who is in heaven. Donata said: Honour to Caesar as Caesar: but fear to God. Vestia said: I am a Christian. Secunda said: What I am, that I wish to be. Saturninus the proconsul said to Speratus: Do you persist in being a Christian? Speratus said: I am a Christian. And with him they all agreed. Saturninus the proconsul said: Will you have a space to consider? Speratus said: In a matter so straightforward there is no considering. Saturninus the proconsul said: What are the things in your chest? Speratus said: Books and epistles of Paul, a just man. Saturninus the proconsul said: Have a delay of thirty days and bethink yourselves. Speratus said a second time: I am a Christian. And with him they all agreed. Saturninus the proconsul read out the decree from the tablet: Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Vestia, Secunda and the rest having confessed that they live according to the Christian rite, since after opportunity offered them of returning to the custom of the Romans they have obstinately persisted, it is determined that they be put to the sword. Speratus said: We give thanks to God. Nartzalus said: Today we are martyrs in heaven; thanks be to God. Saturninus the proconsul ordered it to be declared by the herald: Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Veturius, Felix, Aquilinus, Laetantius, Januaria, Generosa, Vestia, Donata and Secunda, I have ordered to be executed. They all said: Thanks be to God.” All were executed but at the end of that document, some Christian later penned these words: And so, they all together were crowned with martyrdom; and they reign with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.” The church got the message. “Do not be afraid. I am alive forever and I hold the keys of life and death. I am the true King. Shine My light where you are. I am with you and you are safe in My hand.” That message is for you too; have you gotten it?*

Revelation: Things To Come

The Church: Persevering and Persecuted - 2:1-11

As we move into chapter two, it is important that we understand who John is writing to. Look at 1:4. These seven churches were actual churches that not only existed in John’s day, but John had been the pastor or bishop of the church of Ephesus for many years and these churches in Asia, today the modern province of Anatolia in western Turkey, were part of his flock and they looked to him for leadership. They form a horseshoe shape beginning with Ephesus and stretching round to Laodicea. There were more churches than these in the province and why Jesus chose to address these and not others, we don’t know, but it seems to be inferred that these churches had sent messengers to John who was suffering at hard labor on the island of Patmos about 40 miles off the coast to get his directions and word for them. Meanwhile, that Lord’s Day Jesus appeared to John and gave him this great vision of Himself which we looked at in chapter 1. And the first thing Jesus did in that vision was to give a message to John to convey to each church through its messenger. And thus, we have what we’ve come to call:

I. The Letters To The Seven Churches In Revelation 2-3 But let’s talk about them as a whole before we begin to read them. As I said:

1. Jesus sent a personal message to each church through its leader Each message begins the same **(1, 8)** *To the angel of the church in...* That word *angel* means *messenger* and can be and is often used of human messengers which makes more sense in this context; after all, why would Jesus write a letter to angels in heaven? These messengers

were probably key leaders, pastors from the churches, coming to John for instruction and advice now that he was absent from them. But think about this: instead of human direction, they get a message direct from Jesus! What if we answered our GBC phone on Monday and the voice said, "This is heaven calling; the next voice you hear will be that of Jesus Christ Himself! And Jesus comes on the line and says, 'This is how I see what is going on in Glenside Bible Church and here's what I command you to do about it!'" How would we feel? Well, that's exactly what each of these churches got!

2. each message was an evaluation of the spiritual state of the church To each one, Jesus says the same thing, / *KNOW...* verses (2, 9). That's a comforting and at the same time a scary thought! He knows what's truly going on. He is not impressed by a fancy PowerPoint or flowery words. He sees right into our hearts, all of our hearts. He knows all the good things about us and all the bad things. You can see that as He talks to each church. There are things that He commends and encourages and things that He condemns and warns strongly about. But before you wipe your brow and say, "Phew, I'm glad we're never going to get a message from Jesus like that...", let me assure you that we already have!

3. these messages were intended to be read and applied by all of us, both as churches and individuals. After every message, look what He says in verses (7, 11). Each of these churches was typical of other churches then, down through the ages and now! The people in these churches are typical of believers in churches today. These letters were intended to be read by the whole church worldwide and to be read to the church down through the centuries so that as each of us hears the message and we are able to see ourselves or our church in them, WE can hear what the Spirit is saying to US! So, as we read and study these, keep your EARS OPEN! Listen for what the Spirit is saying to GBC; listen for what He's saying to YOU personally! And let's begin with:

II. The Letter Jesus Wrote The Church At Ephesus (1-7) Ephesus was a seaport on the southwestern coast. Politically, it had become the capital of the province and the Roman governor resided there. It was known as "the supreme metropolis of Asia". Commercially, it was at the convergence of three major highways and the center of trade for the region. Religiously, the city was the home of one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world, the great Temple of Diana, the goddess of fertility, and it was the center of the cult of her worship, with thousands of priests and priestesses involved in her worship, many of whom were cult prostitutes. We read in Acts that the church there began 40 years earlier with Paul, Priscilla and Aquila stopping there on his second missionary journey, but Paul soon returned and spent 3 years in the city building the church. Great things happened during that time; the Gospel went out from there to the whole province and at last the Diana cult suffered so much that the silversmiths who made images were losing their business and launched an attack on Paul! Later the church was pastored by Timothy and eventually by the Apostle John himself until he was exiled. Now let's look more closely at:

1. how the believers in Ephesus were living in verses (2-3). Jesus says:

a. they were actively and energetically laboring for Christ They were busy. They were sharing their faith with others around them. They were helping the poor and the needy. They were meeting for worship and teaching and discipling others. And they worked hard at it; they sacrificed heavily of their time and their money. They didn't just "attend church"; their faith was at the core of their lives and they were really living it out. And it wasn't easy:

b. they were persevering through many hardships Twice Jesus mentions their perseverance, that they kept on in the face of many hardships. Some of them were, no doubt, thrown out by their families for joining a despised and illegal cult. Others were fired from their jobs or people refused to do business with them because they were "Christians". Some may have been arrested and brought before the proconsul, but none of this stopped them; they stood firm in their faith and kept right on serving Jesus, never growing weary of it, just like our brothers and sisters do in Kyrgyzstan and so many other places in the world today. What's more, Jesus says that:

c. they were spiritually discerning and faithful They didn't just believe everyone who came along and taught strange things. They were mature; they were able to see when somebody was a false apostle. They compared what he taught to what they had been taught by Paul and Timothy and John and if he was false, they did something about it and threw them out of the fellowship! And morally:

d. they were living holy lives (6) The Nicolaitans were the libertarians of their day. They claimed to be followers of Christ but lived licentiously. They approved of sacrificing to idols and of the immorality that went on. They brought the horrid practices of their culture right into their faith as so many churches have done today. But the Ephesian church didn't buy into that; in fact, they hated it, just like Jesus does! You wouldn't find them debating about the validity of gay marriage or ordaining homosexuals or encouraging their youth to simply be careful and use condoms! Holiness mattered to them.

They sound a lot like some of us, don't they! And Jesus encourages them by saying, "I know all of that; I see it; I haven't forgotten it and I'm glad for it. It pleases Me! Keep it up! BUT there is one thing I have a problem with..." Note:

2. what Jesus said to admonish them (4) He says:

a. you have left the motive which first moved you to all this: love! In nearly 40 years, a whole next generation of believers had come along. Imagine GBC or one of the congregations that combined to form it as it was 40 years ago! Those folks are all in heaven and here we are today! So it was at Ephesus and to their credit, they were doing all the right things! They were following in the pattern they had learned! But they had lost something important; they had lost the motive that drove it all. They had drifted away from the passionate, zealous love they had in the beginning. When they were first saved out of paganism and knew that all their sins were forgiven and that they were sure of heaven, they loved Jesus with all their hearts. They couldn't wait to talk to Him, to hear His Word, to tell others about Him, to fall at His feet in worship. They loved Him so that they would gladly die for him, gladly endure any hardship, any suffering. And they were still doing all of these things! Only now they were going through the motions without the motive. Their love had been reduced to duty. They were doing what they knew they were supposed to do; they were doing it faithfully, but it lacked the one thing Jesus wanted most. He said the first and greatest commandment is what? To love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength! Remember Paul's words, *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.* - 1 Cor. 13:1-3. What a call to us to examine our motives! Many of us are busy teaching Sunday School, working with Pioneer Clubs, holding flea markets, in men's groups and ladies' groups and home groups and Bible studies. But why are we doing it all? I love the chorus that says, *To love the Lord our God is the heartbeat of our mission, the spring from which our service overflows...* Is it? Jesus said to the Ephesians, "I know it isn't!" and then warned them:

b. you must return to it or lose your privilege of light-bearing! (5) Do you remember how it was when you first invited Christ into your life? How filled with gratitude and love to Him you were? Go back there! Realize that you've drifted away and run back! Fall in love with Him all over again! If you don't, you'll lose a great privilege. He won't use you to bear His light in a dark world anymore! He'll blow out the light and pack away your lampstand. The city of Ephesus was sacked by the Goths, devastated by earthquakes and eventually abandoned altogether, its inhabitants scattered to the winds, its believers gone. Its light went out. I can tell you about a church I know right now, once thriving and vibrant in their neighborhood, still doing all those good things, busy and active and persevering, but dwindling more and more each year as they refuse to change, refusing to acclimate and reach out to their changed neighborhood, refusing to participate in the Harvest Crusade because they have doctrinal issues, losing young people and younger families one after the other. And one day soon there'll be a big stone building that's just an empty shell. Their light is flickering; it's going out. And unless they get back their first love, some other ethnic congregation will probably end up with that building and be the light they should have been. That story has been repeated a thousand times over; I pray it never becomes our story, but it could easily be! Here's:

3. what Jesus wants us to remember (7): You will eat from the tree of life in Paradise! You'll do what Adam never had the right to do! His whole life he could never go back into that beautiful garden and eat from the tree of life which was planted for him! His sin kept him from it! But Jesus washed away all your sins, every last one. He has opened the door to God's new Eden, the Paradise of Heaven, for you and you will eat from the tree of His very own life forever and ever! Ponder on that! Picture that! That will keep you in love with Him! Now let's move on to:

III. The Letter Jesus Wrote The Church At Smyrna (8-11) 40 miles north of Ephesus was Smyrna, today called Izmir, a thriving city of 200,000 in that day. Spanning it was the "golden street" with temples to Cybele and Zeus at either end and Apollo, Asclepius and Aphrodite along the way. More notably, Smyrna was a center of Emperor worship. It won the right from the Roman Senate in 23 AD to be the first to build a temple in honor of Tiberius. Under Domitian, emperor worship became compulsory for every citizen under threat of death. Once a year every citizen had to burn incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar and say "Caesar is Lord", after which he was given a certificate. Nowhere was life more perilous for believers than here, so you can guess:

1. what the believers in Smyrna were suffering Verse (9) tells us:

a. they were living in persecution They had to meet in secret. They could not be open about their faith. They had to be careful always and try to find ways to avoid getting put in that position of having to swear loyalty. Believers in Afghanistan today are so reluctant to meet because they can't trust one another. You never know who might be a false pretender who will turn you in and the Taliban will come knocking at your door in the middle of the night. You share your faith discreetly with people whom you know to be sincerely seeking slowly over time. Then there were the Jews in town who had a particular hatred for them, so that instead of siding with believers, they sided with the pagans and created more hassle for them and turned them in! Imagine believers in Saudi Arabia today where it is a capital offense to convert from Islam, how they must live. At one point, Iran introduced a new law making the death penalty *mandatory* for those who convert from Islam. Our Cyprus team met Iranians who had fled from there and are now believers. If they are sent back, they face certain death! This is no ancient edict; it is very real in our world today! And because of their faithfulness and unwillingness to compromise and bow to the emperor:

b. they were living in poverty Disowned by family, cast out by friends, left to fend for themselves and having to stay off the radar screen while eking out a living somehow, their life was literally one of *abject poverty* amid the abundance of wealth in their city. And look:

2. what Jesus said to encourage them First:

a. don't lose hope; God knows what you are suffering (8-9) Jesus says twice, "I know! I know what you are going through. I have not forgotten you. I have not sent you there to suffer and left you. I know the persecution; I know the poverty; I know the pain of being slandered and lied about and betrayed. I know...I became dead, remember? I was sentenced to death before a Roman governor! I was mocked and spit on and I died a cruel death - so I KNOW! I understand! I haven't asked you to go through something I haven't already gone through first, for you!" Second:

b. don't be afraid; God controls what you are suffering (10a) "Greater persecution is coming but it will be limited; it will only last 10 days!" We don't know exactly what Jesus meant by that; some think it points to the 10 official decrees of persecution beginning with Nero in 64 and ending with Diocletian in 250 AD. But each wave only lasted for a time and ended. Domitian's awful decree ended with his death 18 months after Jesus said this. He controls and He limits what you suffer, so don't live in fear. He's in control. Thirdly:

c. don't give up; God will reward what you are suffering (10b) Don't be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do! Stand firm, even if it sentences you to death, because I have you given you the martyr's crown of life that lasts forever! Look at:

3. what Jesus wants us to remember (11): I like to put this simply, **Born once, you die twice; born twice, you die only once!** If you are only born once, you will die twice. Your body will die and then your spirit will be cast into a lake of fire which is the second death, eternal death! But if you are born twice, once physically and then born again by the Spirit of God, you will only die once! You will surely not die in eternity! You will never be touched by the lake of fire that will swallow up all your enemies! So be faithful!

The Apostle John had a young disciple by the name of Polycarp whom he personally taught. He surely saw and read these words. Later in life he actually became the bishop or overseer of the church at Smyrna. About 70 years after John wrote this, when he was an elderly man, Polycarp fulfilled these very words personally. He was arrested, taken from his home and brought before the Roman proconsul and here is the record of what happened: *...the proconsul was insistent and said: "Take the [Emperor's] oath and I shall release you. Curse Christ." Polycarp said: "Eighty-six years I have served him and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" And when the proconsul kept on and said, "Swear by the fortune of Caesar," Polycarp answered "If you vainly suppose that I shall swear by the fortune of Caesar, as you say, and pretend that you do not know who I am, listen plainly: I am a Christian."....But the proconsul said: "I have wild beasts. I shall throw you to them if you do not change your mind. But Polycarp said, "Call them. For repentance from what is better to what is worse is not permitted to us, but it is noble to change from what is evil to what is righteous." And again, he said to him, "I shall have you consumed with fire, if you despise the wild beasts, unless you change your mind." But Polycarp said: "The fire you threaten burns but an hour and is quenched after a little; for you do not know the fire of the coming judgment and everlasting punishment that is laid up for the unbelieving. But why do you delay? Come, do what you will."* [Early Christian Fathers, Martyrdom of Polycarp, pp. 152-3]. They built a pyre of wood and placed him in the middle. When he had prayed and committed his soul to God with thanksgiving, they lit the pyre. It burst quickly into a huge flame but in amazement the crowd watched as the flames curved outward around his body in an arch and never touched him! At last, when the governor saw that he could not be burned, he ordered a soldier to go near and pierce him with a dagger and that's how he died. Nearly a hundred years old, Polycarp never lost his first love; He still passionately loved his King for saving him. He persevered through a century of suffering and was faithful even unto death. And just as the earthly fire couldn't touch him, so the flames of the second death will never even come near him. He gained the crown of life. So will you. Follow his example.

Revelation: Things To Come

The Church: Compromised and Complacent - 2:12-29

Jesus has appeared to the Apostle John there in his exile on Patmos and in this vision, Jesus is giving John messages to write to the leaders of seven churches in the province of Asia, churches which had been under John's care and oversight and who were looking to him for leadership. The third and fourth churches Jesus writes to are actually pretty much alike. They have a particular problem in common and I have chosen two adjectives to try to describe it. The first one is *compromised* and, in the sense I'm using the word, it means *to expose or make vulnerable to danger*. I read the story of two young women who lost their lives in a fire that swept through their apartment as they slept. Their home was equipped with a smoke detector that was in good working order, but it hadn't gone off. Fire inspectors concluded that this safety device had been deactivated for a party that was held the night before. Someone had disconnected the unit to keep it from sounding off because of the smoke from cooking or candles. So, their safety was *compromised*; they were made vulnerable and exposed to danger by something they chose to do. And the second adjective is *complacent*, which the dictionary

says means *pleased with oneself or one's situation, often without awareness of some potential danger or defect*. Those two women went to sleep happy, blissfully unaware and uncaring about the danger they had made themselves vulnerable to by disabling the smoke detector - and it cost them their lives. Like the two women, these two churches were making choices that compromised their own spiritual safety and went to sleep, complacently unaware that danger was creeping upon them. So, Jesus writes to warn them. Let's begin by looking at:

I. The Letter Jesus Wrote The Church At Pergamum (12-17) The city of Pergamum lay about 65 miles north of Smyrna and, like both Ephesus and Smyrna, it was a rich and important city. It was a center of knowledge. Its claim to fame was its great library of 200,000 volumes, second only to the Egyptian city of Alexandria. Several centuries earlier, when King Eumenes II was planning to build the library, the king of Egypt tried to prevent him by stopping the export of papyrus which was made from the reeds of the Nile delta and was the common writing material of that day. So, Eumenes developed a new material to write on from dried, stretched animal skins scraped thin. It became known as vellum or parchment, but in Greek its name was *pergamene*, meaning *from Pergamum*, and it was what all of Europe wrote on for the next 1000 years until the art of papermaking finally arrived from China. Religiously, Pergamum was a world-renowned center of pagan religions. Its chief deities were Dionysius, the royal god of kings (represented as a bull) and Asclepius, the savior god of healing, who was represented as a snake and whose devotees came from all over the world to seek healing in the courtyard by contact with hundreds of slithering reptiles. On the acropolis or hill overlooking the city stood the great open-air altar of Zeus, 100 ft. long and 35 feet high, listed by some among the wonders of the ancient world. Besides all these there were three temples dedicated to the worship of the Emperor. So I want you to take particular note of:

1. how Jesus encouraged the believers in Pergamum (12-13) Now, because we preachers like to neatly categorize things and make them fit into outlines, Pergamum usually gets a bad rap because we focus on the following verses about how they had compromised themselves and minimize these two. One article I read said after quoting them, *The Lord's critique offered little praise and hinted strongly at the church's spiritual decline...* That's not what I just heard, did you? Jesus said, *I know where you live!* He was acknowledging that:

a. they lived in a particularly hard place Jesus said, "Satan has his throne there!" Some think that's a cynical reference to that great altar of Zeus towering above the city. Others say that from earliest times Babylon had been the center of Satan's pagan, idolatrous operations on earth and that center had by Christ's time been shifted to Pergamum and later moved to Rome. I just think Jesus was saying, "I know how hard it is to live where you live! I know how tough it is to stand firm and trust in Me when Satan is so hard at work all around you and trying so hard to destroy you!" We like to think we have it tough, that our society has gone so far downhill that it's tough to be a Christian here. That's baloney! The United States is one of the easiest places in the world to be a Christian! If you don't think so, try living in Kyrgyzstan where the government may shut down your little church and tell you that you can't meet, where your family and your village will throw you out for becoming a Christian. Try living in Iran where the church has mushroomed from nothing to literally millions in spite of the fact that believers are watched and their secret gatherings are infiltrated and the death penalty may soon be made *mandatory* by law for anyone who converts! Try living in Thailand, a world center of sex trade where thousands of foreign pedophiles come each year to find children, where multiple thousands of women are sold into sexual slavery or fall into legal prostitution through poverty and AIDS is a leading cause of death and still stay pure! Listen, if you can't live for Jesus here, you can't do it anywhere! We've got it easy, but Pergamum was one of those kinds of places; they had it hard and yet, Jesus says:

b. they had remained faithful even unto death They didn't renounce their faith, even when put on trial. We don't know much about Antipas from early sources, but tradition says that John had ordained him as the bishop or overseer of the church in Pergamum. He was their pastor. About three years before Jesus said this, Antipas was seized and martyred for his faith. But even that didn't stop them. I wonder if your pastor was arrested and executed this week how many would be willing to gather next week. They were remaining true to His Name and not renouncing their faith, even under the threat of death, a threat that wasn't hypothetical, but had been made very real to them. These were not backslidden, half-hearted believers; Jesus was pleased with them, but warned them strongly about:

2. the teaching that had ensnared some of them (14-15) What's that all about? Well, to find out what Balaam taught let's look at the story back in Numbers. Balaam was a prophet-for-hire. Balak, the King of Moab had summoned him to put a curse on Israel as they were camped in his territory before crossing Jordan into the land. But God caused Balaam to bless them instead, not once but three times! This made Balak really angry and he sent him home, but Balaam must have really wanted to stay in his good graces, so he gave him some devilishly good advice before he left. Look at **Num. 31:15-16**. Balaam's advice, what he taught Balak, turned Israel away from the Lord and 24,000 of them died under judgment in a plague. To see how it worked, look at **25:1-3**. The Moabites were Baal worshippers and Baal worship had lots of feasts and celebrations, so Balaam said, "Don't attack the Israelites! Show friendliness and hospitality! Invite them, particularly the men, to join with you in your celebrations! And get the girls to do the inviting!" So quite a number were:

a. they were lured by the physical activity of feasting Everybody loves a party where there's lots of food and drink and dancing! After 40 years in a desert eating manna, that would begin to look pretty good, wouldn't it?! But Baal was a fertility God and his worship included not only feasting, but orgies and so:

b. it led to the enticement of sexual immorality The promise of freely available sex with young beautiful women is a powerful lure to a man and many yielded to it. Besides, it was a sign of the ceasing of hostility. "We will give our daughters to your sons; we can intermarry; let us live together in peace. Come, enjoy yourselves!". And they did, but:

c. that led to the spiritual harlotry of idolatry The women bowed down and worshipped Baal and their new male friends bowed with them, no doubt thinking, "Boy, this is the life! Our God has all these rules, but if we follow Baal, look how free we can be! We can have all the things we were told were wrong! Let's switch!" So, they bowed down to false gods and became unfaithful to the Lord.

But it was a trap! The original says Balak cast a "stumbling-block" before them; he hid a snare in their path and lured them to step on the trigger. Their very lives were in danger and they were totally unaware. Now in John's day, a group had arisen that taught this very same thing; they were called the Nicolaitans. They said, "Yes, let's be followers of Christ, but let's not make enemies of our culture and society. Let's be open to them. Everybody goes to the temples of the idols to eat and joins in the feasts. We can join in with them and still hold our faith to ourselves. And that old morality that we've been taught is outdated anyway. Sex is just a normal part of human life like breathing or eating. We can follow Jesus and participate with them in their sexual orgies at the temple. It's therapeutic." Does any of that sound familiar? There were people among the little house churches in Pergamum teaching that and there are people that have entered into many of our mainline churches today teaching the same thing! "Christianity is not exclusive. Other religions hold truth too. We can meet and worship together. We need to lay down our outdated rules. Gay couples should be allowed to get married. People should be free to engage in sex as long as they do it in a responsible fashion!" The Nicolaitans are not gone; their descendants are in the church today! But look:

3. how Jesus warned the church at Pergamum (16) They needed to repent! But of what? The church at large was NOT doing these things! They were standing against their society and suffering and even dying for it. So, what does He mean?

a. the church needed to repent of allowing this teaching in their midst They were letting it go on and doing nothing about it. They were letting Satan set a dangerous snare in their midst that was bound to result in spiritual disaster. But the stronger warning was that:

b. the false teachers themselves were in danger of judgment Jesus said, "If you don't put a stop to this and cast them out, I WILL soon do something to protect My church! I won't tolerate this!" We'll see just what He means later, but here's:

4. what Jesus wants us to remember (17) What does that mean? ***We are holy intimates of Christ!*** We don't need some indulgent feast; Jesus is our Bread of Life, the holy hidden manna that only we get to sustain us. We don't need the intimacy of sexual immorality; we are intimates of Christ! We are declared holy and pure, given the white stone, brought close to Him in personal relationship, given a name that only we and Him can know! Everything Satan tries to offer you, you already have something better!

Now let's look at:

II. The Letter Jesus Wrote The Church At Thyatira (18-29) It is almost the same letter! About 45 miles east of Pergamum was the city of Thyatira, today called Akhisar. Thyatira was largely a commercial city which seems to have had more guilds of craftsmen than any other city in the province. It was known for the manufacture of a particular, expensive, purple dye known as Tyrian purple (we'd call it a deep red or maroon), which was actually derived from sea snails. It was sought after to dye cloth for its permanence of color and was known as "royal purple" or "imperial purple". In Acts 16 Paul met a woman over in Philippi named Lydia who was a businesswoman, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. Now look at:

1. how Jesus encouraged the believers in Thyatira (18-19) Basically, Jesus was very pleased with them:

a. they were doing well in every area They were busy and active serving Jesus. And they even had the love which Jesus said the Ephesian church had lost. They were passionate about Him. They were trusting Him and, like all the previous churches, they had persevered and not given up their faith despite the difficulties they faced in their town. And not only were they doing well:

b. they were actually growing and increasing, not necessarily in numbers, but they were maturing in their faith, being more bold and firm, serving more and more with all their hearts.

Again, like Pergamum, this church usually gets a bad rap because of what comes next, but it's undeserved. They were doing really well, but just as in their sister city, look at:

2. how Jesus warned the believers in Thyatira (20-23) Here was a new form of the same problem. There was a lady who was part of the body there. Jesus calls her Jezebel, but we don't know if that was her actual name or if He was calling her that because she was being used to lead people away from the Lord and into idolatry, just like wicked

Queen Jezebel did in Israel centuries before. At any rate old "Jezzie" claimed to be a prophetess; she claimed to have the gift of getting revelation directly from God. She claimed to know mysteries and have secret knowledge from God to impart to the church. But the bottom line is that she was teaching the people that it was OK to participate in idolatrous feasts and immorality; she was just another Nicolaitan! So, while the majority of the believers were being faithful, where they were failing was simply this:

a. they tolerated the presence of a false prophetess who misled others, instead of doing something about it, instead of exposing her for the servant of Satan that she was and throwing her out! Again, their spiritual safety was being compromised and they were complacently letting her do it, unaware that she was planting the seeds of their own destruction. Now Jesus says that:

b. He has been patient with her, allowing her time to repent He cared even about her. She started out probably as a seemingly genuine believer but had fallen into this sin and over time had become a false teacher. He still wanted her to be saved. But she was unwilling, so He says:

c. He will bring judgment on her and those who follow her He will give her and those who listen to her a bed of suffering! Intense suffering! Intense suffering that is going to lead to people dying! Jesus is not going to continue to tolerate this in His church; He's going to take them off the scene. But look:

3. how Jesus encouraged the believers in Thyatira (24-25) To the rest, to the faithful ones, He said simply, **Hold fast!** Keep on! Keep being what you are and doing what you are! I have nothing to add; just stay away from her Satan-ic teaching and keep on! Here's:

4. what Jesus wants us to remember (26-29) We will judge the nations! We'll be with Him when they're gathered before Him and He separates the sheep from the goats. And we'll have a part in it. We'll be asked to rule in His Kingdom, to know right from wrong! We have not only that right, but that responsibility, even now! Here's:

III. The Point: Compromise and Complacency Kill The Church When you let these kinds of people into the church and tolerate their teaching, you've opened the gas valve on the stove and gone off to sleep! Do something about it! Remember over at Corinth there was a man in the body who was living in immorality, sleeping with his father's wife, and the church was tolerant and accepting. And Paul wrote them: *I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."* - **1 Cor. 5:9-13**. Brothers and sisters, we live in a day when the morals and the values of our now-pagan culture are being more and more tolerated and even taught in the church. Our own young people are the ones who are the most susceptible to it. And why? Because they're not seeing in us what the church saw in Antipas of Pergamum whose story was no doubt repeated for generations.

Tradition gives us actually two stories of what brought about his death. One says that the priests serving that famous temple of the god Asklepios, the snake, were the first to accuse Antipas who was by then very old, and to have him arrested. They said that the demons who appeared to them in a dream, had told them they could not accept sacrifices because Antipas with his continuous praying was chasing them away from the town. The priests summoned a large number of people against Antipas and began to interrogate and to force him to deny Christ and to worship idols. Antipas said to them: "When your so-called gods, lords of the universe are frightened of me, a mortal man, and must flee from this city, do you not recognize that, by this, your faith is an aberration?" The other story says simply that Antipas, having been accused of being a Christian, was brought before a statue of Caesar and told to declare that the emperor was God. With great courage Antipas said that only Jesus was the Lord and that there was no God other than Him. Therefore, the Roman Governor said, "Antipas do you not realize the whole world is against you?". To which Antipas answered, "Then Antipas is against the whole world". In both versions of the story Antipas was condemned to a terrible death; he was placed inside the hollow body of a bronze bull statue and a fire was lit underneath. As he was being roasted alive Antipas was heard from within the bull to glorify God with thanksgiving. He prayed for his flock and for the entire world until his soul parted from his weakened body and ascended among the angels into the Kingdom of Christ. Let Antipas be a powerful reminder to you that the whole world is against us! Our culture is against us. Satan wants us to compromise and join in and lower our standards to participate in sin and to call evil good and to join in the idolatry of those around us. There is tremendous pressure to do it. But so be it! If the whole world is against us, then we are against the whole world! Hold fast to the Savior, no matter if it costs your friends, your family, your job, your worldly possessions or your very life itself.

Revelation: Things To Come

The Church: Dying and Dead - 3:1-6, 14-22

Remember that Jesus has appeared to the Apostle John there in his exile on Patmos and in this vision, Jesus is giving John messages to write to the leaders of seven churches in the province of Asia, churches which had been under John's care and oversight and who were looking to him for leadership. The first two churches Jesus writes to, Ephesus and Smyrna, were persevering in the midst of strong persecution. The third and fourth churches, Pergamum and Thyatira, were compromised and complacent; they were tolerating serious sin in their midst and doing nothing about it, a dangerous practice. The fifth and seventh churches, Sardis and Laodicea (we'll save Philadelphia for last), had degenerated about as far as churches can go. They were dying and in Laodicea's case, I think, already dead. Not physically or in terms of numbers, but in the sense that Paul uses the word to describe the widow who lives to seek her own pleasure, saying she *...is dead even while she lives!* - 1 Tim. 5:6. You know what that's like, because the scripture says that before Christ came into your life and made you spiritually alive, YOU were dead in your sins and you were living in them, following the ways of the world around you (Eph. 2:1). You were a walking, talking, breathing, acting dead person who had no life inside and that's what these two churches were like. Now let's look at:

I. The Letter Jesus Wrote The Church At Sardis (1-6) Sardis was about 30 miles south of Thyatira and was an important city commercially and militarily throughout its history. I think there are two things worth knowing about it. First, at this writing its glory was all in the past. It had an unconquerable fortress at the top of the hill that had only been taken twice. It was the capital city of Asia for the Persian Empire 500 years earlier, wealthy, affluent, politically important, but its glory days were over and it was in severe decline. Second, Sardis was known for its impressive necropolis, the cemetery "of a thousand hills," named for the hundreds of huge burial mounds visible on the skyline. It was a dying city and one obsessed with death. So notice:

1. how Jesus addressed the church in Sardis (1) The church was much like the city in which they lived:

a. they had a reputation [literally, a name] **of being alive but it was in the past** There were still people there who identified themselves as Christians. They still met together and had services, probably ate together, maybe even did some good deeds. In earlier days, they had a name for being faithful followers of Christ, for declaring the Gospel clearly and powerfully. But now they were just a shadow of what they once had been. Jesus said, including verse 2a:

b. they were actually dying and nearly dead This church had become a spiritual necropolis, a cemetery full of spiritually dead people. Again, don't think of this in terms of an empty church building with a handful attending. Churches didn't build buildings until the 300's when Christianity was legalized. Little groups met in homes or wherever they could find a place. And they were still doing it, so what does it mean that they were dead? Well, to me it means that:

(1) many had the name Christian but were not truly born again You know what that's like! It's much more true here and now than it was then. All around you in this culture are people who would say, "I am Christian; I am not Muslim; I am not Buddhist." Or maybe, "I am Catholic or Lutheran" because that's the church they went to when they were young. In fact, they may go to a church on Sunday and sing songs and give some money. They may read liturgy and say prayers. But at the bottom line they believe that because they're baptized or because they belong to a church or because they try to live a good life and do good things that God will let them into heaven. But they have never had the living Christ come and live inside them and transform their hearts. They have a name that should mean they're alive, but they're dead spiritually! In 2008 I sat at the tables of at least a dozen pastors in Kyrgyzstan and asked them to tell me their stories. Every one of them was formerly a Muslim, but when they believed in Jesus, He transformed their lives radically. He put His life in them; they became new people and they stood firm through awful persecution from their families and villages. But many in Sardis had never experienced that, just like many around us haven't. We have whole churches full of people like that here and many in the church at Sardis were like that. Then second, I think it means that:

(2) many who believed had fallen into living like those around them Remember in the parable of the sower Jesus warned that, *Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.* - Mark 4:18-19. There have always been people that make a profession of faith in Christ, yet never really get their souls connected with Him. They let the worries of life overwhelm them or let their desires for money or sex or other things take first place in their lives. They may seem different for a bit but they soon return to living just like everyone else around them. Instead of living for Jesus they live for self and the things of this world. We all know people who say, "Oh yes, I believed when I was 12!" but they're living with their girlfriend, drink heavily on the weekends, have no desire to go to worship and have no clue what the Bible says, because they've never read it. They're spiritually dead. That's how it was in Sardis but look:

2. what Jesus commanded the church at Sardis (2-3) He gives them three important commands. First, He says:

a. Wake up! That is, **realize the dire situation you are in!** Not everyone at Sardis was spiritually dead, but many were and it was getting worse. The church was about to die, about to be in that place where the true faith was fully lost. They needed to wake up from the spiritual lethargy they had been lulled into. Listen, if anything I just said describes you, you need to wake up! You're in danger! You need to be concerned for your soul! One of these days you're going to die and stand before a Holy God and what will happen to you then? Second, He commands them to:

b. Remember! That is, to **return to the truth of the Word of God!** Go back to the truth you've received and heard. Get your Bible out and read what it says. Remember that Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried for you and on the third day He rose again for you! Let the power of the Word of God impact your dull heart. And thirdly:

c. Repent! That is, change your mind! Deliberately **place your trust in Jesus**; invite Him into your life and then obey Him; **change your way of living**. Make Him your Lord and determine to live the life of holiness and purity that He's commanded.

Let me tell you about a friend of mine. He graduated from Princeton Seminary. He came to Abington to be pastor of a church, but he didn't believe the Bible was verbally inerrant. He didn't understand that every one of us needs a new birth. He had a form of religion that he thought would help people be better people but his own marriage fell apart. I went to school with dozens of people just like him. He was spiritually dead and pastor of a congregation composed mostly of dead people just like him. But a fellow pastor from the Lutheran Church across the street befriended him and began to show him the truth from the Scriptures. He began to open his heart and one day the light turned on and He understood. What once were religious facts now became personal. He knew "Jesus loved ME and Jesus died for ME and Jesus saved ME!" His first assignment was to win the members of his own church back to deep personal faith in Christ and he went on to do that. He was dead but he woke up and remembered the truth and repented and found spiritual life! He was transformed! Listen there is hope! Here's:

3. what Jesus wants us to remember (4-6) Notice that:

a. even in this dying church there were some genuine faithful believers There were a few people who truly knew Christ, who had been changed by Him and were living His way. They were not soiling their clothes! And that's probably true of dead churches you may be thinking of today. We have to be careful not to be so proud that we write them off totally. Even in congregations where the Gospel hasn't really been preached for a long time there are still precious souls who get it, who truly believe, who trust in Jesus alone, who love Him and are faithful to Him just like we are and here's what He wants all of us to know:

b. we are destined to walk with Him in absolute purity We'll walk with Him in white. His death has purified us and cleansed us and made us worthy of being in His presence! And what's more:

c. our names will never be removed from the Book of Life In heaven there is a record, a book, a roll book of all those who are the recipients of eternal life and our names are written there. Hallelujah! And He says they will never be erased, never be blotted out. Nobody can take that eternal life away from us. **We are secure in Christ!** Again Hallelujah!

Now let's move on to:

II. The Letter Jesus Wrote The Church At Laodicea (14-22) Laodicea completed the horseshoe and was 100 miles due east of Ephesus. It was a wealthy city, a center of trade. Three things stand out about it to me. First, it was known for the production of a famous fine quality black wool used in the making of garments. Second, it had a famous school of medicine and was particularly known for a special ointment known as "Phrygian powder", an eye salve famous for its cure of eye defects. Third, its water supply arrived through a 6 mile long aqueduct. The water was cool and drinkable at its source, but by the time it got to the city it was tepid, lukewarm. Plus, along the way it picked up calcium carbonate and other minerals. Everybody knew that if you go to Laodicea, you don't drink the water; in fact, it was known as a good means to induce vomiting! And if you keep that in mind, you'll probably understand better:

1. how Jesus addressed the church in Laodicea (14-16) Like the city's water supply, these believers:

a. they were neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm Hierapolis to the north had famous hot springs and they were good for bathing. Colossae to the east had wonderful cold clear water for drinking. But their lukewarm mineral laden water was good for NOTHING! And likewise, they were neither hot with passionate love for Christ, nor cold, standing against him. They were just like the folks at Sardis; they had the reputation of believing, but they were like a body that had just died, neither hot like a living soul, nor cold like a corpse long dead, but merely warm. And:

b. they were in great danger of being rejected by Him altogether Like the awful city water, He was about to vomit them out of His mouth. They were even further down the road than Sardis. If folks at Sardis were dying, folks in Laodicea were already dead. Jesus warned us plainly, *Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not*

prophecy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' - Mat. 7:22-23. Now how can that be? Well look:

2. how Jesus described the church in Laodicea (17) First:

a. they were boastful of their own achievements They were not merely trying hard and hoping they would be good enough for God; they were confident that they were! They looked at their material wealth and their fine wool clothes and their great medical abilities and put their trust in those things. They were just like the Pharisees who did all the right things and were convinced that God looked on them with favor because of how wonderful they were, but:

b. they were blind to their true spiritual need In His eyes they were wretched, pitiful, poor, and naked. They couldn't see their true spiritual condition. How many of the people all around us are exactly like that? They are nice people; they are somewhat religious; they believe in God and pray when they get in trouble, maybe even belong to a church. But they have a nice house and two cars and a good education and a kind disposition and don't really need anything, yet they can't see that they are absolutely lost and in terrible danger of being spit out, of being separated from Christ forever, because they don't know Him! But look:

3. how Jesus entreated the church in Laodicea (18-20) He doesn't treat them as they deserve. He doesn't reject them out of hand and say, "That's it; you've had your chance! I'm done with you!" No, He says:

a. Come to Me; I love you; I want you; I'm knocking! "Forget your gold; I have the real gold I want to give you; I want to give you the true riches! Forget your fine black wool; I want to give you white garments of purity and holiness. Forget your Phrygian eye salve; I want to open your eyes and heal them so you can see spiritually. I love you and that's why I'm chastening you. I've been standing at your door and knocking and knocking and knocking. I want to come in. I want to be in your life. I want to live there and spend eternity together with you! But:"

b. You must make the choice; open the door; repent! "I will not violate your will. I can't open the door; YOU have to do that! You have to choose ME! You have to change your proud attitude and realize that my words are true and that you all your righteousnesses are like filthy rags and invite ME to come in and save you and give you life!"

James had worked for a Fortune 500 company for some 20 years when his world fell apart; his wife left him and took the children to another state. He was depressed and hurting but tried his best not to show it. Eventually in his loneliness he found the courage to ask one of the girls in his office if they could go out. She suggested they go to her church. He says, "When we arrived, I was surprised to see such a small church building. Then when I went in, I was further surprised to find there were no statues, no stained glass windows, no candles, no pipe organ and no altar. Then the pastor came out in a three piece suit. I thought to myself, 'As a church this doesn't even count!' I let my mind drift in and out of the service but on one of my drifts back in, I heard the pastor say something that hit my mind and brought an incredible peace to me. I kept rolling it over and over in my mind so I could remember it for those dark moments I had been having. Afterward I figured, 'This is one strange girl and we have absolutely nothing in common!' Some weeks later I was in a prestigious hotel in Connecticut for a few days. I skipped going out for supper with the other guys. As I sat in my room, deeply depressed about my situation, I suddenly remembered the pastor of that church and how the words he spoke had comforted me. I figured they must have come from the Bible. Then I remembered that they say every hotel room has a Gideon Bible. So I looked around and didn't see it but as I opened the drawer in the bureau next to the bed, there it was and I could see that it was lying open. I lifted it out and put it on the table. My eyes were drawn to the marks of a highlighter on the open page. As I looked closer, my breath caught in my throat as I read, 'Be anxious for nothing...let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' They were the very same words the pastor had said! My heart was thumping in my chest and my mind was spinning. Only God could do that and He did it for me! All I could do was to keep thanking Him over and over! I picked up the telephone and called the girl who had brought me to church. I told her what happened and asked if I could go to church with her again. Soon I responded to an altar call and asked Jesus Christ to come into my life!" Later James married that girl, went into the ministry and became the pastor of Christ's Home here in Warminster! Oh, he would have said he was a Christian, that he believed, but he was lukewarm! He had a form of religion, but denied the very power and life of God. He was proud and thought he had need of nothing, until Jesus brought him down to size through suffering and showed him how much HE loved him personally and wanted to come into his life. Jesus is loving and gracious. He never stops standing at the door and knocking and oh, how happy He is when one of us, like James, finally opens that door! Now here's:

4. what Jesus wants us to remember (21-22): Not only has He come into our lives, but we've entered into His. He gives to us the right to sit with Him on His throne! He has a glorious plan for us which includes being side by side in what He's doing forever. **We will reign with Him!** What a wonderful thing to look forward to! But if we want to sit with Him on His throne then, we have to invite Him in to sit on the throne of our hearts now!

Most of us today have done that already and we know it. But maybe God has brought to your mind people you know and care about that are just like James. Spiritually dead and lukewarm are the same thing. They are sort of religious but lost, depending on themselves and spiritually blind. Pray for them just now, won't you? And if by chance you're here today and you have never received the living Christ personally, know that it is not by chance! It's a Divine appointment. Jesus loves you and is knocking on your door, calling your name. So I'm going to invite you to pray with me...

Revelation: Things To Come

The Church: Alive and Well - 3:7-13

I saved the letter that Jesus wrote to the Church at Philadelphia for last. The reason is that among these seven churches it is unique. It had not lost its first love like Ephesus, nor was it compromising or complacent like Pergamum and Thyatira, much less dying and dead like Sardis and Laodicea. Smyrna is the only other church that Jesus does not chastise for something, but Smyrna seems to have been locked into a time of intense persecution. For her to simply hold on and be faithful in her suffering was all she could do. But Philadelphia was a church on the move. She was facing opposition and persecution also, but somehow, she was advancing and making a difference in spite of it. The city of Philadelphia lay about 23 miles southeast of Sardis on a high plateau and the modern city of Alasehir sits there today. It was named for its founder, King Attalus II, who was called "Philadelphus" which means "brother-lover," because of the extraordinary love he had for his own brother. It was founded about 189 BC to be a mission-city, to disseminate Greek language and culture throughout the provinces of Phrygia and Lydia. It was destroyed by an earthquake in 17 AD and the fear of earthquakes governed the lives of its people for years. It was rebuilt by the emperor Tiberius and renamed Neocaesarea. 50 years later it was renamed again as Flavia. The church there was strong and you ladies will be encouraged to know that it was cared for after John's death by a prophetess named Ammia who is mentioned by early writers with the same regard as Paul's companions Judas and Silas and the prophet Agabus in Acts. In later centuries, long after the surrounding country had fallen to Islam and the Turks, Philadelphia held out as a "Christian city" until it finally fell in 1392. Now, as He writes to the believers there, I want you to notice:

I. Three Things Jesus Declares About Himself (7) Hear it again from Young's Literal Translation: *These things saith he who is holy, he who is true, he who is having the key of David, he who is opening and no one doth shut, and he shutteth and no one doth open!* Jesus is declaring His own character, spelling it out in a triplet. First:

1. He is holy. If you're like me, I usually read statements like that without giving them a second thought. Why does He say that first? What does it mean? It means that **He is totally separate from evil**, He does not and cannot condone sin in any form and that if we want to approach Him and serve Him, that we must be likewise. Peter understood the implication of that, **1 Pet. 1:14-16**. The Philadelphian believers had gotten this one right. There is no criticism in this note of sin creeping into their lives, like it had at Pergamum or Thyatira. They stood for purity without compromise and therein lies the lesson for us as a body. So many churches fail in this very thing; they lower their standards and tolerate things they should be dealing with, and it's not always up front things like immorality. Often, it's things like pride and stubbornness and the need to have power and control or unkindness toward each other or gossip and backbiting. And as a result, Jesus can't use them. They miss out on their mission as a church. Second Jesus declares that:

2. He is true. Another simple statement. What does that mean? I think it means **His nature is unchanging**. John wrote elsewhere, *We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true--even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.* - **1 Jn. 5:20**. Jesus is the real, the true, the genuine, the only God and the only source of eternal life. And He never changes! With Him there is no variableness or shadow of turning. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. His character is the same. His Word is the same; what He said, He will do! His promises and His predictions are sure. We can depend on Him because His Name is *Faithful and True (19:11)*. So many churches have shaped and formed "another Jesus" to believe in, as Paul warned in 2 Cor. 11, one who condones sin, one who is not fully God, one who is not the only way, one whose death is merely an example and not an atoning sacrifice, and one who did not rise bodily from the dead! But that Christ is an impostor! Philadelphia stood for the True Christ and so must we, no matter who stands with us! And here's the point Jesus really wants to make to us:

3. He has complete authority. That phrase about having the key of David goes back to an incident in Isaiah. Shebna had been the steward in charge of the palace under King Hezekiah, but he was using his office for personal gain, taking from the royal treasury to enrich himself. So, here's what God says to him, **Is. 22:20-22**. That key was the key to the palace, the key to the Royal Treasury. When he opened it, it was open and when he shut it, it was shut. He had all authority. And Jesus says, "Now I have the key! The Kingdom of David is MINE! In fact, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. And whatever I do, no one can undo! I control everything!" It means **no one can oppose Him!** Neither Satan himself nor the Emperor nor the governors or soldiers or any of the forces arrayed against the church can do anything He does not allow; they do only what His will and authority have determined ahead of time to complete His purposes. That's the Jesus we worship and look where He wants to go with that statement. Look at:

II. The Opportunity Jesus Offers To A Faithful Church (8) Just as Philadelphia was a city created with a mission to spread its Greek culture, the church at Philadelphia was born with a mission to spread the Gospel to its surrounding region and to the ends of the earth and, if we are faithful like they were:

1. He gifts us with an unopposable opportunity for service What kind of door would He be talking about? It is not a door to prosperity and tranquility and health; it is not a door to a problem-free happy life like you often hear preached today. The New Testament knows no such message. The earth is a war zone and we live in the middle of the Battle of the Ages. Jesus is building His church and sending it out to march against the gates of hell to rescue precious souls into His Kingdom. He has given us our marching orders and He has set before us an open door. He has set before us a place of ministry, an opportunity to be involved. You have heard this morning about a fraction of the open door that He has placed before His body here at Glenside in our community. In our Missions Conference you'll hear about other portions of the open door that God has placed before us around the world, in Nepal and Japan, in Kyrgyzstan, in Liberia. We have open doors in India, in China, in Indonesia, in Paraguay, in Mexico through workers we partner with. All of these are part of the open door of opportunity God has offered us to be involved in in building His kingdom, of marching on the gates of hell and tearing down Satan's wall. And here's the deep part. See that phrase, *set before you*? It is literally, *given before you*. The opportunity to serve is a gift! It's a privilege! God has offered us a commission in His service to change the world. He puts it before us and calls us. He says, "Here! Come, follow Me into this ministry, into this life, into this service. Come, let's change the world; I want to use you; let's build My Kingdom!" And if He has opened the door, nobody can shut it! No matter what they do, no matter what may happen or what opposition you may face, His purpose and His plan will prevail. Now it may not always look like it to you, but neither did the Cross! Whether you seem to succeed or fail by human estimation is not your problem; if you walk through the door He's opened, He wins! Nobody can close that door except Him and until He does, it stays open! Now look at:

2. the reason He offers us this gracious opportunity. Look at the text. **He knows us!** He REALLY knows what has been going on in our lives and He invites us to join Him for three reasons. He offers it literally, *because thou hast a little power*:

a. because we have learned to tap into a little of His power We have no power, no strength of our own. Apart from Him we can do nothing and He knows it. He's not interested in what we can do on our own anyway. But somehow, like Philadelphia, we have learned that He is all powerful and we have learned in some small measure to cry out to Him and receive His power. We have seen HIM change and save people and answer our prayers, so we're learning to lean on Him. And He offers it:

b. because we have obeyed His Word We have not done what we wanted; we have chosen to regard His Word as our command and have pledged ourselves to DO it. That's what Philadelphia did and it's our habit of life also. And He offers it:

c. because we have not denied His Name In the pinch when the pressure was on, Philadelphian believers stood up for Him. They refused to cave in and deny Him, even though it put them in danger. And like them, we have stood for Him unashamedly in our culture.

And that's why Jesus invites us into His service! He wants soldiers who depend on Him, who obey Him and who will stand for Him to the last breath! If that's who you want to be, He wants to give you the privilege of serving Him and He'll put an open door of service before you. But:

3. we must choose to enter the door! He won't shove us through the opening! He won't draft us to enlist. He wants you because you want Him. If you want to go live for self, for your own goals and dreams, you're free to do it. Lots of believers do! But if you're willing to sign up, here are:

III. Three Promises Jesus Makes To Those Who Join Him They are for the believers in Philadelphia and for us today. First of all:

1. He promises us victory over our enemies (9) Evidently those who were giving the believers in Philadelphia the most trouble were Jews, who, of course, weren't acting like godly Jews but like instruments of Satan. Today in modern Turkey, they would be Muslims, like those who attacked and killed three of our brothers in Malatya only a few hundred miles to the east some time ago. Here we might face liberal left-wing activists who call Christians bigots or intellectuals who call our faith a myth. But Jesus says, "I'll make them all come and fall at your feet and acknowledge the truth! I'm going to build My church and the gates of hell will NOT stop it!" - **Mt. 16:18**. Now what does that promise mean? Well:

a. we may see this fulfilled on earth through their conversion Paul was a great persecutor of Christians, but Jesus stopped him in his tracks, blinded him and sent him to a believer to receive salvation. If you read the journal of my Kyrgyzstan trip, you read the story of a young Uighur man who believed and when he went home and told his father, the father went to the mosque to the Imam and said, "What shall I do, my son has become a believer in Jesus?" And the Imam said, "Go home and beat him every day, beat him hard". So every day for a month the father beat his son and instead of cursing or fighting back, the son said to him, "Father, I love you and Jesus loves you!" After a month, the father went back to the Imam and said, "This isn't working; I beat my son every day; I beat him hard. Every time he says 'I love you and Jesus loves you'. What shall I do?" And the Imam said, "Then you must kill

your son!" "Kill my son? He is my son; how can I kill Him?" The Imam said, "If you cannot kill your son, we will help you!" The father replied, "I will think about it." and he went home, got his son, seated him at the table and told him, "Son, I went to the Imam and he says I should kill you. Son, I want to accept your Jesus!" In family after family that I talked to, if the first one to believe was willing to stand up and endure persecution for a year or so, eventually their opponents would believe or at least admit they are truly better off and make peace. Loving your enemies always wins some! But even if we do NOT see it here:

b. we will see this fulfilled at His return - Phil. 2:9-11, *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* And on that day, you'll be seated there right beside Him! All the legions of those who are against us and who oppose us and who have tried to eliminate us will bow in that day before our Savior, at our feet as we stand with Him, and confess His Lordship. We will see true victory. We win! Secondly:

2. He promises us deliverance from the time of His wrath (10) The Scripture everywhere tells us that:

a. there is period of worldwide tribulation coming at the end of this age. Jesus said, *for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.* - **Mt. 24:21** (NAS). It is an hour of trial for the whole world and according to what God showed Daniel, it will last 7 years. In John's vision he goes on to see it visually in chapters 6-19. He sees the wrath of God poured out on the inhabitants of the earth and there will be no place on earth to hide from it. It will be unlike anything the world has ever known! But He promises to Philadelphia and to us that:

b. He will keep us "from" it How will He do that? I say this with genuine love and respect for our dear friends who believe that the church will be preserved "through" the Tribulation, but the Greek says He will keep us "out of" it! How? **By rapturing us out.** I believe in the Rapture of the Church, that *...the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever.* - **1 Thes. 4:16-17.** And that that Rapture will occur BEFORE the hour of trial begins. Because we've been faithful to endure, to press on through many difficulties here, He will spare us FROM that great day of His wrath as He promised in this letter! Third:

3. He promises us eternal reward (11-13) If we serve Him faithfully there's a crown of reward waiting for us and He describes it with two images. First, He says He will make us:

a. a pillar in the Temple of God. Philadelphia was leveled by earthquakes several times. One great ruin there today is the ruin of a great pagan temple and only the pillars still stand. The ancient church knew what that meant. Solomon's Temple had two pillars that held up the roof. They were even given names, Jakin and Boaz, meaning "in him is strength" (2 Chron. 3:15-17). To be a pillar **speaks of our permanence.** We'll stand in His presence permanently; we'll never leave it. We will be perpetually in His Holy Presence. And Jesus will name us, He will write on us:

b. the Name, the Name of the Father, the Name of God's city, the New Jerusalem, and His OWN new Name. Sometimes citizens of these ancient cities who had performed exceptional service were honored by having their names inscribed on the pillar of a temple for all to see. So, this image **speaks of the honor of belonging to Him.** He will proclaim us as His own, mark us as belonging to Him and display us permanently in His presence as trophies of His grace. He will say, "These are those who are mine, who stood faithfully through the battle for My Kingdom! Well done!"

Well, now that you've heard the promises, do you want to enlist? Do you want to sign up and walk through that door of service God has opened before you? *Our missionary, Dan Lunow, began life as a Hitler youth in Germany. When he was 14, he went down to the recruiting station and "signed up" in the Hitler Youth. He knew what that meant. He gave everything to Hitler, pledged his loyalty and his life. Hitler was his god. But when Germany lost the war and Hitler died, Dan was totally disillusioned. His god up and died on him. Ironically in the aftermath of the war, Dan was placed into an exchange program and ended up on a farm in Wisconsin to learn agriculture. The farmer invited him to church and he went once to meet the community, but he did not believe all that "stuff" and stayed home on Sunday mornings to rest and listen to the radio. One Sunday morning he was alone and listening to a Gospel program that caught his ear and as the preacher was speaking, Jesus spoke to his heart in an inner voice as clear as a bell and said, "Do you want to sign up with me?" And he did. He bowed before Jesus and made Him his Lord. He gave his life, body and soul, every part of it, to Jesus. He never thought about NOT serving full time. He entered Moody Bible Institute and trained to be a missionary. In 1962 God sent him and his new wife Barbara to the Sougb people in the remote highlands of Indonesia. Today of the 12,000 Sougb there are 10,500 believers in more than a hundred churches and the Sougb church has sent out 13 missionary couples to neighboring areas. What a life well spent! Now, your door and my door of service may look completely different. God does not send us all to the ends of the earth, but He sends all of us into the battle. The question is the same, "Do you want to sign up with Me? Come, be faithful! I have prepared for you a great reward!"*

Revelation: Things To Come

The Church: In Heaven - Chs. 4-5

At Revelation 4 we enter a new division of the book. Back in 1:19 Jesus told John to write down *what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later*. The letters to the 7 churches were the *what is now* part to John. From chapter 4 on are the things that will take place later, at the end of the age. But what I want to impress upon you this morning is that this is not just a book about THE future; it is about YOUR future! If you're a believer, then YOU are in this vision! You will live through this time in heaven. You will see and experience all these things that John saw! Imagine that God sent you a DVD of your own future and you put it in the player and watch the screen and bingo, there you are! You see how you'll look and what you'll do and experiences you'll have. If you had one of those, you'd watch it closely, wouldn't you? Well, that's exactly what Revelation is; you can see yourself and your own future in it! You'll be standing there around the Throne of God when all these things happen, so let's look at:

I. Our Future Vision Of The Throne - Ch. 4 As Jesus finishes speaking with him about Laodicea, John lifts his eyes up and sees a great door standing open in heaven, just like Stephen did. And he hears a loud, trumpet-like voice say, "Come up here!" and instantly, there he stands in heaven before God's throne! And you know, I just can't read that without thinking about the fact that:

1. we'll get there like John got there (1) Do you remember what Paul said? *...the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.* - 1 Thes. 4:16-17. On the appointed day Jesus will descend into the air, the archangel will shout, "Come up here!" and instantly we'll all be caught up to heaven with Him in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! The Rapture of the Church will occur and we'll find ourselves all standing there where John stood. Some of us will get there early by death, but even those will get new resurrection bodies through that shout and will be part of that grand moment and when we stand there:

2. we'll see there what John saw (2-8) The first thing that grabs John's attention is:

a. the Father seated on His throne, the very throne of the universe, the control room from which the entire cosmos runs. And there seated on that throne is our very own Heavenly Father in command of it all! His appearance will be gloriously indescribable. The best John could do was to say that His appearance seemed to be like jasper (a clear diamond) and carnelian (a red ruby). And in a full circle around His throne is the ancient sign of the promise, an emerald green rainbow. Listen, when we get there, it will really come home to us: our God is on the Throne and He keeps all His promises! He always has been and He always will be! Then as John's gaze broadens out, he begins to take in the wider scope of what surrounds God's throne and he sees:

b. the Heavenly Temple surrounding Him Now, you may never have thought about this, but look with me at **Heb. 8:5**. The reason Moses had the tabernacle made like he did, the reason all those exact measurements and specifications are back there in Exodus, is that Moses was making an earthly scale model of what God showed him in heaven. God opened the door and let Him see in there and told him to make a tabernacle here that looks like heaven! Look back to verses 1-2. God has a Tabernacle, a Temple in heaven. At its center is a Throne and that throne is a Mercy Seat, the place where His presence is. In front of it, just like the lampstand in the Old Testament, in verse 5 John sees:

(1) seven lamps blazing and we're told that these are **the Holy Spirit** shining His light. Of course, there are not literally "seven Holy Spirits," but one "seven-fold" Holy Spirit (you can read what those 7 aspects are in **Is. 11:2** if you like). Then, remember how there was a veil before the holy of holies and what was embroidered all over it? Cherubim! Angels! And what was on either end of the mercy seat? Cherubim! And what does John see all around God's throne in verse 6?

(2) four cherubim around Him Serving Him, guarding His throne, declaring His holiness and calling all of creation to worship Him. You can read the details for yourself; they all have meaning. Now in the Holy Place in the Tabernacle, there was a basin full of water for washing called the laver. In his Temple Solomon replaced that with a tank full of water that rested on 12 bronze oxen so huge that he called it a "sea". So, what does John see in heaven in verse 6?

(3) a sea of glass, clear as crystal! No water there! No cleansing is needed any more. It is solidified into glass you can stand on!

So here in an instant we find ourselves in the heavenly Temple, in the very Holy of Holies where God is seated and there seated with him are a group of human beings. Who are they? Who can go into His Holy Presence? Only His priests! So, there in verse 4 you have:

c. the Holy Priesthood seated with Him The 24 elders, who are they? You might be interested to know that in preparation for serving the Temple, David divided the entire priesthood in his day into 24 courses of priests who

would take turns serving. When the elders, the leaders of those 24 priestly family courses were together, they represented the ENTIRE priesthood of thousands. Now look back with me at **3:4-5, 11, 21**. Who gets to be clothed in white, to wear crowns and to be seated with Him on His throne? The Church! We do! Look back to **1:6**. Beloved that's **US!** When we get to heaven, we find ourselves seated with Him to reign. And we find ourselves:

(1) clothed in white: perfectly purified No more sin, no more temptation, no more struggling. Made perfect by the blood of Jesus Christ. And we find ourselves:

(2) crowned with gold and the word here is not the word for a king's crown, but *stephanos*, the Olympic wreath of victory. We find ourselves **properly rewarded** with that crown of righteousness which the Lord Himself has laid up in store for all those that love His appearing!

Look at us! There we sit! Raptured up to heaven. Sharing in all His glory! Seated with Him in His Holy presence in the Holy of Holies and:

3. we'll experience there what John saw (9-11) The cherubim cry out, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!* They don't say just *Holy!* to state a fact. They don't simply repeat, *Holy, holy!* for emphasis. They make it a superlative, the *trishagion*, a three-fold expression to declare:

a. the supreme holiness of God Our God is absolutely without defect or flaw. He is perfect and has done all things perfectly. He is worthy that all things He has created should acknowledge Him and that's why, whenever they cry "Holy, Holy, Holy," the whole church, that's US, is consumed by:

b. the overwhelming desire to give Him all glory and we fall before Him on our faces and cry out, "You are worthy! You are worthy!" And we take off our crowns, the rewards of our own labors and we place them tenderly before Him because we realize that even those are His, that He deserves all credit, all glory, all honor.

Listen, don't think that one day you're going to waltz into heaven and meet God with a "Yo, Dude, good to see ya!". We have so little reverence for God in our generation. We have forgotten His greatness and His holiness. Nothing makes our spine tingle and the hair on the back of our neck stand up any more. I've told you before about a dream I had when I still lived at home. And in that dream, I was out in our front yard and Jesus was coming. I sensed the Rapture was happening and I was overwhelmed with this sense of absolute gratitude. In my dream I couldn't stand up; I just knelt there and kept saying, "Thank you Lord, thank you Lord!" over and over. Of course, I'm not saying that's how the Rapture will occur, but that sense of awe, that He would take me, that He would make me His own, that I cannot even stand before Him and all I can do is kneel and praise Him. That sensation is maybe a small glimpse of what we will experience in that moment when we are called into His presence and we hear the cherubim proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy..." Every one of us will fall at His feet; everything in our being will drive us there and our mouths will proclaim His worthiness as our Creator and God! And this will happen over and over again, no matter what other service He may have for us to do; this will happen every time we're in the great Throne Room of heaven, forever. Then as we move into chapter 5 the scene continues and John records:

II. Our Future Vision Of The Lamb - Ch. 5 It begins with what I've called:

1. the search for the Lamb (1-4) A great inquiry is made. A mighty angel, maybe Gabriel himself, shouts through all of heaven, indeed through all the universe, "Who is worthy to take this scroll and open it?" And there is dead silence. Obviously, we have to ask, what is:

a. the scroll Of course, it's a long roll of paper that has been wound up into a tube, but it is unusual. As John looks there is writing not only on the inside like a normal document, but also on the outside. And the scroll is sealed, not just with one ribbon or strap bound around it and stamped with a wax seal, but with 7 of them. It must be a pretty important document if no one has the right to take it and open it. Well, to find out what it might be, let's cheat. Let's turn to Daniel 7 where God showed Daniel a shortened version of this exact same scene in **Dan. 7:13-14**. Jesus approaches the Father's throne. In Daniel's vision He's given authority, glory and sovereign power to set up a kingdom over all the earth. In John's vision we'll see in a minute that Jesus approaches the Father and is given this important scroll. It doesn't take much to figure out that this scroll is the title deed to the universe; it is **the right to judge and reign over all creation**, to rule and reign over all the earth. Now who has the right to do that? Who has the right to claim that scroll and open it? Who has the right to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords? And there is dead silence! It is a poignant moment, a staged moment. It is like that moment when they threw the woman taken in adultery at Jesus feet and Jesus made a tremendous point with a simple statement, "Let Him who is without sin among you cast the first stone!" Dead silence. No one is worthy! And here God is deliberately making the same:

b. the point: No one in all creation is qualified! He asks the question so that everyone in all creation gets the point deeply; none of us is worthy! No politician, no statesman, none of us is worthy to take charge over this evil world and set it straight and own it! The human race cannot undo what it has done. And that moment is so sad that John is overwhelmed and begins to cry and to weep. It felt in that moment like all was lost, like no one could ever take the scroll and set things straight, that all God's purposes were thwarted. But then one of the elders, the church, reminded John of what He already knew (**5-7**). John was so busy crying with his head buried that he almost missed:

2. the exaltation of the Lamb Suddenly, in the very center of the Throne, Jesus appears. Not in all his glory like in chapter 1, but now with the appearance of a Lamb. And please don't think this means He looks somehow like a sheep with a wool coat or something. Do you remember that day out by the Jordan River when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming and shouted, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" God's sacrificial lamb had the form of a man! And here He is, looking as though He had been slain, with all the marks of His crucifixion still visible, looking here in the Holy of Holies as though the sacrifice had been offered and the blood had been brought in and sprinkled on the Mercy Seat and atonement had been made for all the people. And Jesus comes to the Father and receives the title deed to all creation from the hand of the Father. How can He do that when no one else can? Well, the elder tells John:

a. He is worthy by His title He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. He is the Messiah, the true heir to David's throne and to his Kingdom. He is David's greater Son who was also David's Lord and the promise of the Kingdom that will last forever and ever belongs to Him. He is worthy of it because it is His right. But:

b. He is also worthy by His triumph He has CONQUERED! What? Sin, death, the grave and Satan himself! Where? At the cross! How? By being slain! You see, that right to rule the world belonged to God, but He entrusted it to man way back in Gen. 1. Then man turned around and handed it to Satan by following him into sin and he became Prince of this world. The world system was given into his hands; he even taunted Jesus with it during His temptation. But Jesus bought it back at the cross! Through His death and resurrection, He tore it out of Satan's grasp; He took back the keys! And here in this moment He steps forward to lay claim to what is rightfully His. The kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and He shall reign forever and ever and the rest of this book shows us exactly how He will lay claim to it!

And it all begins here. This moment is so powerful, so dramatic, that it has a drastic effect. Everything begins to:

3. the worship of the Lamb First, He is worshipped:

a. by the whole Church (8-10) Remember the 24 elders represent the raptured church in heaven. They fall before Jesus and begin to praise. And I hate to mention it at a moment like this, but there is a textual problem here. Almost every ancient manuscript we have, but one very important one, has the word *US* in that song and yet the NIV and most other modern translations follow that one lone manuscript and eliminate it. Listen to it in the New King James, *And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed US to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made US kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."* Beloved this is *OUR* song; this is *US* falling on our faces and shouting to Jesus and praising Jesus for saving us! And just look who we are! Those 24 symbolically represent all of us who have believed from every tribe, every language, every ethnic group and every geographical nation of the world! What does that tell you? The job of world evangelization will get done. The job of reaching all the unreached peoples of the earth will be completed. The mission of the church in this world will be completed and there will stand the evidence, believers from all peoples on earth falling before Him in worship on that day! We'll be in that crowd and our hearts will be overwhelmed that our Jesus will reign. We'll be the first to shout, but we'll be followed:

b. by all the angels (11-12) Heaven will be flooded with them on that day. They'll all be called back from their duties for a moment and there will be millions (if you take that phrase literally, at least 100 trillion) of them and they circle the throne and the Lamb and the church and they shout, "Worthy is the Lamb! Worthy is the Lamb!" But even as they take up the cry, it is still not done. They are followed:

c. by all of creation (13-14) Maybe this is what Paul meant in Rom. 8:21 when he said that *...the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God*. Maybe the very rocks WILL cry out! All of creation has been waiting and longing for this day! And it will celebrate!

It is so difficult to convey even a hint of what it will be like on that day. Most of you were watching on Wed. night Oct. 29 as the Phillies won the world series. Dedicated fans had been waiting for this moment since 1980. Citizens Bank Park went wild, screaming and cheering and jumping and shouting. If we had been standing there the roar would have been overwhelming as thousands upon thousands of people released their joy in celebration. Any dedicated Phillies fan would practically have given his right arm to be there in that stadium to experience that victory. Maybe that's a tiny glimpse of what it will be like on that great day for us. Or maybe it's more like this: *In the year 1869 a great celebration was held in Boston in to commemorate the end of the Civil War. You can only imagine how the American people had been longing for the end of that bloody conflict and their joy that it was finally over. A man who was at that celebration wrote a letter to a friend and described some of the events of the day. He told of a 10,000-voice choir supported by a 1,000-piece orchestra. The violin section included 200 musicians, led by the world's greatest violinist, Ole Bull. Two hundred anvils were used in the Anvil Chorus. And when the soloist sang "The Star Spangled Banner" and hit high C with the full orchestra and chorus, her voice was so loud and clear that it seemed to bury everything else. With those memories flooding his mind, the letter writer concluded, "I am an old man now, but I am looking forward to the music of heaven--music infinitely superior to*

the marvelous chorus I listened to that day." Friends, you and I will be there as Jesus the Lamb takes the scroll, takes His rightful position and begins to judge the earth and set up His Kingdom. All of our hesitation, all of our shyness and reserve will be lost. We'll be there and join in as heaven goes wild, the whole church, hundreds of millions of us together shouting "Worthy is the Lamb!", surrounded by 100 trillion angels shouting "Worthy is the Lamb!", in turn surrounded by the whole creation joining us shouting, "Worthy is the Lamb!", then bowing before His feet in reverent worship. Anyone who is truly in love with Jesus, who truly knows they have been redeemed, is anxiously looking forward to that day, is waiting with deep longing to see Him reign! So, if that scene doesn't sound very appealing to you, if you're thinking "what's all the big deal about?", then maybe you'd better check your heart. What are you living for? Who do you love the most? Who really is Jesus in your life?

Revelation: Things To Come

The Tribulation: An Overview - Chs. 6-7

Last week we saw in chapter 5 John's vision of that great day in heaven when Jesus takes His rightful authority, when He takes the seven-sealed scroll from the Father, the title deed to all creation, and all the throngs of heaven fall down to worship him. That was the good news! Today's study is the bad news. As we move into chapter 6, that same scene continues as Jesus opens the seals on the scroll one at a time and when He does, John sees a whole series of horrible events begin to happen on the earth. But before we study those, I think it will help us a great deal to take a moment to look at:

I. The Prophecy That Sets The Stage for understanding them. Turn with me to **Dan. 9:24-27**. If you look closely, here you have the exact time of the death of Christ predicted. After his death the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. There follows then a break of undetermined length, which is the church age in which we're living right now. But verse 27 states clearly that:

1. a final seven year period of judgment will occur before Christ's return to set up God's Kingdom on earth. We usually refer to it as the Tribulation period. Jesus warned in Rev. 3:10 about *the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth*. That "hour" is a 7 year period and it is the events that occur during this period that we are seeing as we stand in heaven from Rev. 6 through 19. In summarizing it, God says to Daniel that during that period:

2. a world leader will first make a covenant with the nation of Israel, then in the middle of that period **break** that covenant by desecrating the Temple and **declaring himself God**. But when that 7 year period ends, he will **be judged and ultimately destroyed**. Now let's go to Rev. 6 and watch with John:

II. The Events That Will Shake The World during that awful period - **Ch. 6** Each seal on that scroll, as it is opened, causes another event on earth. Listen, heaven and earth are connected; earth does not just run on its own! God issues commands on His throne; He decrees His will and corresponding things happen on the earth. First, in heaven John sees what we've come to call "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" come forth. They are God's way of symbolically displaying the nature of the four events that He is going to bring about on the earth as the Tribulation period begins. The first one tells us:

1. there will be a global leader (1-2) The white horse holds a man, a real human being who is intent on ruling the world as many have been before him. Only he will actually succeed for a time. He will come from the same people who destroyed Jerusalem in the first place, so he will be of the old Roman Empire, a European leader. You will notice that he goes out with a bow, but no arrows; he will not begin his conquering by waging war, but by making peace. He will come upon the scene as a hero on a white horse, one that the nations of the world will hail as the answer to their problems, who will unite them to bring in an era of peace and prosperity, just as we saw him in Daniel make a covenant with Israel to allow them to worship at their Temple in peace. We usually call this global leader the Antichrist; he is actually a false Christ, a false Messiah, a fake who promises to do for the world what only Christ can do. And much of the world will run to follow after him. Interestingly, all the things Jesus warned His disciples about in Mat. 24, and which we have seen over the last 200 years, all seem to recur exactly in that order in Rev. 6. The first thing He warned them about there was not to be fooled by false Christs, false Messiahs who WILL come! And this man will be the last and the worst of them all. Look with me at **2 Thes. 2:3-9**. After promising all these wonderful things, after 3 ½ years have gone by, this lawless man will set up his own statue in the Temple in Jerusalem, proclaim himself God and demand that the whole world worship him, just like Daniel said. And he will enforce it with great power as we'll see later! Now, for centuries people have been speculating about who this man could be. Early Christians speculated that one or the other of their horribly cruel Roman Emperors could be him. In the Middle Ages many of the Protestant reformers believed and stated that the Pope was the Antichrist! The internet at one point was full of articles titled "Is Obama the Antichrist?" But this man hasn't been revealed yet; Paul said there is something holding him back, someONE keeping that tribulation time-clock from starting to tick on God's schedule, someONE who has to be taken out of the way first. And I believe that ONE is the Holy Spirit, who is indwelling His Church! When the church is raptured out to heaven as John was in Rev. 4, then this global leader will ride out publicly to develop his kingdom in Rev. 6! The world will not know who he is until his statue is sitting in the Temple and then it will be too late! Now, at some point it will become clear that the promise of peace won't get him too far and:

2. there will be global war (3-4) The red horse symbolizes that that initial peace will be taken away and the world plunged into bloody war. The antichrist will resort to military strength to dominate the world and others will resist. At the end, Daniel tells us that the world will find itself divided into four power blocks, four huge confederacies of nations that all meet in the final battle of Armageddon at Christ's return. And in the wake of these conflicts that engulf the world, as always:

3. there will be global famine (5-6) The black horse symbolizes the fact that the destruction of war will drastically reduce the world's food production and shortages will drive the prices up. A quart of wheat, enough to make a good meal for one person, will sell for a day's wages. Just imagine a small loaf of wheat bread selling for \$100 or if maybe you could get 3 meals by buying barley which is cheaper. Only the rich will have anything left to buy oil and wine. If you think world hunger is a problem today, we haven't seen anything yet! And of course, the inevitable result of all this is that:

4. there will be global death (7-8) The color of this pale horse is literally a putrid ghastly green like that of a rotting corpse. The rider is death, which claims the bodies of men and behind him follows Hades or Hell, which claims their souls! Between those who die directly in battle, those who die of starvation in the famine, those who die of the plagues of disease which always follow, and those who are killed by wild animals that multiply in depopulated areas, one fourth of the population of the world is destroyed. Now stop and ponder that a minute; if it happened today that would be almost 2 BILLION people! That's like the populations of China, Russia and the US combined! A carnage like the world has never seen! But then, at the fifth seal, John's gaze moves away from earth back to heaven for a moment (9-11). Under the altar of incense there in the heavenly Temple, John sees a crowd of people who have been martyred because of their testimony for Christ. So evidently on earth:

5. there will be global persecution also. There will be those who believe, those who have heard the Gospel from their now-missing friends and loved ones, who have picked up Bibles and books left behind, and believed. In fact, overall, there will be a GREAT harvest of souls, even during this awful period. However, the Antichrist will demand worship and kill most of those who won't give it. And here they stand in heaven, comforted by God and waiting for justice to be done. But they're encouraged to be patient because even more will have to join their number as the Tribulation progresses. And finally, this period:

6. it will conclude with global signs (12-17) At the very end, as Christ comes, there are tremendous phenomena that occur in the universe; things so huge that John has no understanding or words to accurately describe them. But you'll find them all over the Bible, in Joel 2:20-21, in Isaiah 34:4, in Jesus' own words at the end of Mt. 24. The sun is darkened, the moon turns blood red, the stars seem to fall from the heavens and the whole sky seems to roll up like some huge scroll! They are signs that will shake the universe and drive men to hide from the very presence of God and then Jesus will come to set up His Kingdom!

Listen, this is no fairy tale! This is no ancient myth, no science fiction Star Wars story. This is God's decree of where the world is going. You can put up all the "Pray for Peace" signs you want and sing, "Make the world a better place," but once the church is gone, the world will basically be destroyed in 7 years! *Some time ago there was a merchant in Calcutta who was a believer. He had just given a check for \$150 to the secretary of a missionary society when a cablegram was handed to him. Reading it, he turned to the man and said, "I've been informed that one of my ships has just been wrecked and the cargo lost. That will make a difference in my business affairs. I shall have to write you another check."* "Oh, I understand perfectly," replied the mission representative as he handed back the first one. The merchant then wrote another check and gave it to him. The secretary was amazed to see that the amount was \$600. "Haven't you made a mistake?" he asked. "No," said the merchant, "I haven't." With tears in his eyes he added, "That cablegram was like a message from my Father in Heaven that read, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.'" Friends, this chapter is a message from your father in heaven that says, "Don't invest your life laying up treasures for yourselves in this world!" In a few short years you'll die or Jesus will come for us and it'll all be destroyed anyway. If the Lord comes, your friends and neighbors without Christ will enter this horrible tribulation time, not to mention the multitudes around the world who've never heard the Gospel! Live for the Kingdom! Make your life about bringing people to faith and maturing them in Christ; make that the focus of your prayers; invest your money in it! And yet, even in this horrible tribulation period all is not lost. The next chapter gives us a glimpse of:

II. The Multitudes Who Will Believe - Ch. 7 Please note that this chapter is not sequential; it is a flashback. Chapter 6 was a picture of what will happen in the world in general; chapter 7 now goes back to show that God will reap a tremendous harvest of souls during it all! This part of the vision has two scenes. First of all, we are shown that:

1. a believing remnant of Israel will survive (1-8) God is not done with the nation of Israel. Yes, He set them aside from the center of His plan and purpose for the last 2000 years of this church age, but He has carefully preserved them as a people and Romans says that just as they were broken off as a branch and we nations were grafted into the trunk of their faith through Christ, so in the end, God is going to graft them back into the tree of faith once again! When the anti-Christ breaks his covenant and plants his statue in their Temple and proclaims himself God, their eyes will be

opened. Many thousands of them will believe in Christ at last. And what we see here is a special remnant out from among those believing Israelites, 144,000 of them, and no, they are not Jehovah's Witnesses as the JW's teach; they are real Israelites, 12,000 from among each tribe who believe. And:

a. they will be sealed to protect them through this period The Antichrist will try to control the world by putting a mark on the forehead of all his followers as we'll read in chapter 13. And here God is putting a mark on HIS! Look at **14:1**. There they are again, standing with Jesus on Mt. Zion when He returns, marked with His Name and His Father's name on their foreheads. And the fact that they are standing there means that they will survive; that seal will protect and preserve them through all the devastation and destruction and the plagues that we'll read about that will come upon the earth. So, at the end:

b. they will stand with Christ and enter His Kingdom alive in mortal bodies! That's how there's going to be a literal kingdom on earth with a literal Israel. This is His "seed stock" if you will, preserved alive through the midst of terrible suffering and through every attempt of the Antichrist to wipe them out! We'll learn more about them in future messages.

But now, in the vision a second scene emerges and we are shown that:

2. a great multitude from all nations will be slain (9, 13-14) In contrast to exactly 144,000 on earth, here is a crowd so huge in heaven that it is innumerable. And we're told who they are. They are not the church; the 24 elders represent the church and it is one of their number who talks to John. This is a huge multitude from all the peoples and language groups of the earth who have believed. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! And here they stand in heaven. They came out of the great tribulation. How? By death! These are the victims of all that persecution the Antichrist will bring on the world; in fact, we've met them before. Look back to **6:11**; these ARE the fellow-servants who were to be killed by the end like those first martyrs were! You'll see them there on that day! Look how many there are! You can't count them! And look who they are! There are some Kyrgyz and some Guarani from Paraguay. There are some Sougb from Indonesia and Fulani from Guinea. They're speaking in Farsi and Tagalog and Urdu and Mandarin. Oh, in the midst of this awful period where Satan tries to rule the world, GOD is the one in control and He will reap a huge harvest from all nations all over again, even as He has done in the church age! And this huge multitude:

a. they will worship with us before the Throne (10-12) We'll see them there crying out in joyous thanksgiving for their salvation and when we see them, all of us together in our blood-whitened robes will fall down on our faces before the throne and shout, "AMEN! AMEN!" and glorify God. Listen, what will move your heart when you get to heaven is not the privilege and position of your reward; it will be the PEOPLE you see there, your brothers and sisters from all over the world who will join you. The Father's whole family will be gathered in heaven, even those who come to work in His vineyard at the last hour of the day! And:

b. they will enjoy with us the pleasures of heaven Look at verses **(15-17)**. Together we will enjoy:

(1) the presence of God (15) That must be a Kyrgyz expression. God will literally *pitch His tent* with us, His yurt. He'll dwell with us. We will be in His personal presence forever serving Him. How many times in our struggles down here do we just long to see Him face to face; how many times must these dear ones have longed to see Him with their eyes in those dark days that took their very lives? And here is the fulfillment of His promise; together we are in His presence. It is permanent; nothing will ever separate us or stand between us again. And there together we'll enjoy:

(2) the protection of God (16) Those are all the terrible plagues they suffered on earth during that time. But they are not alone. God's people down through the ages have always suffered terrible hard things. The writer of Hebrews says, *...others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.* - 11:35-39. That is, until now! Once they are all home, God says, *Never again!* No more sorrow; no more dying; no more suffering; no more cancer; no more wheelchairs; no more diseases; no more pain! *Never again!* Not in His presence! There we will all know His protection from all harm forever. And thirdly, there we'll enjoy together:

(3) the provision of God How many times have we said it, *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters.* That doesn't really describe what they experienced on earth and if we're honest, it doesn't really describe a good bit of our lives either. But just look! **(17)** There it will be completely fulfilled! There He will be our Shepherd. There at the Throne He'll provide everything for us. He will personally care for us and meet all our needs forever and ever. His hand will wipe away all tears from our eyes. We won't cry ever again unless it is with joy!

A missionary shares this story: *"What will he say when he shouts?" The question took me by surprise. I had already found that West African Bible College Students can ask some of the most penetrating questions about minute details of Scripture. "Reverend, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that Christ will descend from heaven with a loud command. I would like to know what that command will be." I wanted to leave the question unanswered, to tell him that we must not go past what Scripture has revealed, but my mind wandered to an encounter I had earlier in the day with a refugee from the Liberian civil war. The man, a high school principal, told me how he was apprehended by a two-man death squad. After several hours of terror, as the men described how they would torture and kill him, he narrowly escaped. After hiding in the bush for two days, he was able to find his family and escape to a neighboring country. The escape cost him dearly: two of his children lost their lives. The stark cruelty unleashed on an unsuspecting, undeserving population had touched me deeply. I also saw flashbacks of the beggars that I pass each morning on my way to the office. Every day I see how poverty destroys dignity, robs men of the best of what it means to be human, and sometimes substitutes the worst of what it means to be an animal. I am haunted by the vacant eyes of people who have lost all hope. "Reverend, you have not given me an answer. What will he say?" The question hadn't gone away. "Enough," I said. "He will shout, 'Enough!' when he returns." A look of surprise opened the face of the student. "What do you mean, enough?" "Enough suffering. Enough starvation. Enough terror. Enough death. Enough indignity. Enough lives trapped in hopelessness. Enough sickness and disease. Enough time. Enough!" [Gregory L. Fisher in Leadership-Vol. 12, #4.] If believers face horrible things like this even today, how much worse will it be for those who believe during that horrible tribulation period. But there in heaven, God will say to all of us, "Enough! No more for you! Never again!" Hallelujah!*

Revelation: Things To Come

The Tribulation: Intensified - Chs. 8-9

As John continues to look on in his vision, the scene in heaven continues. After Jesus took the scroll from the hand of the Father and was worshipped by all of heaven, he began to open its 7 seals one by one. And we saw in chapter 6 a horrible time unfold on earth as He did, a 7 year period we call the Tribulation that leads up to Christ's return. John watched as a world leader came forth, but then the world was plunged into war and famine and death as a result, leading up eventually to cataclysmic signs in the heavens. Then John saw a great harvest of souls in heaven, people from every tribe and nation who believed and were killed for their faith and he worships with them around the throne. And now as we enter chapter 8:

I. Jesus Opens The Seventh Seal In Heaven - 8:1-6 It is in this moment that:

1. God begins to send direct judgments upon the human race In the beginning of the Tribulation period He left the human race simply self-destruct, fall into war and famine and disease. But now at some point during this time (and we don't know exactly when, but I suspect it is after the middle, perhaps in year 5 or 6) God is going to begin to send powerful punishments from His hand directly upon the human race for their sin. Seven angels stand with 7 trumpets to announce each one of them. Now, one of the points of what John sees there in heaven in the scene we just read is that this process of sending judgment upon the world:

2. it is holy and righteous There in the Temple in heaven before the Throne is an altar of incense. And an angel comes and he has a golden censer, a bowl, full of incense. And there is a fire on the altar, burning coals. And he pours out the incense upon the coals and a cloud of smoke goes up before God. Then he takes that golden dish and dips it full of fiery coals from the altar and hurls it to the earth and the judgments begin. What does that mean? Well, that altar is holy and the fire on it is holy. It is righteous; it is pure. So, when God pours out His judgment on the earth it is **symbolized by pouring out of fire from the altar**. In other words, this is a holy act! God has a moral right to do it. He is not a wicked, cruel God who kills human beings for His own pleasure; in fact, He swore it to Ezekiel: *As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die...? - 33:11.* People say, "Oh, the God you believe in is an angry God, a vengeful God; the God I believe in is a God of love!" Listen the God of the Bible IS a God of love, but He is also a just God, a God who is righteous and who MUST punish sin! In spite of every opportunity He has given the human race, the entire world will rebel against Him and He will HAVE to punish them. And He is RIGHT to do so! Nevertheless, God does not take this duty of His lightly:

3. it is somber and serious to Him. That's why in heaven it is **preceded by prolonged silence** before He does it. Have you ever stood in one place silent and unmoving for half an hour? That's a long time. These visions have been moving forward at a pretty good clip and suddenly when this seal is opened, God has all of heaven observe a half hour of reverent silence. Why? To ponder what's about to happen, to think about it. To realize that God takes no pleasure in it, that He sent His own Son, the Lamb, to be slain so that people could escape His judgment, but that He HAS to do it. It's like watching an execution; there's a sense of realizing it has to be done, but oh, how sad is the fact that it has to be done and how serious a thing! It's a sobering moment. However, we are also being shown here that:

4. it is an answer to the prayers of God's people That incense in verse 4 going up before God is connected with the prayers of the saints. Not just the martyred ones back in **6:10** who cry out, *How long, O Lord, before you send your*

judgment and avenge the evil of our deaths? God's people have been praying this way for centuries; just read the imprecatory Psalms in the Old Testament. Believers have prayed, "How long, O Lord, will you let the evil of this world continue! When will you judge it and put a stop to it? When will You judge the evil of this world?" How many times must our brothers and sisters who have been imprisoned and tortured for their faith around the world prayed like that! And God has not turned a deaf ear! He has not forgotten those prayers; He remembers them; He has simply said, "Wait!" all these years, but here is the beginning of His answer! Here in heaven when Jesus opens the seventh seal, God begins to pour out His wrath upon the earth. He begins to administer the righteous punishment His people have longed for and:

II. It Unleashes Six Trumpet Judgments On Earth Seven, actually, but there is a delay of 1 ½ chapters before we get to it. Trumpets played an important role in the life of Israel. They were originally a *shofar*, a ram's horn used to signal the whole camp of Israel and to communicate with the army. But Moses was told to make two trumpets of silver for this. They were blown to announce certain feasts, especially the Feast of Trumpets and the weekly beginning of the Sabbath and to announce important events. So these six angels sound the trumpets of God in heaven to announce and declare God's judgment as it falls upon earth. When the first angel sounds his trumpet:

1. 1/3 of earth's vegetation is burned - 8:7 Do you remember what God did in Egypt? He sent a horrible plague of hailstones that beat down all the crops and vegetation and actually killed any men and animals caught out in it. All through the storm there was lightning striking everywhere. Well, this is far worse. Whatever this hail is, it has the red color of blood and its effect will be wide-ranging fires. Have you seen the pictures of wildfires burning in our country in the news? Acres and acres of scorched earth, no grass, no trees. Can you imagine how many will die in this judgment, what the earth will be like, when a full third of it, more than the entire continents of North and South America combined, is destroyed by fire and becomes uninhabitable? And who knows, maybe we are the regions that get destroyed! Or maybe it is portions here and there throughout the whole earth. But whatever part it is, it's a doomsday scenario that makes science-fiction movies pale in comparison! Then the second angel sounds his trumpet and:

2. 1/3 of earth's seas are devastated - 8:8-9 Something like a giant flaming meteor hits the ocean, filling it with pollutants that turn it blood red and causing huge tidal waves. We're not told where it hits, but it devastates a full third of earth's oceans; that's equivalent to the entirety of the Atlantic Ocean plus a third! Of course, all the fish and sea creature in the affected areas die, 1/3 of all earth's ocean life. Plus, all the ships in those areas are destroyed, 1/3 of all ocean-going vessels. How much of the world's population draws its life from the sea and how many of those will die! But then the third angel sounds his trumpet and:

3. 1/3 of earth's waters are poisoned - 8:10-11 Another meteor-like object falls into earth's atmosphere, this time perhaps shattering and breaking up with particulates being distributed over a huge area. It's named Wormwood, which is a bitter herb that is poisonous in high concentrations, and the effect of this material entering the world's fresh water sources is that a third of the world's drinking water is poisoned. Polluted water already kills thousands each year in the world; just imagine how many multiplied thousands will die drinking poisoned water because they are desperately thirsty! It's not clear whether this is temporary and the waters may clear up after a time as the Nile did back in Egypt, but it's effect will be unimaginable. And then the fourth angel sounds his trumpet and:

4. 1/3 of earth's light is darkened - 8:12-13 Somehow God causes disturbances in the heavens that cause the sun, the moon and the stars to shine less. So, the length of the day is shortened by a third; maybe it only gets light at 9 and gets dark at 3. And a third of the night is pitch black without any light in the sky at all. Oh, imagine the tremendous effects of this on power usage, on growing crops, on ocean tides! One would think that the human race could not miss the point. These four judgments shake the entire world. Whether they occur over weeks or months or even a year, NOBODY will miss them! Nobody will write them off as simple natural disasters. *On Aug. 24 in the year 79 AD, a volcano near Naples, Italy named Mt. Vesuvius erupted. The city of Pompeii, which lay to the south, was engulfed by a flood of lava. One historian writes, "Many of the people--chiefly the wealthy--refused to abandon their homes and precious possessions, hoping the horrible calamity would not reach them. The decision cost them their lives. Steadily the hot tide of rock and ashes rose against the doors and windows, burying the victims as they huddled in courtyards and cellars. Poisonous volcanic gases seeped in and killed others who had taken refuge in the upper stories of their homes. Eventually the molten mass of liquid fire crept above the highest rooftops, and Pompeii was destroyed."* Today it has been excavated and you can see plaster casts of many inhabitants as they died, huddling in fear. The human race instinctively believes the lie, "It will not happen to me! This thing will not reach me!" As long as they're alive and it hasn't touched them, they refuse to change. And that's why God doesn't stop, even after such brutal devastation, and John hears an eagle flying by in heaven saying that the for the inhabitants of earth the worst is yet to come! So we move into chapter 9 where the fifth angel sounds his trumpet and:

5. many of earth's people are tormented: God sends a plague of locusts - 9:1-12 Now what on earth are these things? They are called locusts, but I think that is simply because there are so many of them. They are obviously not insects; they are the size of horses and have faces, heads and hair and yet have tails like scorpions. They are not like any creatures this world has ever seen, but we are shown where they come from:

a. these are evidently demonic beings released from the pit The Abyss or the Pit is where the demons at Gadar begged Jesus NOT to send them. It is a place where God keeps certain demonic spirits confined until the time appointed for their judgment. But God has them released for His use on this occasion and He controls them closely. They are given specific instructions that they cannot disobey. They cannot cause any further devastation to the environment and they cannot actually kill human beings. Instead, they are given power to:

b. they torture people with pain for 5 months They will sting people with their tails and cause them excruciating agony. I read this post on the internet from a guy who got stung by a tiny little scorpion: *Well in my 11 years living in Nevada, last night I was stung twice on my right wrist! The pain is intense, throbbing, and I have pins and needles from my wrist to my fingertips... Its almost 24 hours since the 2 stings and the pain is just as intense.* Later he wrote: *I was bit Monday night, now its Thursday and my hand is just about back to normal. I did end up going to the doctor... He did say in some cases people who get stung take years for the area to get feeling back, but most get over it in a week or so... man that Scorpion was nasty and painful!* Now imagine getting stung by one the size of a horse! No wonder the pain lasts 5 months! It will be pure agony. Those who are bitten will want and hope to die to get out of the pain, but they won't die! Death will elude them! They will have to suffer night and day in agony until it passes. Now, one would think after seeing one of these things and being terrorized by it and then suffering from its sting that people would KNOW this was not some natural disaster but a direct punishment from God and that they would fall on their faces, but even this is not enough. So, the sixth angel sounds his trumpet and when he does the result is that:

6. 1/3 of earth's people are killed: and God does it by means of an **army - 9:13-19** Now what is this? In contrast with the "locusts" who come out of the pit and are demonic in origin:

a. this is evidently a human army coming from the east We'll see it mentioned again in **16:12** where we find that there is a drying up of the Euphrates River to prepare the way for the "Kings of the East". It is a huge army; John can't count them but he hears a number, 200 million. No nation on earth has ever fielded an army of 200 million. Where are you going to get that many people and how are you going to support them? Well did you know that way back in 1965 Time magazine quoted Chinese leaders who boasted of their ability to field an army of 200 million! China and the nations of Asia could do it! And notice something else that is unique here:

b. they slay people with their "horses" In the cavalry it is the riders who hold the weapons and fight; the horses just carry them. These are obviously not literal horses. Remember, John lives in the first century. He has never seen a gun or an explosion or anything like it; he has to describe what he sees using terms that he knows. These "horses" sound almost like tanks, don't they, belching fire from the front and spitting machine gun fire from their tails. In any event they are vehicles that humans will invent and this army of 200 million people moves west across all of Asia toward the Middle East to arrive there for the final battle, Armageddon, killing everything in its path and we're told in verse 18 that the effect is that a third of earth's remaining population, today another 2 billion people, are killed.

Listen between the early wars of the tribulation and this great carnage from the east, more than half the world's population lies dead. Vast portions of the earth's surface are devastated and uninhabitable. Nobody will miss the point that these things are acts of God. One would think they would give up everything they have believed and practiced and cry out to God to forgive and help them. But look at:

III. The Sad Result Of These Judgments - 9:20-21

1. the majority of those who survive refuse to give up their idolatrous worship They still worship the statue of the antichrist, still worship demons and pagan idols. Instead of seeing the folly and inability of their false beliefs to help them, they doggedly refuse to give them up. And further:

2. the majority of those who survive refuse to give up their evil practices They keep on murdering one another and stealing from one another to get what they want, keep on following their occult practices, their drug induced states of trance, keep on practicing open sex of every description. They keep on doing what they've been doing all along, EVIL. They don't stop, they don't repent, they don't turn to God even after such fearsome events.

It's hard to imagine a world like that. It's hard to imagine people like that. But without the church, without the presence of Christianity that today influences an entire 1/3 of the world and provides at least some sort of godly influence that brings balance, this is where the world is headed and what its people will be like. Make no mistake; God may use symbolic elements to describe these events, but the events are real. They will come. They can't be ignored and yet people will. On that fateful day when Mt. Vesuvius erupted and buried Pompeii, a young Roman by the name of Pliny was watching from a villa across the bay at Misenum. His uncle, also Pliny, known as the Elder, was commander of the fleet. In a letter to a friend, young Pliny described his uncle's death: *"He called for his shoes and climbed up to where he could get the best view of the phenomenon. The cloud was rising from a mountain - at such a distance we couldn't tell which, but afterwards learned that it was Vesuvius. I can best describe its shape by likening it to a pine tree. It rose into the sky on a very long "trunk" from which spread some "branches." I imagine it had been raised by a sudden blast, which then weakened, leaving the cloud unsupported so that its own weight caused it to spread sideways. Some of the cloud was white, in other*

parts there were dark patches of dirt and ash. He ordered a boat made ready... As he was leaving the house, he was brought a letter from Tascius' wife Rectina, who was terrified by the looming danger. Her villa lay at the foot of Vesuvius, and there was no way out except by boat. She begged him to get her away... He launched the boat and embarked himself, a source of aid for more people than just Rectina, for that delightful shore was a populous one. He hurried to a place from which others were fleeing, and held his course directly into danger. Was he afraid? It seems not, as he kept up a continuous observation of the various movements and shapes of that evil cloud, dictating what he saw. Ash was falling onto the ships now, darker and denser the closer they went. Now it was bits of pumice, and rocks that were blackened and burned and shattered by the fire. Now the sea is shoal; debris from the mountain blocks the shore... At Stabiae, on the other side of the bay formed by the gradually curving shore, Pomponianus had loaded up his ships even before the danger arrived, though it was visible and indeed extremely close, once it intensified. He planned to put out as soon as the contrary wind let up. That very wind carried my uncle right in, and he embraced the frightened man and gave him comfort and courage. In order to lessen the other's fear by showing his own unconcern he asked to be taken to the baths. He bathed and dined, carefree or at least appearing so (which is equally impressive). Meanwhile, broad sheets of flame were lighting up many parts of Vesuvius; their light and brightness were the more vivid for the darkness of the night. To alleviate people's fears my uncle claimed that the flames came from the deserted homes of farmers who had left in a panic with the hearth fires still alight. Then he rested, and gave every indication of actually sleeping; people who passed by his door heard his snores, which were rather resonant since he was a heavy man. The ground outside his room rose so high with the mixture of ash and stones that if he had spent any more time there, escape would have been impossible. He got up and came out, restoring himself to Pomponianus and the others who had been unable to sleep. They discussed what to do, whether to remain under cover or to try the open air. The buildings were being rocked by a series of strong tremors, and appeared to have come loose from their foundations and to be sliding this way and that. Outside, however, there was danger from the rocks that were coming down, light and fire - consumed as these bits of pumice were... They tied pillows on top of their heads as protection against the shower of rock. It was daylight now elsewhere in the world, but there the darkness was darker and thicker than any night. But they had torches and other lights. They decided to go down to the shore, to see from close up if anything was possible by sea. But it remained as rough and uncooperative as before. Resting in the shade of a sail he drank once or twice from the cold water he had asked for. Then came a smell of sulfur, announcing the flames, and the flames themselves, sending others into flight but reviving him. Supported by two small slaves he stood up, and immediately collapsed. As I understand it, his breathing was obstructed by the dust-laden air, and his innards,... simply shut down. When daylight came again two days after he died, his body was found untouched, unharmed, in the clothing that he had had on."

What a graphic picture of what the day of God's wrath will be like on earth. And what shame! This man's own ignorance and arrogance killed him; he did not have sense enough to simply flee from a danger so obvious. And millions will be like him on that awful day when that wrath is poured out. But thank God YOU were not like that. The Scripture says this about you: ...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. - 1 Thes. 1:9-10. What we've studied today, dear brothers and sisters, is the coming wrath He's rescued you from. Thank God that like Pliny the younger watching securely from the other side of the bay, you will only watch this wrath safely from heaven like John did. You are rescued! Hallelujah! But all around you are people who are not. What about them?

Revelation: Things To Come

The Word Of God - Ch. 10

Revelation 10 is an interlude, a parenthesis in the middle of the book, a break after the sixth trumpet judgment, where God pauses in the events He's been revealing to John to reinforce for him and for us:

I. Some Truths About Bible Prophecy (1-7) Now put yourself in John's place for a moment. If you had just seen all these visions of terrible judgments coming upon the earth, you would probably be thinking two things, "Can such things as these really be so? Can they actually happen?" And if they will, "When will they happen? When will all of this end?" Well, this mighty angel that John sees is sent to assure John (and us) with absolute certainty that these things will indeed happen and that they will happen and be brought to completion at just the right time, the time that God has appointed. Indeed, when we read of things like a fourth of the earth's population being killed or of a horde of demonic locusts torturing people with pain, our modern minds tend to have the same questions, "Can this be real? Is it actually possible?" So, let's look at what we just read and see what God is saying to reassure us. First of all:

1. God is in absolute control of everything This glorious angel just looks SO powerful and in verse 2 he takes his stance on the sea and on the land. It's a stance of ownership, of control, and when he shouts, the heavens answer with thunder. What does all that mean? God is in control of the earth, the sea and the heavens, the whole universe! He created it and He controls it; it obeys Him today just the way it obeyed Him when His command brought it into existence. God is God and nothing is impossible for Him. The things God says will happen, He has the power to make happen, however:

2. God has chosen not to reveal many things to us In verse (4) seven thunders spoke in loud voices to John yet God tells him not to write it down, but rather to “seal it up” and keep it to himself. Why? God does not tell us everything. He does not spell out for us every detail of His plan. He reveals to us only what we need to know. The things He hasn’t revealed we must leave with Him and trust Him that we are best off not knowing them. Speculating about things that God has not clearly revealed has always been a dangerous pastime in the church and has led to all kinds of disasters. What we need to focus on is this:

3. what God has revealed is as dependable as His own character In verse (6) the angel takes an oath. He swears *by Him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and the earth and the sea...* that all these things will happen and come to a completion. An oath depends on the nature of the one who is sworn by. If God is eternal and God did indeed create the universe, then just as surely, everything He has said will happen WILL happen! Do you get that? What He has revealed is as dependable as His own character, His own nature. We’re convinced that God is eternal; we’re convinced He created the very earth we stand on and the heavens we look at. Just as surely, everything He has revealed will come to pass, no matter how crazy or unlikely it may seem to us. If God is God, then His Word is dependable and:

4. what God has said will come to pass at the time He has planned It may be a mystery to us, a hidden thing, but according to verse (7) it will be accomplished just as He has announced it. It will arrive right on schedule in His Divine plan. The best illustration of this that I can think of is *Gal. 4:4 (NASB), But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...* The prophecy, the promise of the Christ, stood for centuries. Some sparse details were revealed to Isaiah and to Micah, that a virgin would conceive and bear a son and that he would come out of Bethlehem. And that’s about all, but when the exact right time came in God’s plan, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman. The birth of Christ is one of the greatest proofs we have that God keeps His Word, that what He says will happen, will indeed happen! And the same God who made that promise also says that He will send His Son back again to reign! He’s given us some scanty details of how in Revelation, but we can rest assured that His timetable is right on schedule and all these things will happen when the fulness of the time comes!

Now let’s move on to the second half of the chapter, verses (8-11). Notice that the angel has a little scroll in his hand which is open or unrolled. The scroll is evidently a record of the things John is going to say or write down further in the rest of his book. Note the word *again* in verse 11. Now John is going to go back over again the same events he’s already seen, but in more detail. Chapters 11-19 will cover the same ground as 6-9. The big scroll Christ is opening in 6-9 gives the macroscopic view, the overview; the little scroll in 11-19 is the microscopic view, the things that don’t appear clearly in the bigger picture. But the little scroll IS the Word of God and what does John do with it? He EATS it so he can give it out to us! So, in that little scene we learn:

II. Some Truths About The Word Of God that are really a great reminder for us. First of all, like John:

1. we are commanded to take it (8) God’s voice from heaven commanded John to go get it and take it. Likewise, His voice commands us in *Josh. 1:8, Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it...* Those very first believers in Acts devoted themselves every day to the Word of God and prayer. They listened daily to the apostles teaching what Jesus had said; they didn’t have a Bible to read for themselves, but you and I do! What a precious privilege! God told John to write down all that he saw so YOU could read it! God Himself wants you to read His Word! And here’s a note of encouragement:

2. we can understand it In both verses (2, 8) the scroll is lying open, unsealed and unrolled in the angel’s hand. It reminds me of what Moses said, *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.* - *Deut. 29:29*. God didn’t give us this precious Book to confuse us, to confound us. He gave it to us to follow! We CAN understand it. We can know what God wants. We CAN understand His instructions; we don’t have to have some expert to tell us all it means. However:

3. we must make the effort to get it (9) The angel didn’t grab John and shove it down his throat. He had to make the effort to go ask for it and take it and we must make the effort too, the effort to set aside time regularly every day to read the Word, the effort to study it sincerely with a desire to understand it, the effort to stop and look up hard words, the effort to listen and look for what the Holy Spirit is saying to us personally through it. If you’re looking for a New Year’s resolution that will change your life, here’s a habit you can build in and develop that will do just that. I challenge you to set aside the time to read or listen to God’s Word regularly, daily if at all possible! But we can’t do it mechanically. The next thing John does in the vision is to eat the scroll, literally. What that says to us is that:

4. we must ingest it (9), internalize it, take it to heart. It will do us no good if we simply read for reading’s sake, as though we can say to God, “There, I read my daily chapter. I did my duty.” No, we must think about what we read and memorize important parts and ponder how to apply it in our lives. We must let it transform us and direct us and guide us and warn and admonish us. It won’t always be a fun thing; in fact, like John:

5. we will find it both sweet and bitter (9-10) In his mouth it tasted sweet as honey but it upset his stomach. As we read things like Rev. 4-5 and that glorious description of the throne room of heaven, they will be sweeter than honey to us. But as we read things like 8-9 and the judgments coming on the earth, it will seem bitter to us. In this book we find both heaven and hell, suffering and glory, comfort and conviction, encouragement and admonishment. Both sweet and bitter things are needed in our lives. And finally, verse 11 reminds us that:

6. we must share it with others (11) This vision was not given to John to keep to himself, but to share with others. Likewise, the Word of God is not given to benefit us alone; it is for us to share with others. As we ingest and absorb it and it touches us, God wants to use it to touch others through us as we share it.

We just don't realize the power and the importance of the Word of God! This was brought home to me in an extremely powerful way during my trip to Kyrgyzstan in 2008. Since I've never had the opportunity to report to you about that trip, let me just share with you the stories of a few of the Kyrgyz pastors that I visited and have been keeping in touch with ever since.

Almaz was our driver and translator for that week: *My uncle was the head mullah for all of Naryn. I was under his tutelage, learning Arabic and the Quran. My older brother believed in '94 and started spreading the word to us and others in our village. I was very angry with him and prayed, "God, what do you want me to do? If you tell me to kill him, I will." But there was no answer. For two years I didn't even talk to him. I was told that Baptists knew some spells and brainwashing techniques, but I was curious about the change in my brother's life. One day when no one was around I saw his New Testament on the table. I read a little bit but when I heard someone coming, I quickly put it back down and acted as if I was just sitting there thinking. I had read enough to get interested, and every night I would sneak the New Testament from my brother's room, read a little, and put it back. I read the whole New Testament a few times and then asked my brother for some more books. An influential one was McDowell's, More Than a Carpenter. I really started searching after I read that. Pastor Kairbek visited one day in '96 at the Baptist church and my brother persuaded me to go. As soon as I stepped into the room where he was speaking, I felt joy in my spirit and a sense that the truth is here. I asked the people there what to do since I now believed. They said I had to repent, but it needed to happen on Sunday so I should come back then. I did that and made a list of friends and relatives to tell. Today Almaz is a pastor and leader of an extensive house church movement.*

Kubanychbek say: *In '94 I was in debt. My second son was just born, my wife still in the hospital and I was out of work. I was lying in bed thinking about life and what I have done. You can lie to other people about that but not yourself. I was thinking about God's judgment after death. I wanted my sins to stay here when I went to God. I heard something like a voice saying, "Come." I knew it was God and that I was going NOW instead of 100 years from now, as I had always been thinking. There was no time to think. In fear I said, "When?" but I was thinking, "Where can I hide?" I was getting ready to go and I realized in my panic I had put on four pairs of pants, one over the other. I fell on my knees and said, "I'm a sinner." Then I saw a scene [vision] where God came to earth and all people were bowing before him. I woke up. After that I started looking at all religions, Islam, Hare Krishna, and the Orthodox. After a month, God guided my steps to this place in the south, to the first [evangelical] church I had actually set foot in. The Korean pastor told me of Christ and said to accept him but inside I was against it; I was afraid of God. I looked for something bad in Christ to use as an excuse to turn him down, but I couldn't find it. Something inside me was saying, "Don't accept it! Don't accept it!" I said, "I have no reason not to." The voice stopped. I knew the Muslims could report on Muhammad's faults, but the believers could not do that for Christ. Then I asked for some water to wash myself and I accepted Christ. After I believed, I started reading the Bible. I had accepted Christ as a prophet. I was thinking I would go all the way through the Bible and then keep on looking at other faiths, aiming to come up with a new religion that would satisfy me. We (the pastor and I) began in Genesis. When we got to Lev. 11, I realized I was a believer and not a Muslim. The chapter is about what is clean and unclean. The Quran also talks about purity but not like this. I realized that comparing the Quran to the Bible is like comparing "Adidas" sneakers made in China [fakes] with an Adidas original [the real thing]!*

Aytu was a boxer and had dreams of becoming a world champion, but then he started pondering it, thinking, what would it mean if he did? People had told him about Jesus but he wasn't interested. They gave him a Bible and when he opened it, he just started to read in Ecclesiastes where it says, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" In other words, life is totally meaningless apart from God! It hooked him completely because it dealt with his big question and eventually brought him to Christ.

Gany is an incredible young man: *I was a difficult little boy. Mom told dad to discipline me. He said he was too busy with work so they should send me to a madrassa in the South of Kyrgyzstan at age 8. The first of the four years I behaved well because I was afraid of God. The second year I lost my fear and resumed my bad behavior, but I was still a good student and at the end of the 4 years I was one of the top 4 boys with the best Arabic and knowledge of the Quran. They said I should go home for a year and then they would send me to Saudi Arabia for further study. My family was delighted with me. They also told me they had some good news; my older sister had gotten married. I went to visit her and found her and her husband praying on their living room couch in Kyrgyz. I knew this was not right. They said they were believers and were praying for me. They wanted to give me an Injil [New Testament]. I said many bad things to my sister, and I told myself I never wanted to go back there again. I had been taught at the madrassa that my whole family will go to hell if I ac-*

cept Christ. I didn't want to go to hell for my sister's apostasy so I tried to think of a way to show her the error of her ways. I decided I would go back, accept the gift of the Injil, read it, and then explain the errors in it to her. I put the Quran and the Bible side by side and began to compare Mohammed and Jesus on about 20 points. I got an Arabic biography of Mohammed, which included a lot of things I did not admire, like going to war and accepting the gift of a 9-year-old girl as his third wife. But the biography of Jesus in the gospels was amazing. I had nothing to say to my sister on the day I next visited. She invited me to come to their meeting that evening at 6. I refused and went away but a voice in me kept saying, "6:00, 6:00, 6:00." I called my friends to get together at that time, which normally would have been easy, but they were all busy. At 6:00 I went. I didn't actually hear any of the words but I felt that God was close. Another time I went to her birthday party and there were a lot of believers there. I asked them questions about Mohammed and Jesus but they did not know Islam well enough to answer so I started answering my own questions. Then they said to me, "Then why don't you accept Jesus?" I did. It was 1992 and I was 14. The year was up and the madrassa called me back to go to Saudi. I told them that I believed and they instantly kicked me out. They called my dad and said, "Your son is crazy." He was going to beat me but I asked him to watch my life for one month. He did, and afterward he made no objection to my faith.

Finally, here is **Sharshenbek**: I am from Naryn. My brother believed first and prayed for me for a long time. I used to forbid him to spread the news when he would come to the village. After moving to Bishkek I started working in a factory with some Baptists. I'd rebuke them, call them traitors, tell them they were fooled by Americans who were "taking their money". I thought that Baptists were zombies. I was afraid to go to any of their meetings lest I come under a spell. I was curious but afraid. I was also in a difficult time. I had my own house and business but I lost it all in about ten days. I took a mortgage on my house at the 20 som/\$ rate; it shot up to 38 som/\$ in a few days and I lost everything. I considered suicide. I went to the mosque. For a long time, I had thought about serving God there. I thought it would draw me closer to God, but when I went, I didn't like it. They said if you die as a Muslim, you will see a river of milk and honey and you will have many beautiful wives. I said this is a fairy tale. Even as a child I didn't believe that kind of bunk. Another thing I didn't like was that the mullahs never went out from the mosque like the Baptists did to spread their ideas. Everybody had to come to them. I started asking myself which was the true way. My sisters and my older brother were believers at that time. They were afraid to talk to me about it, but they did give me a children's Bible. I read it and got the Good News that way. I didn't know Islam well so I didn't know how to decide what was true. I was saying, "God, if I die tomorrow, I don't know where I will go. If someone kills me or I die in an accident, I won't have a chance to ask for forgiveness before I die. God, these people don't agree concerning the truth. My ancestors were Muslims. God, reveal the true path and I will go there." My wife had also believed before this. I told her that if I saw her going to a church meeting, I would break her leg. My wife's sister lived with us at the time and she also became a believer. One day she came home late and said she had been at a church meeting. I kicked her out and told her to go live with the Baptists. After some time, I had a dream about an empty tent in the wilderness. There was a rock to sit on, a wooden bowl, and a bow (and arrow) hanging up. I realized it was John the Baptist's house. A voice spoke but there was no one there. It said, "My son, for how long will you be running away from me. Come to me." I woke up and gave my life to God. I didn't want to tell this to my wife but I asked her when their meetings were being held. I went to the meeting and accepted Christ.

All these guys are pastors and I've been calling them regularly with a translator to encourage them. They all face situations so much more difficult than anything we know. But do you see the power of the Word of God in each of these lives? Listen to Heb. 4:12, *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* The Word of God you hold in your hand today is living; it is powerful. It pierces hearts and changes lives! Will you make the effort to take it in, to listen to it, to read it, to internalize it and apply it, and to share it with others?

Revelation: Things To Come

The Tribulation: Two Witnesses - Ch. 11

Today we enter Chapter 11. By way of a quick review, in chapters 6-7 John saw 7 seals opened and received a broad overview of the 7 year period we've come to call the Tribulation. It is a 7 year period between the day that the Church is taken out of the world to meet Christ in heaven at the Rapture and the day that He returns to the earth to set up His Kingdom. During this period God will pour out His wrath in mighty judgments. In chapters 8-9 John saw 6 angels sound trumpets in heaven and each one unleashed another of these devastating events. Then after the sixth trumpet in chapter 10 came an interlude, where in his vision John was given a book to eat and we learned some lessons about the power of the Word of God. But in the last verse of that chapter, John was told that he must *prophesy AGAIN about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.* In this next section of the book through chapter 19, God is going back to reveal to John a more detailed view of this whole period and the events that occur during it. Now, the fact is that God is not simply going to judge the world during this time of tribulation, but He is going get an immense amount of glory for Himself by reaping a tremendous harvest of souls in the midst of it. We saw them back in chapter 7, this great multitude in heaven who were martyred during that time. But how do they come to believe? At the beginning, the church is gone; all believers are in heaven; there is nobody on earth to tell them! Chapter 11 reveals to us that during this time, under the worst possible

conditions the world has ever known, God will use tremendous supernatural means to bring people to faith. The first thing you'll notice is that this vision shows us that:

I. God Will Have A Temple In Jerusalem (1-2) Now think for a moment. John saw this vision just after 90 AD. Was there a Temple in Jerusalem to measure? No, it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD! From that day to this there has never been a Temple in Jerusalem. There is only one portion of one wall of it left, known as the "Wailing Wall". In fact, on the mount where it once stood now stands a mosque known as "The Dome of the Rock" built in 691 AD, the third holiest Islamic site in the world! But God isn't showing John what was then or what is today; He's showing him what WILL BE in those final 7 years of history. So, the fact that John sees a temple and John sees worshippers tells us that:

1. the temple will be rebuilt and used for half of the tribulation That number, 42 months, is 3 ½ years. No matter what stands on that site today, one day it will come down. God's Temple will be rebuilt once again by Israel on this spot; it can be built nowhere else because this is the place of which God said that He would set His Name there forever. And oh, how the Jewish people have been waiting and longing to build it down through the centuries! Ever since they became a nation again in 1948, it has been the desire of their hearts. If they did it today, it would ignite World War III, but one day they will. How? Well, earlier in our study we read **Dan. 9:27**, *He [the world leader or antichrist] will confirm a covenant with many for one `seven' [that is, one 7 year period]. In the middle of the `seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.* As he comes to power, this leader of the western world will make a covenant with the Jewish nation. They will build their Temple. They will offer sacrifices and offerings daily once again! But right in the middle, at the 3 ½ year mark, he will break his covenant and desecrate that Temple by putting his own statue up in it and proclaiming himself to be God. And from that point:

2. it will be desecrated for the second half along with the city of Jerusalem It will be overrun by the nations and trampled underfoot. Look what Jesus said when His disciples asked Him to tell them the sign of His coming in **Mt. 24:15-16, 21**. In that moment the Jews will realize who this man is and they will flee to the mountains in hiding. Many of them will believe in Christ and form a believing remnant of Israel that we'll see again in chapter 12. But let's not miss the point of these verses; this scene is *before* that awful moment and in his vision, John is given a reed to use as a measuring rod and told to measure the Temple and count the worshippers. However, did you notice he doesn't report any measurements or numbers? And then notice also that he is not to measure the outer court; that part is going to be desecrated and trampled by the nations; God has *given* it to them. He measures the inner Temple, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies; evidently God plans to *keep* that part for Himself. You see, measuring implies ownership. He measures what belongs to Him! So, what's the point? I think it's this:

3. God is in complete control of what happens to it Man does not succeed in "ousting God" from His own house! God causes it to be built and used, God determines that a portion of it will be defiled and desecrated and trampled underfoot, and God preserves a portion of it safe in the midst of it all by His power. He's in complete control. He will use the very desecration of His own Temple to be a tremendous and powerful means of witness to the Jewish people to bring them to faith. But for the rest of the nations of the world God has planned to do something more specific and graphic. We read in verses **3-14** that:

II. God Will Have Two Witnesses That Impact The World (3-4) Here is how God is really going to get the message out. He will have two witnesses (Greek, *martyrs*), two special individuals that He plans to use in a tremendous way. I believe that:

1. they will be two literal persons That phrase, *these are the two olive trees and the two lampstands*, comes from a vision that God showed **Zechariah** in chapter 4 of the book that bears his name. In Zechariah's day after the Babylonian Exile, God used two special people to rebuild His temple and restore worship and anointed them with the power of His Spirit; they were Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the High Priest. But the final and complete fulfillment will occur during the tribulation period. God will have two other men to be His Spirit-empowered witnesses to the world and their ministry will last for a period of 1260 days, which is (you guessed it!) 3 ½ years, half of the Tribulation period. Now it doesn't say which half and Bible students have been divided in their opinions over this and over the whole chapter, but what makes the most sense to me as I try to understand it is that their witness occurs during the first half of the Tribulation period. I'll show you why later but notice this:

2. they will have supernatural powers (5-6) Now who does that sound like? Who called down fire from heaven twice when the king's soldiers came to capture him? Elijah! And who prayed that it wouldn't rain and it didn't rain for (coincidentally) 3 ½ years? Elijah! And who turned the water into blood and struck Egypt with every kind of plague? Moses! Just as God empowered Elijah and Moses in their day to do supernatural miracles for their own protection and for a witness to the world, these two men will display the power of God in supernatural miracles as they proclaim to the world the truth of the Gospel. In fact, I think there's a good chance that they actually ARE Elijah and Moses sent back again. Why? Well, why did Jesus meet with Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration if God was done using them? Elijah never died, remember? He went to heaven in a whirlwind. Maybe God plans to send him back! Maybe that's why Malachi says that God will send Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes and

even Jesus said that Elijah WILL come again! And then there's that crazy little verse in Jude 9 where it says that Michael the archangel had a dispute with Satan over the *body* of Moses. Why on earth would God want Moses' body? Genesis says that "God buried it." What if He's preserved it somewhere all these centuries because He plans to send Moses back again! Well, whether it is literally these two men or two others who are very much like them:

3. their impact will be worldwide Verse (9) clearly shows that what happens to them will be known and seen by every people, tribe, language and nation. How on earth is that even possible? How can two people in one place be seen by the whole world? Well, did you watch the evening news last night? You know, for 1900 years there was no way in which this verse could be literally true. However, in our generation God has wired the world by satellite and internet. Today I can sit in my office and talk live to a friend in China and see her on my computer screen! I can watch on my TV what is happening live right now anywhere on earth with a satellite uplink. Maybe God has wired the world so that in the end times His messengers will be shown on the evening news all over the world, so that the entire world can listen to them and see what happens to them and the miraculous thing God does. And maybe God has wired the whole world so that every eye can see at once the return of His Son in glory as He sets foot on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem! Well, pardon my digression there, but here's what will happen to these two:

4. they will be attacked and killed by the world leader [antichrist] (7-10) The beast is the world leader whom we'll meet in detail in chapter 13. Even though their supernatural spiritual power will protect them through the 3 ½ years of their ministry, when God has done all He wants to do through them, he will allow this leader to attack them and overpower them and actually kill them. Their bodies will lie unburied in the street of the city of Jerusalem. Can't you just see CNN panning cameras over their bodies every day as a worldwide holiday is declared? The enemies of the state are dead; those who tormented us and stood against us are lying there. People will send each other gifts like it's Christmas! These two prophets will be hated by the world in general like the US hated Osama Bin Laden and their deaths will be celebrated for 3 ½ days, but then suddenly, look at (11-12):

5. they will be resurrected and ascend to heaven Boy, can you imagine watching the news that day as some reporter comes on and the cameras pan their dead bodies for the thousandth time and suddenly, they get up and stand on their feet?! Instantly terror is struck into the hearts of the watching world; they're overcome with fear of a God who raises the dead! And then, as the cameras roll, a voice thunders from heaven and says, "Come up here!" and they ascend up into the air until they vanish from sight in the clouds, just like Jesus did. And they do it while all their enemies watch! What a powerful testimony! Just as God proved to all men that Jesus was who He said He was, the Son of God, by raising Him from the dead, so He will prove to all men that what these witnesses said for 3 ½ years was true by raising them from the dead in the sight of the whole world and many around the world will believe, some from every tribe, tongue and nation. These folks believe and are later martyred for their faith by the world leader. That's where the great multitude or martyrs comes from in chapter 7! So:

6. their ultimate impact will be to turn many to Christ (13-14) God has one more dramatic turn to add. As the cameras continue to roll looking up into the sky there in Jerusalem there is a severe earthquake. The cameras shake and fall over. A tenth of the buildings in the city crumble and fall. 7,000 people lose their lives. And at last, there is a note of hope; the survivors in the city finally give glory to the God of heaven!!

It sounds to me like this whole scene plays out at the midpoint of the Tribulation. For 3 ½ years these two witnesses give out the Word and are unstoppable, but at the midpoint, the antichrist reveals himself, sets up his statue in the Temple, demands that the world worship him, and then successfully attacks and kills them. But God raises them and sends the earthquake and together these things are what cause the remnant of the nation of Israel to finally believe that Jesus is their true Messiah and that they missed Him, as they are fleeing into the wilderness to hide! Listen, even in the darkest, deepest places God does not leave Himself without a witness! We look at it and think there are places so hard, so difficult, so resistant, so godless, that it is impossible for people to hear the Gospel; nobody there will ever get to believe. And we read things like this, supernatural interventions, and we wonder, "Can God really do things like this anymore?" But friends, He is! All over the world, even today, He is doing them! *LuAnn and I were attending a funeral a few years ago for one of her relatives at a little church near Harrisburg and during an idle moment I was chatting with the pastor about missions and he told me this story. There was a woman who began to attend his church who was from Ghana, West Africa. She had come to this country and was working for a personal care service for the elderly. She shared with him how she had become a believer. She was a devout Muslim in her home country and after many years she had saved up enough money to go on the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. So, there she was in Mecca, the holiest place in all Islam, where no Christian is allowed to enter, with thousands of other pilgrims participating in worship near the Kaaba, the sacred black stone and Jesus appeared to her! She immediately knew who He was and He said to her, "You're looking in the wrong place!" She went back home and found someone to share with her and believed in Jesus!* Story after story like this comes out of the most difficult places in the world today. Jesus is alive and He will not leave Himself without a witness, not even after His church is taken out, not even in the Tribulation period. Even then, during Satan's final attempt to steal the entirety of the human race in that generation away from God, condemn every last soul of them to hell, and claim full dominion over this world, God will still raise up a vast multitude from every people and language to believe! And then, when He's all done:

III. God Will Set Up His Kingdom On The Earth (15-19) Now the seventh angel sounds his trumpet and John sees a whole new thing in his vision. And what you need to understand is that:

1. this is a preview of the events detailed in chapter 19 We've been in an interlude, a parenthesis, and here at verse 14 John's vision is actually picking the story back up where it left off at the end of chapter 9. 9:12 says the first "woe" is the demonic locust horde unleashed by the fifth trumpet. The second "woe" must be the invading army from the east unleashed by the sixth trumpet and the third woe will soon happen when the seventh trumpet sounds and it will be the return of Christ Himself. It's described in detail in chapter 19, but here we are given only a preliminary glimpse of that moment, not from the earthly viewpoint at all, rather:

2. in it we see the worship of all heaven at Christ's return They're shouting those amazing words forever embedded in our memories by Handel in that majestic chorus in his "Messiah", *The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever! Hallelujah!* Oh, how great the rejoicing will be in heaven when Jesus at last leaves to take the earth back once for all and set up His Kingdom! And we're there! We're the 24 elders, the church, and we're falling on our faces and worshipping Him and giving Him thanks because:

3. in it we see the purpose of Christ's return (17)

a. it will be time for Him to rule the earth at last Satan has too long held dominion; it is time for Him to come and take His rightful Throne and rule the world. And verse 18 says:

b. it will be time to raise and reward His servants Oh, how the saints of all the ages have waited for this day, but how much the millions we have seen in heaven who have been martyred during this horrible period, who've been crying out "How long, O Lord? How long must we wait?" have longed for it! And when the trumpet sounds it will be time to receive their resurrected bodies and be rewarded. And at last:

c. it will be time to destroy those who destroy the earth, to put Satan and his world leader and all the leaders of the nations who have turned the earth into their evil playground for so long, who have perverted it from God's intended purpose, to put them out of business and bring them to an end once and for all.

No wonder all of heaven will celebrate! This is the grand and glorious culmination of all of human history. It is so hard for us to imagine what it will be like. Words fall short. The best that I can think I can think of is this; I heard a song by Travis Cottrell, a wonderful new song that imagines that pictures the scene in heaven at the birth of Christ and follows it through to His return. It's called, "In The First Light" You can hear it at this link:

http://www.godtube.com/view_video.php?viewkey=13b643b4cef2a7f3e5c3

Revelation: Things To Come

The Tribulation: Israel's Place - Ch. 12

There has always been a great deal of confusion in the church about the nation of Israel. After all, in the whole of the Old Testament which we treasure and believe, Israel is God's chosen people. But when Christ came, she rejected and crucified Him and became the enemy of the church. So, it has been really easy for the church to simply conclude that the church took Israel's place, that she is His new people and that's that, end of story. And what made it easier is that for 1900 years there was no nation called Israel. In 70 AD Rome destroyed Jerusalem and much of the Jewish race was scattered to the four winds, literally over the whole world. But in 1948 she came home! Jews from all over the world came back to their homeland and the nation was reborn. And not only is she a nation again, she's on the nightly news; she's the focus of world attention, and anger! So, what about Israel? Does she still have a special relationship to God or not? Well, in Rev. 12, God reveals to John in his vision the place that Israel has in His plan, both anciently and in the end-time tribulation period. We're told twice (verses 1 and 3) that what John sees in this chapter are "signs"; they are symbolic representations seen in heaven that describe earthly realities. The first half of the chapter displays for us the ancient part of God's purpose:

I. God's Plan For Israel To Bring Forth Christ (1-5) The first character we meet in this drama in symbol is:

1. the pregnant woman (1-2) She is really royal looking, clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet and a crown with 12 stars. Now who would she represent? Well, do you remember one time when he was young, Joseph had a dream in **Gen. 37:9-10** and in that dream he saw the sun, the moon and 11 stars bowing down to him and his father knew what it meant. The sun and moon were his parents and the 11 stars his brothers. So, the sun, moon and 12 stars would easily symbolize the entire family of Jacob, whose other name was **Israel!** The real clue is that in verse 5 this woman brings forth a Child who is to rule the nations and that has to be Christ, so the point is that:

a. God used her to bring Christ into the world - Rom. 9:5 says about Israel, *Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!* God granted to the nation of Israel the high and holy privilege of being the people who would give the world His Son, their Savior. And John sees her pregnant and in the throes of labor about to give birth. Well, that probably represents:

b. her suffering for years before Christ came For almost 600 years Israel suffered as a conquered nation under the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and finally, the Romans. Just before the time of Christ, she was able to throw off the yoke for a brief period, but then the heavy hand of Rome fell upon her and at the time when Christ came on the scene she was yearning, travailing in pain, deeply anguished, wanting her Messiah, her Deliverer to come. But there is a second actor in this drama:

2. the red dragon (3-4) He's enormous, giant and he's red. If you want to know who he is, just look at **verse 9**. He is **Satan**, the ancient serpent who was around in the garden and ever since has been the great enemy of God and of God's people. That phrase about his tail sweeping 1/3 of the stars out of the sky is controversial, but has often been taken to mean that 1/3 of the angelic host fell with him in his original rebellion against God and became the demonic hosts under his control today. But in this vision as a dragon he has a particular appearance. He is a huge beast with 7 heads, 10 horns and 7 crowns on his heads. We'll be seeing that again in chapter 13 and again in 17. Without explaining it fully now, let me simply say that his form here is meant to advertise:

a. his control over the nations His heads and horns represent an empire of kingdoms and we'll see later on that it will be a revived form of the Roman Empire, the very empire that was in power at the time of Christ's birth. Satan was in control of the Empire that ruled the world and he stood before Israel waiting to use his earthly vassals to carry out:

b. his intent, which was **to destroy Christ after His birth**. Satan could not stop Christ from coming, from being born, but he could do his best to destroy him afterwards. How did he do it? He began by using an unscrupulous, crazed, power-mad Roman pawn king by the name of Herod and stirred him up by the visit of some innocent wise men from the east to order the slaughter of every male infant in Bethlehem! And he ended up using the insane jealousy of the highest of Israel's religious leaders to deliver him over to a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate who ordered Him to be crucified. *Acts 4:27 says, Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.* It was a conspiracy, a Satanic plot to destroy Jesus, to devour Him, to swallow Him up in death. But I'm ahead of myself; the third actor in this drama is:

3. the male Child, who is obviously **Christ (5)** You see, this conspiracy is all about:

a. His destiny He is destined **to rule the nations**, to rule the world. God had said so in **Ps. 2:8-9**, *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.* Christ was born to rule the world, to be King over all kings. But Satan hated that! Ever since Adam had handed the authority over to him in the Garden, he had been the prince of this world. And he wanted to keep it forever. He wanted to be king. So, when Christ was born, he conspired to kill him, to put him to death and I guess he thought he had succeeded! He even had his Roman henchmen post a guard at the tomb to make sure Christ stayed in there! But the joke was on him! In the last part of verse 5 we have:

b. His ascension and exaltation God raised Him from the dead! I don't think Satan really believed that was going to happen, but God did it and caught Him up to Heaven and seated Him on the throne of the universe and in the process provided salvation for the entire human race. Satan ended up doing exactly *what [God's] power and will had decided beforehand should happen - Acts 4:28!* Hallelujah!

But let me get back to our major point. God used Israel ultimately to bring Christ into the world. He sent His Son to His own people, but His own people didn't receive Him. They refused and rejected Him. And even after He rose from the dead and He sent the apostles to them with the news, they rejected them. So, at that point there was a dramatic change in God's dealing with them as a nation. There is a huge gap in time, nearly 2000 years, between the end of verse 5 and what happens in verse 6. And that gap represents:

II. God's Rejection Of Israel During The Present Church Age It is described for us in **Rom. 11:25-26**. Here's what that means:

1. Israel was set aside nationally while God uses the church to reach all nations After their full rejection, their temple was destroyed, their holy city was destroyed and the people of Israel were scattered to the very ends of the earth. The focus of this age is found in Jesus' words: *I will build my church!* God's use of Israel as a nation is paused, put on hold. Today there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. Both are called to faith in Jesus and when we believe, that dividing wall of Jewish ethnicity is broken down; we're all on the same plane. We are one body of believers, Jew and Gentile alike, one church. Now this brings up an interesting point of application. How should I regard the nation of Israel today? The answer is in **11:28-29**. As far as the Gospel is concerned, they are on the other side of the fence. They are unbelievers and enemies of the Gospel. But at the same time, they are beloved because they are the one people on earth that God has chosen to claim as His own out of all the rest. We love Israel and long for their salvation! As we sit here today Israel is in a war. *Susan Estrich wrote this in her Thursday column: The world is quick to condemn her as the casualties mount. "Go back to the oven," the woman in her hijab in Fort Lauderdale, FL, yelled to the Jewish Americans demonstrating their support for Israel. "You need a big oven, that's what you need." Israel is ti-*

ny. If you live in Massachusetts, as I did ...imagine Rhode Island being in the hands of those who are committed to destruction, sending rockets over your common border. If you live in Los Angeles, as I do now, imagine San Diego being not only a different state, but a committed enemy whose official government has long been listed as a terrorist organization. How do you live like that? How do you raise your children knowing that, when they graduate from high school, they will go to war against those who do not place the same value on human life as you do, fighting people who send their children to be suicide bombers? Amid the violence in Gaza, Israel stopped shooting for three hours yesterday to allow the people to get food and supplies, to allow trucks with medical supplies to deliver them in safety. Imagine Hamas doing the same thing to help Israeli civilians. I cannot. Not for a minute. I do not always like everything Israel does. I do not always like everything my own country does. But I love Israel for the determination and courage of its people in standing up to the terrorists who would destroy it.... Maybe that will help give a little perspective to the current situation, but that's not why I love Israel. I love Israel because GOD loves Israel. He set His love upon her forever. For a time, He set her aside in His plan to reach the world, but His eye is on her yet and He who touches her touches the apple of His eye. And there's more, God is not done with Israel as a nation. In fact:

2. God's plan for Israel resumes when the church is removed In **Dan. 9:25-27** God made this very clear. He declared that 70 "sevens", 70 periods of 7 years, would sum up the entirety of His plan for Israel as a nation. After 69 of those periods, He told Daniel that Messiah would be cut off, that is, die, and if you calculate it, the death of Christ happened right on schedule! At that point the clock stopped ticking for Israel. However, He also said that the people of the prince that would come in the future would destroy the city and the Temple (which the Romans did) and that desolations and war would continue until the time of the end. And then, when the fulness of the harvest of the nations has been brought in by the church, the clock starts ticking once again! The 70th seven, the final 7 year period, begins, which we call the Tribulation. God begins to deal with Israel as a national identity once again. We already saw last week in chapter 11 that:

a. she will have a Temple and offer sacrifices again - Rev. 11:1 The world leader, the Antichrist, will make a covenant with her and she'll build her temple and offer sacrifices for 3 ½ years. But at the midpoint, the Antichrist will break his covenant, set up his statue in the Temple to desecrate it and through that:

b. God will open her blinded eyes and bring many Israelites to faith in Jesus In fact, we saw in **Rev. 11:13** that there will be a great earthquake and the survivors in the city of Jerusalem will turn to God in faith and give Him glory. Now, all that happens after verse 5 in our text and that's the moment at which the story picks up again in verse 6. What we see in the rest of the chapter is:

III. God's Rescue Of Israel During The Tribulation Period (6-17) We are told five things that will happen during the final period before Christ returns to earth. First:

1. Israel will flee to the wilderness (6) Jesus gave them the instructions for this 2000 years ago in **Mt. 24:15-21**. Israel will flee *en masse*; she will run toward the desert. When they realize who the antichrist really is and who Jesus really was, they will flee. They will leave their homes and not take anything with them. They will flee as hard and as fast as they can toward the wilderness, the desert, the south of Judea, to get away and save their lives. Now hold that thought and here's the second thing that will happen:

2. there will be a great war in the heavenly realms (7-12) Now, I don't pretend to understand this completely, but somehow:

a. Satan has continued to have heavenly access to accuse us Verse **(10)** says that this has been a continual practice of his. You can actually see him doing it in the prologue to the book of Job, standing before God and accusing him. For whatever reason, God has chosen to allow him continued access to the heavenly realms. But at this moment, when Satan's man sits in God's temple and says he's god, God says "No more!"

b. Michael the archangel and the angels of heaven will oust him and his forces - Dan. 12:1 says, *At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered.* Satan will lose this great war; in fact, it will be a rather short war! He and his demonic forces will be hurled down which means that:

c. he is permanently barred from heaven and confined to earth Any hopes that he had of taking the throne are dashed. He will never go back to those realms and the effect, according to verse 12, is that:

d. he is furious because he knows his time is short He knows the clock is ticking and he's only got 3 ½ more years before Jesus comes to rule and he's bound in the pit for a thousand years. And that's why the short, second half of the tribulation is such an ugly, awful time unlike anything the world has ever known! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth in that day! Now the third event is that:

3. Satan will pursue the fleeing remnant of Israel with all his fury (13) He will hate Israel more than he did for bringing Christ forth! He will hate her all the more because now he knows he can't stop Him from coming back. And he will pour out that wrath, of course, through his world leader and his armies! They will pursue the Israelites out into the desert to destroy them. But it won't work. We read next that:

4. God will supernaturally protect this believing remnant for 3 ½ years (14-16) God has a place prepared there somewhere in the wilderness, a place of refuge, of safety. Many have speculated that the place could be Petra, which is just across the line in modern Jordan, a huge basin capable of supporting an entire city of 10,000 or more people surrounded by an impenetrable wall of rock mountains with only one tiny narrow entrance, one of the wonders of the ancient world. We don't know if that's the place or not, but wherever they flee to, God will grant them supernatural aid. They will get there with supernatural speed and the flood of soldiers that are sent after them, God will swallow up in the desert somehow. He will protect them out of Satan's reach for the entire remainder of the Tribulation, until Christ returns. And Satan will realize that, not only is he barred from heaven, but he can't even take it out on Israel whom he hates! So:

5. Satan will furiously turn to the persecution of all believers (17) The *rest of her offspring*, I believe, refers to Gentile believers, those who come to believe among every tribe and nation of the earth especially through the two witnesses of chapter 11. Thousands of them, too many to number, will be martyred for their faith during this awful time. We met them standing before God in the second half of chapter 7. Yes, people will believe during that time, but there will be an awful price to pay for most of them.

And that brings me to close by making a point that we can learn something from these Tribulation believers. Look back to **verse 11**. How will they stand for Christ in this awful time? How will they withstand Satan's furious hatred for them? They will place their trust fully and completely in the blood of the Lamb to wash away their sins. And they will be unashamed to share the testimony of what Jesus Christ has done for them. And they will love Him so much that they will be absolutely unafraid to die, because to them to live will be Christ and to die will be gain! That's how the first generation of believers was! That's how the last generation of believers will be! What about us?

On March 21, 2007 Christianah Oluwasesin looked forward to the ending of school that day. That's because the Christian teacher was to leave the government high school in Gombe, northern Nigeria and rejoin her husband. But first she had to give her female students their final exam. To prevent cheating, she collected the book bags of each student and brought them to the front of the class. One of the students began to cry. She told the class that there was a Quran in her bag and by touching the bag the Christian teacher had desecrated the Quran inside it. Tears turned to outrage and anger and soon the class was shouting, "Allahu Akbar - God is great!" They began threatening the teacher. A fellow teacher rushed her to the principal's office and he locked her in the bathroom to get her away from what was now an angry mob. Outside, the anger was growing. Radical Muslims who lived nearby heard the commotion and ran to the school. Eventually a mob of extremists dragged Christianah out of the school, clubbed her to death and burned her body. [VOM, Special Issue 2009]. There are many places in the world where tribulation conditions exist right now, where to stand for Christ places your life in jeopardy every single day. What if you or I lived in one of those? Do we love Him more than life itself? Are we willing to share the word of our testimony?

Revelation: Things To Come

The Tribulation: World Leaders - Ch. 13

Just like any other era of history, the end-time 7 year tribulation period that precedes the return of Christ to earth will have its key figures. John is introduced to them in his vision as we enter chapter 13. They are revealed here in symbolic form as two beasts, not referring to literal animals, but characterizing them as men with animal-like characteristics, men who act like animals, who tear and destroy, who have no human compassion, who kill anyone that gets in their way. Their titles are not actually given fully in this chapter, but if you compare 19:20, they are called the Beast and the False Prophet and you'll also note that they are Christ's chief opponents at His return and their end is destruction in the lake of fire! They are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, but here in chapter 13 we have the clearest picture of them. The first man will be:

I. A World Political Leader described in verses (1-8). He is called **The Beast** or is commonly referred to as the **Anti-christ** which comes from 1 John 2:8. Elsewhere he is called "the man of sin", "the lawless one", "the son of perdition", and even "the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called god." The key thing to note is that he is a political leader, a general of armies, a man who sets out with the dream of ruling the entire world and almost makes it happen. But in the way that he is revealed to John here in the image of a beast, two things are actually in view. Look at **(1-3a)**. First of all:

1. this beast pictures a revived Roman empire and in order to understand that, we're going to have to look at two visions that God gave the prophet Daniel. This beast which John saw clearly represents the Roman Empire and, from our perspective, that means that:

a. this empire must be revived King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a dream about huge human statue made out of four different metals from top to bottom. And here's what it meant: **Dan. 2:36-44**. God declares that there will only be four world empires. The first one was Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's own empire. After that would come another, the Persian empire, followed by a third, the Greek empire built by Alexander the Great. These are actually named in later chapters. And the empire to follow the Greeks was, of course, Rome, which ruled much of the known world for more than a millennium. Now this fourth empire was seen to change in form from a single unit on the lower torso of the statue to the two legs representing a division of that empire, an east-west division that actually occurred in history about 500 AD, and in its final form, it would be an empire of 10 kings, represented by the 10 toes of the statue. However, note verse 44. It is in the days of this fourth empire, the Roman Empire existing as a union of 10 kingdoms, that God will set up HIS kingdom. But how is that possible? No vestige of the Roman Empire has remained after 1453 AD; it never did take the form of a union of 10 kingdoms and Christ has not returned! The answer is uniquely simple; it hasn't happened yet! Somewhere in this vision we passed from what is past to us to what is still future and that means that God must be planning to put this Roman empire back together, to revive it! Sound far-fetched? Well, humor me for a moment and let's look at Daniel's second vision and see:

b. what this revived empire will be like - Dan. 7:1-7, 23-27 Here is a vision just like John's! Out of the sea of the nations come four beasts, a lion (Babylon), a bear (Persia), a leopard (Greece) and then a fourth ugly beast with 10 horns that has to be Rome! And out of this 10 horned Roman empire comes a leader who rules the world, oppresses the saints and is destroyed when God sets up HIS kingdom. Remember those images and go back with me to Revelation 13. What do we see in verse 2? A beast coming out of the sea and it has the body of a leopard, the mouth of a lion, the feet of a bear and 10 horns on its head!

(1) it will be a composite empire (2) This end-time empire will have the swiftness of Greece, the strength of Persia, and the awful bite of Babylon, all rolled into one 10 nation empire. It will be the strongest empire that the world has ever known. And here's what I've been waiting to show you:

(2) it will reemerge after not existing (3) One of the heads of this beast seemed to have a fatal wound. It appeared to be dead. But somehow it was healed; it was brought back to life after it was dead. Look over with me at **17:8**. This beast will exist, then "not exist," and then exist once again! I believe one day it is going to be put back together again! The territory that Rome once ruled, all of Europe and the Mediterranean coast, is going to be reunited, reconstituted once more into a world empire of 10 nations in the end time! You say, "that can't be!" Well, we're not far from it today! All of Europe is already united in a European Union. On Jan. 1, 2002 it adopted a new common currency, the "euro", which is now the currency with the highest cash value in circulation in the world, surpassing the US dollar! The Eurozone (economic zone) is the second largest economy in the world. It is already the largest aid donor in the world. Its citizens can live and work in each other's countries, cross each other's borders freely and there hasn't been a war between member nations in 70 years. It would not take much to make them one nation and, if they had the right leader, the right unscrupulous Hitler-type popular madman, it would not take much to forge them into a true world empire which would in essence BE the old Roman Empire in a new multi-nation united-together form! The old Roman empire WILL come back to life and in Rev. 13:

2. this beast also pictures the man who will lead that empire (18) Literally, *it is the number of a man!* Now don't bother trying to figure out WHO it is! People have been doing that ever since John wrote this. And don't worry if you move out to Valley Forge and Verizon gives you a new phone number that starts with 666. Nobody is going to know who the antichrist is until the Tribulation period, but people who believe during that period are going to be able to identify him by calculating the numerical value of the letters of his name. There will be a man who leads that revived western empire and he is in view here. And look what John is shown about him:

a. he will become the world's idol (3b-4, 8) They will be astonished by his power, by his military might, by his ability to pull this empire together. In principle his authority will extend to the whole earth, though in the end whole sections of it will rebel against him, bringing on the final battle of Armageddon. But the world will literally worship him and the one who gives him his power, that is, Satan. Have you ever seen any of the old films where they show Hitler speaking to the masses in Germany in the pre-war days? How the crowds were mesmerized and hung on his words and followed him unquestioningly! They idolized him and it will go even further with this man. Now please listen carefully to what I'm about to say; I am NOT intending to say anything negative about our former President Obama. God put him in place and we respected him and prayed for him. But in watching the events of the inauguration I was struck with how much of America idolized him. Two million people converged on Washington; the entire mall was packed. People who were interviewed said things like, "I have been waiting for this man all my life!" They wrote songs about him and played them on the national network. Many Americans seemed to be hailing him as a sort of messiah who would lead us into a golden age. Again, I am not saying that any of this is his fault or that he is an evil person or anything like that; I am simply pointing out how prone even we wise educated Americans are to idolize and how easy it will be in the future for the world leader to sway masses around the world to worship and follow him, in the beginning by popularity, and then later on by force! Now note that:

b. he will be a blasphemer (5-6) A change will occur in this man. During the first half of this period, he will seem like a Savior, like the answer to the world's many problems. However, at that midpoint he will reveal his true nature and intentions. Look with me at **2 Thess. 2:3-4**. He will sit in the Temple of God in Jerusalem and proclaim himself God. He'll put his statue there, as we'll see in a moment. And he will demand that the world worship him, and they will! And for those who won't:

c. he will be a persecutor (7) Just as the US declared a war on terror, intending to seek out and hunt down terrorists, this man will declare war on believers. He will hunt them down to destroy them wherever they are. The multitudes who have believed through the two witnesses of chapter 11 will be slain and appear in heaven as a great host of martyrs that we met back in chapter 7, millions upon millions of them. He will seek to eradicate faith in the true God and faith in Christ from the earth!

Now the reason he will be able to pull this off so well is because alongside the beast or antichrist, the political leader, there will be:

II. A World Religious Leader whom John refers to as **The False Prophet (11-18)** Look at **(11-12)**. This second beastly person is a religious leader, a prophet, and:

1. his purpose is to cause the world to worship the political leader His life will be dedicated to bringing glory to the beast, to bringing him the worship of the whole world. Do you see that there is an unholy trinity in place here? Satan is trying to usurp the position of God Himself; the antichrist is trying to be a false version of Christ and set up his kingdom to rule the world and receive its worship. So, the false prophet is filling the role of a counterfeit Holy Spirit, glorifying the false Christ and drawing the whole world to worship him and the one who empowers him! And:

2. he will exercise tremendous power to accomplish this First of all:

a. he will demonstrate miraculous powers (13-14a) Satan will empower him to do great miracles. He will even call down fire from the heavens as Elijah did, and as the two witnesses did in chapter 11. He will counterfeit the works of God to deceive the world into worship. Paul said, *The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie.* - **2 Thes. 2:9-11** The world will be deluded and deceived by the miracles done by this false prophet and they will believe the lie! So:

b. he will exercise sweeping religious authority (14b-15) He will be the leader of a world system of religion for those last 3 ½ years. He will come up with the idea of setting up a statue of the antichrist in the Temple and demanding the world to worship it under penalty of death. He will even somehow get this statue to appear to have life, either by demonic power or mechanical deception, and he will get even get the statue to declare that those who refuse to worship must be killed! So, people will worship the antichrist out of awe and also out of fear for their lives. But that's not all:

c. he will exercise sweeping economic authority (16-17) He has another idea. He will invent "the mark of the beast". He will declare that everyone must show their allegiance to the antichrist by wearing his mark, his name stamped on their forehead or their hand. And without that mark they can't buy or sell, so they will have no income; they won't be able to get food. In short, they won't be able to survive unless somehow, they live out in a wilderness where they can fend for themselves and avoid detection!

Oh, what an awful time that last 3 ½ years will be before Jesus comes! Satan will literally do his best in a final bid to take over the world. And he will appear to succeed! How frightening and discouraging it will be to any believers who live during that time! How frightening and discouraging it is to us even today, as we watch Satan's evil henchmen be in control of so many portions of the world! But right in the middle of our text, in the verses I skipped over, there is exactly what we need:

III. A Reminder That God Is In Ultimate Control (9-10) Verse 9 is a great big "STOP, LOOK and LISTEN" sign! Pay attention! God is about to tell you something that He REALLY wants you to know! And here it is:

1. He determines what will happen to His people, not the evil rulers of the world! When they haul one of us off to prison, it looks like they are in charge. When they kill one of us with the sword, it looks like they have won, like their kingdom rules, like evil has prevailed and good defeated. But don't be fooled! God determines what happens to His people and He has determined that some of us will be imprisoned and some of us will die for our faith. We may not understand the reason, but we can know that it is HIS choice and if we are in prison, He will sustain us and if we are killed, He will welcome us to all the riches of glory! And we can know that in the end HE will prevail because we've read the end of the book! And we know that those who do the imprisoning and the killing will end up in the lake of fire and Jesus WILL reign. Just not yet! But Jesus has told us beforehand that it will be so. He said, *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One*

who sent me.... All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.... - John 15:18-21, 16:1-4. That has pretty much been the history of the church. From age to age believers have experienced persecution at the hands of wicked leaders. In fact:

2. He warns His people to expect antichrists in all eras John wrote earlier, *Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come...* - **1 Jn. 2:18**. History is replete with leaders, both secular and religious, trying to set up their kingdoms on earth and persecuting the saints of God. The Neros and Diocletians have given way to the Genghis Khans and the Napoleons and the Stalins and the Hitlers, who in turn have yielded to people like Kim Jung Un of North Korea and Ahmadinejad of Iran and the Taliban and Hamas and Hezbollah and dozens of others like them who hate, persecute and kill believers. Jesus said, "Expect it! When it happens don't be surprised! They did it to ME; they will do it to you! I want you to remember that I warned you because then you'll remember that I am in control, not them!" In all ages:

3. He expects His people to remain faithful and endure suffering as it comes upon them. He wants us to hold firmly to Him to the very end, no matter what we face, and He will strengthen us for it. We must patiently endure all that comes upon us, trusting that He is in control and that He has a plan and we must wait for His coming to set things straight.

John and Betty Stam were young missionaries serving with the China Inland Mission in the early 1930's. Scarcely one year after their marriage in China, they found themselves caught up in the advance of the Communists into the town where they were living. They were captured, held for an exorbitant ransom, marched through the streets of the village, and finally executed. They managed to leave their 3 month old baby Helen wrapped in blankets in an abandoned house where they stayed their last night. 30 hours later she was found by local believers who staged a daring rescue and smuggled her out of China to her grandparents. With the baby was found, two \$5 bills were pinned to her clothes and this letter: "Dec. 6, 1934 - China Inland Mission, Shanghai. Dear Brethren, My wife, baby and myself are today in the hands of the Communists in the city of Tsingteh. Their demand is twenty thousand dollars for our release. All our possessions and stores are in their hands, but we praise God for peace in our hearts and a meal tonight. God grant you wisdom in what you do, and us fortitude, courage and peace of heart. He is able-and a wonderful Friend in such a time. Things happened so quickly this AM. They were in the city just a few hours after the ever-persistent rumors really became alarming, so that we could not prepare to leave in time. We were just too late. The Lord bless and guide you, and as for us, may God be glorified whether by life or by death. In Him, John C. Stam." On their tombstone in China today are these inscriptions: "John Cornelius Stam, 18 January, 1907, "That Christ may be magnified whether by life or by death." Phil. 1:20; Elizabeth Scott Stam, His Wife, 22 February 1906 "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Phil. 1:21. As they were being marched to the town where they were executed, they stopped at a small post office, and the clerk asked John Stam, "Where are you going?" He replied, "I don't know where the soldiers are going, but we are on our way to Heaven!" Their ministry was not long, their accomplishments not great. But thousands have surrendered to serve God through their example. Whether we are near the end time or not, the world is full of those who will hate God's people. One day we or our children or grandchildren may be the ones living under one of them. And if that should be, He has told us ahead of time to remember that He is in control and to be endure suffering patiently and be faithful unto death.

Revelation: Things To Come

The Tribulation: A Preview Of The End - Ch. 14

How many of you have been to see a movie in a theater lately? The last one we went to, we got into the actual auditorium about 10 minutes late and didn't miss a moment of the show and you know why. The first 20 minutes after the listed show-time are devoted to something called "previews." Preview literally means to view ahead of time, to view something before the real thing happens. So, in the theater you watch a miniature summary of a movie that many times hasn't even been released yet; it isn't even finished, but there in front of you is a brief and exciting summary of the most important happenings in that "film-to-be". Well, that's exactly what chapter 14 of Revelation is! Having shown John the two witnesses who will reach the world during the early part of the tribulation in chapter 11, what will happen to Israel during the Tribulation in chapter 12 and what the two awful world leaders of the Tribulation will be like in chapter 13, God now shows John a preview of the events that will occur at the end of the Tribulation. This chapter is a miniature summary revealed to John ahead of time of the events that actually follow in chapters 15 through 19. And you know what? Sometimes those previews are almost better than the real thing, aren't they? You can actually enjoy them for their own sake and benefit from what they have to share. So, let's attempt to enjoy chapter 14 on its own merit because God put it here for a reason. The first thing we come upon in the chapter is:

I. The Triumph At The End Of The Tribulation (1-5) Here he sees Jesus, the Lamb of God, now standing on the earth once again, standing on Mount Zion, standing on the mountain near Jerusalem. You know that's where He left from and

Zechariah says, *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two...* He'll set foot on earth once more in triumphant glory right where He left from! But verse 1 shows us that:

1. 144,000 believing Jews stand with the Lamb at His return We met them before, way back in chapter 7 where God had them marked with a special seal, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel, to protect them from all the awful plagues that were to come upon the earth during the Tribulation period. Now here we are given a glimpse of them again at the very end when it's all done and they are still alive, despite all the awful fury of the antichrist and the false prophet directed against them and they have run to stand with Jesus as He touches down in triumph. Not one has been lost, just as He said! Oh, what an encouragement to us! If all the forces of hell, loosed in all their fury, cannot penetrate God's protecting shield around these who will be the most hated and targeted of all, then His promise is true for us, *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.* - John 10:27-29. Listen, no one and nothing can snatch us out of His hand! Anything that comes into our life, HE chooses to allow to enter between His fingers! He is in complete control. No wonder the 144,000 are rejoicing!

2. they sing of the Lamb (2-3) Heaven touches earth here. A new song is being played in heaven by a thousand harpists; loud voices are singing it, so loud that it is heard on the earth in that day. The hosts of heaven are shouting (That's us, folks!); we see it in the first half of chapter 19 as Jesus comes down. And earth can hear it. The 144,000 hear it; it's just for them, a special song of praise, and they learn it and they sing it to the Lamb. Oh, what praise they will render (and so will we!) when this man-made mess is all over with and Jesus is in charge! And then notice that:

3. they have served the Lamb (4-5) Here is some special information about how they served Jesus during those awful years until He arrived. They evidently chose to remain single, like Paul, to give the fullest possible service to Him under those horrid conditions and never yielded to immorality though it was all around them. They were holy, blameless. They never lied to save their own necks. Like Job in all his affliction, they did not sin with their lips! So now they get to share in His Kingdom on the earth and follow Him wherever He goes! If I'm right, they are His firstfruits, His seed stock to re-start a righteous nation of Israel all over again during His millennial reign. Remember, in Mt. 25 Jesus said that when He comes in all his glory all the people of the world will be gathered before Him and separated like sheep and goats. And they are judged based on what? On how they treated HIM! And remember, He said, *In that you did it to the least of THESE MY BROTHERS you did it to me!* Well, if all the peoples of the earth are in front of Him, who are "these My brothers?" You're looking at them! These dear believing Israelites who bravely live through it all and they enter along with the sheep into His Millennial Kingdom. Hey, are you sold out to Jesus, are you fully consecrated to Him like these are? Listen, when He comes, you'll be glad you were!

Now the scene changes and John sees three angels flying, not in heaven and not on earth, but in midair, through the skies above the earth. And these three are sounding:

II. The Universal Warning Before The End Of The Tribulation (6-11) During this age Jesus is using His church to reach all the peoples of the world. After we're gone, during the early part of the Tribulation, He plans to use the two special witnesses of chapter 11. But some time just before the end comes, God will use the ministry of angels in a direct way to the human race. During the first week of August 1945, American planes flew over 35 Japanese cities and blanketed them with a million leaflets that read: *Read this carefully as it may save your life or the life of a relative or friend. In the next few days, some or all of the cities named on the reverse side will be destroyed by American bombs. These cities contain military installations and workshops or factories which produce military goods. We are determined to destroy all of the tools of the military clique which they are using to prolong this useless war. But unfortunately, bombs have no eyes. So, in accordance with America's humanitarian policies, the American Air Force, which does not wish to injure innocent people, now gives you warning to evacuate the cities named and save your lives. America is not fighting the Japanese people but is fighting the military clique which has enslaved the Japanese people. The peace which America will bring will free the people from the oppression of the military clique and mean the emergence of a new and better Japan. You can restore peace by demanding new and good leaders who will end the war. We cannot promise that only these cities will be among those attacked but some or all of them will be, so heed this warning and evacuate these cities immediately.* Acting in grace, we gave Japan a last warning before the awful atomic judgment fell that finally ended the war. God will do the exact same thing during the second half of the Tribulation using angels, three of them, who will somehow circle the globe and give an angelic warning from the sky to every people on earth in their own language. The first angel will bring:

1. a warning of the last opportunity to repent (6-7) "Turn to God! Turn to the One who made the world, who made you! Give up your foolish false worship! The hour of His judgment is come; it will not wait any longer. This is your last opportunity! Turn to Him or be destroyed!" And right behind the first angel comes a second with:

2. a warning of the fall of the world system (8) "Great Babylon, the world empire of the Beast, which has you under its thumb, which demands your allegiance and control, that empire is fallen! It is about to be destroyed! It will not be able to protect you from God's wrath! You cannot trust in it; it cannot help you and you don't owe it allegiance anymore! Turn from it and all its wicked practices!" And behind that angel comes a third one with:

3. a warning of the awful punishment of hell (9-11) "Don't worship the beast! Don't take his mark! Don't fall prey to his deception! If you do, if you choose this foolishness of idolatry and rebel against the true God, He will pour out His Divine wrath full strength!" In those days they used to dilute wine with water before drinking it, but God's wrath will be poured out full strength; that means you will endure an eternity of suffering in the lake of fire which we call hell! Now notice that there are some things we can learn about hell itself right in this passage. First of all:

a. it is physical anguish; it is a place of burning, of the torment of physical pain. It will not just be unpleasant; it will be torture, painful suffering. On top of that:

b. it is mental anguish It is not so much that heaven can see into hell, but that hell can see into heaven. Those who are suffering can see and know what they missed, that they could have been in the presence of the Lamb with the holy angels. It seems that they may somehow have a continuing view of it that only serves to torment them further, just as the rich man in hell was able to lift up his eyes and see Lazarus across the great gulf being comforted. Then note in verse 11 that:

c. it is eternal anguish It lasts forever and ever, to the ages of the ages, and finally:

d. it is continual anguish There is no rest, no respite from it day or night, no drop of water to cool the tongue, no wisp of breeze to cool the brow, no moment of relief.

Listen friends, I know this is a warning for those in that day for those who choose the ultimate wickedness of worshipping Satan over God and the antichrist instead of Christ Himself. But it is also a description of the same lake of fire that awaits every human being who dies outside of Christ! Every one of them is ultimately doing exactly that same thing and the penalty is the same! I know we don't enjoy talking about this; I don't enjoy preaching about it. But Jesus talked about it quite a bit and gave bold warnings about it. Whether a person believes there's a hell really doesn't matter. Reality is reality. Jesus said there is one, so there is, and our responsibility is to rescue people from it by taking the Gospel to everyone both near and far away. In essence, we do today exactly what God is doing in our text; we show mercy! Just as He will show infinite grace and mercifully warn every single soul in the world in that future day; today He has sent us to give people a last warning before it is forever too late! God DID something about their awful situation; HE SENT US! But finally, after the warning, John is shown a vision of:

III. The Great Harvest At The End Of The Tribulation (14-20) This is a two-fold vision. John sees two symbolic actions, the reaping of the whole earth as one would reap a grain harvest, and the harvesting of grapes and throwing them into a winepress to be trampled into juice. These don't seem to be two separate events, but rather two views of the same thing. The words of the vision clearly indicate that this is when the vision of Joel will actually happen. **Joel 3:12-14** says, *Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow-- so great is their wickedness! Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.* Here in Revelation, we see it come to pass and what it means is this. At Christ's return:

1. all unbelievers will be gathered to one place (14-16) In reaping all the acres of wheat, stalks are cut and gathered and brought to one place for threshing. But this harvest is not one of good grain. In the Greek, this harvest is literally *withered away, dried up*. In farming terms, this harvest has been lost to drought and it needs to be cut down and burned up. Jesus told his disciples, *As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.* - Mat. 13:40-41. *"I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left."* *"Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."* - Luke 17:34-37. At the time of Christ's return the angels of God will gather ALL the unbelievers of the earth to the same place, to Israel, to Jerusalem where He is, to receive judgment. And there:

2. all unbelievers will be destroyed (17-20) Now the vision is one of cutting all the ripe grapes from the vine and throwing them into the winepress and crushing them so the wine runs out. Only God's winepress is not a stone pit; it is an entire valley outside Jerusalem where the masses of unbelieving people from earth are physically slain. They are killed and crushed in a carnage so awful that the blood runs out in a river as deep as a horse's bridle and flows 180 miles south into the Red Sea. I know that sounds unbelievable, but just think if the average human has 1.25 gallons of blood and if, using today's numbers, let's say 5 billion people perished in one place, that would be some 7.5 billion gallons of blood! Then God calls the carrion birds to come and feast on the carcasses - **Rev. 19:17-18**.

What a gruesome picture! What an awful end for the human race! God wiped the earth clean with a flood once before; this time He will do it selectively with his angels and only those who acknowledge Him will survive to populate His millennial Kingdom. Now, the world, hearing these things, immediately points a finger of accusation. They say that we have a sadistic God, a cruel God who enjoys tormenting and killing poor defenseless human beings! They can't believe in such a God. But listen, our God is a God of grace and mercy! That is the awful fate that ALL human beings deserve. But smack in the middle of the broad road that leads to destruction, God planted a CROSS on which His own SON was crucified to save them from it, to keep them from falling over that precipice into hell! To get to hell you have to walk out around Calvary.

Listen, God is not willing that ANY should perish but that ALL should come to repentance! He swears it to us: ...As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die... - Ezek. 33:11. God is a God of mercy and grace and love. He loved the world so much that He gave His only Son to prevent them from perishing, from enduring this awful fate! He sent His church for 2000 years to tell the whole world the News. In the Tribulation He will tell the whole world again by the two witnesses and at the last He will warn them one more time directly by His angels. They will all hear; they will all know; they will all be without excuse! But if they refuse His mercy, there is nothing left for them but to endure His eternal wrath! Take a deep breath and let the enormity of that sink in. Now in the middle of all of this I skipped two verses. Many WILL listen to the warning! Many WILL believe and God puts here:

IV. An Encouragement To All Who Believe During The Tribulation (12-13) God is honest with them. He tells them straight up that as believers:

1. to live will require faithful endurance of enormous hardships Since they refuse the mark of the world leader, they will have to flee their homes, they will be hunted and sought out, they will lose everything and not be able to buy. They will have to trust God through incredible hardships that we can't begin to imagine. And the result is that many of them will die; they will have to give their lives, but here He also gives them this wonderful assurance that:

2. to die will be a blessed release from suffering To die will be gain! It will be a rest from the awful labors and toils they are suffering during that horrible time. And God will not forget they have endured it all out of love for Him. There will be a great reward for all they have done.

We usually read this verse at funerals but this promise is meant specially for those who will believe during that awful period. It will be a precious word from God to them that will strengthen their hearts. It will help them to overcome by trusting the blood of the Lamb; it will help them to love not their own lives even to the death. But it certainly is true for all of us even now. As Paul put it, to die IS gain, today! It is the icing on the cake of salvation. To die is to be blessed; it is to enter into glory and to be with our Lord and rest from all the misery that life brings on earth and be eternally rewarded. Here's something I read in a missionary newsletter; it is the explanation of a Native American living in Alaska. May these words encourage you: *"I take family on holiday camping in Alaska beautiful mountains. Mountain paths. Quiet clear stream. Sweet perfume flower. Tall mountain. I use best supply I can get. I want holiday to be happy. I look and look for the best spot make camp. Find best spot before other person find. Then I put up good tent. Buy it at good store -- not cheap -- and I work hard to make tent sturdy for wind and rain. I do good. Stand strong and we ready for nice holiday in tent. But whole time I put up tent and after when I see good job -- never -- not once ever say to self that we live in tent forever. Even when I put up, I know in a few days it come down. I go home. Father in heaven not make us for feel at home in this tent body. Body very fickle home like tent. Move it around. Never meant be permanent house like Paul say (2 Cor. 5). Tent come down. Self soul move on. One day I sit in tent and wind start to blow. Door flap tear. Stitch start ravel. Then I not so comfortable in tent any more and Father say, "OK. Permanent house ready now. Come move in." Family sad. My tent all they know. One day be happy when move out their tent and go live permanent house by me and Father in Heaven. Until then pray my family comfort and we enjoy tent life for little while until our house ready in heaven."* [newsletter from Jeff and Terry Krimmel, serving Christ with SEND Int'l., in Alaska].

Revelation: Things To Come

The Tribulation: The Last Plagues - Chs. 15-16

Part of the problem with understanding the Book of Revelation is that there are a number of events that are happening simultaneously. In a movie the scene would suddenly cut from the action in this place to the action in that place and then to a third and then back again, so you would easily get the idea that while A was going on, that B was going on at the same time and so was C. That's actually the way that God is showing these scenes to John! He is cutting from one scene to another, describing many things that are all happening in parallel during the final 7 year tribulation period. Our problem is that when we read a story in print, our minds seem to expect it to be chronological, to progress continually in order. And overall, Revelation does that in its outline. The church appears to be raptured in chapter 4; the Tribulation begins in chapter 6 and it ends in chapter 19, then comes the Millennial reign of Christ in chapter 20 and finally new heavens and a new earth as it ends. But in that long middle portion, there the scenes often cut back and forth giving details, but frequently not advancing the story timewise. Let me try to summarize all we've studied about the Tribulation. On the *Political Scene*, in the beginning a man called the Beast or Antichrist unites the west to form a 10 nation empire, becomes acclaimed as the ruler of the world and tries to force his rule upon all nations, however, in the end three major blocks of nations rebel against him and come to fight him in what we call Armageddon. At the same time on the *Religious Scene*, in the beginning he makes a covenant with Israel and restores her worship. God has two witnesses that impact the whole world. But right in the middle the beast kills them, breaks his covenant, desecrates the Temple and demands that all human beings worship him. Israel flees into the desert where God protects her and he begins a huge campaign to eliminate faith in God from the earth, in the end killing millions. At the same time on the *Scene of God's Judgments*, in the beginning He sent the world into the chaos of war, famine, disease and death, described as "seals", and as this period progresses, He sends another round of judgments described as "trumpets," which destroy a third of earth's vegetation and pollute a third of the

sea and the waters. Then He sends demonic beings who torment men with suffering and later draws an army from the east which destroys a third of the human race as it travels. Finally, after warning the entire race that it is their last chance by means of angels, we come to what are called the 7 last plagues, described for us in chapters 15 and 16. In chapter 15 we have:

I. The Preparation For The Last Plagues - Ch. 15 In verse 1 the scene shifts back now to what is going on in heaven. He sees seven angels who were assigned to a specific task. They were to bring about the 7 last plagues on earth. And as his gaze sweeps around the heavenly panorama, he sees:

1. the victors and their song (2-4) He sees a multitude of men and women standing before the Throne of God, playing harps and singing to God a special song which is called the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. Some of the words of that song are recorded here for us. But first let's ask:

a. who they are Think about it; it says that they were victorious over the beast and his image, so they must have lived on earth during the second half of the Tribulation. Yet here they stand in heaven, so they must have died!

They are **believers martyred during the Tribulation**. We met them singing before the throne of God way back in **7:9** and in verse **14** we were told that they had come out of the great tribulation. Here they are again, coming back into view once more for a closer look. As God is about to pour out the fullness of His wrath on the human race, they sing about how just He is in doing it, how righteous He is in pouring out on mankind what they deserve! But look closely and here's:

b. what they show us The text says they were victorious over the Beast and his image and his number. They defeated him! But not by fighting back, not by wresting control from him and destroying his armies and killing him. In fact, the world would say they were defeated; they lost. They died and he won. But the opposite is true; they died and **THEY** won! They became victorious by dying! You see, the real battle is not physical! It is spiritual. Satan's goal, especially during this time, is to utterly destroy faith in God and drag every single human being away from God to make them worship him. That's why they won! Do you see that? They loved not their lives to the death; they died in faith believing to the very end and were ushered straight into His presence! Satan lost! The beast lost! They won! God won! You see, **faithfulness is the true victory!** Satan's strategy against you before you were saved was to keep you from believing. But now that you believe, Satan's goal is the same as it was with Job, to get you to curse God and turn away from Him, to make you suffer enough or make you afraid enough or whatever tool he can use, to get you to rebel against God and walk away. But if you don't, if you remain faithful through it all even to the very end, God wins and you win! Oh, be faithful! Whatever you're facing, however deep your pain is, stand with Job and declare, *Though He slay me, YET will I trust Him!* Stand with these who will suffer more than you can imagine and sing with them, *Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the Ages!* That is victory! And look:

c. what they sing next: all nations will worship YOU! The very thing Satan is trying to prevent, the very thing the Beast is trying stop from happening by making every human being worship him, won't happen! All the nations, all the peoples that God has created **WILL** come and worship before Him! They will do it in heaven and when Jesus comes, they will do it on earth! Isaiah said, *the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.* - 11:9. Zechariah said, *The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name...* Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain. - 14:9, 16-17. John heard it sung again, *All the nations will come and worship before You!* Listen, He wins! That was His goal from the very first! It was His goal all the way through Bible history, it is His goal today and, in the end, He will have it! Hallelujah! Now we look back to the seven angels and we see:

2. the bowls and their meaning (5-8) These angels are given 7 bowls and we are told:

a. what they contain: they are full of **the wrath of God**. Don't think of wrath as some sort of flaring up of temper, as though God has finally had enough and blows up. No, God's wrath is His holy, righteous, pure anger at sin and evil. The plagues that God is about to send upon mankind are plagues that mankind deserves for their rebellion against God. They are His just judgment upon wicked people who have refused time and again to repent despite all His warnings. And here's:

b. what their pouring out symbolizes: completeness Look at verse **(1)**. When these last events are poured out: **(1) the judgment of God upon the human race is completed.** It is the same word Jesus cried from the cross, *It is FINISHED!* It's completed. Everything there is to do has been done; everything there is to pay has been paid and it's fulfilled, brought to an end. So now God's judgment is FINISHED, brought to completion, poured out to its last full measure of justice, to the very last drop! And from the fact that in heaven the Temple where God's very presence is it filled with smoke from the glory of God and His power so that no one can enter until they are poured out, we learn that:

(2) the judgment of God is, at this point, irreversible No one can stop it. No one can intercede any longer. No one halt the judgment. The human race has passed its final warning sign; they have sinned away any remaining grace and nothing is left now but to experience the wrath of God. Oh, what a fearful thing! Then as we move into Chapter 16, we watch:

II. The Pouring Out Of The Last Plagues - Ch. 16 These plagues happen right at the end, it seems, in the very last days of the Tribulation, and they seem to happen in quick succession, one right after the other. The first one is:

1. the plague of sores (1-2) Painful, malignant sores break out on men all over the earth. But notice that it's selective: they break out ONLY on those who have the mark of the beast and worship him, but they break out on ALL of them. It's just like the plague of boils that God sent upon the Egyptians in Moses' day! The magicians of Egypt couldn't stand before Moses, they were in so much pain. And these sores don't heal overnight or in a couple of days; in verse 11 they are still cursing God because of their painful sores! Next comes:

2. the plague on the sea (3) Earlier a third of it had been turned to blood and a third of its sea life died. But that was merely a warning shot. Now the entire ocean becomes coagulated with red sediment like the blood of a dead person! All marine life dies! And after that comes:

3. the plague on water sources (4-7) Earlier a third of earth's water sources had been poisoned. Now every fresh water source, every stream and river and spring, is turned to blood, is poisoned with red sediment and made unfit to drink. The angel adds his comment, "How just this is, O God! They have shed the blood of millions of your people! So you have given them blood to drink! They deserve it!" And notice verse 7. Altars don't talk! Back in 6:9-10 we met a group of people *under the altar*, early tribulation martyrs who were asking God, "How long before you avenge our blood?!" And they were told to wait a little longer until all their brothers were also killed. And now God is doing it! He's avenging their deaths and they cry, *Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments!* Then comes:

4. the plague of scorching (8-9) Earlier the sun was lessened, the day shortened by a third. Here the opposite occurs. God intensifies the heat of the sun or removes the ozone layer or however He does it, so that it scorches people. It sears them; it burns them. They can't be out in its full light without some shield. And get this; they know who is doing this! They know who controls the sun and who polluted the waters and sent the sores and they CURSE Him! They refuse to repent and fall before Him in sorrow for their sins; they display the hatred of God and the true wickedness that is in their hearts. He IS just! Then after a bit of being scorched, God turns the sun off and sends:

5. the plague of darkness (10-11) Now there is a period of darkness, like the darkness of Egypt, and it is focused particularly upon the kingdom of the beast, that 10 nation western empire. God shrouds the sun somehow and daytime is black as night. And there they sit, those followers of Antichrist, covered by painful sores, nothing to drink, nursing their burns, biting their tongues in agony and what do they do? They curse the God of heaven and still refuse to repent! Oh, the heart of man is desperately wicked, Jeremiah said! Then comes the sixth angel and the effect when his bowl is poured out is a little different. It is:

6. the plague of the gathering of armies (12-14, 16) Now this relates to what we saw back in **9:14-16**. There God released some wicked angels, some demons, who had been kept bound at the Euphrates River. And by them God started a vast army of 200 million from the east, sweeping across the land mass of Asia, slaying a third of the earth's population as they go. Verses 13-15 here seem to be a flashback showing how that worked. Satan had sent out three of his most powerful evil spirits to indwell the kings of various regions of the earth. In Daniel we are told that there is a northern, probably Russian, confederacy, a southern, probably African, confederacy and an eastern, probably Chinese, confederacy. These leaders receive miraculous power and are able to lead their groups of nations to rebel against the Beast, the western ruler, who is dominating the whole world. So, in this final hour these armies are all drawing near to Israel. This vast army from the east is approaching and the only remaining thing standing in its way is the great Euphrates River, so now God dries it up. Maybe supernaturally, but there are already dams on the Euphrates River today that could do this. The target of these armies is a broad valley in northern Palestine, the valley of Megiddo, and they come for a clash, a final war that has become known as Armageddon. The sixth plague really is the arrival of this vast eastern army for the final battle! Now you might want to ask yourself, "Why would Satan want to gather all the armies of the earth to fight against his own man, his own ruler who already dominates the earth? Why would he want to divide his own kingdom?" I think the answer is that Satan is using it as a ruse; his goal is to gather all of earth's military might in one spot, the right spot, so that it can all be turned directly against Jesus Christ as He comes! So now it's all in place and just before Christ lights up the sky with His coming God sends the last plague:

7. the plague of destruction (17-21) First there is:

a. a colossal earthquake in verses **(18-19)** that is worse than any ever recorded. It's off the top of the Richter scale. It is felt worldwide, so severely that cities all over the world collapse and that great city which is called Babylon in the text, but is probably Rome, the capital of the beast's kingdom, crumbles and is split into three parts. We'll

see more about this in the next chapters. But one can hardly imagine the seismological changes and the changes in the plate tectonics underlying the earth's land masses. No wonder that along with the earthquake comes:

b. physiographical changes in verse (20) Great geological shifts occur worldwide. Islands sink and disappear; mountains are leveled. The world seems to be falling apart, it's very foundations crumbling. And from heaven God rains down:

c. gigantic hailstones in verse (21) Hundred pound hailstones! Imagine it! That would break right through the roof of your house! People must be hiding in basements and cellars and yet what do they do? Instead of turning to Him, they still curse God! Listen, when Christ gathers all the unbelievers of earth at His coming to destroy them, He is not gathering poor innocent people who never heard of Him. He is gathering wicked people who have been warned time and again, who have seen and know the power of His judgments and who have wickedly cursed Him to the bitter end! They deserve His wrath; He is just in what He does!

But what about His own people! There will still be a multitude of believers living in that hour and they will have to live through the suffering of these final days. Well, right in the middle of these last plagues, John hears the voice of Christ Himself breaking in. Look at verse 15 where we have:

III. Christ's Encouragement To His People (15) What is He saying? **"Look to My coming!"** "See, open your eyes and watch for me. I know it looks like all is lost and the very foundations of the earth are shaken but I am coming swiftly and suddenly. Be ready and look for it! I am coming to deliver you!"

I am reminded of that scene in the Lord of the Rings movie where good King Theoden and Aragorn and his people are under siege in the castle of Helmsdeep by an army of 10,000 horrible uruchai. The castle wall has been breached. They are locked in the inner keep and the enemy army is battering down the wooden door with a battering ram. The death of all seems only moments away. And Theoden is ready to give up in total despair and says, *So much death! What can men do against such reckless hate!* And at that moment a ray of light bursts through the upper window and Gimli says "It is dawn." And with that the words of Gandalf, the Christ-figure in the movie, come echoing back to them all... *Look to my coming at first light on the third day. At dawn look to the east.* So they mount their horses and ride out through the door trampling their enemies and there on the high ridge above the valley sits Gandalf on a shining white horse with thousands of riders gathered behind him and they sweep down in a majestic wave and destroy every last enemy! Friends, that is what Jesus is saying to his despairing end-time followers, *Look to my coming! I am coming quickly, swiftly! In just a few days now. Do not despair; do not give up; stay faithful to Me. I will be there right on time!* Oh listen, that is His encouragement to you even today. If you are suffering, if you are struggling, if the foundations of your world seem shaken and you have no place to turn and it seems all is lost, hear His encouragement, *Behold! Look! See! I am coming. Watch for Me! Stay faithful; keep your garments of righteousness. Be ready for at just the right moment I am coming. And even if I take you home to Me first, still know this: I AM COMING and I will set the world straight! Evil will not triumph. I will!*

Revelation: Things To Come

The Tribulation: Two World Systems - Chs. 17-18

As we ended chapter 16 last time, we saw that the last plague God pours out on earth at the very end of the Tribulation period just before Christ comes is the destruction of a city called "Babylon the Great" (verse 19) with a great earthquake. Chapters 17 and 18 are a fresh vision which spells out that destruction in greater and more graphic detail. Now the first question that should be on your mind is, "What is all the talk about Babylon all of a sudden?" The word only occurs five times in the New Testament outside of Revelation and four of those times it refers to the Babylonian captivity of the Jews in the Old Testament. The best that I can tell, at the time that John wrote this, the literal city of Babylon on the Euphrates River had been lying almost completely in ruins for 200 years! There has been no city of Babylon for 2100 years! Saddam Hussein set out to rebuild its ruins and make himself the new Nebuchadnezzar until the US invasion put a stop to it! You know why? God said in Is. 13:17-20 that He would overthrow Babylon and it would never be inhabited again to all generations! So the name:

I. Babylon: is A Veiled Reference That's what the word MYSTERY means in **verse 5**. It is not part of the name. God is telling John to stop and think and realize that the Babylon the Great is not literal. It is a code name, if you will. Verse 9 confirms again that we must think about it and realize that it's not literal. It is in fact, **A Code Name For Rome**. In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter signs off his letter by saying, *She who is in Babylon... sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark*. Peter and Mark were not camped in the ruins of ancient Babylon; they were in ROME! Peter was beheaded there! Mark was with Paul there! Babylon the Great was a way of talking about Rome, the great empire that ruled the world, the center of all that was evil on earth in its day, the great city that was shedding the blood of the saints in awful persecutions. So why not just say "Rome"? Well, maybe God was shielding Christians from even greater persecution on the basis that their holy documents say Rome will be destroyed. But I rather think it's because God is describing something that it is more than just a literal city and empire. Rome in John's day was the climax and the epitome of two systems, a system of religion and

a system of secular power, that had been present through all of human history and will reappear and rise to their fullest height during the Tribulation period. So, as we enter chapter 17, we see:

II. Babylon first as: The Religion Which Dominates The Early Tribulation - 17:1-6 *Adultery, harlotry and prostitution* are all terms which the Bible uses throughout the Old Testament to describe those who leave the worship of the true God and become unfaithful by giving themselves to the worship of false gods, idols. Chronicles describes Israel thus, *...they were unfaithful to the God of their fathers and prostituted themselves to the gods of the peoples of the land...* - 1 Chr. 5:25. Babylon became the symbolic name for this kind of false idolatrous religion and I guess the reason is that it all began there in the first place!

1. Babylon is the root of all false religion Look with me at **Gen. 10:8-10, 11:2, 9**. Nimrod was not a hunter of animals; he was a hunter of people, a great warrior. He was the first empire-builder of the human race, the first man to set out to rule the world. 3,000 years before Christ he established four cities in Mesopotamia and his capital was Babylon. There he led his people in building a tower. It wasn't an architectural feat or an astronomical observatory; it was a ziggurat, a tower built for false idolatrous worship! Nimrod led the people of earth into rebellion against God and established the first system of apostate adulterous religion, of trading the knowledge of the true God for the worship of created things. Of course, God scattered them abroad and the tower of Babylon became the tower of Babel, the tower of confusion. But the religion birthed there did not die out. Rather:

a. it reproduced into a multitude of Babylonian cults that continued for centuries. The ancient religious myths say that Nimrod had a wife called Semiramis. She was the high priestess of the idol worship. She had a son, a son whom she claimed was miraculously conceived. He was named Tammuz and was worshipped by many of the peoples of the ancient near east as a savior. After her lifetime Semiramis was worshipped as the "Queen of Heaven", even by some of the Israelites mentioned in Jer. 7:18, 44:17-19. Tammuz, it was said in the stories, was killed but he rose again and weeping over him was practiced even by Israelites in Ez. 18:4. Among the inhabitants of Canaan Tammuz was known as Baal and worshipped together with his lover Ashtoreth by several cultures in that region. Egypt had similar legends about its gods and the whole of the ancient world became filled with cult after cult in imitation of early Babylonian worship and almost all of them included ritual sacred prostitution and blood sacrifices (both animal and human). The gods were re-named but the concepts kept on being passed from one people to another. As the rule of this part of the world passed from one empire to another, from Syria to Assyria to Babylon to Persia to Greece and finally to Rome, this Babylonian paganism:

b. it morphed into not only into the legends of the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses but into the plethora of **the mystery religions of the Roman era** which Paul contended with. The myth of a mother goddess and a savior son was obviously a Satanic counterfeit of God's plan to send Christ into the world, but in its various forms it fit awfully conveniently with the story of Christ and later, once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 325 AD, it was integrated into the very practice of Christianity itself. Instead of a vibrant personal faith in Christ, over the centuries Christianity was often reduced to rituals and ceremonies that were strangely pagan in origin. Such concepts as the continuing dying of Christ over and over in the mass, that's what Tammuz did every year! Or the concept of praying for the dead or worshipping dead saints. Worshipping the virgin mother and paying her homage, having a priesthood to offer a sacrifice for the people, so many of the practices of medieval Christianity have roots in this paganism and led it so far astray from the church Jesus came to establish. It amassed huge amounts of wealth and property and joined itself to political systems so that popes were crowning kings and sending armies to do battle. No wonder that God broke in and "reformed" His church 500 years ago and split off whole new wings of it that went back to apostolic and true faith. But of course, these "Protestant" manifestations of the church often fell back into the same trap. Well, I said all of that as background to say this; this passage is showing us that:

2. ultimately during the Tribulation a "false church" will arise And that makes sense if you just think about it for a minute. If the Rapture occurred today and suddenly all the true believers in the world were gone in an instant, would there still be churches? Would there still be people attending them? Sure! Of course, evangelical churches would sit largely empty but many congregations in some of the very liberal mainline denominations would still have a good portion of their people left! And all of those left would be people who didn't know Christ, who didn't believe the Bible, who will be glad to be rid of the ancient archaic notions which we hold, who will be glad to embrace open morality and homosexuality and abortion, who will be glad to say that their way is only one of many ways to reach out to God and join together to finally bring about a true worldwide church, one umbrella for all religious people to enter. That's how during the Tribulation a "false church," an "unfaithful, harlot church" will arise.

a. it will be completely unfaithful to God in teaching and practice In fact, for all its modernity it will probably look strangely like ancient idolatrous religion has always looked, filled with immoral practices and absolute denial of Christ as the only Savior. But this "harlot church":

b. it will deeply impact the world's political system It will "ride the beast", just as its forbears did. It will have heavy political clout and influence, particularly over the western portion of the world. And:

c. it will accumulate great material wealth That's why this harlot is dressed in purple and scarlet and glittering with golden jewelry. Just as the church became steeped in materialism before, so it will again. And sadly:

d. it will persecute true believers Those who do come to believe and trust in Christ for real will be the enemy. And so, she is drunk in verse 6 with the blood of the martyrs. It will be a new inquisition, a new purging of the world once and for all, in their eyes, of all religious bigotry, a triumph of modern religion. Then note in verse **(18)**:

e. it will be identified with the city which rules the world, that is, Rome. Now, PLEASE don't go home and say that I said that the pope is the antichrist and the Roman Catholic church is the great harlot of Rev. 17! Luther said that, but I didn't say that! This harlot church will have Catholics in it, no doubt, but it will also have Episcopalians and Lutherans and Methodists and Presbyterians and Baptists and probably some independents too. They'll all join in one massive body that is identified with and probably headquartered in what will then be the capital of the western world, Rome. However, this false church:

3. it will be destroyed by the ruling empire (15-17) To put it simply, this false religious system:

a. it will be wiped out at the mid-point of the Tribulation During the first 3 ½ years I'm sure the world leader, the antichrist, will encourage it, just like he will the Jews. But in his heart, he has other plans. At that midpoint, when he shows his true colors and sets up his statue in the Temple, he'll wipe this false church out and:

b. it will be replaced by the cult of worship of the world ruler alone. The only acceptable religion will now be the worship of him and only him.

Now why talk about this anyway? We'll be gone! Well, if the Rapture were to happen today, we just read the fate of so many of our friends and neighbors, good people who may be religious, but they're lost and don't know Christ. They have a "form of religion"; they go to church; they say prayers; they do good works. But they have never experienced the "power of God" to make them new creatures. Of course, if they die without Christ they will be lost forever. But if they should live into this period they will almost surely be caught up into this false movement and swept along to oblivion! Their chances of genuinely trusting Christ will be far less than they are now! We have to learn to see the world as Jesus does. When He saw the people of the nearby Samaritan village coming out to meet Him, He said, *...I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.* - John 4:35. We are harvesters! That's the purpose of our lives on earth, to bring people into the kingdom. But so often the harvest stands in the field unreaped while we are off seeking our own pleasure or prosperity. May God give us eyes to see and care about the great need of the many around US that we may bring them to Him! We need to move on to look at:

III. Babylon, second, as: The Empire Which Rules During The Tribulation - 17:7-14 This beast is the political system of the end time. It is an Empire, a world empire, and notice three things about it. First:

1. it will be restored after going out of existence (7-8) It will exist, then not exist, and then be restored to life again. Without going back to Daniel again, we saw already there that if God's word is true this HAS to be the Roman Empire. The nations that made it up never ceased to exist; it simply fell apart into a jumble of individual nations. But it will be put back together once more as an empire, an empire with a taste to rule the world. Second:

2. its emperor will be the last in the line of godless rulers of that empire (9-11) The seven hills point to Rome but they also represent kings, rulers. Multiple attempts have been made to guess who God means here and truthfully, we don't really know. What we do know is that just as there was a succession of Caesars at Rome who ruled the world, there will be a last in their line, the beast, the antichrist of chapter 13. He will be the last and greatest of all. And third:

3. its form will be a confederacy of 10 nations (12-13), a unity of 10 member states who join together in the final hour of the world to give him their power. The desire to rule the world which began in Babylon and moved through state after state to Rome and lasted almost 1000 years, will revive and emerge into this end time political system that rules the world. But at the same time, it is also an economic system and in chapter 18 we see:

IV. Babylon, thirdly as: The City Leveled In The Last Plague Of The Tribulation - Ch. 18 That last plague from heaven in chapter 16 was a great earthquake that crumbled the great city, great Babylon that ruled the world! And here we see that:

1. its destruction is complete (1-3, 21-24) Those words are strangely like the words of doom that Isaiah pronounced against ancient Babylon. Just as that city has lain in ruins perpetually, so this great city of rebuilt Rome that will rule the world during that time will be completely destroyed. Why?

2. its destruction is deserved (4-8, 20) She is evil and she is proud. She has set herself against the people of God and she deserves to be destroyed. It is absolutely just. And look who misses her!

3. its destruction is lamented, first of all, by kings (9-10). All the kings of the earth who had allied themselves with her stand terrified. How can this be? How can she be destroyed in a day, so completely! **Merchants** stand there too

(11-17a). She was the center of world trade, of economic prosperity and here she lies in ruins in an hour! All their wealth has fallen into a heap of rubble! And **Seamen** stand there in **(17b-19)**. They stand on their ships and watch her from afar (by the way that's another reason this can't literally be Babylon; there is no ocean, no seaport for hundreds of miles there). They throw dust on their heads as they see the end of their economic life before their eyes and shout the same lament.

So, what lesson does God have here for us? It seems obvious: People who set their hope in the things of this world are doomed to lose them! Jesus put it like this, *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?* - *Mark 8:36. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.* - *Mat. 6:19-20.* That's true right now, whether we are close to the end time or not! When you die, it all goes up in smoke. You brought nothing into the world and you can't take anything out of it. The only treasures that last are spiritual, the development of our relationship with Jesus Christ and the fruit that results from Him living out His life through us on earth. But it's also true in a historical sense. Even today we live in a Satanically-controlled world system. Babylon, the empire of this world, is always trying to get its clutches into us! Its message comes at us from every direction; we are pressured at work, at school, and by the media that bombard us. Babylon never stops trying to get us to join in its rebellion against God, to think the way it thinks, to do the things it does, to leave our status as Christ's pure virgin bride and become an unfaithful adulteress. The pressure is awful, but I saved the good news for last:

V. Babylon: Satan's System, will be Annihilated At Our Return With Christ - 17:14 At the very end all the forces this world system can muster will be gathered in Israel to make war against the Lamb, to stand against Him as He returns to stop Him from setting up His kingdom on this earth. But the Lamb will conquer them; the Lamb will be victorious. In fact, we'll read next week that He will wipe them all out simply by the word that goes out of His mouth! How can He do that? Because He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and nothing can stop Him! But look, there's more! With Him when He comes are His called, chosen and faithful followers! Who are they? US! We are with Him when He comes! Oh brothers and sisters, it's tough to live under the evil system of this world, even now! The pressure to give in and worship the beast through materialism and self-centered philosophies and false religions with empty promises is almost unbearable at times. But be faithful! Jesus is coming soon to wipe out Satan's kingdom forever. One day the kingdoms of this world will all come crashing down and He will set up a Kingdom where the lion will lie down with the lamb, where they won't hurt or destroy in all His holy mountain, where all the redeemed nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and they won't learn war anymore and the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. And when He does it, we will be with Him!

1700 years ago (Feb. 23, AD 303), the Roman Emperor Diocletian issued his well-known "Edict Against The Christians" which began 10 years of the last, bloodiest and harshest persecution the church had ever faced. Hundreds of thousands died, many by the most gruesome forms of torture. Diocletian was so bold that he and his co-regent Maximius both minted coins commemorating the extermination of Christianity from the earth. Eight years later (311) Diocletian died, an emaciated man, his body ravaged by illness and having stepped down from emperorship in disillusionment. He may have committed suicide. One year after that in 312 his successor Constantine saw a vision of the sign of the cross in the heavens and openly declared himself a Christian, ending 250 years of waves of persecution. 70 years later (380) the emperor Theodosius declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. No Babylon, no earthly empire or system that sets itself up against Christ, has ever stood. The last and worst of them all won't stand, because HE is King of kings and Lord of lords and HE WILL REIGN! And when He does, Beloved, we will be WITH HIM! Be faithful!

Revelation: Things To Come

The Return Of Jesus Christ - Ch. 19

Rev. 19 contains the prophetic record of the central event of all history, the moment that the entire universe has been poised and waiting for ever since Genesis 3, the moment that the church has been longing and looking for ever since Jesus ascended in Acts 1, the Return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God on this earth! As we began this series, I urged you to view Revelation as the record of your own future, to study with anticipation and see yourself participating in it. In chapters 6 through 18 that's been a bit difficult because they describe the 7 years of the Tribulation, during which time you and I will not be on earth but in heaven. But now in chapter 19, if you look closely, you will find yourself squarely in the middle of all that is happening. The chapter divides very obviously into two halves. In the first half we watch as:

I. All Of Heaven Celebrates Jubilantly (1-10) That great day and hour has finally arrived. Among heaven's millions the excitement runs so high that all of heaven is shouting their praise to God with all their might. Try to picture it. Think of the multitude in Times Square on New Year's Eve at the moment the ball drops, how they all scream. Or imagine the noise in the stadium full of fans as the Phillies won the World Series! Now multiply that sound into millions upon millions and that's what John calls, *the roar of a great multitude in heaven!* And what they are shouting is one word that occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, yet we find it here four times. Hallelujah! It's a Hebrew word that shows up only in the Psalms and then only in a few of them, such as Ps. 150 which starts and ends with this word being translated, *PRAISE THE LORD!* In Hebrew it is *Hallelujah!* It is an expression of great joy emanating from the heart. Handel tried to capture the majesty of it

in his grand "Hallelujah Chorus". When King George II first heard it, he was so moved that he, the King, rose to his feet to acknowledge Christ and the entire audience rose with him which is why we still do that today. The story is told that one day Handel's assistant walked into Handel's room after shouting to him for several minutes with no response. The assistant found Handel in tears, and when asked what was wrong, Handel held up the score to the Hallelujah Chorus and said, "I thought I saw the face of God!" We can try to picture it; we can try to sing it, yet try as we might, we can't begin to imagine the overwhelming explosion of joy that we will personally experience in heaven on that day! And in the text, we read that that joy will come from two sources. First there will be joy:

1. because the world system has been destroyed (1b-4) The destruction of great Rome, the Great Babylon, the capital city of this world during the Tribulation, has been destroyed, just shortly before this by a great earthquake in chapters 16-18. But it is more than that; heaven is rejoicing because in just a few moments Satan's entire system will be shut down and brought to an end! The day of evil will be over at long last and the era of righteousness will be brought in! No more war! No more disease and famine! No more poverty! No more murdering the innocent; no more fear for the helpless! It's over; its day is past! Hallelujah! That's reason enough to shout, but the heavenly multitude is also shouting for another reason. They're shouting:

2. because the wedding supper of the Lamb has come (5-9) Oh, there's a grand wedding reception about to happen. Our beloved King is getting married! On the 29th of July 1981 crowds of 600,000 people filled the streets of London trying to catch a glimpse of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer on their wedding day. More than 750 million people watched the ceremony around the globe, making it the most popular program ever broadcast. She was the first English woman to marry an heir to the throne in 300 years and it seems the eyes of the whole world were upon her. Yet even all of that pales in comparison to the grand wedding that will occur at the return of our King! The eyes of the whole UNIVERSE will be upon it, shouting and cheering for it. And we are told in verses 7-8 that:

a. His bride is ready (7-8) Now who is that? What wife would our great King of the universe choose for Himself? Listen to what Paul said, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* - Eph. 5:25-27. **The Church** is His wife, His bride! And who is the church? YOU are! I am! Everyone who has believed in Christ for the last 2,000 years is! This is OUR wedding feast, the celebration of OUR union with Christ! But please understand that this image of a wedding which Scripture uses in a number of places is different from weddings the way we are used to them. A Jewish marriage had essentially three parts. The first is betrothal. The potential groom would approach the father of the bride with his desire to marry his daughter. And if it was agreeable and the arrangements suitable, he would pay the bride price that was asked and a covenant was made. The couple drank from a common cup of wine as a sign of it and from that moment they were considered married, although she continued to live in her father's house for the next year and they had no physical union. During that year apart, she would prepare herself and collect the dowry she would bring with her and the groom would prepare a room in his father's house for them to live. The pattern of Christ's betrothal is obvious; the Church:

(1) she was betrothed to Him in covenant at the Cross Look with me at **Mt. 26:27-29**. That cup was the cup of His marriage covenant. He drank it together with His disciples, with His church. We drink it with Him every time we celebrate Communion. It reminds us of the great bride price that He paid to have us, His own blood shed on the cross! Beloved, we are betrothed to Christ. We are His chaste virgin bride as Paul said. He left us for this season of betrothal, this church age, to get ready for the wedding and He went back to His Father's house to prepare a place for us! But on the appointed day, the second step would happen; the groom would come to the bride's house to take her to His house, her new home, where they would live in full union from then on. And so, with the Church, Christ:

(2) He will come to take her to His home at the Rapture He said, *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.* - **Jn. 14:2-3**. On the appointed day He will come and get us and take us to our new home with Him in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. But there is one thing left to do! The marriage must be celebrated. A great banquet of celebration is prepared. When the bride arrives at the groom's home, the guests have already been called and they are waiting to have a feast, a joyous celebration that could last for days, even an entire week. And for the Church:

(3) the marriage feast will occur in the Kingdom That's what our text is talking about. At Jesus' coming there will be a great celebration as His bride is unveiled in all her beauty before all of creation and there will be a feast like nothing the world has ever seen! Jesus spoke of it in **Mt. 8:11**, *I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.* You see that's what it means when it says that:

(4) His guests have all been summoned in (9) We use this as an invitation like, "Hey, do you want to come to a wedding? Do you want to receive Jesus?" But the Greek says, *Blessed are those who HAVE BEEN CALLED.* They've been summoned and they are already there to celebrate! If the bride is the church, then who are the

guests at this feast? We just read the names of some of them! Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be there! The **Old Testament saints** will join in the celebration and so will those great multitudes that believed during the tribulation once we were taken up. They're the guests and they're all there to celebrate with us! And what a time it will be! John Eldredge described the wedding feast of the Lamb like this, *Now, you've got to get images of Baptist receptions entirely out of your mind--folks milling around in the church gym, holding Styrofoam cups of punch, wondering what to do with themselves. You've got to picture an Italian wedding or, better, a Jewish wedding. They roll up the rugs and push back the furniture. There is dancing. "Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well" (Jer. 31:13). There is feasting. "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples" (Isa. 25:6). (Can you imagine what kind of cook God must be?) And there is drinking--the feast God says he is preparing includes "a banquet of aged wine--the best of meats and the finest of wines." In fact, at his Last Supper our Bridegroom said he will not drink of "the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:18). Then he'll pop a cork! [The Journey of Desire - p. 141-2]. Hey, maybe they'll be music by David and Heman and Asaph! Listen, there is a great party coming when all the people of God will celebrate the Marriage Feast of the Lamb at His coming! No wonder all of heaven is shouting, "Hallelujah, it's finally here!" But here's a detail that we all should pay attention to. Did you see the dress the bride had on? Guess what!*

(5) she is wearing a garment of her own making (8) We're making our own wedding dress! While our Groom is in heaven preparing our home, we're on earth preparing our garment by what we do with our lives! The reward of our righteous deeds done through the Spirit is a glorious garment of white to wear on our wedding day! That ought to make us consider how we're living, shouldn't it? Well, in verse 10 we have:

b. a reminder: the purpose of prophecy is to glorify Jesus (10) John is so overwhelmed that he can't take it all and simply falls down at the feet of the messenger to worship. But the angel warns him: never mistake the created thing for the Creator! It is so easy to get all caught up in the abundance of revelations, to immerse yourself in all of the details of what we've been shown and, in the end, to love the study of the book more than the Groom who's coming to get us! The spirit and purpose of all prophecy, all revelation, is to glorify Him! Now, as all of heaven celebrates jubilantly, in the second half of the chapter:

II. Jesus Returns To Earth Triumphantly (11-21) Oh, just look at:

1. the manner in which He will come (11-16) What a sight, our Lord Jesus on the day of His Return, radiant in all His glory! Look more closely at Him and here are some things you can see. First:

a. He will come as a Victor (11a) The scene here is clearly like that of a Roman "triumph", the grand parade where the victorious general rides into the city on a white horse at the head of all his troops, the streets lined with cheering citizens! The next time Christ comes it won't be humbly and riding on a donkey meek and mild; it will be on a white horse at the head of a heavenly army! He will come as the triumphant Victor who has conquered all His foes and put all His enemies beneath His feet! Second:

b. He will come as a Judge (11b-13) His garments are red, not this time from His own blood as our sacrificial lamb, but from the blood of His enemies! He comes to slay all the wicked of the earth in a just judgment. Third:

c. He will come with His saints (14) When the Lamb comes to destroy His enemies, 17:14 says, *with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers!* The armies of heaven are US! We'll accompany Him on that great day at His return. Won't it be grand to ride in with Him like the cavalry, just in the nick of time to save the world and to rescue that poor remnant of tribulation believers who are just hanging on by a thread! Finally:

d. He will come to rule the earth (15-16) Don't worry; we are with Him, but we do not come to fight! There is a sharp sword that comes out of His mouth that destroys them all which is a symbolic way of saying that:

(1) His word will destroy His enemies He will not lift a finger. He will not raise a sword. He will not lift a shield. He will simply speak a word! And at His word they will all die. Their very life is sustained by the power of His word and at His word it will be removed and they fall lifeless before Him in heaps. And:

(2) He will assume His rightful position His title is emblazoned on His robe, *King of Kings and Lord of Lords!* From this moment on, the earth will be directly under His rule. No more usurpers! No more tyrants! No more will Satan have his way and wreak havoc on His creation! Now look:

2. what will happen when He comes (17-21) First:

a. He will destroy all the armies of earth at His word. They have been gathered in the valley of Megiddo in the land of Israel to fight one another, and as His sign appears in the sky, they will all turn *en masse* to stand together against Him. But one little word will fell them all! In fact, they will become carrion for the birds, a huge feast for the vultures, who will clean up the bodies! All the might of this world cannot stop the King of Kings from taking up His Kingdom. But a special doom is reserved for some of them:

b. He will cast the leaders of earth alive into the lake of fire The Beast, the antichrist, and his henchman, the False Prophet, are thrown alive into *gehenna*, the lake of eternal fire to suffer eternally. And if you look down to 20:10 you'll see that they are still there 1,000 years later and that their torment lasts forever and ever. That is the true and just penalty for opposing the King.

And with all opposition finally out of the way, the kingdoms of the world become the Kingdom of our Lord. But more about that next week. I'd like to close with a story that I borrowed from Dr. David Jeremiah: *Once there was a nobleman whose wife was dead and his only child was a beautiful young lady of marriageable age. The father invited all the young noblemen in the country to come for a week of entertainment at his castle. Great preparations were made. Strolling musicians were hired, minstrels were engaged, while pigs were roasted and a hundred appetizing foods were prepared. The castle was a bustle of preparation. Early on the day of their arrival, a loud knocking was heard at the postern gate. It was a deformed man on crutches. A few crusts were thrust at him and the gate slammed in his face. He continued to knock. "What do you want?", someone asked. "Isn't this the day the guests seek the nobleman's daughter? I've come to beg for her hand." Peals of laughter echoed as cooks, servants and soldiers gathered to laugh and to mock the poor fool. Hearing the noise, the daughter asked what was happening. When told, she said, "I'll go and see him." Down the winding stairs she went, out into the cobbled yard and the crowd opened to let her pass. "What is it you want?" she asked the beggar. He fastened on her an earnest look. "I have seen you while I myself was unnoticed and I love you and have come to ask if you will marry me." The crowds howled, but the man and maid eyed each other deeply. "Yes, I will marry you," she said as the crowd shrieked with merriment. "Very well," said the beggar. "I will return in a year and a day." The guests arrived in due course but she gave them no encouragement. The nobleman scolded and importuned and finally was actually cruel to his daughter. The servants were the same. Gloom descended on the castle. "You would marry a beggar," snapped her father. "He will never come back, that's sure!" But the girl simply smiled. A year passed and finally the day came. The morning passed uneventfully, then at high noon distant peals of music were heard and the rumbling of drums. The sun flashed on spears and polished armor. A courier spurred to the gate with the astonishing news that the king's son, the royal prince, was arriving. The nobleman and his daughter had barely time to reach the gate. There, riding between two rows of knights was the king's son mounted on a magnificent white charger and clad in golden armor. Swinging gracefully from his steed he stood before the nobleman, to whom he gave no recognition. He took the girl by the hand and in a most endearing fashion said, "My love, I have come back for you as I promised." Her eyes filled with tears as she murmured, "I knew you would come." So he took her as his bride. But before she left there was just time for one of the maids to ask, "How did you know that the beggar was the Prince in disguise?" "Ah, I recognized him the first time" she said. "I looked into his eyes and listened to his voice and I knew that day that he was indeed the son of the King." [Turning Points Magazine, Feb. 2009, p. 15]*

Jesus came the first time in humility as the poorest of men. He came to seek His Bride, to ask her hand, to claim her as His own. He was mocked and ridiculed and crucified. But His Bride said, "Yes, I will marry you!" And today His Bride is making herself ready. She's often scorned and ridiculed, even rejected and treated cruelly. Yet we who have been betrothed to Jesus simply hang on to His promise that one glad day He will come to take up His Kingdom and that together we will rule in joy forever and ever! And people ask us, "Why do you wait for this beggar?" And we answer, "Many years ago I listened to His voice and I knew that day He was the Son of the King! I know He will come."

Revelation: Things To Come

The Kingdom Come - Ch. 20

For 2000 years Christians have been praying, *Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!* And while that is something we are praying will happen even in our current world, chapter 20 of Revelation records the ultimate answer to that prayer. After Christ returns to earth and defeats His enemies in chapter 19, He will set up His Kingdom right here on the earth. As loud voices from heaven put it when the seventh trumpet sounded back in 11:15, *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.* That is what chapter 20 is describing and we note here five important events. The first thing that happens when Jesus comes is that:

I. Satan Is Bound (1-3) Even though he was defeated at the Cross and "put out of business" there, as Heb. 2:14 says, God has still allowed him to be free all these years, free to use the only weapon he has left, deception. He has been free to blind the minds of unbelievers and deceive them through all kinds of lies that the culture around them brainwashes them with from their earliest days. He's been free to convince people that good is evil and evil is good and lure them into all kinds of awful behaviors, but more than anything, he's been free to keep them locked away from the knowledge of the truth of God. However, now things will be different. In that moment he will be bound with a great chain that he can't break and locked securely in a place that he can't escape from. Notice first:

1. the place of his confinement: the Abyss, literally the *Bottomless Pit*. We've seen the abyss before, back in 9:1-2. The abyss is not hell, the lake of fire where eternal punishment takes place; it is the place where demons are confined by God. Look with me at **2 Pet. 2:4**. Not all of the angels that fell with Satan are running around as free demons wreaking havoc. Many of them God confined in a special place. The Greek word here is not *hell*, but *tartarus*, which simply

means the underworld. In Revelation that same place is called the Abyss or Pit. There they are confined in chains and suffer while awaiting their eternal judgment. The legion of demons in the man in Gadara begged Jesus not to send them to this place, the Pit, but to let them keep roaming free. But now Satan himself is chained and locked securely there in the pit, a place from which he cannot escape to roam free any more. And the text doesn't say so, but I imagine that all of his demonic hosts are locked up along with him. But for how long? Well, we read that:

2. the length of his confinement is 1000 years For a thousand years he will not be able to deceive the nations, to lie to people or to tempt people. Imagine that! No more external temptation! No more demonic thoughts being whispered into people's minds! No forces outside of people urging them to do evil. No one will be able to say, "The Devil made me do it!" or even, "The Devil tempted me to do it!" And therein lies the reason for this confinement; it is to give the human race the opportunity to respond to God in and of themselves without Satan's interference and influence. From the first days in the garden of Eden he has been there suggesting evil, leading astray, but no more! Not in Christ's Kingdom! Now, immediately after Satan is bound, a second thing happens:

II. The Saints Are Resurrected (4-6) At the beginning of the Kingdom there is a great Resurrection. What's that about? Well, remember what happened at the Rapture of the Church seven years earlier? Thessalonians says that when the Lord descends for us, the dead in Christ RISE first. That is, they are resurrected. What does that mean? Their spirits are already with Christ, but now their bodies are resurrected; they are given new spiritual bodies just like that which Jesus had when He rose from the dead. And those who are alive are translated into new bodies on the way up. So we, the church, are already resurrected; this is not us. Then who are these people? They are people who had not worshipped the beast or his image, so:

1. they are tribulation saints who perished For seven years, people have been believing and dying, slain by the Satanic world system of the Tribulation period. Thousands, millions of them. We saw their souls waiting patiently in heaven before the Throne and worshipping in several places in Revelation. And now they come to life. That is, their bodies are raised; they are given new glorified resurrection bodies, just as we were! And the text doesn't say this, but I happen to think that:

2. they probably also include the Old Testament saints, because **Dan. 12:1-2** says, *...There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.* All the people of faith from Adam to Malachi died and were with the Lord, but they were not the church; they were not "the dead in Christ" who were resurrected at the Rapture. They don't have bodies yet, probably not until this moment when their believing Israelite brethren who died in the Tribulation get theirs! Yet at any rate, the point is that:

3. they are given resurrection bodies to serve and reign with Christ They'll be priests of God and of Christ; they'll serve Him. They'll go about carrying out His service and leading in His worship. And they will reign with Him in His Kingdom. They'll be His administrators and coregents for the new world order, as will we! We reign with Him too! And once Satan is gone and the believers from all eras have been raised, then:

III. The Savior Reigns For 1,000 Years We call it **The Millennium (6b)** You can't miss the time frame. God writes it six times in seven verses (2 thru 7), *a thousand years, a thousand years...*! He wants us to get the point. There is a new age coming in this world, the Kingdom age, and it will last for a specific period, a thousand years. Not much is really said about this period here, but we know plenty from other places in the Scriptures. First of all, think about this:

1. the earth is repopulated with nations by surviving tribulation believers When Jesus returns, He says that all the peoples of the earth who are still alive are going to be gathered before Him and separated into sheep and goats. The goats are destroyed, but to the sheep He says, *Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.* They go as normal human beings, alive in human bodies, on into the millennial earth. They build houses and cities. They multiply into nations. They fill the world again, but it happens so fast because the world:

2. it will be transformed by the presence of Christ Look with me at **Is. 11:6-10**. What a world, transformed into peace by the presence of Christ! No more violence; no more hatred; no more war; no more crime. *Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.* - **Is. 65:20-21** The longevity of man will be restored as it was before the flood. Yes, the people who dwell on earth will be real humans in real bodies, just like ours, doing real work but enjoying the reward of it. They will die, but only of natural causes! Violence is gone and people live in peace and harmony and here's why:

3. it will be ruled by Christ and all will worship Him Look with me at **Zech. 14:9, 16**. His rule will be direct and visible. All the nations will worship Him; they'll all go up to Jerusalem, the seat of His government, to worship. We will rule

from there with Him and administer His government of the world. He will literally be worshipped by every tribe, people, tongue and nation, not merely in heaven, but right here on this earth! For a thousand years it will literally be heaven on earth.

But oh, how different that is from the world as we live in it today. *There's an old movie called "Network" and in it there's a fictional newscaster named Howard Beale who's really losing it and in one of his rants on the air, he says: "I don't have to tell you things are bad. Everybody knows things are bad. It's a depression. Everybody's out of work or scared of losing their job. The dollar buys a nickel's worth; banks are going bust; shopkeepers keep a gun under the counter; punks are running wild in the street, and there's nobody anywhere who seems to know what to do, and there's no end to it. We know the air is unfit to breathe and our food is unfit to eat. And we sit watching our TVs while some local newscaster tells us that today we had fifteen homicides and sixty-three violent crimes, as if that's the way it's supposed to be!"* No, that's not the way it's supposed to be! And these verses are here as a reminder that Somebody IS going to do something about it! Jesus is going to return and set it all straight. *In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.* - Micah 4:1-4. For a thousand years, an entire age, the world will be the way God made it to be! Hallelujah! However, there is a fly in the ointment. At the end of that glorious 1,000 Kingdom years, God's:

IV. The Subjects Rebel Again (7-10) But how can that be? Well, remember we are talking about a world full of people who are real human beings exactly like you and I. What are they born with? A nature that WANTS to sin! Man is NOT basically good at the core. Forever people have said, "If you just put the child in a good environment, he'll turn out good! Take away all the evil influence around him and his inner goodness will come out!" For a thousand years people will be in the most excellent environment possible. They will have no external evil influence. They will see Jesus in a direct fashion. They will obey and worship Him, at least EXTERNALLY. But at the end of that time:

1. Satan will be loosed once more from his prison. He'll be allowed to spread his lies once more. He'll be allowed to tell people that there is a way they can get free from God's control over them, that THEY can be god and control their own destiny. So, in spite of the fact that they have seen Christ with their own eyes and experienced His goodness, the minute they are given the opportunity, a number will jump at it! Why? Because the force of sin dwells INSIDE us, no matter what's outside! And because of that:

2. the nations will be deceived once more Not all of them, of course. But many, many, will believe Satan's lie. They will form an army once again. He will tell them that with the might of their human strength they can go to Jerusalem and take the throne of the Kingdom away from Jesus Himself! A fool's errand! And so, after a thousand years of peace and prosperity a generation will rebel once again, proof for all eternity that man is evil and needs a Savior, that he will never be able to build his own utopia, but must be transformed by the power of Christ. Yet, as every other attempt of Satan has, this one will fail too.

3. the rebels will be destroyed suddenly It will be only a brief attempt. Fire will come down from heaven and destroy them all. And now that God's demonstration is over and Satan has served God's last purpose for him:

4. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire permanently in verse 10 and there he will suffer in torment and torture forever and ever in that fire which Jesus said was *prepared for the devil and his angels!* He will get what he deserves and he will never ever be free to touch our lives in eternity anymore! Oh, how we will rejoice to see our old enemy, that ancient serpent, be cast into the fire once and for all! Then finally, also at the end of that 1,000 years, we read that, at last:

V. Sinners Are Judged Eternally at what is described as **The Great White Throne (11-12)** Here it is at last, Judgment Day, the day when the dead stand face to face with Eternal God for their sentencing! Now who are these dead? Look back at verse 5. These are *the rest of the dead*. You see, the resurrection of the dead occurs in two waves. The first wave is the resurrection of the church at the Rapture and then the resurrection of the tribulation believers and Old Testament saints at the beginning of the Millennium. We do not stand before THIS throne! There is no Judgment Day for us! Our judgment occurred at the Cross; that was our Judgment Day! The judgment for our sins fell on Christ and there is no condemnation left for us to face. This second wave includes everybody else that's left. It is all the rest of the dead of all the ages, those who were non-believers, those who were not rightly related to God. It includes all the dead who died during the horrors of the Tribulation without Christ or were slain at His return. Plus, all the people who repopulated the earth and even died during the Millennium, whether they truly believed or not, haven't been resurrected yet. So here they stand, all of them, millions of them, before God's throne and when they do, notice that:

1. the books will be opened Our God is a record-keeping God. He keeps books! The deeds and the acts of every human being are recorded in heaven. It doesn't matter whether the person was great or small, important or insignifi-

cant; no one is exempt and there will be everything they've ever done fully exposed. Nothing will be secret; nothing will be hidden; all will be revealed. And these dead will be judged by what is written in the books! But only one verdict can come from that evidence! Guilty! Guilty of sin! Now, the millions of souls who stand there on that day:

2. they will be given resurrection bodies (13) What does this mean? Well, unbelievers don't simply sleep until the resurrection. Just as the souls of believers are instantly in heaven when they die, so the souls of nonbelievers are instantly in *hades* or hell when they die. You remember what Jesus said about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man died *...and in hell he lifted up his eyes...* He was tormented in the flame, yet he was still only a soul; he did not yet have a body and he had not yet stood before God. The millions and millions of dead bodies will be given up by the grave and by the oceans. Each unbelieving soul will be resurrected, re-embodied in a body that will last forever, just as we will be. And then they will stand before God for sentencing, to receive the just verdict of punishment they deserve. But then look! Another book is opened, a more important book, the Lamb's book of life, the record of all who have trusted Jesus personally to save them from their sins. That's the book where our names are written and Jesus told us that we should rejoice that our names are written in heaven. And their names could have been written there too, yet except for those who believed during the Millennium, for the billions of all the ages who did not believe, their names do not appear! And because of that:

3. they will be sentenced to a second, an eternal death (14-15) They will die a second time in their immortal bodies. They will be cast bodily into *gehenna*, the lake of eternal fire where, Jesus said, *their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched*. It is a place of outer darkness, of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Listen, so many people think that when they die God is going to weigh their deeds and balance them out and are hoping against hope that the scales tip in their favor and God will let them into heaven. I don't know who started that, but in this courtroom, there is no trial! There is no defense; there is no voice. There is only a presentation of the condemning evidence and a sentence passed by the Judge of all the Earth. And the sentence is real suffering in a real body in a real lake of fire forever! The time to escape it is now by fleeing to Jesus! Once we're dead, it's too late! To put it simply, if you're born once, you'll die twice! If you're born twice, you'll die only once! If you are born physically, but are never born again by the Holy Spirit, you'll die twice. You'll die a physical death first and then a second eternal death. But if you are born physically and then born again spiritually, you will die physically, but you will surely NOT die in eternity - John 11:26! *You will not be hurt at all by the second death* - Rev. 2:11! Listen, this second death is a real thing. Hell is a real place! We hear many stories of believers who have near-death experiences and get a glimpse of the light of heaven. But the opposite also happens. *Dr. Maurice Rawlings, a cardiologist in Chattanooga, writes about a time when a man went into cardiac arrest right in his clinic. The doctor and his staff worked feverishly to resuscitate the patient, but he kept fading in and out. The doctor was performing heart massage, but every time he stopped the man appeared to die again. At one point the man regained consciousness. With a look of sheer terror on his face, he yelled at the doctor, "I am in hell! Please don't stop. Every time you quit, I go back into hell. Don't let me go back!" The patient survived and recovered, later committing his life to Christ and gaining the assurance that he would go to heaven when he died. [Beyond Death's Door by Maurice Rawlings. Thomas Nelson, 1978. Pages 19-20.]*

So, consider this: the "rest of the dead" who will stand at the Great White Throne on that day are standing all around you and I right now! And they are standing in even greater numbers at the ends of the earth, in the 10/40 Window, in the Muslim block, in the heart of Asia. And our assignment is to make disciples of them all! Listen to what Peter wrote, *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."...The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. - 2 Pet. 3:3-4, 9.* He is patient with US! He is waiting for us to do our job! We are that doctor! We are the ones keeping people out of hell! That's why we're still here! May that same dedication and that same urgency be ours!

Revelation: Things To Come

Our Eternal Home - Chs. 21-22

In chapters 21-22 of Revelation we come to several ends, to the end of this series of messages, to the end of the book of Revelation, of the vision that God gave to John, to the end of the Bible itself, so that we now have in writing all that God has planned to reveal to us, and finally, to the end of time as we mark it. In chapter 19 we saw that Christ will return to earth. In chapter 20 we saw that He will reign over a transformed earth for a thousand years, a Millennium. But then what? The life that Christ has given us is eternal; it has no end! So, what will forever and ever be like? These two chapters are almost the only glimpse we have in the Word of God of:

I. The Eternal State (21:1-8) And the first thing we are told is that:

1. there will be a new creation (1-2) The heavens and the earth that we know now will pass away and God will make new heavens and a new earth. We're not told here just how that will happen, but look with me at **2 Pet. 3:7, 10-13**:

a. the present heavens and earth will be destroyed by fire After that day of judgment of ungodly men which is the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the Millennium, God is going to remake the world. He's going to purge the earth with fire and melt the elements and reshape the whole thing. We don't know exactly what it will be like; we are only told that there will be no more seas. Do you realize that 70% of the current earth's surface area is covered by oceans? That will not be the case in the new earth. I wonder why? I wonder what God has planned? It sounds like He's making room for expansion! I guess we'll just have to wait and see! It will be a different order of creation from what we know now and it will have a wonderful city different from any earthly city that ever existed for us to dwell in. What we do know is that:

b. the new heaven and earth will contain only righteousness The one thing that will be missing completely is sin along with all its effects. In this new world there will only be righteousness. There will only be truth. There will only be love. All of the things that have characterized our world since its inception will be gone. In fact, **Is. 65:17** says, *Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.* Nobody is even going to remember "the way things used to be". And unlike the current world which is running down, wearing out, and has a termination date:

c. the new heaven and earth will endure forever - Is. 66:22 says, *As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me, declares the LORD, so will your name and descendants endure.* The new heaven and earth will endure; they will last for eternity. They are our eternal home. Now, in this new creation that God will make:

2. there will be a new intimacy with God (3) It will not be like it is now where we cannot see Him or only as through a mirror, darkly. We will have full communion with Him; He will be our God and we will be His people. He'll be with us and we'll be with Him. There will be no gap, no distance, nothing to separate us from His love. He will not be high and separate; He'll be our Father and we will be His children. We are created to enjoy God forever, the catechism says, and He plans to enjoy us the same way! And notice Who says so! This voice is from the Throne; this is voice of God Himself telling us that this is the way it will be! And:

3. there will be a new order of things without suffering (4-5) Oh, think about it! Nobody dies; nothing dies anymore! Things don't come to an end. And nothing will make us sad any more. No tears. No parting from anyone. No injustice, no fear of anything, nothing to cry about. All tears gone. And no pain, not from anything. Nothing will ever hurt again! The old order that we live in now where you die and cry and sigh will be over and gone; it's never coming back! Everything will be new! GOD says so. He says, "Write it down so people will know you can count on it! I mean it!" However, God also makes it very clear that:

4. all this will be enjoyed only by believers (6-8) You see:

a. it is freely available to all who will come and believe Anyone who is thirsty for it, anyone who wants to have life, can come and believe. It's freely available. And if they are genuine and continue in the faith and don't simply pray some prayer of repentance and then go their own way, if they genuinely want this relationship with God, they can have it. Anyone can! And through it, they will inherit all this. But:

b. all who refuse are punished eternally Those who won't come to Christ and continue in their sinful lifestyles, their eternity looks quite different. It is a lake of eternal fire as we saw last time.

So now God gives John a good look at:

II. The Eternal City (21:9-22:5) Start with **21:2, 9-10**. Notice here:

1. the identity of that city: the New Jerusalem Rome has been called for centuries *the Eternal City*, but it really isn't! There is a far more glorious city! It is the place that Jesus said He was going to prepare for us; it is the city that has foundations that Hebrews 11 says Abraham was always looking forward to by faith. It is a city that was constructed in heaven, of heavenly materials and is lowered down to earth by God Himself as a dwelling place for His people. This is *...the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God - Heb. 12:22*. And this is your new neighborhood; this is where you will live with God for eternity! Now John is shown closely:

2. the appearance of that city (11-21) Let me summarize all of that by simply saying two things. First:

a. it will be unbelievably glorious It is built of the most exquisite and beautiful materials imaginable and some that aren't! Just think, if some of you ladies have good taste and can beautify a house and make it look incredible, how much more taste does God have! It will be beautiful beyond belief! And secondly:

b. it will be absolutely enormous One *stadion* is 600 feet, so this city is built like a cube that is 1,364 miles long, wide AND high! That's like a city stretching from here, west to the Mississippi River and south, all the way to Florida and it's that high as well. That's more than 1.8 million square miles of space, simply on the first level. And the total space is more than 2.5 billion cubic miles! It's huge! There will be plenty of space for all the Old Testament believers from Israel and all the believers from the church age, from all time! Just for fun, the Population Reference Bu-

reau estimates that the total number of people who have ever been born on earth was roughly 100 billion in 2002. There's enough space for every person who ever lived to personally have a space 500 yards (5 football fields) long, wide and high! Or for you farmers, that's a 51 acre plot that's 500 yards high! And of course, most of the people ever born were not believers and won't be there! It's enormous beyond comprehension. But what's so neat is:

3. the central Source of that city (21:22 - 22:2) There's no Temple because the Father and Jesus are the Temple. We get to interact with them personally and directly. We don't have to go to a place and go through motions to worship. We can express our hearts to them directly! And we don't need to worry about the weather. It isn't lighted by the sun or moon or by electricity; it is lighted by the very glory of God Himself! And it'll never go dry because there's a river of the pure water of life flowing out from the Throne of God and down the main street! Now honestly, I personally hold, along with a number of scholars, the opinion that because of these verses about the nations walking in its light, that the city actually comes down from heaven at the beginning of the Millennium and hangs above the earth like a giant chandelier and the nations of earth have access to it and are blessed by what it supplies to them. And then it is lifted while the earth is remade and comes back down once more for eternity. That makes sense to me, but in truth it's only a guess at the meaning of some of the symbols here. At any rate, what we really want to know about is:

4. our life in that city which is described for us in (22:3-5) What will we do there? What will our life be like? It says that:

a. we will serve Him We will have tasks and responsibilities to perform in this vast new world of His. We won't just sit around on clouds with harps idly doing nothing. We won't just sing or bow down eternally. We'll have a real existence with real things to do, real work, only without effort and strain. And it says that as we do it:

b. we will see His face We will be in His Presence continually, in perpetual personal fellowship and interaction with Him. That will be our worship, continually doing things together with Him forever. And it says that:

c. we will share His reign eternally What does that mean? I read somewhere that there are about 125 White House office staff and something like 3,800 employees. If it takes almost 4,000 people to run one little White House, imagine how many people it will take to run the New Jerusalem! And the new earth! Reigning is not sitting on a golden throne looking picturesque and barking orders! It is being in charge and planning and carrying out responsibilities and overseeing projects. Who knows what God plans to do with us!

The great 18th century Bible commentator Matthew Henry, anticipating that some would unduly mourn his death, wrote these words of comfort and assurance: "Would you like to know where I am? I am at home in my Father's house, in the mansions prepared for me here. I am where I want to be--no longer on the stormy sea, but in God's safe, quiet harbor. My sowing time is done and I am reaping; my joy is as the joy of harvest. Would you like to know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness. Grace is swallowed up in glory. Would you like to know what I am doing? I see God, not as through a glass darkly, but face to face. I am engaged in the sweet enjoyment of my precious Redeemer. I am singing hallelujahs to Him who sits upon the throne, and I am constantly praising Him. Would you like to know what blessed company I keep? It is better than the best on earth. Here are the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am with many of my old acquaintances with whom I worked and prayed, and who have come here before me. Lastly, do you want to know how long this will continue? It is a dawn that never fades! After millions and millions of ages, it will be as fresh as it is now. Therefore, weep not for me!" Hallelujah, that is our eternal future! Now as John's vision comes to an end, the Lord concludes it with a long warning, a warning that stands through the ages:

III. The Eternal Warning (22:6-21) Prophecy is not speculation; it is not a fantasy world of religious myth. It is actual history recorded ahead of time and therefore, to read it and to be told what lies ahead in the future brings with it six great dangers. First is:

1. the danger of doubting (6, 8-9) There is a great danger in hearing that Jesus is coming again and all the things that will happen and thinking, "It is not so; it can't be like that!" There are only two ways to know something; you either accept the information that God has given you or you decide for yourself what you think the future holds. Which one of those do you want to trust? These words are trustworthy and true! The Lord Himself sent an angel to show John, and through him us, what is going to take place in the future. John wrote them down carefully and testified that they are so. It would be very foolish to doubt what God has gone to such great lengths to make clear to us! Second is:

2. the danger of procrastinating (7, 12-13) Twice Jesus says, *I am coming SOON!* The concept in the phrase here is not so much *immediately* or *right away*; it's obvious that some 1900 years have come and gone since this was written! Rather *soon* means *swiftly* or *suddenly*. The events recorded in this book can begin without out any notice and when they do it will be too late. To hear the words of this book and say, "I believe it's true, but I have time; I'll wait to give my life to Jesus and follow Him!" is tremendously dangerous. Third is:

3. the danger of ignoring (10-11) Now what does that mean? Some who hear will just go on their merry way and ignore what they've heard; it will roll off them like water off a duck's back. It will make no impact. Verse 11 doesn't mean that God doesn't want anyone to change; it means simply that if you don't do something, if you continue to pursue the

present path, the Lord is going to come and there'll be no changing. How you are in that moment is how you are! And you'll have to face it one way or the other. You can't prevent His coming by ignoring it! Fourth is:

4. the danger of refusing (14-17) Oh, see the wonderful three-fold invitation to life here: *Come, come, come!* God says, *Come!* Whosoever will may come! Eternal life is free; just come to Jesus and receive it! He made this wonderful new world and new city for you! But if you don't come to Jesus, you end up excluded! You can't get in! You're not only outside, but locked forever in a lake of fire. Oh what a dangerous thing to do, to act like the guests in the parable who were invited to the wedding of the King's Son and make some excuse to say, "I cannot come"! This is one invitation no one can afford to decline! Fifth is:

5. the danger of tampering (18-19) Here is the most devious thing of all, to try to change what is written in the book, to add to it or remove something from it. Of course, that stands as a warning to the many copyists who hand-copied it thousands of times over the centuries not to try to change it or doctor it up. But it also stands as a warning to thousands of pastors in pulpits in liberal churches across world who ignore its words and count them as so many fairy tales, who would just as leave cut them out of their Bible and ignore them because they refuse to believe in a living Savior who is going to come back again as He promised! In fact, this warning stands at the end of the entire Bible; with the next words, the whole of the Scripture is completed forever. It is dangerous to tamper with God's Book! That is the pathway to damnation; it is the pathway to eternal death.

*Many years ago, a terrible railroad accident occurred which killed many people. A commuter train had stalled on the tracks just minutes before a fast freight was due to arrive. A conductor was quickly sent to flag down the approaching "flier." Being assured that all was well, the passengers relaxed. Suddenly, however, the speeding freight came bearing down upon them. The crash left a ghastly scene of horror. The engineer of the second train, who escaped death by jumping from the cab, was called into court to explain why he hadn't stopped. "I saw a man waving a warning flag," he said, "but it was yellow, so I thought he just wanted me to slow down." When the flag was examined, the mystery was explained. It had been red, but because of long exposure to the sun and weather, it had become a dirty yellow. Listen! God is not saying, "Slow down!" The flag of His Word is not yellowed! He's waving a bright red flag and shouting, "Stop! My Son is coming! I'm telling you it's a sure thing! Come to Him and receive the gift of eternal life now!" We close our study with verses **20-21**. There is Jesus' last word, *Yes, I am coming soon!* And there is John's prayer, *Come Lord Jesus!* In the early church this thought became, not only a prayer, but also their greeting, the first words on their lips to one another. The Greek word is *maranatha*, "the Lord is coming". It became the last word they spoke as they parted from each other. It became the thought that bound them all together. *Maranatha! The Lord is coming!* We add our prayer to theirs, *Even so, come Lord Jesus!**